

RG-50.751*0010

Oral history interview with Ruth Reiser

D: You are Mrs. Ruth Reiser. It is Saturday, March 5, 1994.

You understand, Mrs. Reiser, that Dr. Roger Ritvo and I are writing a book about women who performed nursing care and did medical treatment, such as they could in the concentration camps. This is a new form. You can look at it and sign it if you agree to it. Dr. Ritvo is at the University of New Hampshire.

R. What means "credit will be given, for what?"

D. It means that we will use your name if you want. If you don't want us to use your name, we won't. Okay? And, please date it. And why don't we start over, okay? Just tell me where you're from, where were you born?

R: I was born in Prague, in Czechoslovakia, the Czech republic. And I'm the only child. My parents - my father was working in a bank. And I had a very pleasant childhood as such. I was born in 1926. So, until 1939, when I was 13, or 1937, when things started to be a bit more difficult, but until '39 certainly, it was a very pleasant way of normal life. It think it's the only normal life in my lifetime which I had. And primary school, and then for three years - two and a half - in the third year was the already very difficult in the high school. Three years of high school, and then it was a ruling that Jews are not allowed anymore any education. So I came out of the school - it was in '39.

D: Did you get any nurses training or....?

R: Well, my nursing training was not important because I was 13, then in 1941. The transports started. In 1940 already, the Jews were not allowed to go into a normal hospital or, you know, it was a small Jewish hospital run only by Jewish doctors, and everybody on the staff was Jewish. And I very much wanted to become a nurse, but I was very young, and it was wasn't very easy to get with - my parents were certainly delighted with the thought that a 13 year old girl should go nursing, especially - 18 nowadays people are, you know, younger going into professions, but at that time, it wasn't done. But I didn't want to do anything else. I always wanted to go into nursing. Young people have some goals. So, in the end, my father said if they won't help me, but they won't stand in my way, and if I can possibly find my way to become a nurse in this Jewish hospital, if they will take me, he's not going to stand in my way. And I think that they thought that I can never succeed to do it. But I did, and I became a student nurse. I was the youngest there. I had a nice time because everyone there was extremely nice to me. The doctors were nice, and - so that was my first experience in nursing. In the time, there already the ghetto was formed and people are not allowed anymore to live in all parts of the city. And I worked there until the deportation to Theresienstadt. Then in Prague, it was run as best as possible, with not many medications, but still, medications were available. Surgery was available. It was a big department. It was, sort of, still running in a reasonable, normal way, only by Jewish people. And everybody was trying their best to do the best they could. And, of course by today's standards, the normal standard was very low because there were no antibiotics, there were no -

the x-ray was a top thing. There were no MRIs, and no things like this. So you were not deprived of so much which would have been possible otherwise. Nowadays, if you don't have money, you don't have - it was a lab working normally. We had, sort of, people who, I remember, people who had some excema and other things were got got special rays which, I don't know whether they did anything, but they were called buckyrays. I don't know what it was.

D: Buckyrays? How do you spell it?

R: Buckyrays.¹

D: Buckyrays?

¹A Gentz ray: a soft, penetrating ray used to treat excema.

R: Buckirays, something like that and it was a small apparatus, and you put your hands under, and the rays of the lamp of some sort, I think. But it wasn't - those things - and the lab was working, and the x-rays were working. At one point I was working for the X-ray department, which was normal I suppose. The safety was not that hot, but I don't think it was because it was a Jewish hospital because the safety at that point wasn't.

D: Was it located in the ghetto?

R: The whole hospital was located in the ghetto.

D: Do you know how many beds?

R: I don't remember. It wasn't big. If you are very interested, I can find out because there are still...but I would think though, that it couldn't have been more than sixty beds or something like that because the building wasn't that big. So I think surgery was not done in that particular building, but in another building, in another part where the surgery was done at that time. So that was my first nursing experience, and I was more and more sort of keen to do it, and after the deportation to Theresienstadt. So when I arrived there...

D: What year were you deported to Theresienstad?

R: In June '43.

D: And how old were you?

R: I was thrown out of school. We all were thrown out of school. The administration, the Jewish administration, especially the Zionistic Youth Movement, tried to open a school which was under the name that they prepared people for going to Palestine then. It was called an Aliya school, and they had permission to go, and that lasted a year, a year that school was running. So it was still very - I could go to school, but was not - the Hebrew was taught there, and they tried to do as best that they could to do a little bit more education, whatever they could, but they had - very young people were the teachers and we were young, and so after that I started in the hospital. And we were deported, and because I was_very active in that youth movement, in the Zionistic in Prague, my parents were very Zionistic, and I was brought up in that way. So when I arrived in Terezin, it was a time when it was very very overcrowded. The first week we lived in a loft, and I was offered as a special treat, because when I came already they knew that had tried - the young people who were in the movement - it was in that way politically probably very biased or something because I knew a lot of people who were already there, and they tried to run as best that they could that the young people have some work which they demanded. It was a group of people who could go and work outside in the fields and gardens. And that was considered a fantastic thing because they could go out of the ghetto and you were outside all the time. But I didn't want that. I said I just want to work in a hospital again. And they thought that was ridiculous. You can get out of the boundaries of the ghetto everyday, and I said no. So I didn't go, and I went to work in a hospital which was not a hospital building. And it was already arranged that way. It was a building with many rooms, and it was rearranged for a hospital. The name of the chief physician Dr. Salus, who was..

D: Dr. Salus? S A L U S?

R: Yes. And he was a very nice man, and he ran it.

D: He was Jewish?

R: Yes. It was already in Theresienstadt. There were no -the whole thing was run completely, the administration, everything, was run again only by Jews. And the people tried very hard to keep the standards as high as possible under very very difficult circumstances. Because I don't know whether you are familiar with the Theresienstadt ghetto. It was a normal garrison town which had a population of, with all the soldiers in the barracks, of I think, at most 7,000 souls. This was the normal population. When I came there, it was over 50,000 people there. And it was overcrowded. I lived in one room, a normal room in a small house which - somebody had a family house - in one of the bedrooms, and 21 girls lived in that one room.

D: All the same age?

R: We were reasonably near that age. And that was again a great privilege in many ways because they were all from this youth movement and people were trying to look after them. And because we were all sort of under 20. And again I tried, but I can put only about eleven together. I can't remember the rest because it wasn't that you stayed long time in the same formation. A lot of people had to be deported again, and it moved around. But with many I am still in touch. And I think I was the only one working in a hospital. The rest worked in various other places. The hospital which that was run - it was several - another doctor was a Dr. Lohr, L-O-H-R - him I remember very well. I remember the chief nurse - the head nurse, who was very German, very sort of a disciplined - had to be very...

D: What was her name?

R: I can't remember. She was very small. I can see her in front of my eyes, but I can't remember.

D: Can you describe her?

R: Yes. She was a stocky, small lady. Of course I was - for me she was much older, but she was probably in her 30s or something like that.

D: She was German-Jewish or German?

R: No, no, Jewish. But she was very nice, but she ran it in a very very strict way. So we had normal shifts, night shifts and day shifts. One day a nun arrived from Austria who was in her habit - extremely nice young woman who had no idea she's from Jewish origins. She was brought up in a convent, and then they found out some part of her is Jewish. They transported her as she was, in her habit and all. And she became a good friend of mind.

D: What was her name?

R: Mirly, M-I-R-L-Y - whether it was her real name or her nun's name, again, I don't know. I don't know her other name. But we were a long time together working. And she didn't survive. She died.

D: She was a nurse also?

R: Well, whether she a was nurse in the convent, I don't know. She was nursing in Theresienstadt.

D: Can you describe the hospital facilities at all?

R: The facilities were none.

D: Well, what you used as a facility.

R: Yeah, well they were rooms were - which had sort of certainly it would look overcrowded in normal hospital, but they were rooms rooms which had - some had six beds, some had about six beds, eight beds might have been the most. Then they were smaller rooms which had fewer beds, but they have been people who were infected by something and they tried to have it a little bit not all together. I remember very well a man - a - middle aged man who had lupus, and who had it so badly that everyday several times, he had to up and you had to take just a broom and take all the skin off..

D: Lupus erythematosus?

R: Yeah. You know it was just, he was shedding, but I don't think it was anything more done for him than giving him a bath because I don't know whether anything was available generally but certainly not there. Then I remember a big grave digger, which was a grave digger in Theresienstadt, a Jewish man who suffered from tetany. I don't know how it is called in English actually, but it is lack of calcium, which at points gets him absolute comatose, and we had to get very quickly a shot of calcium. Well, we had calcium, calcium was available, syringes were there available - they were not sort of disposable ones, but you had to - it was a small facility, in a corridor, and in the corridors - it was a big house which might have been before - wasn't a school but it might have been used as offices. So it was a building which wasn't a family house. It was bigger than that and it had more rooms. But, in the corridor we had a station for nurses to sit there, and then we had a small place where you could boil the syringes and sterilize a few things we had. There were some bandages available, but I think on the whole not much medication was available then, I don't know. I remember that he got very easily the calcium because I administered - I remember him because he was an enormous man - must have been over 6 feet, and I am a small person and was slim then. And I can remember that holding him rigid was always - you know, I had to find quickly somebody to hold him and to get that syringe and get him - he was a very gentle man, but he was a giant of a man. That I remember then was a young man who was from Moravia I think, who suffered from elephantiasis.

D: Can you describe him?

R: He was in his 20s then and his thighs were normal, not all proportionate. I have no idea what happened to him later. I remember him as a patient there. And then was a room of elderly people who suffered from heart disease. A lot of people suffered from tuberculosis, which took various - I was mainly on a men's ward. I can't remember many women, so I must have been more on a men's ward - that was segregated as much as possible, the rooms, some were for women; some were for men, and I remember more the men, so I must have been more on the men's side. There were a lot of people - elderly people were not in this hospital because really old people - it was a different hospital which catered for the old people, which was much worse hospital, where not much could have been done for them. It was mainly malnutrition and complete depression, something. So that was not in that place I was working. They were really people physically ill for some reason.

D: Do you know how many hospital "facilities" were in Theresienstadt?

R: Well, I can't tell you off hand exactly, I can find it out for you. But that there was this one, then there was a children's hospital, then there was an old people's sort of hospital and then there was a facility for retarded people, which was a very bad thing. It was, normally there, under the circumstances, there was no food, and there was no - I had never been there, so I can't tell you. But I know it existed, and I that know for the old people existed another hospital. Then there must have been another hospital because my now would have been mother-in-law was for a long time in a hospital, but not in the one I was working, so it was another one there. But they were not hospitals or hospitals there because the possibilities of space were so small. So they were many places in various places and only few beds always available. They were always a want for them again. So the beds may be, at most - so, because of beds there, it wasn't one big space because originally I don't think it was any hospitals in the town when it was normally inhabited. The soldiers must have had military facilities somewhere in the barracks. And I don't know where the population - the town was too small - I think they had to go to a district hospital which was out of the boundaries of the city. The city is sort of fortified, and that's why they chose this city - because there are fortification all around. It was during Maria Theresa, that's why it is Theresienstadt. And it has real fortifications. It had moats. It had ramparts, and it was easy to keep people in and not to make any great fences or anything. There were a few gates, which were locked. They didn't have any problems containing people in. So it was for them more facilities for being hospitalized. And people tried very hard. The Jews - their administration - tried very hard to use it as much as possible so that no great infections could come in. Typhoid was a great possibility, and in the end, I think, it was there after I left, typhoid came. But at my time there were few illnesses which became worrisome, like meningitis. It was infectious meningitis, and one of my colleagues died of it as a nurse. There were no antibiotics; there were no...

D: Sulfa drugs?

R: Sulfa drugs might have been, but I don't know whether they were used for this. And they were not always in great profusion to be had. I don't know which hospital got which drugs and how this was distributed or administered. I had no way of even being interested in it. I was doing what I was told to do, and maybe if a doctor would know more about it. But certainly I wasn't interested even in that at the time.

D: How many patients? Just one patient per bed?

R: Yes. At Theresienstadt was one patient per bed. I don't know in old people's homes how that worked.

D: How about linens?

R: There were some linens, hardly enough, but to Theresienstadt people brought - were allowed to bring about 25 or 30 kilos - you were allowed to bring from home. And most of it stayed in - even if in it, in the end, didn't end up with you, it ended up in Theresienstadt. So a lot of people took linens and when you left for the first transport - it's very very difficult to visualize - my parents, for instance, who were sort of used to live in one place all their lives and have everything there, now we had to move twice to smaller and smaller quarters until we were in Prague in a ghetto. But you still had a lot of possessions people don't want to lose or get rid of.

And when people were much more sort of used to have their things. So to choose then 25 kilos, or only as much as you can carry, which nobody can carry it for you, so you have to have only as much as you can carry. What do you choose to take with you? Is it your shoes, or is it your linen, or is it your clothes, or is it something you can barter with or sell later? You don't know where you are going, and you don't know - so I suppose the linen might have come from normal people, and maybe you had no chance to use the linen too much. But I know, for instance, when I left Prague, I had with me a duvet which we made ourselves.

D: Spell it.

R: Duvet. D-U-V-E-T.

D: Oh, Duvet.

R: We made it ourselves from fiber beds. So that was important because it's cold in winter, so everybody had his own quilt in my time. I can't remember from where it came otherwise.

D: Were they laundered - washed at all? Or cleaned? Changed?

R: There were laundry - sort of, not laundromats. But there were people who were assigned to do laundry, and in the barracks - they were military barracks, many of them in Theresienstadt, there were washrooms with troughs and things, and in these the linen was washed. And people could, you know - some women were assigned to do just washing. And did washing for many people and you know, you brought it there like to a laundromat. Of course you couldn't pay, and you had it done as best as that person would wash, but it but was washed. It wasn't washed as often as it would have been, but they were laundry facilities in Theresienstadt.

D: How often were the linens changed then?

R: I don't know, I can't remember that. I think it was changed when it was necessary. It wasn't changed every other day, and it wasn't sort of - but I can't remember in the place I worked that anybody would have been in a very dirty place. But I had - most of the people were very very careful themselves to be very clean, and they were not terrible. Some were terminally ill, but they were not people lot of -terminally ill. Put they were not of people who needed lot of - there were bedpans there, you used bedpans and you - So, I honestly can't remember that I would have - what was what was terrible, and that was really a problem, were the bugs, the bed bugs. And that was nothing anybody could do anything about because it was so overcrowded and there were no pesticides or anything to be used. And they were a real problem. You could sort of sit at night at the nurses station, and they were just crawling up the ceiling. It's something - in America it's roaches, and there it was the bed bugs. But that was a big problem. The lice were the biggest problem because of the typhoid. But it was not yet as bad. Later, when I went out of Theresienstad, that was terrible. But the bed bugs, I remember in this hospital was a bad thing. And so, in the place where I slept, in my sort of room because in summer we used to try to go and sleep outside where we are not bitten to death by all these bugs. So we used to sleep in the balcony or on a terrace which used to be the floor terrace, something like that.

D: Did you bathe your patients at all?

R: We washed them. It was no bathroom facility because all the bathrooms were used for lab or whatever, so it was no bathroom. They were few - they were made again, that was because of bugs now, where there were showers, possibly, but not in the hospital. For the population you could get to showers.

D: Are you talking about the ghetto or...?

R: The ghettos, the ghetto, yeah. Because the ghetto - the boundaries are really the barracks. And they were all occupied by -only one barrack was occupied by administration, the rest was with people. But they had before facilities, washrooms for soldiers, and they stayed that washrooms for soldiers. So if you had your mother in the barrack, your father in the barrack, where you could sneak in for a shower, because normally in the small houses there of course were some showers. But there I remember being in a shower a few times. You could keep yourself there - you still may have your own clothes - maybe not much, maybe occasionally you sold something, you know, for food, but you still own your things. So in the hospital too people had their own pajamas. If they came with some. Most people came from very civilized places, so they were themselves trying very hard to keep very clean.

D: Did they have soap?

R: A little soap, but I think soap - occasionally soap was not given out, but again, people who came in brought soap in, and you could buy it for something.

D: What about toothbrushes, or just what you brought in?

R: Just.

D: Did they have toilets available?

R: Toilets were available again, but was a good thing that the barracks - the main sort of - lot of people lived in the barracks. And the barracks were preferred for many. Not as many as there were. They had people who were especially assigned to the toilets, to keep them reasonably clean and to be nasty to people who didn't keep them clean. And, in the houses were toilets. There were not many, but I think they were functioning.

D: Did they have any, or - what kind of instruments did they have?

R: Again, I think some doctors probably brought in. There, whoever had the specialty, some what they want there, ophthalmologists or so brought his instruments, as much as he could, in his bag, in his little bag. For surgery, some surgeries were done but how this was...

D: Anesthesia?

R: It was ether anesthesia.

D: Who administered it?

R: The doctors must have done it. Because I know the surgeries were done. In the hospitals I have seen in Theresienstadt, there were no surgeries done, so I couldn't, but I know that my husband's brother had big surgery - on his ear he had tuberculosis in his ear. He died there after the surgery.

D: Tuberculosis in the ear?

R: Yes. Well, tuberculosis at that point was not treatable. And when you got tuberculosis - you can have tuberculosis of bones, and of various parts.

D: The ear?

R: Mid ear infections.

D: Oh.

R: And the infection got, you know, the tuberculosis got in, and it never healed. Because of that it couldn't be healed and there were no penicillin or any antibiotics or things like that. So he was ill for a long time and he died when he was 16. But he had a trepanation done, which has a reasonable recuperation, I think, nowadays. You have to open that bone of the ear. And I have a friend who had terrible problems with her sinuses in the forehead. So she had also surgery in Theresienstadt.

D: They opened into the sinuses?

R: They opened here.

D: Above the eyebrow?

R: Above the eyebrow and cleaned her sinuses. She has a big scar still.

D: She lived through it?

R: Yes. And I think it helped her. So I know there were operations done. I don't know about appendicitis. I know there were a lot of abortions done there. But how the instruments got in, I'm sorry, I can't help you.

D: What kind of food did the patients get?

R: Same food which was for most of the people. I think it was brought for all the patients from the kitchen. There were kitchens which every day - nobody could cook for themselves, so you had to go and here you had your coupons for it, and you had to go, and I suppose that was for small - they had 30 people that they had it, and you could heat it or whatever.

D: What was the food?

R: What was the food. Mainly soup.

D: With what in it?

R: You know I have not much recollection of the food in Theresienstadt.

D: Was it adequate?

R: Of course it wasn't adequate because there was no fruit, no - it was mainly from potatoes and a few things. They must have had a certain - don't forget that at that time, during the war, the whole population of Bohemia and Moravia, which was then a German protectorate, had no food either. It wasn't - certainly the ghetto has less food than the general population, and they could grow something or they could have their own chickens or their own livestock in some way, which was again registered and highly illegal to keep, but people did keep it if they were free to require there as before. But in Theresienstadt, there must have been a certain a certain bulk of food which was delivered in. There it was a bakery. we had our own bakery for Theresienstadt.

So that was a great thing to work in the bakery.

D: What came out of the bakery?

R: Bread for the 50,000 people.

D: How was the bread?

R: That was wonderful. The bread is always wonderful if you are hungry, and any kind of bread - it's dark or bread. And they made even some light breads, something, but that wasn't usually distributed. Distributed was only the dark bread. But they did bake on the side something like a barches.

D: Like what?

R: Like challah.

D: Oh, challah.

R: Which was called barches.

D: What was it called?

R: Barches.

D: Spell it.

R: B-A-R-C-H-E-S.

D: Barches, what kind of word is that?

R: It's some sort of Hebrew thing.

D: It comes from a Hebrew word?

R: And it was always used for the Friday evening, and it was good challah. Only when I came here, I realized challah is - only it was always barches. And that I know because I had a boyfriend who at some point worked in the bakery, and he used bring me a - to work in a bakery was extremely hard work, which was, you know, most people really, in the end, died because it was so hard. But it was so fantastic to work near some food or being a cook who cooked there from whatever.

D: How often were you given food? Everyday?

R: Every day, every day you were given food. Twice.

D: Twice?

R: Twice.

D: Soup and ...

R: Soup and whatever was - to be honest I can't exactly remember what we were given foodwise. But I know that, for instance, my mother - I didn't live with my mother. My mother lived in the barracks, but she kept always bits of bread of her ration, and then once in a time she made a little, like a cake from it. You were given a bit of margarine. I don't know whether it was weekly, probably weekly, with bread. It was a certain amount of bread. Bread wasn't daily given out. It was, I think, every week. You got a bread, a little bit of margarine, and a little bit of sugar. And she used to keep that bank - not to eat her portion, and then she made a little cake out of it, sort of. And was a thing like that. So food was - everybody was supposed to have the same rations, but that didn't work that way. In the end it was who was working harder got probably bigger

portions because, and of course the older people were very, very short on food because they didn't go out to work, they had no chance - most of the old people were very malnutrition.

D: All right now, what about the patients?

R: Patients got, I think, reasonable portions. They were not...

D: More than the..?

R: No, they don't have more than the - certainly not more than anybody else. But at the time I was there, and at that particular hospital, I don't think anybody would have - everybody would have liked to have more food, that's for sure, but nobody would have died of hunger there.

D: Okay, what were your duties?

R: Your duties, you have to wash the patients, you made their beds, you brought their food in, if they needed medication you had the roster for administering the pills, or whatever they were. And then the newer patients like our gravedigger, you knew already when he was sort of starting to be rigid, that you have to do something. They were as best duties made as near as the normal hospital could have been, only under circumstances that it was. Very, very overcrowded, very few things which a normal hospital would find, even not everybody could have a bathroom; nobody had a bathroom, but I think the duties were - you had a night duty - you couldn't, of course, sleep so if somebody needed something, some bedpans were there, and they were and then - it was really trying, very hard. I know that Dr. Lohr tried even to do some of his own so called research on people on I think, on malnutrition, really, because he did weigh what people ate and what people, you know. And so everybody tried very hard to do the best for everybody that they could. But it wasn't always - it was not easy, but umm.

D: Did you work with Ellen Loeb in Theresienstadt?

R: No. I don't even know that she was in Theresienstadt. I never knew her name. Was she in Theresienstadt? I don't think so.

D: No, you're right, she wasn't.

R: Yeah, I don't think so.

D: My mistake.

R: No, it doesn't matter.

D: Okay, do you recall, were you there when the Red Cross came through?

R: Yes. I was there when the Red Cross came through.

D: Can you describe what happened?

R: No.

D: At least the hospital, or where you were. How it affected you.

R: The hospital wasn't on the route for the Red Cross. So they never came in, so nothing special was done for that hospital. I don't know in which hospital they went. But I would take it they probably went into the children's hospital because that - everybody always tried hardest, even without Red Cross, to make it the best for the children so if they chose something, I am sure they would have chosen the hospital with children, but I'm not sure. But the hospital I worked in the Red Cross didn't come in. I remember very well we had - where I lived we had to make big rearrangements because we had bunks in three tiers to accommodate 29 people in a normal bedroom. We had to immediately, within half a day, to scrub the third tier and make it only into two tiers. So as we were all young girls and all had some boyfriends, some were working, so the boyfriends came and we took off the third tier and made furnishings that we can accommodate everybody on the second one. We had to make curtains, and where the curtains were provided from I couldn't tell you either. But to make a route. They didn't come into the into the houses, and I think that was the biggest mistake. They never looked in, but of course, the pavement was scrubbed and everything was done wonderfully, and everybody was briefed in case somebody asked you if everything was wonderful, and you had best time of your life. And the children were briefed what to say, and the saying is nearly until today with us. The children were playing in the playground, and a merry-go-round was put there, and the swings and everything, and a few children who were briefed were saying, and then the SS man - he was called a Rahm, R-A-H-M. And they were supposed to say, "Oh, Uncle Rahm have you got again sardines?" Until today, when we have sardines, we say "Oh, not again sardines." And so, it was a big show, and it was completely reversible. It was completely useless because they didn't at all find - they didn't look. That's why they didn't find. And everybody knows why they didn't look properly. Normally there were hearses - sort of, it was a two wheeled - how could you call in English - a thing for - sometimes even they even had horses draw some vehicle - what is it called, help me.

D: Carriage?

R: A little carriage or something, and that was used for dead people or.

D: A lorry?

R: Well, it's not a lorry. A sort of a wagon.

D: A wagon.

R: A wagon, a sort of a wagon. Whatever was needed was used for it, but of course, when the Red Cross came, people who were using it had white gloves and had bread on it. And a few hours before, it was full of dead people, but they somehow didn't go in the houses. Then came the, probably you know about that, the thousand children from Bialystok. Did you ever hear about that?

D: Why don't you tell me about that?

R: It must have been '44 already. One day there was a big curfew.-The curfew was always at 8 o'clock, but there was a curfew during the day, and nobody was supposed to go out, and big hush and then soon the ghetto came about thousand - there were more maybe, but about a thousand very small children - maybe 4 or 5, till 10 maybe. And it was the eeriest thing, and I think absolutely unforgettable thing. It was not a word from these thousand children. They were walking absolutely silently, ushered somewhere where nobody was allowed to come to them, only very few people who were supposed to look after them. And they were - everybody volunteered to - wanted to look after the children because they were - it was terrible to see them. Even in Theresienstadt there were children, and they were not of course free, and they couldn't do what they wanted, but they were a little bit sort of still trying to - they could speak to each other and they speak with their elders, and they were being in little classes or something. People tried to look after them. But these kids wouldn't utter a sound. And it haunts me till today. And many, many of my friends and many people volunteered to look after them. And they said these kids are going out somewhere into freedom. But of course, they went to Auschwitz and they all were destroyed straight away with the escorts which volunteered to go with them.

D: Why do you think they were silent?

R: Well they already came through many many camps and they already knew much worse camps than Theresienstadt. Why they brought them to Theresienstadt I don't know. I think it was another thing that they came - they were apparently, most of them, from Bialystok, and they came from Bialystok.

D: How many children?

R: Over a thousand.

D: Over a thousand? And how long were they in Theresienstadt?

R: They must have been there two or three weeks.

D: And then they were shipped away?

R: But nobody had - nobody apart from the people were assigned to work with them, because they never wanted anybody to know through what these kids already went. And they were sort of - they were walking in the fives holding their hands, and they were never sort of...

(END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1)

R: ...Theresienstadt.....

D: Well we didn't get that much about Theresienstadt..your memory was really kind of bad.

R: Okay.

D: I kept asking you, "Do you know this?" And you kept saying, "I don't remember, I don't

remember."

R: I must have been....

D: No, that was before. Are you okay?

R: I'm okay....

D: You're okay, all right. Then you were in Theresienstadt for how long?

R: I was in Theresienstadt until the 12 October '44.

D: And then you were taken where?

R: And then I went to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt. There were big - there were lot of transports going at that point..it was a main deportation from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz at that time. In the Fall of '44, there went many transports then, and they all went to Auschwitz, but nobody of us knew where they were going. We knew there were transports to the East that was, and somewhere into Poland. But nobody, nobody would want or dare believe, even if people tried from Auschwitz...sometimes they let you in Auschwitz when you arrived write a card with a date which was postdated, and by the time these people got the card, all the people were dead. But they were wanting that the cards arrive and that people are not making any fuss going, and they believe that somewhere there is working. They would think they are going to a labor camp. And everybody knew it's nothing good to go to the East. Everybody knew it's bad, but nobody, nobody could arrive, and nobody believed what's waiting from them, even when they had hints from people, wrote in the cards in Hebrew words, it's a lot of death here and this and that. Nobody, nobody could somehow could grasp the the real thing. They would say, all right, it's hard work, you could die from work, malnutrition. Nobody believed it. So I went on the first October with my mother; my father was already gone. My father worked for the administration, I doubt very long. I don't even know what. But he worked in Theresienstadt for the administration, and I have the suspicion he knew more than he ever let go. I don't think he knew about the gas chambers. I'm nearly certain he didn't. But he knew there was very little chance to survive. And he left about a week before me and my mother, or ten days maybe, And when he parted with me he knew he would never see me again. And that was very hard, but at least I did say goodbye to him, which - he gave me his blessing, and he did know what was waiting. And I don't know what happened to him. I think he got through, he got with a transport which went afterward to Kaufering.

D: Kaufering?

R: K-A-U-F-E-R-I-N-G. But I'm not sure because when I asked after the war, few people - everybody said just don't ask. I was transported with my boyfriend, my then boyfriend, which I was very keen on, and this is the last time I saw him. I said goodbye to him. He was quite optimistic, saying, well maybe he will come back; will you would marry me? The last time I saw him - he died six years later. He died of tuberculosis. I know because his brother was with him. I'm in touch with his brother and his best friend who was a physician, much older, but a

physician then for whom I worked already for in Prague for this physician. And he - I think he died.

D: Where did he die?

R: In Kaufering

D: What kind of camp is Kaufering and where was it?

R: I don't know. Anyway. So he had already tuberculosis as his will and he left. And after some time in Auschwitz, I know he just went and - but anyway. That's one I know what happened. My father I never know because most of these people even who were there wouldn't probably remember who he was anymore. Straight after I came back to Prague, I remember after the liberation when I came and I met a few people straight away when they came back and I asked them, they all said to me, well I don't have to ask. don't look.

D: Your mother?

R: My mother went with me on the transport from Theresienstadt. We went on the first of October, which was I think was four more transports. And that was the last one which went from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz.

D: Can you describe the journey?

R: The journey there was - I don't know exactly again. Usually there were about a thousand people going, and train was - by that time it was - the railway was extended into Theresienstadt, which wasn't before. When I came to Theresienstadt, it was no railway going all the way. It was only to the nearest small place and then you had to walk, not very far, but I don't know, a few kilometers you had still to walk. But by that time, because they had so many people - I knew they want to deport 50,000 people, and they wanted as little commotion as possible, so they made the railway going all the way in front of some of the barracks. And again, you got your new number. My number was EQ936, and you had to have your number on you.

D: Where on you?

R: It was made from a little cardboard. You had it tied it around your neck. I didn't remember the number. I got the number later from some register - from some archives, from the archives at Terezin, actually. And so in German ways they were very organized and everybody had - it was no more names, but went under a number. And the transport - you were put into the trains. We again - they said we can take as much as we can carry and they tried that you take as much as you can because they knew they are taking it - on the other side - all away from you. But of course you didn't know, so you made the trouble to again decide what you take, what you don't take, not that you had much, but anyway, it was for the fall. You knew you were going into the winter somewhere in Poland. It was very cold, so you needed boots and you needed a warm dress and this and that and the other, and you had that. And my, husband with whom then I knew him very well. He was a patient of mine in this Dr. Salus' hospital in Theresienstadt, that's how I

met him.

D: Oh, really? What was the matter with him?

R: He had glandular fever and tuberculosis.

D: Your husband now? He had glandular fever. So how did you treat him?

R: They let him rest. I don't think there's any great treatment today for it either, so I think the general rest is still - but he was quite ill. I don't know exactly how long, but at least three weeks, four weeks maybe he was in a room in the hospital.

D: And did you fall in love then?

R: Um, well we knew each other quite well. I don't think whether I fall in love or whether we - we just understood each other very well. He had somebody else and I had somebody else, and it was sort of, but then we understood and we could talk a lot. At night he didn't sleep well, and I had night duty, and he was with me. And we talked about various things. There were younger patients in the hospital and older. But before I left - he left after me. His father left with my father, and I left with my mother in the next few days. And he was still in Theresienstadt, and he brought me - I don't know how he got to them - a box of sardines, the famous sardines, which were I think for the Red Cross, they were supplied in great quantity, and somehow at one point he worked in the bakery too, so he could get some food, battering for bread. And he gave me this one box of sardines which we took for the journey and with my mother. And my mother was very, very depressed, of course, because my father left, and I don't know how much he told her, but I think she was quite aware that we are not going into a sanatorium. And after my father left she was pretty broken. She was very young, she was 48, but she looked tired and she had a scarf on - a head scarf, and. So after we left, the wagons were normal wagons which we went in. Many people were already in some sort of cattle wagons even from Theresienstadt, but we went in a normal way.

D: In a passenger car?

R: Well, sort of reasonably. It had some benches in it. You could sit down and you not - you were pretty squeezed, but you were not suffocating, let's say. I went afterwards in worse. So if you look, you know, everybody says to me, "My God if you talk about Theresienstadt, you think with fondness. I do, because it's so hard to describe why everybody who was there - and I think you heard the same reactions of people who were there because we still had the families around. You didn't live with them. These were very difficult circumstances, but after, what was after that, this was heaven. It still was sort of a certain dignity was allowed to you; you were dressed normally, you could speak normally, you tried to read, to think, to - you had a reasonable, very overcrowded, but some way of life with hope that this is only a transition until the end of the war. And I think that's why thinking now back, still I can't have anything terribly bad things about Theresienstadt. It was no fun to be there, but I was very young which helped a lot. I was with a lot of people my age, so we tried the best to do from the worst possibility. We didn't have luxuries, we didn't have a lot of food. But we were not absolutely starving, we were on a sort

of - I can't remember ever having decent food or anything like this. Bread was there, potatoes were there. It was a war. Everybody had very hard times around. And we had a certain - when you have your own - any of your own possessions, even with the fewest of things, you still feel somehow yourself. I don't know how I would describe it. I don't know whether you were ever burglarized. But if you were, you know the feeling afterwards. It's terrible. You don't want to go out and you feel you were violated. Even if you were not there when they did it. Happened to me a few times. But I still feel, you know, as long as I have something of my own, you cling to it and you are - we tried. We had in the evenings after work, we could talk about boyfriends, or hopes, or what will we do after the war and things like that which later what will be - you know - will come. So from that point, I still feel that for me Theresienstadt - I agree that people who came old, sort of people over 60, there's no chance, there's no hope even in Theresienstadt - that they were completely sort of, it was different. But for me it wasn't that bad anyway. I can't say exactly how long it took. We went, I think sometimes in the afternoon we were supposed to report in one of the barracks.

D: First of all, do you know approximately how many were in your coach?

R: In the apartment?

D: In your wagon.

R: In the wagon. But they were - as I said, in that one - we went with my mother, were seats, so everybody I don't know there were five people at the bench and five people at another bench and behind you it was an open, I don't know, not the whole wagon was open. But there were benches in it, so maybe about 50 people in that wagon.

D: And everyone was sitting.

R: But as I remember, most of the people in my vicinity were sitting.

D: Did you have any toilet facilities, any water, food?

R: We had food what we took with us. It was not supplied specifically for that, but we took with us the sardines and we had something, but I tell you nobody was very interested in having food at that moment, not knowing what will happen afterward. I think people were so - facing something completely - not knowing where you are going, knowing you are going to something much worse, but not knowing where. So the facilities must have been somewhere, but not - at that journey, is nothing I can remember would have been terribly upsetting to me. So it must have been some facilities to, to go. And we still didn't know where we are going. And we went all night. And they used to, I think, use the trains mainly at night. Not many people know what is happening outside. And it's not that terribly far from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. I don't know in miles how long it is, but it's not -so it couldn't have been more than a 24 hour journey. I don't think even if the trains were just standing in various places where other trains were allowed to go. And we arrived during the day. It was not yet dark. It was during the day, and I again don't know anymore if it was morning or afternoon, but I would expect it was during the late morning because a long time was still light. And when we arrived we saw the inscription Auschwitz. And

then, of course, everybody was absolutely out of their minds. We knew we came somewhere - this was the last thing we wanted to get to, and nobody believed this will happen. And when the train stopped, the prisoners came on and started to get people out very quickly and say leave all the luggage, everything leave, just you get out and you get out very quickly and nobody - we will get your luggage and all this sort of thing, and a young man came, looked at me and said, "How old are you?" And I said 17. And he said, "You are not, you are 21 and don't forget it." And he said "Have you got any food?" And I said, "well, I have sardines here," And he said, "eat them, eat them very quickly, but eat them quickly and get out." So I opened with scissors these sardines and ate the whole box of sardines. I think that saved me for a few days, you know afterward. And I didn't understand you know, you were, it was, it was so unreal the whole thing, you didn't know what's happening. And my mother couldn't swallow and couldn't eat anything, understandably because she had the worry about me. It's a different approach to danger, to everything. You are looking after your parents and you are worried, but your parents are worried much more about you. Because I have never had my children in the camp, but I have nightmares about having my children in the camp. Never the other way. So I think it's a very different approach. So my mother must have been completely out of her mind. Anyway, I ate these sardines. You got out with the whole group of the people and we were very quickly ushered on the platform - the whole thing was unreal. In groups, and the men on one side, and women on one side. We were only two of us, and some people who came with us who were living near my mother. And my mother had this head scarf and looked kind of worried. And we came in front of this guy, we didn't know, a big sort of officer in a uniform. There were a lot soldiers with rifles and dogs and sticks around him. And he said to me go to the one side and my mother to the other side. And I went in front of her and I said, "No I go with my mother." It's my mother. I don't want to go without my mother. And never know why he didn't say go with your mother. He wouldn't let me go with my mother. He sent some soldiers to sort of, quite sort of - violently got me to the other side, and they said, "Oh you will see her soon enough, don't worry." So I didn't even blink, I didn't say goodbye, nothing to my mother. And so we went, sort of and we were taken through the camp, I remember very well, because it was so - it's something you couldn't imagine in your wildest dreams how it looked. They took us between the fences, electrified fences, away from the platform. And there were dogs and there was screaming, and there were people behind these fences who thought we still had some food and they were begging for, "Have you got any food? Give us any food." And the soldier next to me was very sort of - had no hesitation and a woman came very near and wanted some bread, and he shot her. Another person came to the wires, touched the wires and was dead. So you come to a - you know, you really don't know what happened to you at all. You are sort of a - so anyway we walked, and I was thinking, I prayed my mother doesn't have to do this. Maybe the young people will be taken, you know, to harder work and she will have better time. Well then they got us to the barrack where they stripped us of every clothes, we were naked. They took our hair; they shaved our heads.

D: Just your heads? They didn't shave you....?

R: Yes, they shaved everything, but the rest doesn't worry you as much as your head. And it's something you are unprepared for, and it's all done in a very rough way. And I had two things - everything you had to - of course - your watches, and your whatever you have jewelry still on, if you have any. And I had a ring which was - no, it was just a metal ring. It was made, I think, I was in Theresienstadt already. No precious metal, but a nice ring somebody gave me, I don't

know whether my mother, must have been. I had that, and I didn't want to part with that. But I still left it on my finger. And then I got for my last birthday in Theresienstadt my boyfriend - not my husband now, but my boyfriend, had made for me a little lucky charm which had the biblical Ruth, a woman with grain - with still grain growing - how do you call it, when you're in the fields when the grain is, you know, when you harvest grain, so in big bunches, and it was done

D: Was it sheaves?

R: And I know exactly who designed it, somebody designed it somebody made it. And it was very nice it was done in stainless steel or something. But I - somehow at that moment it was all I - I thought if I loose that, that's it. I don't live anymore. So I put it in my mouth and left the chain from it go and left my ring on. And nobody noticed it, and then we were naked and they had a big bunches of clothes and quickly you can take what you can. So you just grabbed from nothing, you know, what it is. And I got some long johns of somebody and something else and a handkerchief, which was wonderful. And you go on and you get a two shoes which don't match. And certainly not your feet. They were too big or too small. But nobody cared.

D: Regular shoes or wooden shoes?

R: They were - at that point, they were normal shoes. Some pile of normal shoes, but not together. You just grabbed what you can because they were sort of chasing you quick, quick, quick, get it, get it, get it, get it. So you get something. You still don't believe that it's the real thing - you think maybe you get somewhere else, and that you are not naked or anything. And then a woman who was in charge there realized I had this ring on. And she said to me, "Give me." Took the ring off. "How can you keep still it? Were you not told to get everything out? And my ring was gone. It was my least worry, but I was - this lucky charm of mine was not going to be gotten from me, and I managed to get it through many selections. And they looked all sorts of places. But I managed to get it and unfortunately I was mugged and lost it many years after the war being mugged in my purse. And I am very sorry I did lose that because I think that otherwise, but I had it. So then again we were naked, we were with nothing on, we were with no hair, we looked terrible. Somebody, you know you looked around. "Do I know anybody?" You practically don't because you don't recognize people when they are in such a - difference. I think somebody looked at me and said, "Oh you look like an ugly boy." And then we were still taken from there to the barracks. So the first night was absolutely unbelievable because when we got to the place we were supposed to sleep, and I don't know how many we were, there was so little space that when you wanted to turn, there was some sort of planks you went on. Of course, you had no blankets, nothing like that. But when you wanted to turn about 20 people had to turn because you couldn't turn; we were like sardines on it. But you had one good thing. It kept you a little bit warm. And I kept together with a woman who was my mother's age and who lost at the same time her son. So I think she felt she had me around, and I felt had her. And we spent this night together. And the whole night it was raining; it was - that part of Poland in the late fall, it's something that was foggy, it was mud, mud, mud. Nothing but mud, fog, and rain. It was raining all night, and we were getting all wet with the little clothes we had on, and nobody sort of cares a hoot. And that's the first night. I don't know what happened to her. I don't remember her name anymore. That night, when we arrived in these barracks, of course everybody asked the inmates who were there already a long while in that camp, was, "Who looked after - What happened to

the other side? Where are the people? When will we see them? And they all were very sort of cold and cruel really, at least some. "They are already through the chimney." And this is not what I wanted to know. We were there - we still didn't believe that it's possible.

D: Did you see the chimney?

R: Well, not at that point. I saw them later, and even if you would have seen the chimney you wouldn't have believed what for they are used. When you come somewhere, you see a big factory chimney. But you believe that the smoke there is a smoke from the bodies? You wouldn't.

D: Did you smell the stench?

R: Yeah. You can smell the stench very much, especially a few days later when there were a lot of transports and when they're in full operation. But you are shocked in such a way that you don't know what you are seeing, what you are feeling, what you are smelling, you don't know. And if somebody tells you, you know - your mother - three hours before you have seen her and she is dead, she's already gone. You just don't want to believe it, and you don't believe it. You say well, they are saying it, they are saying it because they are here already a long time and they are envious that we came only now. You find various reasons why you don't want to believe the truth. And of course that woman who was with me, the same was said about her child because it was a small child and that's why the guy told me, never, if somebody asks you, never say you are 17, you are always older. Because when they wanted you for work, they didn't want children. The children they kept on for experiments. Anyway that was the first night, and then it's a sort of blur of what happened the few next days. But of course, you stand for hours and hours being counted. But not for food. Always standing outside now with no hair on. It was very cold. You are much colder than if you have something on your head like a handkerchief helped me a little bit because I could put the handkerchief at least on me a little bit. But you get very cold and tired and absolutely out of your mind standing hours and hours. And they had no intention to let us work, so all you do is stand or lie in these subbeam-like places. A few days later, I stood with some people I knew on one of these appells and looked into a window of a barrack and saw my husband's sister there whom I knew very little. I met her two or three times before - my today husband. But I saw her and then it was at the next appell, we would try to stand with each other and decided that we will stay at least together as long as it is possible that we will stay. So we did stay together and stayed together on and on, and it was not always easy to accommodate it because they did so many psychological tricks on you, knowing that people had nothing else, maybe a friend at least, or a mother or someone -they don't want to part. So the minute they knew they tried everything possible to separate you. Now they were really tricks because you were walking somewhere, you were marched somewhere and everything, and a big military truck was standing in front of you - a military truck with the insignia on and everything. As you walk always in fives. Somewhere two had to go this way and three had to go this way, and if you are unlucky and you are standing with your partner, and you have to part you never know whether you will see each other again because it's so - you are so used that whenever you lose something in Auschwitz, you'll never find it, whatever it is. It might be a handkerchief, you will never see it again - whatever. And whenever you get used to it - you have a shirt on which is maybe 60 times bigger than you need, you will be in two hours stripped naked again and

never see that again. So you could never - these trucks were absolute horror because you never - and you never knew where these lines will part and where it will come together again. That was terrible. It was nothing. It's nothing looking back, but when you are going through it, it's pretty awful. And we got to another barracks and these were a little bit different. And we had again not much space, but they were tiered bunks and...

D: How many tiers?

R: Two tiers. In that particular barrack all night the rats were running across. They were so tame that they could do whatever they liked. They would walk - the rat - on your head. That was the only barrack I encountered the rats, but that was terrible, must have been infested, and that was there was a few nights of just rats around you.

D: Did they bite?

R: They didn't bite me. I don't know if they bit somebody else. That was not funny. Then a friend of mine from Theresienstadt who was already for some time in Birkenau and survived a big transport, which was very shortly before we came, or sort of gassed, but few people survived. She was the one who survived, was looking for somebody else I think, but found me and my sister-in-law. And she really was the first one I did believe when she told me where we are, what's happening - no chance of anything because by that time, they didn't - I had none to do because they stopped what they were doing. They were starting to just destroy the people and not making any more - you know they were not thinking that they send many people out for labor or anything. So the crematoria were working to capacity, and I had nothing to do. She had there to do, and so she knew more about things. She brought me even some bread, which was unbelievable in Auschwitz to get a bit of bread. But she did bring me bread. She said she can never probably find me again because it was very dangerous to go somewhere far. But I did believe the things she told me, what's happening and who from our friends died, and she told me all that. I never saw her again until sort of after the war. Her advice was if you ever can get out, don't hesitate to because a lot of people, when a rumor came a transport is going out, they started to hide under the bunks and behind a corner. They all thought it's going into the gas. So me and my sister-in law said we can't survive here, no chance, there was no food, we were not supposed to be working. We were just a just a mass, waiting for nothing and treated that way. It was very cold, it was very dreadful. By then I think we had clogs, the wooden clogs, which of course didn't fit either. And if you had clogs which are too big and you are sticking in mud, you have hard time to get out. There is no perch, nothing. We were very cold, we were very hungry and generally very miserable. So we decided any possibility, anybody breathing the words, "a transport is going out," we are trying to not to hesitate to - not that you could volunteer for it, but you could make sure you get soon, you know because they were always hard to describe, but if you were in a barrack and they said "go quick quick quick, you have to be out you have to be out." And a column was formed and these Capos or somebody said, It's for a transport out; it's a working transport." Again, a lot of Hungarian girls and other girls started to scream they don't want to go. It will be the gas. Anyway we went with my sister-in-law, and we went out and stood in the line in fives. I think we must have been in that first 25th - you know, they stand in fives. So maybe in the first 100 people. And so we said, "Oh, whatever happens we are in this column of about 2000 people and so whatever happens we are out." So we were really marched to a

platform to everybody's surprise, not to a selection, but to a platform. Before that we went through, I think, seven selections while we were there, which means always to be completely naked, to run around some officers, you know, looking at you and again saying, "You go this way, you go that way." So when you both end up at the same side you are extremely relieved that at least you are together and you know very quickly whether it is for life or for gas because the older people were people who looked a bit less fit would be there. We were both very young. We were still very fit. We were not that long in Auschwitz. I was, on the whole, only four weeks in Auschwitz. And so we went through seven selections on the whole, which was a lot. Every time you go for one, you are stripped for whatever you have, you go naked, you come to another barrack, they throw at you some other old shirt and things, and you are no more a human being. I don't think - you know, nothing can be - you are completely dehumanized. You have no name, you have no - you have a number, but the number doesn't mean anything to you because as long as you had the tattoo you were sort of a labor force, but if you hadn't - you know - just nothing. And anyway, so we go into this column and were marched to a platform where actually a train would be arriving, and we are all sort of great elation, if you can say, we don't know where to go. Whether it can go worse than here. Whatever happens can be only better. And then I think there must have been about 2000 people, so it's a lot in fives. It's a long, long column. And then a big officer comes, usually with bloodhounds and with his stick and with all that, and says, "About turn." And we were the last 100. We never think it will happen. And still don't know what's happening, but then they are counting these people in and they needed 2000 slaves for some labor camp. As it happened this transport went to Bergen-Belsen, and they had a very tough time of that, but I had a few friends who saw me standing there not getting on. And when they saw me after the war they couldn't believe their eyes because they were absolutely convinced that we went to the gas chambers. Anyway, they get on, they counted 2000, 100, less or over, or I don't know, 100 or 80 or 120, something of that kind. And this man who marched us in a count says to another one, "Eins gas." So even though you play this field.

D: What did he say?

R: Into gas.

D: No say it in German.

R: "Eins Gas".

D: Oh, "eins gas."

R: So by that time at that time I don't know whether you have any feeling or you are relieved or whether you are not delighted, but what can you do? But they did get us to something which is - all of us who were there have a little bit different memories of this, but all pretty horrible. But you know, what was in there, it was something which you would use as a kennel. It was sort of not a big - it wasn't even a barrack. It was some sort of - looked like a kennel - you couldn't stand up, you couldn't lie down, you could just about fit. And you were very squeezed in it. And it was in front of the gas chambers. You could see the columns of people waiting for the gas chambers. You could see there the smoke, you could smell everything. And was a big commotion because the people who were definitely sort of waiting already for the gas chambers were - a lot of them

were praying and wailing. And it was dreadful. And the worst - maybe not the worst - but a very bad thing was they didn't give us any drink - the food - we were hungry, but thirst is much worse than hunger if it comes to it. You get really, really dehydrated, and we would give anything for a drop of food and people were - some people can take it more and some less. That was terrible. That was very bad, and you really fear that you are no more alive because they don't sort of - you are begging for water - people who were passing by. Then, I don't know how long we were there. I don't know, and again my sister-in-law has a different view of how long it took and somebody else has a different view. I don't know. I think we were there certainly more than one night. But how long it took I don't know. Then they needed 100 more people for another transport. They got us out, we didn't know for what. They got us out, they got us to the platform, brought us to another column of people, and that's how we got out of Auschwitz. It must have been fate or something. I can't think of anything else it could be because it certainly we had any - we had no doing about it or saying about it or anything what happened.

D: Tell me something. You were so close to people marching into the gas chambers. A few people that I've talked to who were in this position, what did they say to each other or what were the expressions on their faces or?

R: It could be several things. I tell you something. It's something which I think really in my mind doesn't - I have clear recollection - I haven't been - it wasn't that it was two yards in front of you. It was on that side. I was in this kennel, and I could hear all night the wailing and the praying and the dogs barking if somebody stood out a little, but, if I would try recollecting, I couldn't tell you. What we together spoke - I don't think we spoke much at all because what can you - you are first of all your thirst is getting you practically into a coma. And I don't have any recollections that we would have had any last thoughts about anything.

D: Essentially you are numb.

R: You are completely - that's what I was, and my sister-in-law was.

D: You're beyond fear; you're just numb?

R: I think also you know and you know what's happening. You still, you just - and by that time you are physically pretty beaten down and you are all time the psychological things, the selections and the people around you and the screaming and the - as I say, you become completely dehumanized. And you feel that well what has to come has to come. I think the feelings that you are alone, that you don't have anybody terribly to worry about. If my mother is no more around, or that people there, they have no - it must be terrible to have your child with you. Because that is - your feeling is totally much more for somebody else at that moment than for you.

D: Was there anyone in the group who assumed a kind of a caretaker role?

R: I don't know. Apart from my sister-in-law, I can't well remember who was in that particular situation for the - they must all come to Lenzing because we then all went to Lenzing. But I don't know who it was because they might not have been Czechs, but they were a lot of Hungarian,

they were Polish, they were Dutch. So they all spoke in their own languages if they spoke at all. You were not supposed to speak. It was another thing you couldn't really do much speaking because we were not allowed to speak. We were not allowed to speak at a zellappell - you know, at the zellappell you're not allowed to utter a word. I know that at one of the zellappells in Auschwitz I fainted, and I only wanted to die. That was the only time - I thought I just don't want - they can do whatever they like with me, but there were two or three girls around me, and they started to revive me. They just pushed me up and held me up standing, and then they were putting my head up and down, up and down, up and down. I thought, oh if they only would let me go. That was the only time I fainted in Auschwitz. Whether it was from hunger or whether it was I'm cold, it was a combination of everything. So that was the only time I thought I really don't think I want to go on. I can't go on anymore. But otherwise I had this sort of strong preservation. I want to end it very quickly. Well, we got on that train, which was - that was pretty awful. They were wagons there. They were the cattle wagons, and they got about 100 people into a wagon. You couldn't - not everybody could sit down, maybe a few people could sit down. And we were sort of squeezed together, standing. I had a corner with my sister-in-law and some other people around, and that point we were released, and we at least get out, whatever happens after that. And we were given a bit of bread and I think a bit of very, very sharp meat which was very very hot.

D: They gave you a little piece of meat?

R: Oh, yes, they gave us a little bread, I can't remember exactly how much. A bit of bread. And a bit of some sort of very very hot sausage which was - I don't think it was on purpose. It was something to preserve the meat was so hot. But to have that after being so thirsty and having no water for another three days was unbelievable. Well, it took us three days to get to Lenzing. We

D: Did you have water or ...?

R: Well, they left in each wagon, they left two buckets. One bucket for toilet and one with water. But the wagon had no windows; it was very dark, and very soon the two buckets were identical. So it was no water, and at intervals of 10 hours - I can't be sort of sure how many hours but at long intervals, they let the buckets to be emptied when they stopped the train somewhere, but it wasn't sort of enough because then they let a bit water in, but you never got more than, you got less because people were then crazy for water and it's really much, much worse than hunger to be thirsty. Whilst we were - well it was dark, it was unpleasant, people were ill, people were everywhere, people were - no pleasure to be in that wagon, no space to sit, not knowing what's happening. But they are - little as they are, so awful on these wagons, they are little slits opening near the ceilings of the wagons, and then they were, between the planks, there were little openings, so people who were near the wall with good eyes could see a little bit through what's happening. We realized that we are going through Moravia. At one of the stops - we knew exactly where we stopped, I know it was on the 28th of October. It used to be a national holiday in Moravia. So we are delighted we are going through, and we, of course, didn't know where we are going. But we knew we are going through our territory. It was not bad, at least, to go there. Well, after I think 72 hours or something like that, when they opened the wagons in Lenzing, we were awaited with some SS women because they were men - and there were few men around with bloodhounds, but mainly women were waiting. And when we got out of the wagons, they

were absolutely aghast. They had never seen anything like this.

D: They were absolutely what?

R: Aghast.

D: Oh, aghast.

R: They just couldn't - they didn't know what to do with us. Because they knew we are - they thought they are going to get labor, and they were digging out skeletons - of course in a terrible state, no clothes, no nothing. We were in a terrible state. And they were very - a man came who was from the factory where we were supposed to work in. And he apparently said - I personally don't remember it - but I was told now that he said, "Where is the luggage?" And the soldiers who came with us to escort with this train said, "It is no luggage." And the man said, "Well where have they got some clothes, or, you know, they can't work like that." And he wanted to send us back. He didn't want to accept - you know they had to sign for 2000 bodies, and he didn't want to accept. But these people who escorted us - they must have been some officers, SS officers, or whatever they were - but they were so worried that they would be encumbered with us more, so apparently they just took the train and took off and left us there. "That's what we were supposed to deliver, we delivered, and that's it."

D: All right you came into Lenzing rather than Mauthausen?

R: Yeah, it was straight to Lenzing. We were sold to this factory.

D: To a factory in the town of Lenzing.

R: In Lenzing, which was a zell factory. It's called zell. It was zellwolle. It's a wool which was made from some sort of fibers, from synthetic fibers. And that was used for some war use. They thought it was very important. I don't know whether it was or it wasn't, but I don't that it still exists, but it did exist for a long time, this factory. It was quite a big factory. Anyway, the women didn't know what to do with us. They gathered us in the usual fives. And they were women who were used to look after prisoners in Mauthausen, but they were still not prepared for what they have seen. They marched us about 4 kilometers, something like that, from the factory to our - where we lived was about four kilometers - to a hut. I don't know whether it was bombed or burnt out. An old paper mill factory, and that was to be our habitat then. It was big, a big hole, an enormous hole with windows, half of them were broken, half of the roof was broken. It was fenced, on three sides it was fenced and the fourth side had a river, what was the river called? Ager is what they were called ager A-G-E-R. And on the side of the river, it was a big washroom made solely - you had faucets coming from the river into the washroom so it was absolute heaven because you had people that just went wild to drink the river water. They ushered us in, they said we should take - there were bunk beds, two-tiered bunk beds, the third was an enormous hole. And we should take, so we were so used to be - I don't know how many on one bunk - so everybody who knew each other started to crawl into these things, and the aufseherinnen (supervisors) whatever we called them in English, were absolutely out of their minds, saying, "Well, where do you think you are? If ever we see too many in one bed

together - you will be shot." These sort of people they couldn't believe, you know. So we actually got two to a bunk and we had a so-called mattress, which was a sack filled with shredded paper, but it still was something to lie on. We each got a horse blanket, and they supplied us with paper trousers, long trousers made out of - woven from paper and they striped them, and the striped tops. And I think we got - some of them at least, or some of us got some hats, but I don't think I had one. And we got our own numbers - put on a metal strip, which we had to have on our wrist. And then we had to put it on the coat, on the jacket, on the third jacket. And I think they left us at least three or four days doing nothing because they couldn't see that we would be able to walk as far as the factory.

D: Did they feed you any?

R: They did - they did - made a kommando the first day. They asked who speaks German. Few people volunteered. People were very reluctant to volunteer for anything, but a few people did. And from then they made helpers for the Germans, and a few people stayed then in the - where they lived and didn't have to go to work but looked after the so-called administration of the place - to look that people go and bring the food. Every day four or five people had to go. And an hour before everybody else got up, they had to get up, which meant at 2 in the morning, because we got up at 3, and went these four kilometers there and four kilometers back with a kettle of so-called soup, or in the morning it was some sort of liquid. It was - I don't know from what it was. It certainly wasn't coffee, but it was from something. We had a day a slice of bread, which was getting smaller and smaller because at that part it was no food. Generally the Germans had in there no food there. And I think after the war, when we compare the rations - I think we were the least; that's the smallest rations we ever got. We had five deca, which is a little bit more than a quarter - four deca is a quarter, so five is a little bit more for a day's bread. And that was the ration. So in the end, we ate grass; we ate anything you could possibly get. Really, there was very bad, the hunger was very bad. But we were - when we got - I am jumping from one thing to the other. So when we got out at this station, it was - for me - it was, I thought, well, that is, you know, something fantastic, coming from Poland, from this mud bog, you come to the Austrian mountains. You could see the big mountain then, which is called the Traunstein. It's over a big lake, over Attersee, it's a very beautiful part of the world. This was very near. You could see the peaks were already under snow; the sun was coming out. This fantastic air which you could breathe and didn't breathe any smoke and any terribly - was fantastic, and everybody, sort of, "Oh my God, here we can survive whatever. It can't be that bad." So then when we were put into this factory. They made some divisions of who will go to work where. It was one room made to a sickbay, where we had a Czech doctor whom I knew quite well from before. Her name was Charlotte Springer. She was then, she must have been then in her late 30s, around 40. Was a slight woman, but very, but very energetic. And I don't know how they got the nurses. They had 2 or 3, 2 and a half nurses, which was a start.

D: What was a half nurse?

R: I tell you what a half nurse was. Well it was, the one was Ellen Loeb, which was a Dutch girl who studied already - had a semester or so of medicine, and a girl from Wuppertal, from Germany, Margot Weil. She was a nurse before. And then we had

(END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1)

D. You had a girl from Prague

R. Yes, we had, we had a friend who was from Prague, and who managed to get her twelve year old sister through Auschwitz with her and they came with us. And this girl was only twelve. She was, she was, physically a big girl and managed to do that. So in order not to endanger her in anything, because she was a, I think a half nurse who was sort of helping in the sick bay. She certainly wasn't a nurse. But managed to be a lot working there in order not to go out on assignment because it was hard. The walks were very hard. You had to get up every three o'clock in the morning. It took till six till they counted all the five hundred people. Then the few people who went for the breakfast, came to the breakfast we were given our ration of bread and, uh, liquid and then we marched over an hour the 4 km. to the factory. At 7 o'clock the shift started. We were divided in many various parts of the factory so everybody worked in some other places, and I'm familiar only with where my sister-in-law worked and I worked. My sister-in-law went straight into the beginning of where they start this, zellwolle. It is from a liquid which is partly of an acid I think because it was terribly painful to breathe and you got burned and of course all the foreman and the Germans had protection glasses and things. We had nothing. So my sister-in-law worked in this part and I was assigned to the - it was funny because she was at the complete beginning and I was at the complete end. I already had to transform the bales. It ends up like a very, very sharp cotton-wool, but, like glass cotton-wool. If you touch it, you open your hands and everything.

D. Did could cut your hands?

R. You could cut yourself, badly. But this was already in bales in a normal.... Whether of my memory is right or not I don't know but they were certainly bigger than I was. And you had a little two wheeled carriage, and you had to put them into rows and on top of that, off of that, like in a storehouse. I don't know how long I would have lasted there -definitely not very long because it was very, very difficult to do it. And who and how I got away from it, I don't know either. I think what happened from what other people said that at one point they stopped for two weeks the factory. They didn't have the raw material or something happened, and they stopped the it and I think at that point I got away from that assignment luckily, and I got into clear the floors and the everything in the SS mess, in the, in the cafeteria, in the sort of cafeteria. So I was every day scrubbing floors and the chairs, every chair had to be scrubbed because they didn't have enough work for us so they made us scrub it under and over and everything, so fine. And I can remember to make myself sort of sane, to do it all day long from 7:00 till 5:00 in the evening, I pretended that how will have my kitchen done then I'm back, and when I have my own apartment or house and it will be my chair that I am washing, and I got through all of it quite well because I was fantasizing, never speak to anybody. That didn't last very long, and after this my sister-in-law and a friend who became one of the translators between the SS and between the rest of us - she was called a schreiber, I think it was called a schreiber, somebody who was administrator there - what you call today in America an administrator. And she took pity on me and she assigned me because she could sort of change a little bit and she assigned me to do the, about five or six people went to peel potatoes in the SS sort of canteen, which was not

a big assignment, also we were peeling all day long, raw potatoes. But, of course, we could eat those potatoes and we could not to be seen. We could take the peelings from there. And on top of it I had every day, ah, a ration of soup which was from there and not our soup. But we were given, everyone was given a grey metal plate, just a soup plate, a little spoon and that was it. So in order to get to my sister the soup, I had to carry these 4 km. an open soup plate. Apart from the time that it was frozen and it was easy, it wasn't very easy to carry and not to spill for four kilometers. But I did it till the end. Sometimes I managed to share with her the carrying if I was anywhere near her in the column and it was like I had just a little bit more food to myself back in this peeling thing. We were not allowed, of course, to bring even the peelings home, that was very, very sort of, off. And once they caught me of course I did carry sometimes the peelings together. I don't know I give them to pigs probably or somewhere but ah, but probably the prison to have them. Once I had stuffed them in my pocket or something and they made a search when we came back occasionally from the search and they found my peelings and they made a mock trial which I will never understand how, you know, I was brought - I was sure that they would send me back, not feed me or something because that was a terrible crime to do and I was brought in front of three soldiers, the Wehrmacht or SS - I wouldn't know - and they asked me why on earth do you do this. I looked at them in absolute sort of astonishment and said, "Well, they're hungry." And they said, "Well why don't you say so?" It was, it was unbelievable, they let me go. So, I didn't have my peelings, but nothing happened to me, nothing whatsoever. And the problem was that um, where we lived, we had this little bit more privacy, that we had our own bath, everything was right, but it was cold, it was no heating there whatsoever, and up there in the mountains it is not warm during the winter. We came in the end of November. And while there was a stove which was every day lit, it was in the sick bay. So, I knew the doctor. I got very friendly with Margo, and through Margo with Ellen and, uh, what did she call herself, Illa?

D. Illa

R. And, uh, I can see her. She was sort of - not too, she was bigger than me, but she was a bit stocky looking girl and she was always very fair and she was very good. Margo, so every now and then or every night if it was necessary, or whenever I could I went to the sick bay and I had a bit of hot water and a bit of warmth and helped out whatever was necessary. They didn't have many beds, there but um, they tried to do the best and there were a lot of things which were happening and one thing why it was not very memorable - was on the 11th of January, it's my sister-in-law's birthday so that's why I know the exact date of it, um, I tried - she was - Dr. Springer let her stay home. She was ill, she had her hands in a terrible shape because she used to work in this uh, awful infested place, and so her hands swollen in terrible place so always the doctor could leave somebody one or two days at home, I mean one day if it wasn't, so she was staying at home one day and because it was her birthday I worked out to make me sick too so that we can be that day together and not to go out to work. So she, she wrote me sick that day and I stayed at home and at 3:00 in the morning it was the appel and about 6:00 everybody left and it was 11th of April. The days are still relatively short, completely dark and it was snowing very hard and the column comes over again and the rows of five women and it's a long column because 500, or really 500 people were marching. So in front was a soldier with a dog, and in the back was a soldier with a dog and in between were these women who were looking after us, everyday and all the time and they all had assigned a certain amount of women or a commando

which was working in this place or that place and always had to have this woman, with them. And they changed, they never let any of these SS women be longer than 2 or 3 weeks that they don't get used to us, which of course they could have been nicer then when they knew somebody. So they rotated it all the time. But that's beside the point So these women walked within the forest walk of one unprotected train crossing. And it was snowing very had and the ones in back were screaming go faster, go faster, the column musn't be split on the railway because they never, they were always worried that somebody would escape if anything happened unusual so we must cross before the train comes. It was foggy; nobody could see near enough. And because they just forced these women to run through the forest, the women to run under the train and quite a few women were killed. And, of course, there was a great commotion because then they had to leave the injured and the dead women but were completely -you did - the bodies, somewhere the legs, and this and that. And the rest ran afterwards to the factory to work and somebody came back to where we were and said, "What happened?" And not even thinking, five minutes further, I immediately volunteered to go with blankets to help to get if somebody was still alive or something but of course, they were sort of, they said, how come I am sick and I can go. But, um somehow it sort of smuggled out that I had only a terrible flu and I can overcome it. And they had to take blankets and bring all the bodies back. and I don't think there were any survivors, if there were any they died, so it was nobody who was brought to the sick bay, not to my knowledge and I don't know how many people died, there must have been uh, fifteen, and uh, so that was one thing we all of us remember very well. And, uh, the next one was a little bit later in January when Auschwitz was already evacuated. And a lot of people were driven to death marches, a death march in the snow. And there were about twenty girls who survived one of these death marches and one of them was a Yugoslav girl called Nadja, I forgot her other name. I wasn't exactly there after the war. I forgot her other name, she was about fifteen when she came, and she had her feet completely frostbitten and frozen. They were black, they were completely black so she was taken to the sick bay and she had an SS doctor from the factory who used to come and sort of see whether things are going right and whether the doctor is not doing anything she shouldn't and, uh, he was unfortunately a surgeon who loved to find something he could cut or amputate or who knows. So it was always the biggest worry of the doctor and to keep them there, and to hide people who would need any bigger thing to do, not to be shipped with him and tried to do whatever we could do best. So Nadja was hidden from him for a long, long time because he would have amputated both her legs. And also, she was in absolutely excruciating pain, and we had absolutely - the doctor didn't have anything to heal or to put - all we had was charcoal if there was diarrhea or dysentery or something. So charcoal they dished out. So instead of giving her anything, any ointment on it, to put the charcoal on, it was very good because anything which was infected would be a little bit - the barrier the charcoal would spill out, and it was sort of down to powder, it wasn't little pills and powder and every day we had to, at night, late at night, we had to take off the bandages. Every time one of her toes stayed in the bandages and she screamed with pain and somebody was always needed three or four people for her changing the bandages because somebody had to hold her, somebody had to be at her head, she was in excruciating pain. But she survived and she could walk after all, but not very easily. She lost all of her toes. But it was sad. For many many weeks we had to hide her every night from, uh, to do the bandaging but nobody knows about it, and to hide her when the doctor came that she doesn't see her. And, uh, that was what I remember, that was the time I was a lot every night and needless to say it wasn't easy because at 3:00 in the morning I had to get up and at best, we got back about 7:00, because the shift was usually from 7:00 in the

morning till 5:00. Now we had to wait for everybody to assemble from the various places of the sector and to be counted again at the sector and then walk the four miles back, be counted again before we were sort of allowed to go to our, to be free to go at least lie down or something. So that by that time we got another soup or so called soup. So it was another standing around for a long time. So it was well after 8:00 must have been before we are free. So then when I went to the sick bay and before everything was done. So I slept very very little for long periods of time. And by that time I was really getting very very exhausted and my sister-in-law was a great help because she at least arranged for me that I didn't eat my bread in the morning, the minute I got it because I would have done it, I'm not that disciplined. And she always hid a little bit home for the evening and she is much more disciplined than I, and could do that. So I was quite a busy person. A woman was pregnant and she had either a stillbirth or an abortion, we don't know whether it was induced by the doctor or whether it was a stillbirth, which very possible, but that had to be hidden from everybody because she wouldn't have survived she would have been shipped back to Mauthausen or somewhere. Then there was another very young girl who was pregnant and who carried the pregnancy very secretly and she had the child, the day after liberation. Because we had no clothes which were you know, somehow -you know - she somehow managed to carry it to term, which was very very dangerous. She was a very young girl, 19 or something like that.

D. Who delivered the baby?

R. Huh?

D. Who delivered the baby?

R. I don't know. It must have been the doctor. I don't know. But it was after, it was the day after the liberation, the 4th of May. And, uh, it could, it was, there wasn't any more the excitement of hiding the child because the child would have been normally killed straight away. Um, All the, whoever, delivered a healthy child wherever in the camp, the child was always killed straight away.

D. What was the sick bay like?

R. My memory, is, you want it to be, that I'm very, I can't now distinguish always this physical part, what is a real memory and what is a little bit of fantasy maybe because there's a friend of mine who was a sister of this very young girl, we have terrible disputes whether the window was on the left side or on the right side. She thinks it was on the right side, I think it was on the left side, so it's very irrelevant but to say that I remember photographically how things looked is not. It was a not very big room .

D. Just one room?

R. No, I think they were two rooms. It was all a wooden barrack, which was still adjoining this old factory in, the offices before when the factory was - it looks to me that it were offices while the factory was still in operation which it wasn't anymore when we came there. It was either bombed out or burned out. But it looked, it was a big hall where we lived and there was a corridor and across the corridor were these various little rooms and one of them was - the SS had

the, you know, the rest things there, and there not all of the time, one had the Werhmacht, the men had one and then I think two maybe three, I don't know, I think two rooms were the sick bay and one was with a stove where it was more just like a surgery done, no bed but people came there and the doctor saw them and then he did a little bit and if somebody was cut up badly, sol they had some bandages. The only thing that was available was charcoal and I don't think anything else. So what our doctor...

D. Aspirin?

R. I think not, at that time iodine was available and whatever, if you were cut you could put iodine on it and the charcoal was available if you had diarrhea. If you had a high fever she let you stay two days at home and I think that was the only remedy she could do. How she managed with miscarriage or that, um, I know it was done but whether she had any instruments to do anything, I wouldn't know, I don't think she did acually. I think there must have been something he prescribed. I don't think she had anything because that had to be secret. And um, the bandages, there were very few bandages available for people who had injuries in the factory because there were a lot of instruments. Some places were done, and it was then done into various stages so if you had to use big machinery and things there were people there I am sure injured. Then there were times where some of the kommandos went out and had to bring some stones from one place to another. One kommando worked in salt mines. So there must have been a few - there were no medicines there, not any kind. But she invented a fantastic thing.

D. Who's that

R. The doctor. She realized that a lot of people need to believe they are treated, so she managed to find little bottles or a bottle of something which we put water in. And with an eye dropper and a little spoon she administered a few drops of just plain water and said, "Don't tell anybody I gave you this. I've only got a few of it." And she administered this water and people are getting better. We used to call it Udenol. It had a name. Udenol. It had nothing, nothing, nothing, but even after the liberation, where I worked with her in a different hospital then, she used Udenol and people loved it and went around saying you didn't give me - six hours now, I need it. That was a good invention, it didn't do any harm and so I really, really didn't work in Lenzing in any capacity as a nurse. After the liberation, she a few people um, Illa and very very soon, back to Holland, we were there another five weeks and I got within a week I think, a plane, and I got all of the Dutch people...

D. Plane or train?

R. Plane. They came with a plane. They were wonderful, and uh, there were not that many and they got everybody out very quickly but we had to wait about five weeks before we left, before we were transported back.

D. Before you tell me about the liberation can you tell me more about Ellen from your perspective?

R. Well, I - she was a very nice person, she was very, how would I say it, she was the one who

tried to be very fair to everybody and very sort of - she somehow realized that she had a bit of privileged position there. It was, she didn't have to go out, she got her food delivered, not that it was any food but at least she didn't have to fight for it, because everybody was very careful to be nice to her because occasionally you need a day off and if you couldn't anymore, to work, so that, of course she worked very very closely with Dr. Springer. And, uh, I knew her very well, but I was much more friendly with Margo because Margo was nearest to my age. Illa was a little bit older than I am, but she already had, I think, a semester or so of medicine, didn't she? Well she pretended to have. But she was older than me, of that I am sure. Do you know when she was born?

D. Yes, she was, uh, I don't have that information with me.

R. Never mind, I'm certain. Margo was either the same - I think Margo was the same age as me, and Margo did have nursing in Wuppertal, I think. I don't know when Margo was transported into our...

D. Where was she?

R. She's from Wuppertal and, Illa's sister told me they are from Wuppertal, which I didn't know because I thought she was Dutch, so I never was close enough with her that she would have told me she's not Dutch or anything. She tried to be very reserved with a lot of people because she needed that little bit, otherwise people would have taken a lot of advantage of wanting this or that.

D. She tried to be what with you?

R. Reserved

D. Oh, reserved, okay.

R. I don't know how she was later, but I know that I tried very hard to find her, but of course I could never find her, I don't know her name, she must have married since. I found Margo by sheer coincidence, I knew from where she was exactly. And I was once in London, in a - still in France, it might have been still in France. And I went to a bookshop and with German books, and I was looking for something and it was another man standing next to me looking for something and somehow he said to the salesperson he's from Wuppertal. So I went to see him, and that I was very sort of - a very sort of question or request which you might refuse or might not be able to do, but I am desperately looking for somebody from Wuppertal. Could you tell me how can I write to a office or somewhere? And he took Margo's name and he found her for me. That's how I found Margo. By then she was married and she lived in Paris and that man helped me to find her. So it's, Illa, I lost touch the day she left or before. I was with her, though, very often but, as I say, it was mainly about Nadya, which was several weeks - this Slav girl with her with her boned feet, and uh, the times I used to come there but if I was not, I knew all of them so it was not a great sort of friendship with one of them. I knew Becker, the doctor who was Czech and I knew Illa, Margo, I knew her very well and I was reminded, I didn't remember that she was there with her mother. I remember it now, but it wasn't then that I was aware of it that much. I

don't think - most of the interaction with other people was on these walks because you didn't work with them or when you were back on your, on your bed or whatever you call it. For instance with my sister-in-law and with my friend with the thirteen-year-old sister, she desperately tried to do some little education for the sister. So if we had any Sundays we didn't have to go to work, so we sat together all four of us and we made quizzes and we exchanged, uh,

D. You made what?

R. Quizzes.

D. oh, quizzes.

R. And we tried to remember streets of Prague, which shops are on the streets, and just to do something and we tried to learn Hungarian so they can count I think to 10 in Hungarian. To do something not to be completely in the place, to keep sane, another pastime which was more than a past time, which was an obsession of practically everybody, was exchanging recipes for food and it meant absolute terrible quarrels because if you said this recipe need , three eggs and somebody said you need five eggs and do you need hot water, hot milk or cold milk and it was an obsession, but we couldn't think of much else than food. We exchanged these recipes, at night. We woke up somebody saying, "Do you remember your mother's recipe for this or that? Tell me. It's a very important thing." But this had nothing to do great. But that happened I think in all of the camps. Somehow, there's some things which you can't help and in the end we, in the last bit in April it started to be very bad. There was no food so we used to on the way collect some grasses, some bits which we knew are edible. People tried and then the snails came out in spring, people ate snails. I can't eat snails even today. And uh, but, uh, sorry I can't think of much more, I can't now recollect about ..

D. But you can eat sardines

R. I can eat sardines, that I like.

D. All right, what about liberation.

R. Um, I think in about, in April, both fronts was coming nearer.

Machine off.

D. We were talking about liberation.

R. I have to get back to.

D. Back into your thoughts.

R. Well, um, the front was coming near in April ,and uh, the Germans started to be a little bit more nervous about things. The air raids were being more frequent and at that time over the, most of the territories, were flying very low planes which were called tief flegers.

D. Tief ?

R. Tief, t - i - e - f . Low airplanes, and they were really very low so that pilot could see the people on the ground, it wasn't that they were you know. They were bombing whatever they found, so they, at first they used to get us out into a booth and make us take off striped things and put them on the ground and sometimes they even put them over their uniforms to, they were so scared that they would go for their uniforms so they thought nobody will go for the striped uniforms. Of course for us, it was quite, we were glad and we knew the end was coming. And the rumors started to be that they don't let us survive, that they would get us to these salt mines or another quarry or somewhere, and they will blow us up. And whether it was true or not, I still don't know, but some of the girls who were working in the salt mines said they know, they have seen the charges there and the mines will be blown up. And, uh, we didn't know what was happening and we knew, through the grapevine there was a lot of prisoner of war camps around, the real prisoners of war. Russians were there and, uh, some of the French people who were free to walk around, they were forced labor, but not prisoners were around. And, uh, I couldn't speak any French. My sister-in-law is very fluent in French. And one day these two guys appeared near the fence, they were French and they had bikes and they were saying we should be calm and keep on. They will try to find the Americans. And we could hear the front. The shooting was coming and the Germans were saying, "If the Americans come we are all right; if the Russians come we commit suicide because they will kill us." Nobody knew. It was sort of, on the road. People were going in all directions. In this direction there's a fleeing sort of - the front was coming and it really came to the crunch there where the Russians and the Americans met. And uh, we knew that when the air raid siren, you knew exactly how often the siren goes, what's happening, either these are the low flying airplanes or it's a big air raid of many planes. It was a code and how many times the sirens went up and down. Everybody knew what's happening really. They said when the sirens will go on an on and on, I don't know how many times, thirty times or something like that, it means that the Germans are allowed to abandon their posts and flee. So everybody was counting furiously the sirens, how often the sirens will go whenever the air raid came. And then, no, it was even before. Yeah, I don't know exactly when, but, um, at one point the air raid came and the sirens are hooting and hooting, and the main woman who was in charge of the whole camp, called another appell, and she said, as you can imagine, "The enemy is here, and we have to abandon our posts, but they locked, they will lock you in still." She had a bike, she put herself on a bike and disappeared and in a little while she came back because she forgot her iron for ironing, and collected her iron and disappeared again. And, uh, in a short time a very small, it wouldn't even a whole division, two trucks of Americans arrived. The commander was a Jew, and he had a division of blacks with him It was the Eighth Division of Patton's Army, and, uh, they were - I don't know whether it's so, or whether there was another night division with him, but these came. They were the only ones who came at that moment,

D. To Lenzing?

R. To Lenzing. And he said he was making a diversion, just to liberate us because he was alerted by these French guys that if they don't come soon we will be killed.

D. What was the name of the commander?

R. I don't think - I never knew it. It was, I think, from history, I know that it was the Patton's Third Army. I don't know, I have no idea. They were very shocked, they were absolutely shocked, I think that was the first time they saw something like that, and unfortunately they emptied whatever they had food - the K rations or whatever rations they had for, and in that was bacon, a lot of bacon. And it was taken by many for many people, and many people died, people who couldn't restrain themselves not to eat it and God, it was terrible. But they disappeared very quickly and then was, sort of, they locked us in again, and it was nothing. People were, of course, very happy and praying and singing and doing this and that, but it took another day I think or before the real army came, and it repeated itself. they opened the gates. They let us, if we want to, we could go out, we couldn't go very far because, funny enough, we could walk 8 kilometers a day, but when we were free, we couldn't walk very far. It was, somehow, overwhelming to go where you want, and so, like an animal, we went a little bit out and in again. And, uh, when the army came they took over sort of the doctor Springer, that she was supervised and whatever. They gave her another small hospital which then served the main lager in Camp II, which was which was in Ebensee, which was very well known, or to Voecklabruck hospital. And so I went with her, and a few other people went with her, and I can't remember, I'm sure as long as I was there she went with Margo but, because neither were there 5 weeks, and they went very quickly back. So it's not in my memory anymore. It was a lot of work, a lot of people were just exhausted, a lot of people had tuberculosis, a lot of people died of typhoid, a lot of people had dysentery. Something I forgot to tell you before, a bad thing was at one point Lenzing was infected with lice. And we got no sleep at all because we were bitten absolutely and you can't get rid of it. We had no great possibilities. We had no hair, they have been growing slowly, and they didn't shave us anymore there. And I suffered terribly from any bites of insects mostly, but, uh, I get terribly allergic. I'll be like a balloon, and I was. And I was very scared that they will ship me back because it looked like I had scarlet fever or something terrible. I was absolutely bitten on every part possible. And, with that, typhoid came to - it was an outbreak. When the Americans came there, it was all right The doctor got even assigned a car. The Americans gave us from the Russian prisoners of war, a driver. I think he was called Vladimir. It was my first encounter with something I couldn't understand because we all were crazy about the thought of going home. Who is back home and who isn't back home. And when we talked to Vladimir, he said he had one wish: to be arrested by Americans. And he did everything possible to be arrested. And I said, "Vladimir why, why don't you want to come?" "Oh, I will never find my family again." And we couldn't understand it. He said, "Oh, Russia is a big country, and they are moving here the daughter, and here the wife. And he was not interested at all, well not totally interested, but he really, he did everything possible to, short to short of kill somebody, to be arrested. I don't think that he succeeded, I don't know because they were still, the soldiers were prisoners of war and had such a good time. They were then shipped to Japan and uh, to France. I don't know. But he was very superstitious, when he saw a black cat he stopped the car and he wouldn't go a step further or anything. So we had this car with the doctor. We were going round to all these little tents and hospitals because they needed it, and before we left home, I went to one of the commanders and said would he give her the car and he did. He loaned her the car, which was the property of my sister-in-law and we - of course we couldn't drive the car, then somebody drove it and never saw it again. A car after the war was a big commodity.

Tape stops.

R. We had sort of, my sister-in-law didn't want to nurse, but we didn't want to part because we were so close by then together we wouldn't have survived without each other I think. And, as many people found, that there were times where one couldn't go on anymore and the other one said you must. And when life was worse there and other people couldn't and you had to talk them through it and things. But after the liberation of course we had all only one thought, or two thoughts, one to get home and the other one to have enough food. And it was unbelievable the amount of food that we could consume and never to stop. Then the Americans supplied is with rations, UNRRA rations, I think, and, uh, it was a lot of condensed milk in it and we consumed I don't know how many, a fifth each of condensed milk, we could eat a night. Through a night shift we could eat sometimes more. We had enormous for many, many, many months. We came home...

D. Now wait, you were in a DP camp?

R. Yeah,

D. You stayed in Lenzing?

R. We stayed in Lenzing and then the Czech government or the rescue operation by Red Cross, I think it was Red Cross mostly was looking after the, every day on the radio, saying which part will be collected from which camp and where they will be going. And at one point, shortly after the liberation there were some people who said they are going to Prague, so we begged them to let them know that we are there and that we will be waiting. So we were listening to the radio every day. And then surely the radio said, the next day or whenever, be prepared. The trucks will come to collect you, and sure enough, they came and we drove home.

D. What kind of medical facilities did the Americans provide you?

R. I think whatever they had. A lot of people were x-rayed for TB. Of course we had blankets; we had sheets and a sort of soap. It was more that than any, any medication I don't think unless people are really ill with dysentery and they are quarantined some. It was, there was a place where people were quarantined for some time because they were worried that it will cause - but, uh, I don't think our place or places around us were priority for any great emergencies because Mauthausen had such more effort. Much more because they found all those bodies there they had to bury or do something with. I don't think they were terribly interested to tell you the truth, in any medical, they were very sympathetic but they were, whatever Dr. Springer asked for and they could supply I am sure they did supply, but they were not worried what were we supplied for these people. And they were not prepared for anything like that. They weren't trained for it, and they were just soldiers - they were not - I think they were so shocked to see people in the state we were in, of trying to survive. I can't remember that anybody would have been friendly there apart from this first man who was in tears and who was sort of very delighted that he could do it. I think they were more shocked and not prepared. They really didn't know what is wrong and what they found. And, it's exactly - have you been in the Washington Holocaust Museum? It's exactly when it comes out, it's so true. When you go the elevator, the first thing when you go

up the elevator somehow they remember it too. And the voice of the black man says, "We found something. We don't know what it is." People usually don't even register this remark. I saw there a lot of Americans who don't even know what it means, exactly what it means. They can't, and they don't know what it is. So, I think they all, they were friendly, they gave us all that they had in their pockets and in their boxes and so, but they weren't stationary anywhere - moving the war wasn't over, it wasn't already over anywhere; it was still on. So, I can't remember the, who the commander was there, the one who wrote us to - but everybody said it's nonsense; don't worry. They had jeeps, they had cars, they were not interested in civilians' cars, nobody. So they took it away from Germans, said well, could give us a car, we could take the sick ones in the car and put them, which happened, but the driver was honest and was not used to this, which was not an army driver. It was a civilian who just did a good deed and disappeared with the car.

D. Do you believe the citizens of the community, the town of Lenzing, knew about the camp?

R. Of course they knew. They must have. We walked twice a day through, and there were many camps, but - they were many camps around. There were few people from, in the factory, there were some people, the foreman, who were very nice to people, who behaved afterwards nicely in the hopes that they would get a testimony possibly, but they did leave somewhere because right here, the bit of food they had, but they definitely knew about, but it wasn't much sacred to them. They're not allowed to with us. It was under a death penalty if you do anything for somebody, and so, they did what they could. I had once a terrific toothache, really, really bad toothache. I suffer terribly with teeth always. So they took. - more people had problems, so one of these SS woman took me to the surgery of the factory and, standing, he extracted my tooth. I spit it out, walked away, happy as anything, my pain gone. After the war, I nearly died with all the anesthesia and everything, extractions. You have funny resistance in terribly infected tissue, which I don't understand. But, uh,

D. You were there for five weeks, and then you went back to France ...

R. To France which was more traumatic than expected.

D. Why is that?

R. Well, for several years you have, in your mind, only think to be back to your hometown, to everything. Now you come, on a lorry in the middle of this town, and they get you out on the street and you don't know where to go. You are truly and absolutely homeless. I knew my mother isn't coming back. I guessed my father, possibly is not coming back. I knew it within a day that he's not coming back. So where do you go? Some some people you know, I had a distant relation who married a gentile, so he was in France at the time. So I went to them, but they were very nice to me. But you feel nobody can ever understand what you went through. So they look at you a little bit like from somebody from a zoo. We had no clothes, we were still in the striped things, you are sort of - um, also we arrived in hometown. A lot of people were many many who put their stuff for safekeeping of course were not delighted when anybody came back because they didn't want to give it back. My parents I knew that they put some things to people and all of them denied it, and all of them said, "Oh, we were so badly off we had to sell it. Or, so you could look at it in their apartment. And I was nineteen, what could I do? You can't say it's

not true. So you look away. I knew my father, all his life my father was working for one bank, for one big bank and I knew he had a life insurance. And I was told I was entitled to pension of his because I had no money, I had nowhere to go. I couldn't go back to school or anything. So I went to the bank, and they gave me 200 crowns, but all the documents were destroyed because to do it, they had to destroy it from the Germans, and they had no idea about the life insurance. They gave me 200 crowns, which is worth about \$150 or something like that, and that was their obligation to me. And so, again, what are you going to do? You have no idea whether you have a right to do something or not. So a lot of people tried to emigrate very quickly because our welcome wasn't overwhelming. I sort of wanted to stay. It took a long time to settle a little bit and um. Well, I worked at first, I worked for the Jewish Civic Center or whatever it was. It was sort of trying to find people and register people who came. And they had a lot and lot of books which were stored by the Germans in synagogues - in our synagogues - and they were trying to restore the library from what books were still around and what it was. So for a little while I worked in this bookstore to make sort of register of the books or some cataloging of the books. Then I always wanted to do something, I knew I couldn't. I had no way to finish my high school or anything, so I went into a nursing school in a big hospital and I did nursing. And after that, during that actually, was a transport of children from deprived countries going for three months to England. And they were looking for escorts for these children. So I jumped on this and went. And those children were, I think, 4 or 5 weeks in a camp at a kind of quarantine, and then were taken by foster parents. But for the minute they were taken by foster parents I didn't know what to do so I went as an au pair

D. A what?

R. An au pair, it's a girl who looks after the children .

D. Spell it

R. A - U P - A - I - R

D. Oh, French word

R. Yeah

D. Okay, alright.

R. And, uh, stayed the rest of the time. Then I decided it would be nice if I could stay in England, so I arranged for myself a working permit if I do midwifery because I wanted to stay in there and take midwifery. For me, at least, I couldn't do nursing because I have no notifications to start, no money to finish. But there they took me and said I can start to work with the students. And in the last two days I decided I don't think I could stand it there, and I went back to Prague. Then I married, and I started to work in a hospital, but I didn't work anymore as a nurse. I worked in another field Still I was working, I worked in that hospital. So, that was it. But the coming back was very, very traumatic, and I think very hard to get over until today. I never felt at home there after that. I never felt I could relate and always I tried to somehow get out.

D. Now, your sister-in-law survived?

R. My sister-in-law survived. She married, she started to work as a secretary, and she married a man who was in England during the war, came back in a Czech army soldier. And they became involved more in the politics. They became colonists. So they were okay. It wasn't my idea at all, and I wasn't sort of going, so that's why I didn't want to stay. But in '68, I emigrated to Washington.

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End of tape