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I was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia on May 30th, 1922. I was the only child, the first grandchild in the family, and my mother's only live birth. A child due a year before me had died just before delivery. My mother had at least five or six miscarriages after me. She was a rather sickly woman who had frequent pneumonia. She was very shy, very sickly, and had enormously heavy, thick glasses because she was so near-sighted. I was very independent, almost compensating for her. My character was much more like my aunt's, my mother's sister, and my father, who were much more outgoing.

I was very fortunate because we lived with my grandmother and grandfather. All my first warm memories are about my grandfather who died three months before my third birthday. My birthday gift for the members of the family was to learn a poem. I had come to give him his poem for his birthday, which was in March. When I told it to him, he didn't respond. I think he had a stroke. I was told that I came out crying because my grandfather didn't kiss me or say thank you. He died shortly afterwards.

My grandmother was with us as I grew up. Her birthday was five days before mine, so

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<sup>1</sup>Narrative constructed from the following sources:  
Hana Bruml, interview by Radu Ioanid, 12 March, 1990, used with permission of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.  
Hana Bruml, telephone interview by Roger Ritvo, 6 March, 1992,  
Hana Bruml, interview by Diane Plotkin, 4 June, 1993. Tape recording.

we celebrated together. She always kept a piece of her cake for me. She would also tell me stories, fairy tales which I had heard about fifty-five times but wanted to hear again from her. At eighty-six her hair was black and long. When I was good, I was allowed to braid it.

When I started going to school, she would cross the street to help me cross back again. I was more concerned about her crossing safely, but she was concerned about me. She was, in many ways, the mother on whom I patterned my life. She was bed-ridden most of the time, but her mind was fine.

My grandmother had a very orderly closet in which she kept a bag with her white shroud. According to Jewish custom, she wanted to be buried in this shroud, in the same grave as my grandfather. Although we sent it with her to Theresienstadt, she never had a chance to use it.

I had scarlet fever at age seven; I was in the first grade. My parent's house and the whole schoolroom had to be fumigated. I was the only Jewish child in a children's hospital run by nuns in Prague. People couldn't visit me, although my mother was with me the first week in a private room. After the three days, the strep was gone and I felt fine. I was up and around and bored stiff. I saw the children down the hall playing and having fun, so I said, "Mother, please go home, go home, go home," and she did. I couldn't see my parents for six weeks, although I could see them from the window. I really preferred being with the other children, most of whom were quite poor. Because I had more than they did, I was in charge of lending them my toys. In the evening, the children had to kneel and pray, but I refused to do so. I said, "I'm not going to go out and kneel, but if you want I will pray by myself in bed." In a way, the nuns respected it.

In the fifth week, I got an ear infection for which there were no antibiotics. It was a very distinct pain. I was up all night, thinking it was teeth, but it turned out to be my ear. They let me

go home after the drum burst from the infection; that was a relief.

For the first five years I went to a Jewish school, which was more Zionist than religious. There were twenty boys and ten girls, of which five were named Hana; it was a very popular name. Of the five girls, as far as I know, I'm the only one who survived. Of the twenty boys, I know about five survived. I am in contact with one of them, and just recently, he sent me a picture of the second and the fourth grade, which was a real find for me.

After that, I went to gymnasium, which was the academic level. Then I went into a business school and started working. As an eleven or twelve year old, I went to collect money from my father's builders so he could make his payroll. In the beginning they looked at this little girl who came to collect money and would call my father, "Is that on the level?" He said, "Yes, it's okay." Nobody knew that I was collecting money for the payroll. I gave them a receipt and signed it.

When I was about eleven or twelve, I read a book about the Marranos. These were the Jews in Spain who, during the Inquisition, had a choice: either maintain their religion or be converted to Catholicism. Many of them converted in name only and still secretly celebrated all the Jewish holidays. I remember so clearly telling my grandmother, "Aren't we fortunate that we live in the twentieth century in Czechoslovakia, that such a thing cannot happen to us!" Six short years later, it happened to us, but much worse. One doesn't realize how vulnerable one is.

I was fortunate that we were still able to have some social life and go to dancing schools - with the long dress and formalities. At that time, I was going with a student named Rudolph Schiff (we called him "Rudla"). I was about sixteen, and he was nineteen. We got married November 14, 1939 at the City Hall. Because there was no separate housing for us, I went home,

and he went home in the evening. His family lived a couple of blocks away from us, so it was no big problem.

When I was seventeen, things were starting to get bad. I remember the day the Germans came. I remember the place, the street where I stood. It was a cold, snowy day, and they were pulling in. I was by myself. It was not far, maybe three-quarters of a mile from where we lived. We were watching them on their wagons, with their tanks, their half-tracks, with guns pointing to the rooftops. We knew that the screw was going to become tighter. We knew what was happening in Austria, but somehow we still had some foolish idea that we were safe in Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, when the Germans came, they went to the Jewish *Kultusgemeinde*, the religious and cultural community, and wanted the names of the Jews. From there they got the names for the transports. We were so stupid! We went and registered!

We had to give up our jewelry, radios and so forth because if we listened to the radio, it was dangerous. We tried to hide a few things with friends. Some were very cooperative and kept them. Others were afraid. Some friends decided that if we didn't come back, they would keep our things. It very much depended on the person.

My father's workshop was taken away, and he didn't have any other means of support. My parents' maid, who had worked with us for ten or eleven years, was my mother's age. She was very helpful and undemanding. She went shopping and did what she could, but her ration tickets were regular ration tickets, while ours were marked with a "J," so we couldn't shop when there was food in the stores. We could shop only at certain hours for certain things. Nevertheless, she was very instrumental in helping us.

We had all kinds of difficulties during that time: getting supplies, buying food, working,

and going places. I remember going on the street and meeting one of my school friends. By that time I had the star. As we came closer to each other, we walked slower, thinking, "Should I stop? Should I talk? Who was it worse for? Her? Is it worse for me? What should we do?" So we slowly came together, looked at each other, winked, and passed again. It was that sort of situation. You had to think, "Wait a minute. Is today Saturday? Saturday, I cannot go this place. Friday, I cannot go to that place." The restrictions were getting tighter.

As the Germans closed in, we had to go into increasingly cramped quarters. Rudie's parents had a big sub-divided apartment. Each bedroom was given to another family, so there was really nowhere to go. Then one of the families was sent to a camp, so for couple of months we had one of the bedrooms. In the meantime, he got scarlet fever. At that time, when you had scarlet fever, you had to go into a hospital for six weeks because they thought you were infectious until your skin started to peel.

Hitler closed all the universities, so I couldn't go on with my studies. Rudie had a brother, Karel Schiff, who was finishing his MD degree. Only two Jewish people were allowed to get their degrees. Although they awarded the degree to everybody, they gave the two Jewish fellows their diplomas in the bathroom.

At that time, I had an infection in my finger, which radiated up my arm. Of course, I couldn't go to the hospital; at that point we were not allowed to use the hospital. Later there was one private hospital which was very crowded, but Jews were able to use it. But at that time, there was none, and the infection was worsening. The Aryan, non-Jewish, fiancée of my brother-in-law, Karel Schiff, took me without my star into the regular hospital. She was a physician. At great danger to her, she had me operated on and took me home by taxi. We were

not allowed to use taxis. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to get help.

I worked in what they used to call a Palestine Office. There were still people able to move, to emigrate. When you signed your paper for emigration, if I was Hana Schiff at that time, I had to sign it as "Hana Sarah Schiff." All women had to take "Sarah," and all the men "Israel" as a middle name. They had to give a list of all the property they were going to take in their suitcases. They had to pay that much for this and that much for that. Jacob Edelstein was the head of the Palestine Office and knew some people there, which later became very important to me.

We listened to the orders to go and register people so they could be sent by transport. When you went depended on what you did and where you lived. You were continuously threatened: "Am I going to be on the next transport?" We knew daily how many left. We had lists of people printed in the newspaper. Lists of people who were shot or hanged were posted. A friend of mine was among them. The screw was tightening with more regulations.

At one point, Heydrich, the protector of Czechoslovakia, was killed when two paratroopers from England threw a hand grenade under his car. Lidice was the Czech village where, as revenge for the affair, the Germans went and killed the men and many of the women and some of the children. Those who were left they sent to Ravensbruck. I knew some of them. It was not known that some of men from Theresienstadt were commandeered to go to Lidice to clean up the sheep, goats, and cows. At the same time, in Prague, the Germans were looking for someone on a bicycle. They came around us, looking and confiscating bicycles.

My parents went to Theresienstadt the end of July 1942. They got their suitcases and left in a transport. I went with them as far as I could before the collection place. I was saying

goodbye to my father and to my mother, but much more emotionally to my father. I really knew in my heart of hearts that I was never going to see them. Our maid, Maru, was in touch with them through some gendarme and sent them packages for a while, but I knew that I was not going to see them anymore. My grandmother went with them. They carried her down the staircase on a litter and put her with the other old people on the bottom of a moving van. Her last words were, "Love each other. Be good to each other. Love each other. Be good to each other." As they carried her down the steps, there was no complaint, just kind of a blessing. From my mother, I know that when she came to the gathering place, she became confused with all the commotion and all that craziness. She didn't know what was going on, what was happening to her. She died three weeks after arriving at Theresienstadt. I was told she was begging for a couple cubes of sugar from somebody who came to see her. The original records showed when she was buried in one of the last mass graves at that time. We went to the field; you could still see where they dug the furrows, put the bodies in and put the soil over it in heaps and valleys. The Germans registered which row it was in, so we could count the rows, figure out about where she was, some flowers on it, and have her name put on the grave.

Rudla and I were living with my in-laws. I remember it so clearly. We were in bed reading John Steinbeck's *The Grapes Of Wrath*. The knock on the door and our "invitation" to the transport. I don't think I ever finished reading the book. We packed the suitcases very carefully because these were the only possessions we were going to have. We were at the collection station for a couple of days before they organized everything. This gathering place used to be exhibition hall. Over the PA system came, "Anybody who has money on him or gold or cigarettes or matches will be shot." In the lining of my coat, I had a metal box of Yardley talc.

In that box I had some jewelry. Although we heard all of this, we had to protect ourselves somehow.

When we fifteen hundred people came to the gathering station, we were told only a thousand will go. All the women will be pulled out. Then they pulled us back. They took the person next to my husband and gave me another number. Through all the years in Theresienstadt I went as "Transport BA, Number 1101."

We came to Bohusovice, the train stop for Theresienstadt. My parents had already been there for three weeks. My husband was rather weak and sickly at that point. We carried a big bag - each tried to hold one handle - in which was mostly food. We each had a bed roll. On our backs, we had a knapsack with just a few things. As it turned out, what we carried with us were the only things we had for the next few years.

We had to walk about three kilometers from Bohusovice to Theresienstadt. We carried just the knapsack on our backs and the hand luggage. After we came to Theresienstadt, we never got the suitcases. Our transport gave these suitcases as a "gift" to the German nation for the "bombed-up" people. I was so glad we contributed something! So the precious fifty kilos we were allowed to take, which we put together with great care, were all gone. All I had for the three years in Theresienstadt was in a knapsack on my back. After that I had less and less, and finally only my body, but you were glad you had your body, for it meant that you were alive.

When we came off the train in Bohusovice, I happened to see Jacob Edelstein, the head of the ghetto government. He said, "Try to get yourself confirmed to work as soon as possible." I didn't know what it meant, but I went with all possible speed in order to protect us.

At that time, all the former citizens of Theresienstadt had been evacuated, and it was a



Jewish ghetto. Therefore, we were able to move around. It had once been a military town with barracks. Each *kasserne*, or barrack, was named them after a German town. There was "Dresden," and "Magdaburg." "Hohnelbe" was for the older people and sick people. When I went by this hospital, a doctor was leaning out of the window. I said, "You need some help?" And he said, "Yes, get yourself confirmed." Without any further training, I started working as a nurse. I was always fairly well rated.

When we came to Theresienstadt, all the nurses who worked with the infectious diseases lived in a former brewery. We had two little rooms in the back of the building. If you went to the last room, you had to pass through all the other rooms. The first room was very small, but there were eight people living in it. All the nurses who came in from the day shift and the night shift were in eight bunks. Because the nurses lived together in these very tight quarters, intimacy with your husband was very difficult.

In my room, which was the second, there were three bunks. I remember in the room ahead of ours was Sister Miriam, a kind, gentle soul. She was a nun from Vienna, Austria, of a Jewish background. She had converted to Christianity and had been a Catholic nun for about thirty years. Because she was of Jewish origin, they brought her to Theresienstadt. She was in her fifties when she came. In the beginning she was very embarrassed because she was bald headed. She was shaven and wore a wig when she went in public, but all of a sudden she had to show herself without hair. Later we were all bald in Auschwitz. For her, it was shocking, destroying her life. Nevertheless, in spite of everything, she showed a great gentleness and kindness towards everybody. She worked as a nurse, the only one who really had some training in nursing. None of us nurses had training; we just went there and the doctors trained us. She

was a very kind, calm, sweet person. From what I have heard, she eventually died of cancer in Theresienstadt.

At that time men could visit. We got sheets as a little curtain, and privacy was minimal. When you washed your hair, you used water you brought from somewhere. On the second floor, there was a kitchen, and behind it, three or four rooms. In the kitchen were old ladies from Vienna who tended the oven, warmed up things for us and heated what they could. Nice little "old ladies," they were probably much younger than I am now, but for us they seemed like little old ladies.

We got rationed soap of horrible quality, like a little stone, but every little bit of that soap was precious. I remember being in the yard, washing my laundry with this little bit of soap, and there was a little left over. At one point we were issued money and could buy things with it. One of the things you could buy was a little bit of mustard, a little bit of ketchup, or another piece of this terrible soap, if it was available.

You could leave your laundry in a certain place, and maybe three weeks later you got it back again. There was also a shoe repair, where you could get some shoes fixed because we could not replace anything, but they were only open when we had our work hours. It was very difficult, but we worked together; our life was there.

There were hearses which had been brought from all over Czechoslovakia, all over Bohemia, from Jewish cultural groups. They brought corpses to the cemetery in hearses. Everything was transported in these hearses: sick people, bread, wood. These were the only wagons.

There were two small houses right opposite of the main *kasserne*, where the leadership

was. The Germans, in their organization, took away all the names of the streets. Because Theresienstadt was built as a grid, they called the lengthwise streets "L" (for "Lang") and the crosswise ones "Q" (for "Quer"). Typical German. So these two houses were L-17 and L-19, Q-17 and Q-19. These were two smallish villas that were joined together. That was to become a hospital. The lower floor, one big room, was where the doctors lived. Six doctors slept in the same room. They were all males. One of them died of a kidney infection. The administrator of the hospital had the room behind them, and across from the entrance, on the other side was a hospital. There were about four rooms, one after the other.

The children were in iron beds, one next to the other. There were not even little aisles between them because there was no space. If laundry was possible, maybe it was changed every week, maybe every two weeks for these children. We slept in the other house around the corner, not very far away.

At first we had children with whooping cough. Then came a very big epidemic of scarlet fever. The whole hospital was converted to a scarlet fever hospital. At the time, it was thought that scarlet fever is contagious for six weeks. I worked at that hospital because I had had scarlet fever and felt I had enough immunity to safely be in a hospital with scarlet fever patients.

It took about a good nine months to a year before the scarlet fever epidemic ebbed, and eventually there was typhoid. We did get typhoid shots in our shoulders, not in our arms, so we could work. We had a little group of children who had scarlet fever and abdominal typhoid.

There were two little rooms in the back of the building. We had two teenage boys and six little girls, three little girls in one room and three in another. The oldest was sixteen, and the youngest one six. One day they had brought in a little feverish girl. I said, "What's your name?"

She said, "Misha." I said, "Misha Lausher!" She was my cousin's daughter, a very bright child. She was only six years old, but she knew what her temperature had been for the last three days.

Misha drew a picture of a garden and a tree with a bird on it. The bird had an open beak and out of it came letters. I said, "What is this?" She said, "It whistles," and gave me the note. I kept her drawings. Her parents couldn't see her; I was her only contact with the outside world. I would take what she had written or drawn, iron it out, and carry it out to them. She survived in Theresienstadt because her parents were making toys for the Germans. It was just luck. Most children recovered only to be killed with all the nurses I knew who went with them. This was such a terrible tragedy.

We didn't have any disinfectants. All we had was us, kindness, and trying to bathe the children. You were supposed to contain these children who were basically all right after the first fever was gone. Many children got impetigo, and we painted them with gentian violet to neutralize it. That was the only thing we had. These children had all of these violet spots on themselves and the bed sheets. They were trying to play and that helped them. Bathe them, entertain them, and maintain them so they wouldn't scratch themselves and fight. We were lucky if we changed beds every week or two because there were no facilities.

I had sort of a black sweatsuit and a white apron. We had only one advantage in that infectious disease hospital. There was a small bathroom, and we had a container. We were able to make a fire and heat water, so two of us could take a bath at the same time. Then we put the same clothes on because we didn't have much else. I was in that hospital for quite a while.

There was quite a bit of TB and a big TB ward. Alna Schtreizer has a brother who was sixteen, a beautiful, smart young kid. He had a very pervasive TB, and he died in that first

hospital we were in. I remember his beautiful long lashes. Kids with TB had long eyelashes. He was in the room with everybody else, but they just put his bed a little bit towards one side. I remember Hana; I can't think of her last name right now. She was my age and had TB. Everybody from her family brought her food, trying to maintain her, but she's gone forever too. We had one beautiful bright thirteen year old die of TB. His brother's still alive and is a friend of mine.

It was hard work with the children. We worked twelve hour shifts. We had to do everything. That means we had to serve the food and wash the dishes and the floors. We had to make the fire. We had to wash the patients. We had to take out the urine and the feces. We knew the only infection from typhoid is through excretions, so when we dealt with excretions, we put Lysol in the water and washed our hands. That was the only thing we had. There was always some sort of a container with Lysol where we put our hands when we carried anything out. All the time hands in Lysol. I actually liked the smell; it's a clean smell. Lysol did help.

For parents it was heart-breaking. They were outside and didn't know what was happening to their children. There were no visiting hours. Mothers could visit only through the windows because it was so crowded and many of these things were infectious. They didn't know how their children were. We were the only contact. In the meantime, they were afraid they would be called into transports and the children left there.

They brought us food from the central kitchen in big kettles, and we put it into smaller containers for the children. Twice a week we got some sort of dumpling, and once a week this caramel sauce. That was a big deal. Otherwise we got some sort of soup; it might have had some vegetables in it, but that was still very good. In the morning it was black coffee. We used to say,

“You take one bean, put it on a string, wave it over the pot, and that’s what makes coffee.” Of course, it was not coffee at all, but it was warm and black. Once a week we got some sort of tiny piece of bakery. It was not much, but for us it was great, and there was a little bit of milk. I remember that because we worked as nurses in infectious diseases, we got a little bit of extra milk. Otherwise we wouldn’t have gotten any milk at all. We did get a little tiny bit of extra food. But it was very little, and because my husband was sickly and he couldn't work, I gave him the extra.

The first doctor was Hans Schaffer, a pediatrician from Brno. He was very good with the children. Eventually he had three young doctors with him. The irony was that he was deathly afraid of typhus, not typhoid. He worked with typhoid all the time. Typhoid is an intestinal disease, which is different.<sup>2</sup> Typhus is transferred from person to person by lice.<sup>3</sup> He died of typhus later in the camp. It was like he had a premonition. He was always afraid he would die of typhus, and he did.

At that time there were no antibiotics, no vaccination. We did get a sulfa drug made by Bayer called Prontosil. It was good, but it was red and dyed everything red. The urine was red, the children were red, we were red. Because the children were throwing up, even their vomit was red. Then we got Cibazol, one of the first antibiotics made by CIBA. That was precious, but very

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<sup>2</sup>Acute, generalized systemic illness caused by *salmonella typhi*. Usually spread by contaminated food and water. Symptoms: prolonged fever, malaise, characteristic skin rash, called “rose spots,” abdominal pain, enlargement of the spleen, bradycardia, delirium, and leukopenia [low white blood cell count]. Later complications may include intestinal hemorrhages and perforation (Dorland's 623).

<sup>3</sup>Acute infection spread from body to body by lice. Symptoms include severe headache, chills, high fever, stupor, and macular or maculopapular, petechial, or papulovesicular eruption. Central nervous system involvement progresses from dullness to stupor, and sometimes coma and death (Dorland’s 1780).

rare. Some people got it for exchange from outside and smuggled it in.

We had a few people who had measles. With measles you can get complications of pneumonia, so for that the Cibazol was very helpful. We didn't know how much to medicate and didn't know the strength of these broad-based, primitive antibiotics. We also had heilgas,<sup>4</sup> glycerin and ammonium chloride. They put it on wounds. It was very primitive and haphazard.

When there were fewer children, they brought in the grownups. I left that hospital and worked for a while in a clinic with two urologists. In Theresienstadt's *hohnelbe*, in urology, they had an EKG instrument and could give people EKGs. I learned quickly. One of the gentlemen who had to come in was Professor Alfred Cohn, from the Czech University. He was the one who had identified and discovered the function of paratyphoid. Until then, people knew about typhoid, but not paratyphoid. Many people, after an operation on the thyroid gland, get tetany. He discovered that the paratyphoid gland controls the calcium in the body. He was a gentleman of eighty years of age, and he had problems with his prostate because an older gentleman with an enlarged prostate retains urine, so he came in to have a catheter inserted for his bladder to be emptied. Mostly older gentlemen came in with infections, but again, there was not much medication available.

There was a woman who had scarlet fever. Then she got measles and pneumonia. She got mostly aspirin because that is what we had. The doctors did all they could to help her, and she did survive, but her heart was damaged.

There were people with all kinds of illnesses. I remember this one particular woman from

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<sup>4</sup>Healing gas: a mixture of antibacterial and astringent agents.

Germany with some internal problem. I don't know what it was. She was a nurse in Germany, so she knew what was going on. Twenty-four hours a day she would not move from her bed. She squirreled away the little food she got to give to her husband, who was much older than she. Yet she needed it so urgently. She was in a pitiful, debilitated condition. I talked in German to her, and I got her at least to the point where she put her feet on the floor. But all we could do was move her body to the other side of the bed, so we could make it. I felt a real victory that I got her to move. Holding on to her, I got her to be a little bit more alive, to walk three steps in front of the bed and three steps back. She gave me the big plastic apron she had brought with her from Germany. She would never need to use it again as a nurse. I didn't want to take it, but I had to because for her, it was the best she could give to me. I took real personal interest in her. I don't know what happened to her or to anybody else.

In that room, there were at least twelve beds in one tier about six inches apart. We had another woman who had some sort of an internal problem and another woman with dysentery. That's where I learned about it. There were no medications for it at that time.

Across the yard there was a laundry with a mother and child living there. They didn't want her anywhere else. The child was severely retarded. He was six years old and about two feet long. He couldn't sit up or respond to your gaze. He was a total "it," and for six years, the mother had loved him and taken care of him. I'm sure she went to Auschwitz with him and no further. When they took "it" away, they took away her whole life anyhow. The child was so pitiful, and she was so pitiful with that child. In the same hospital we had a fifteen-year-old girl. She was big and strong, but her mind was like that of a five year old. You had to take her to the bathroom and wipe her off. Her parents brought her these little children's books for two or three



year olds, and that's what she read. She was severely retarded, but she was still a human being who responded to you and looked at you and laughed at you. But this other was a total nothing.

In that house we had a young boy aged sixteen, who had a kidney disease. He became very weakened. I was still strong; I put him on my shoulder and carried him to the yard so at least he could see a little sky. These were the kinds of things we could do.

There was one *kasserne* for old people. They had the worst medical care. I had duties with the older people, but it was pitiful. They were treated terribly because whom do you care for first? They didn't have enough food or care. Older people didn't have anything to exchange; they died from hunger. The hunger was particularly bad in 1942 and 1943. For them it was the most difficult part. There I found my grandfather's sister, Antonia, who was in her eighties at the time. One day I was allowed to give out food, some sort of boiled potato. She was so happy because I was able to give her an extra one.

Through my entire time in Theresienstadt, I remember only one female doctor. She was with the old folks. If somebody was dying, we had to bring in a doctor. Every night somebody died. To enter the main door of the older patients' *kasserne*, you had to walk across a big yard with big trees. She was scared stiff to walk across that yard, afraid of the shadows. I had night duty, so I went. I, who was about twenty at that time, walked her across the yard so she could fill out the papers for the Germans.

Then I worked in a hospital where there was encephalitis. They had wooden beds and people slept most of the time. There was nothing. We just had to wait until the infection was over, until the body healed itself. Jewish doctors examined them and could diagnose them, but that's about all. There was nothing much we could do

There were some emergency operations. I remember a lady who had scarlet fever and got a terrible infection in her hand. One of the children's doctors opened her hand, drained out all kinds of pus, and closed it again. He did an extremely good job. I don't remember what kind of anesthesia they used; maybe it was ether, one of those sprays that stinks. I was very excited to see how an operation was done.

We had people coming to the clinic after surgery for care. We had one woman who had a breast removed for cancer. From the infection after surgery, she got *erisypelas*.<sup>5</sup> It was horrible. She had to be bandaged because there was pus, but you couldn't give out new clean bandages. She was a wonderful, cheery woman with a great attitude. In spite of the pain and the horror of the infection, in her state, she took these bandages to whatever home she had, washed them herself, brought them back, and we put them on again. She was getting some medication, but I don't remember what it was. It was minimal because whatever medication we had was minimal. As a matter of fact, I touched her and got *erisypelas* on my earlobe, so I was all bandaged. I also got hepatitis. I had yellow eyes, but I got over it.

If somebody got pregnant, and they knew what was going on, they had the baby aborted. The abortions were performed by Dr. Hahn and Dr. Polak from Brno, who were gynecologists. They were very skillful doctors, who really did wonders under impossible situations and who tried to be very humane and as kind as possible. Nobody talked about it, but it was a sheer necessity because it meant survival for the mother. I was in gynecology in the Hamburg *kasserne*

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<sup>5</sup>"An acute superficial form of cellulitis involving the dermal lymphatics, usually caused by infection with group A streptococci, and chiefly characterized by a peripherally spreading hot, bright red, edematous, brawny, infiltrated, and sharply circumscribed plaque with a raised, indurated border (Dorland's 577).

one time and saw a couple of them done. I don't know how much I assisted actually; at the time I was total novice. He would have told me, "Give me this, that." You took increasingly larger instruments to open the cervix. Then they took long prongs and delivered the baby. After a couple of hours, the mother went back to where she lived. We had one woman who was pregnant. A few weeks before the end of the war, she was taken to another camp, but they had to do a high forceps delivery. The child was brain damaged and didn't live very long, but the mother had gone through the whole pregnancy in the camp and we sort of protected her. We didn't have very tight fitting clothes; you did what you could.

There was a big ward for mental patients. They had bars on the windows. When you went by, they were screaming and hollering. In the old mental hospitals, the only thing they could do was to wrap them in cold sheets; that was all what was available. I knew a sweet, dear, gentle lady who was working with them. Of course, that unit was cleared out very quickly.

At one point, towards the end, in one of the special room, we had two men, Rudy Cohen from Germany and Robert Kohn from Czechoslovakia. They both had scarlet fever and typhoid. First they were upstairs. When they brought Rudy in, he was not so bad. At night he walked around, bending over the other people and probably infected somebody else. That's how Robert got typhoid. Robert, who was still sick and had high fever, was a human being you could talk with. But as Rudy, the German, was just getting worse, his fingers were split and full of pus. He was just full of pus all over. I don't know what he had besides the typhoid. One morning, when we were coming off duty, we said, "Is Rudy still alive?" We expected him to die any moment. I came on duty and he was still alive, in terrible shape. Robert had a pocket watch hanging on the wall. Rudy was on the right and Robert on the left. Robert asked me, "How

much longer can he live?" I just had to tell him something because I could hear the labored breathing. It was getting shorter and shorter. We could see it was coming to an end. So, just off the top of my head, I said, "Half an hour." He died in half an hour, the first death from typhoid we had in the hospital. Robert would never forgive himself. He got well and Rudy died.

After he got well, Robert worked in the kitchen, peeling potatoes. Once in a while he brought me an extra potato. He did not survive.

There was a man who was sent from Theresienstadt to a campsite in some woods to do something which he found terribly obnoxious. So he thought it would help him if he drank some sort of a disinfectant or something. He drank it so it would make him sick for awhile and they would take him away, but it completely ruined his intestines. He had continuous bloody, watery diarrhea. Whatever he ate went out, and he just got weaker and weaker and couldn't make it to the bathroom. He had one of those night potties next to the bed, and that's where he sat. He really ruined himself completely. I don't know how long he lasted. He defecated himself to death. It was just one tragedy after the other.

At that time, they started sending transports of the older Germans. They told them they were going into a sanatorium. It was cold in winter and hot in summer, but they came from the train in fur coats and big hats. The ghetto had sixty thousand people instead of the six thousand in normal times. They were put under the roof of the big *kasserne*. These were huge rooves with huge wooden beams. You didn't know if they were sleeping, or if they were dead already.

Most of the work in Theresienstadt was done by young Czech Jews because we were the main occupants. I was delegated to go and help out, and they would say, "If Hitler only knew what the Czech Jews are doing to us!" The hygiene there was impossible. There were no

bathrooms, but they still couldn't comprehend it; they couldn't put it together. The survival rate was very small.

We were forever living under a threat: Who is going to be in the next transport? My aunts came through Theresienstadt in the beginning of October 1942 and then went on. My aunt Eva was closest to me; we were four years apart. She had two children: Raymond was sixteen at that time and Joe was twelve. My aunt was very near-sighted, just like my mother. She was legally blind. Because I was a nurse, I was able to go with her to the gathering place, but they wouldn't even let them come into Theresienstadt. They kept them there in the gathering place as they arrived, immediately prepared for a transport to go on. We did everything to get them out, but we couldn't. So I took Eva and Joe out of there, brought them to where we lived, and put them in my bed. They had boots on. I put the two pairs of boots under my bed. They slept together so they would at least get some rest. My aunt told me, "I know I'm not going to survive. I know I'm not going to be back, but I know that you will take care of the children." And I would have, had they survived.

Eva threw a card out of the window on the way to Auschwitz, which was addressed to Jiri Pollack, who happened to be my school-mate. After the war, I met him; he told me that he had the post card. Somebody had picked it up and mailed it. They were the first transport to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt. No women or children and not too many of the men survived. They arrived on the 27th of October, 1942.

In Prague, they had brought in a darling three or four-year-old, little Frankie. The parents were Polish Jews who had escaped from Poland and were going to go to France. They were poor people escaping with this little child who got scarlet fever and had to go to the hospital. They

were not allowed to take him out of the hospital, but they had to go in the transport. They were sent away, and this little child was left alone in the hospital. My sister-in-law, who didn't have children, befriended him. We were already in Theresienstadt, but she was not, so he finally had another mother. Then they sent him by transport from Prague by himself, just with a number. When he came to Theresienstadt, my husband and I went to visit him; he was just totally confused. "What's going on? "Who we are?" My sister-in-law was transported to Auschwitz holding him by the hand, and, therefore, she went to gas with him.

October 1943 we heard that this transport of two hundred children from Poland was going and they were looking for nurses to go with them. They were to be deloused, washed, bathed, dressed and prepared for a trip to Switzerland. For volunteering, they were supposed to protect our families. I was still with Rudolph, but I volunteered and was accepted. I had my few things packed, but was told that anybody who was married cannot go - only single people. I knew some of the nurses who went. They went to Auschwitz where the children were annihilated. They went straight to the gas.

The worst part was that we were continuously in uncertainty. There was a Damocles sword hanging over you all the time. You never knew how much time you had for what. Daily life was difficult. We lived so close together. As crowded as we were, hygiene was poor and laundry was impossible. In summer, it was suffocatingly hot, so sometimes people tried to sleep out in the yard. Fleas were a pain in the neck. They were multiplying and biting, which made it difficult to rest. It was hard to get rid of them because people in the barracks lived in three story little cubicles. If you were able to kill a few, more came. You couldn't go and air your stuff or disinfect. Then came the bed bugs.

There were periods, like windows of permission, when you were able to get packages, and some people were getting packages from abroad. The Danes were the best off; they were able to get a monthly five kilo - not a pound, but eleven pounds - a five kilo package with salami, butter, and cheeses, from Denmark. That was the gift of the Danish government to the few Danish Jews in Theresienstadt. There were also a number of prominents, Germans and Austrians, who during the war<sup>6</sup> got the Iron Cross, or any of the very high medals. For some reason, they were protected in Theresienstadt and not sent on. During the time Edelstein, who was a wonderful man, was Judenaltester, he did what he could. But he himself was deported, and we had other Judenaltester, which made things worse. Nevertheless, there was this tremendous, vibrating cultural life. I remember seeing a whole production of *Die Fledermaus*.<sup>7</sup> I remember going to a poetry reading. There were philosophical debates and concerts. There was this need to live very intensively. I think this was the essence of Theresienstadt. You had these few years, so you had to live them so intensively. You had to use every minute.

Then I was hospitalized with pneumonia. I just remember that I was in a hospital, and Ruth [Reiser] was with me. Upstairs was a men's department and her husband - I don't know what he had - was there. I remember that I borrowed the book *Fleur de Mal*, by Baudelaire, from him.

I had middle ear infection, and they had to trepanate my ear drum. I sat in a chair while they punctured it. Things of that sort one had to endure. You either got well or you didn't. There

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<sup>6</sup>The First World War.

<sup>7</sup>A Viennese operetta by Johann Strauss.

were not many choices. I would have gone in September 1943, but it saved me; I was taken off that transport.

My husband was in the men's barracks and was really going down the drain. He didn't wash properly. It was always a very bad sign when you didn't keep up your personal hygiene. I had to go into the *kasserne* - the men knew me - and clean up his bed. He was sickly and really couldn't do much. It was getting worse and worse. In many ways, he was resentful that I could work. When I came after work on the night shift, I wanted to sleep during the day, and he woke me up.

The marriage was getting very difficult. I was seventeen at that time and naive. As time went on, I realized more and more that the marriage could not last. Things got so bad that I really couldn't tolerate it anymore, and the marriage ended. Even if my husband had survived, the marriage would have ended. He went in the September transport with his parents and his brother to the *familienlager*.<sup>8</sup> He had a sister and a brother-in-law, but none of them returned. My father-in-law died in the transport from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. My mother-in-law, a very energetic woman, and my brother-in-law were in the family camp. I was told they knew what was going to happen to them. Rudla was with them, and I understood he was quite sick. He probably died of encephalitis before he went to the gas chamber. I heard that he was asking for some mashed potatoes, for something to eat, which was, of course, impossible

I made friends with, and then became the wife of Bruno Mandel, one of the young doctors in the hospital. He was an internist. He would have trained for cardiology and been very

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<sup>8</sup>In Auschwitz



good at it. I could see that he was very involved with his patients. We worked together day by day in the hospital. He was very kind to me, which was very different from Rudie.

He was ten years older than I. He came from Prostejov, Moravia, with his mother. Officially, we couldn't get a divorce and get married. There were all kinds of obstacles. But within the jurisdiction of Theresienstadt, we got our papers changed so that I would be divorced and married to Bruno after the war.

There were two private houses which had a small garden. We had a tiny little plot where we could plant little radishes, which was the only fresh food one could get. He spoke English, and together we read *Lady Windermere's Fan*.<sup>9</sup> I tried to read and translate it because he wanted to help me learn English. We also went over all the bones, so I would know anatomy in Czech, German and Latin. He taught me a great deal, and I knew he valued me a great deal, too. Don't forget, I was there by myself. At that time, his mother very much wanted me to be with him, but Rudla's parents were asking what I was doing. Besides working twelve hours a day, six days a week, I was under a great deal of pressure. Nevertheless, in the evening we went to lectures that were held under the roof of the barracks. We went to every cultural situation we could. It was such an intensive life, all this work, the social things, the personal things, and all the diseases around you.

There was constant pressure; transports kept going. Are you going to be on the next transport? Are you going to be saved from the next transport? With whom can you stay? Who is going to go? There was pressure on the people who made the lists were as well. Are

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<sup>9</sup>A play by Oscar Wilde.

you going to save your family? My father's cousin, whom I was very fond of, came through. I knew he was going. How do you try to keep any kind of normalcy and somehow still stay a human being under these circumstances? With very great difficulty!

The tendency was to try to maintain as normal a life as possible. How do you replenish the few things you brought with you? The inventiveness of people under the circumstances was incredible. At one point I was able to make a contact. First, I used up my money on the black market to buy extra food smuggled in by the Czech gendarmes. We bought as much as we could. Finally I sold my wedding ring for half a loaf of bread - exchanged it through the gendarmes. I thought the bread was more important. A slice of bread, a small loaf of bread was a wonderful birthday present. Somebody saved it up or had connections.

Misha's father had access to a little bit of grass. He planted some tomatoes so that Misha would have some fresh food. There was a group of women who worked in agriculture. They were sometimes able to smuggle something in.

Misha's mother, Irma Lausher, my cousin, was teaching children in the youth home. She had an incredible memory and wrote me books of poems for my birthday. Even under these circumstances we tried to celebrate birthdays.

My parents went with one of the transports and could have gone to any of the camps. I don't know what happened to my mother. Somebody told me they saw my father in Auschwitz, working in some laundry. Even though he was in his fifties, he was still in fairly good shape. As far as I could trace, I found out that in February 1945, he was in one of the ships that was loaded with prisoners and sunk in the North Sea. Just to get rid of prisoners, they took old German ships, loaded them with explosives and prisoners and just sunk them in the cold sea.

My uncle was on one of the ships. Just by sheer accident, he survived, the only one of his family. By coincidence, the British were trying to help the people who were sinking. It was very humane.

I was in Theresienstadt when the Red Cross came through, a comedy organized and directed by Germans. In May we started to beautify the city. The main street was painted, made beautiful, and we got a coffee house. The "coffee" was chicory mainly, but it was warm. The miracle was that the water was somehow blackish, but we got better food for a week.

They made one house as a sample - one family can live together in one house. The houses were painted only outside, where the inspection was going to take place. They loaded people on a truck, like they were coming from a harvest. We all knew it was total make believe. It was for a propaganda film which was completely false.

Seidl was the SS man there.<sup>10</sup> The children were told if somebody comes to interview them, they were supposed to get a box of sardines and say, "Uncle Seidl, Uncle Seidl, sardines again!" That became the joke. Calling him, "Uncle Seidl. We are getting sardines again." Of course, we never ate or saw sardines.

When the Red Cross came through, they didn't come to the clinic at all. We just kept away from them.

Then there was the counting of the people. One day all the people had to go to this big meadow. This counting was documented in films. We were in the hospital with the children, so we didn't have to go; we spent that lovely day in the hospital. We didn't know what was

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<sup>10</sup>Seigfried Seidl, the Obersturmfuhrer (Bondy 241).

happening to everybody; what was going on; what was going to happen. It was a terrible day.

I was in Theresienstadt from 1942 until 1944, for two and a half years. Then I volunteered to go to Auschwitz with Bruno. In September of 1944, they were saying the transports were going to labor camps in Poland. The front was moving. They need labor groups with shovels, with spades. There were five transports of men. In the last transport, they allowed five hundred women, so I volunteered to go along. What else was I to do? We packed our things, and miraculously we were not in a cattle wagon. We were in a regular wagon, sitting on top of our luggage, crowded. We were on a transport of fifteen hundred people. To be sure he had them, Bruno carried our marriage papers with him.

It must have been early afternoon when we arrived in Auschwitz. We got out of the train and were told, "Don't touch anything. Leave everything as is." But we still carried some things. I had come from Prague to Theresienstadt in ski pants, good boots and a winter coat, which was fortunate, and I had it through all these bad winters. This is how I came to Auschwitz - with a beaver collar. I had kept it for the transport. I was still pretty strong, more husky because I'm big-boned. We were supposed to stand outside of the train, always in fives because Germans can count easier that way. Women here and men there as we got off the train. We were standing there with a young soldier in camouflage uniform. All around us were camps with wires. Out of one camp ran a woman yelling (I don't remember if it was German, Polish or Yiddish) at us, "They will take away from you everything. What you have, throw it to me!" One of the girls had a knapsack and threw it to her over the fence.

I have this scene so much in my memory. This young guy was talking to us, and I see this woman running about to catch the knapsack. At that moment, he took his gun and "psht," shot

her. That was our welcome. This young man, who chatted with us in German, just took out his gun and "psht!"

We are standing in fives, and I was in one of the first rows. In front of it came the man in an SS uniform and white gloves. Mengele! I didn't know at the time it was Mengele, but I knew there was something very ominous about him. He was standing there with his gloves, and as every person came by, he pointed with his finger either right or left.

Men went first. As my Bruno went by, he was yelling at me, "I'm not going to see you again! I'm not going to see you again!" I didn't want him to say that, but that's what he was saying. As they went by, Mengele shoved him.

When the men were gone, we started to go. When we came there, Mengele shoved me on the other side. So I stepped up and said to him, in German, "My...my...my husband went on this side. I want to go there, too." He said, "March on the other side!" There were soldiers with guns around us. I just saw this one shoved, so I went to the left. One was to gas, and the other was to work. How did you know? Fate. Total fate.

We were so incredibly naive. When we got off the train, we saw the SS men or other older prisoners taking the carriages and the children off the train and putting them beside it. We said, "Well, they are not so bad. You see, they are helping." My foot! They were put to death!

That was our welcome. By this time it was getting dark. This is the end of September in Poland. They marched us first to where we had to undress. I had a can of oil and a can of sardines in my pockets, and I still had a good Swiss watch. There were women prisoners as guards, who already had short hair. We had to undress. I thought I would be very smart. I went to one of them and asked her, "What is your name?" She said, "Hanna Muller." That was my

maiden name! I said, "Look, in the corner I put my watch and the can of sardines and the oil. Keep it for me when I come through." Of course, I never saw her or anything else.

We were supposed to strip completely except for our shoes, so I still had my good shoes. As we undressed, we had to go through a hallway, naked except for the shoes. The SS came by and looked at our breasts and bellies; some of us might be pregnant. If they saw anybody pregnant, they pulled them out.

Then we went to a room where they shaved us. I remember sitting there, seeing someone I knew with long hair. At that point, half of her hair was shaven and half was still long. I had a few bobbie pins and kept them. I thought when my hair grows, I will have the bobbie pins. When you suddenly see bald-headed, completely shaven women, everybody looks like a monkey. With that German thoroughness, they also shaved our pubic hair - hundreds of people with one blade. No cleanliness!

In the next building there was a cold shower. I was still holding the bobbie pins when we went to the shower. When I went for my shoes, they were gone. This is the first time I started to cry. The shoes were the last thing I had.

We went into the next room, and were given some old rags. I was given an old summer dress, some pants and something. This was in cold weather. The wooden shoes we were given were absolute killers. In the mud of Auschwitz, there were no socks in the cold. The wooden shoes rubbed our feet. When you had a sore on your foot, it would never heal. They also got stuck in the mud, and you couldn't pull them out.

We were marched into the barracks and saw the fire from the chimneys. We wouldn't believe what it was. I didn't eat for three days; I was in a state of shock. How could you believe

that the fire was from burning our families? It was incomprehensible. How could you believe what was happening?

The last bit of humanity was taken away. We were given one big pot with five scoops of soup. Everybody slurped like an animal. At one point, I saw somebody dragging a bag of spoons; one was hanging out. I pulled it out, so I could be more civilized. I kept it throughout and gave it to the Museum.<sup>11</sup> It's an old scarred spoon, but it's special. It was part of becoming less than a human when you have to slurp like a dog.

We slept five to a bunk and didn't have any blankets. It was cold, but we warmed each other. We were five friends who stayed together. The dehumanization continued when you went to the toilet - benches with holes in them. You didn't even want to sit down, but if you didn't, all of a sudden somebody came and pulled you down because the women who were in charge of those holes wanted them clean. They just pulled you down very gently.

You couldn't wash; you couldn't clean. But you had to wash the floor everyday in the barrack. We had to go through the shower. We stood there naked, waiting. These were portable showers, again cold, no soap, no towel, nothing. One girl had very heavy beard and had to shave. Of course she couldn't. We didn't have anything. We were just as we were born. These young soldiers, SS men, came and looked at us. One came to her very kindly and said, "One of us has to shave." Kindly!.

Disinfectant was poured on our clothes. When we came out of the shower, we got somebody else's rags. This was the last time I menstruated for many months; we lost

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<sup>11</sup>United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

menstruation. Very carefully I washed out the pants but couldn't hang them. I couldn't do anything with them because they would be stolen immediately. So I carefully folded them and held them under my arm so my body warmth could dry them. Then I folded them the other way and held them under my arm for about three days, hoping they would be clean and dry. Finally, I was able to wear them, only to lose them and get somebody else's dirty pants. All the time there were these kinds of dehumanizing things.

I didn't see any medical facilities in Auschwitz. We had a dentist, a Polish one; all she could do was pull teeth because there was nothing.

We had to be shaved again, with all the people walking around. We heard shooting because there was a "selection." Older people were selected. They were running around or shooting while we were in the barracks. It was terrible. In our barrack I happened to run into two women whom I knew from Prague before the war. One went to the same school I did. She came to the religious classes from another school. Hanka Narastrukova is now a physician in Switzerland, and Jera, with whom I went to gymnastics, is in Prague now. They were in the Lodz ghetto. They happened to be in the same barrack. It was awful there.

The woman in charge of our huge barrack was from Slovakia. She learned that the man who was going to come and look for labor was pretty good. At that point, labor was needed, so various factory supervisors or directors used to come to Auschwitz to select laborers. We were told that this man had a pretty good set-up, so they directed him to our barrack. They took two hundred women, one-hundred twenty Slovaks and eighty Czechs. We were five friends together, and he took four of us. One of the oldest he rejected, but she survived. She was an aunt of Bruno.

They took the four of us from the *familienlager* in Birkenau to another transit lager. We



were there about a week. The leader of that barrack was a Ukrainian. The Germans had a high stack of blankets, but she wouldn't allow us to have them. There were also Ukrainian woman prisoners who had long hair and were better dressed. Instead of a toilet, there were two buckets. We stood in line to use the buckets. A lot of people had diarrhea, but when a Ukrainian came, she pushed us away and went immediately; never mind the line.

One of the lower leaders in the hierarchy was a woman, Jana; I don't remember her other name. She came from Ruthenia in the easternmost part of Czechoslovakia. She lived in Nachod and had a boyfriend there, but she had been in Auschwitz for long time, when they had to go work with the dogs barking at their feet. She was telling us about it one evening. It was pretty awful.

There was an antisocial woman prisoner wearing some sort of uniform with a black triangle. She had a gun. While waiting for a transport, she was shooting rats in front of us. She could have shot any one of us just the same. It was fun for her!

We had to stand in rows of five for hours in *appell*. By this time, it was October, and it was cold. Somewhere I saw a big bag with a sock hanging out. I ran and got it - just one sock. The five of us would use the sock. The one who had it would stand in front because she was getting the coldest air and was sort of protecting the others. Later I cut that one sock in half and made two gloves out of it.

They did give us some better clothes. I had a striped skirt, a sweater, and some big black, heavy winter coat. They didn't give us caps, so I took a piece of the lining and made a scarf because, if you have no hair, it's very cold. Then they gave each of us a piece of bread and something else, and we were loaded on cattle trains. There were also men on this train who were

in striped outfits, but they got hats.

We watched the stations and knew we were going westward from Auschwitz. Then we stopped for long time. God, we had been going for thirty-six or forty-eight hours. All of a sudden, we started looking at where we were standing. To our absolute horror, we realized we were going back again. If we were going back to Auschwitz, we knew what it meant. Then they uncoupled some wagons and moved us again.

Two hundred Polish and one hundred Czech women arrived in Kudowa-Sackisch.<sup>12</sup> It was a small camp. There were so many camps. You met people and all of a sudden found out about all these camps. They told us, "This is a spa, but not for you." We were walked to the wooden barracks. There were already three hundred women there, mostly Poles and Hungarians.

From October 1944 to May 1945, until liberation, we were twenty women between eighteen and thirty-five who knew each other from Theresienstadt, all together in this one room with double deck beds. In this last camp, there was also a woman who had five or six children, and they took them away. At night she screamed, yelled, and hollered, so they put her into a room by herself because nobody could tolerate it.

The German *lageralteste* from Sudetenland was miserable. She had an *unterscharfuhrer*, a non-com official. When she was angry with somebody, he had to beat the women. She didn't allow people to peel the potatoes for our soup; they had to be thrown in as is. But she was removed, and we got an older *lageralteste*, which was a great advantage. Hanelle didn't want to be an SS woman; she was drafted. She warned us before an inspection and was in

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<sup>12</sup>A subcamp of Gross Rosen, located in Lower Silesia.

many ways much kinder. She allowed the potatoes to be eaten, and when an SS man came for inspection, she always slept with him so that he didn't bother us. She escaped before the end of the war and became a civilian in Czechoslovakia, but they knew who she was. I know she was hanged after the war.

In December of that year, my husband's friend, Hanna Klein, who had worked as a nurse in Buna, which was part of Auschwitz, became sick with a high fever. We didn't have a doctor, but I was convinced she was dying of typhoid because I could hear her labored breathing. There was a certain smell about it, too. I recognized it because I had worked with typhoid and saw the symptoms. She was moved into one empty room, and I volunteered to stay with her overnight. I really thought I was immune. After so much typhoid, nothing could happen to me. This was not unrealistic; I was pretty much immune. I stayed with her until she died on the 19th of December 1944. That was a really low point for me.

Then a very peculiar thing happened. Miraculously, this last *lageralteste* allowed me to have a flashlight for her at night, which was unbelievable. She ordered a plain wooden coffin for her. I washed her, dressed her in newspapers, and stuffed her in the coffin. People asked, "Are you crazy? Why are you doing it?" Nobody does that." I said, "That's the only piece of dignity I can give her. I treated her. If I washed her when she was sick, why shouldn't I wash her now?" I didn't realize until years later that this was that the Jewish tradition. Visit the sick. Wash the dead. Comb them, clean them, dress them before they go, but that was not conscious at all. She's buried in that camp.

This was an enormous experience for me. People were dying all around us, but I was alone with her when she died. That was the last decent human thing we could do. It was

nonsense, but that was the tradition. The women in my room didn't want to let me back because they were convinced I was crazy for washing a body.

In that area there used to be big textile factories which were changed into ammunition factories. We were making the part of airplanes in which the propeller sits. In one of the camps next to us were Russian prisoners of war, mostly the Mongolian mustachioed, heavy-set Soviets, working on the propellers. There were all kinds of groups in this factory; it was a tower of Babel. There were German soldiers who had gone AWOL and were like prisoners under guard. They moved heavy machinery. There were French, Italians, Danish, Dutch and, of course, the Poles.

I started working on a big turning place (a lathe). An Italian by the name of Antonio Pezutto taught me how to do it. There's a very sharp knife that goes to the metal and cuts what needs to be cut, but they didn't have enough material, so they put only the edge in the metal. Of course we were breaking the knives, and they were very angry with us. Then they took us to a classroom and taught us how to use a micrometer. The man who taught us was a German *meister*, a foreman. I knew how to use a micrometer, but we had to do that. They wanted to know if we knew fractions and things like that. We sat in school benches. I looked, and in one I found a core of an apple. Somebody had eaten an apple and left the core. I didn't care who ate the apple; I ate the core. My goodness! That was fruit!

We were there only a few days. One day the master said to the five of us, "Look, if you would like to bathe, I will let you take a shower." That was very dangerous for him to do. He took five of us to the shower room and let us shower. We didn't have a towel; we didn't have soap. We had to put the clothes on that we had, but just to be under water, to shower, was such a relief! It took years before I finally allowed myself to remember why he did it. He stood in the

corner and watched five naked young women taking a shower. He got his jollies!

Antonio Pezutto sometimes brought me a piece of bread. He was one of the Italians who had fought in Italy with Badoglio, who turned against the Germans. They came in as prisoners, but they were better off. They could move around and got more food. Once in a while, he brought me a roll or a piece of bread. He hid it somewhere and I could take it. Some of the other women also got food from the *meisters*.

At Christmas time it was cold as could be. The screws on the inside of the barracks were white with ice. All we had was a bowl and a spoon. It was so cold at that time that we put them under our coats and put a string around us because we didn't have gloves. Mimi was thirty-five, and she was old, the oldest of us. She was also the most flat-chested of all of us. She was going with the bowl, and one of the Mongolian guys stepped out of his line to touch her because he thought it was a breast. But instead he touched the dish. It was very dangerous for him.

At that point we were working twelve hour shifts again, seven to seven. We walked in the snow and ice three kilometers to the factory and three kilometers-back. Today three kilometers isn't much, but at that time it was terrible. We walked through the village at night; we never saw daylight. There were lit windows, and at Christmas people had Christmas trees. There were people living normal lives in those houses, but we were like animals, going back and forth. Once my terrible shoes were sticking in the snow and I couldn't get them out. The women absolutely dragged me to the factory. I was out of breath for about a half hour.

When we came to the factory for the twelve hour shift, we got two little metal triangles with DMV: *Deutsche Metal Werke*.<sup>13</sup> When we went to the john, we had to put one on. We

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<sup>13</sup>Actually documented in Nazi records as VDM, for *Vereinigte Deutsche Metallwerke*.

could go twice in the twelve hours, and since we had diarrhea, it was terrible. The *lageralteste* just sat there.

Some of us had to carry the big metal containers with soup, which we had at midnight. They didn't know we had lost menstruation. The craziness was when they thought we had menstruation, we didn't have to carry it. Never logic!

We tried to celebrate New Year and do some fun things. One tried to be human even under these circumstances; it was very important to us.

Slowly we were running out of material. Because the eastern front was coming, shipments were not arriving. At the end they loaded all the material, all the machinery, on trucks and took them to Germany. They were bombed on the way, which we were not sorry for.

When they had no more material, they shipped the machines away and made work, such as taking bricks from here to there, then bringing them back. I had to sweep with one of these big brooms. It was horrible to sweep for twelve hours. The only good thing was that it made possible for me to move a little bit around the factory, and I made contact with a Czech guy. At that time, we had some very sick people. I asked him if he could get some pudding, and he did. He hid it in some material. I went in, got the pudding, put it in my pocket, and brought it to this girl who was very sick. I sent him a thank you letter after the war. His father answered that he got the letter on his birthday: "That was the best letter I could get, to find out how well my son behaved."

I made contact with other people as well. Once the Italian boys had a whole big can of

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soup that got sour. They said, "Do you want it?" Of course we ate it. We said, "Well, we will think it's potato salad. That's why it's sour." We got sick. This time I cried for hours because, with the work, with everything, I was getting more and more desperate.

Together we had one needle. It got lost, which was a tragedy. Once an SS man came and asked us, "What is the thing you want the most?" We said things like a toothbrush. A toothbrush was so basic. He promised us toothbrushes, but of course we never got them. This was a kind of teasing. I had repeated dreams about taking a bath and having a nice towel because we were not able to clean ourselves. I remember sitting on the bed and finding my first louse, an absolute downer. The last drop of civilization was gone. We had to look for lice every day. In that camp there was a group of people who had to wash the laundry for the SS. They also had lice. They said they had lice even in their handkerchiefs.

One day, I didn't eat the bread; I exchanged it for some sort of a contraption out of which I could make a bra. I wanted a bra so badly. These were the sort of leftovers of civilization.

We needed to read. Not being able to read was a deprivation. One of the girls read *Gone with the Wind*. I never read the book, but I remember her because she told us the whole story. I knitted a pair of socks for one of the SS women because she gave me printed material - one of those Harlequin romance-like things. She was a woman who could blow hot or cold. Once in a while, she talked to us; her boyfriend was at the front. On the other hand, sometimes she would beat up people. But she did give me a piece of soap for the socks.

We had a game. You had to make a menu card for a whole day, and then the next woman had to make a menu card. You couldn't repeat it until everybody made all the menu cards for the week. We told jokes. We recited poems - anything to keep our minds going.

I trained myself to go to the bathroom every second day to save strength. I walked very slowly. I had these horrible shoes to walk in, but they were shoes. As camps go, this one was by no means the worst; this one was pretty good. Even so, we were getting pretty desperate about what was going on to happen.

Toward the end of April 1945, I didn't think I was going to survive and became very depressed. I talked so slowly that people didn't have patience to listen to me. Then the hills started to be green; spring might come. We knew the end was near, but we didn't know when.

The front was coming. There was a pocket of resistance around Breslau, and we were close to it. We could hear the shooting and were happy. "Maybe the end is coming."

One of the girls was able, through somebody else, to make a contact. They were going to build a railroad from Nachod, across the border in Czechoslovakia to make a connection. Some of the Czech women from the village got together, and even though it was rationed, got food and bribed the SS women by giving them more food for our group to eat. They were wonderful. They did it at great risk, but the SS women took the bribe of food because they didn't have that much either.

Bozenna Levitova was one of the women. Her husband was Jewish, and she protected him. Her three children were all in camps, one in Theresienstadt and two in Dachau, and she was doing this. She was a great woman.

Out of five hundred, thirteen women died between October and liberation, which was the beginning of May, a short time for normally healthy young women. But comparatively, thirteen was very few. They were buried in coffins because, miraculously, Hanelle had ordered them. It was unheard of.



We were liberated on the sixth of May 1945 in Nachod, in Upper Silicia, three kilometers from the Czech border. When the Russians were coming, the SS just opened the gates, said, "Go," and disappeared. So we went. There was a tremendous crowd of people, all going in cars, wagons, motorcycles, bicycles - you name it - from east to west, escaping from the Russians. Going westward, I just walked out on the street. I had a different shoe on each foot. We walked to the border, into what was Czechoslovakia, to Nachod. Nobody told us what we were going to do. Totally spontaneously, we stopped and sang the Czech anthem. In that moment, singing that anthem and crossing the border, I was normal. I spoke normal. I walked normal. Everything was normal.

Everybody knew we were prisoners. That's how we were dressed. We had no hair. A man whom I met on the street, who knew Jana, gave each of us some money. "I know you just came back, but did you happen to run into Jana?" I told him, "Your name is so and so." I remembered him. She gave us his name in October, and I just remembered it in May. I told him she had survived. She did survive and returned, and they married.

I went to Mrs. Levitova. All her three children had survived. She brought us thick Czech bread with a half inch of butter on it and honey. We bit into it, and you could see the imprint of the teeth in the butter and the honey. I will remember the bread with butter and honey - the first meal. That was a marvelous meal! Our teeth were singing! Mrs. Levitova let us have a bath. She put us in a bed with pillows and covers. Trude, a friend of mine, and I pinched each other at night. Is this a dream, or are we really sleeping in a bed? Mrs. Levitova fed us for a few days, then her three children returned.

We walked into Nachod, and that very first night of liberation I volunteered to work at

the Red Cross shelter. The Germans were coming through, and the Russians were chasing them. There was still shooting going on. On the streets, they took down the Swastika and put it on the floor. For one crown, everybody was allowed to clean his shoes on it.

On the first day the trains ran, I went to Prague, to my parents' maid. I slept in her kitchen for three days.

After the war, I studied nursing, but I left it because I had a chance to come to the United States. When I came here, I had to go to work to pay for my education. Once I was able to, I went to the university. I earned a bachelor's degree in three years and a master's in a year. I am a clinical psychologist, a Ph.D. from George Washington University. I did my internship at St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

When I'm in Prague, I always go to my grandfather's grave and put little stones on it. Since we were not able to bury her there, I had my grandmother's name put on the same gravestone. My relatives in Prague maintain the grave, even though so many others are neglected. So she is there, at least in memoriam, as she wished to be.

Every survivor has a different story to tell from a different point of view. Because I was a nurse in Theresienstadt, I saw things from the point of view of the nurses and doctors. You had to learn how to protect yourself. That was most important. Later we talked it out. When I talk to some of the people who didn't talk about it, who kept it inside, it was much worse. I feel like it's a part of my life that I have pretty much dealt with.