

RG-50.944.0005

Recorded on March 4 and August 22, 2016 in Budapest, two tapes, ca. 4 hours.

[Translator's Remarks: Mrs. Müller seems to be somewhat confused about places and times. There are frequent references to memories committed to paper 10 years prior to the interview. A 1944 notebook with places written down after her liberation and a family photo album are also shown at the end of the interview.]

Summary

Anna Veronika Müller Heller (Heller Sándorné, Müller Anna Veronika), born on March 8, 1928, Budapest, Hungary. She grew up in Rákospalota (small town near Budapest, at the time unincorporated in Budapest) where her family purchased a house. There is barely any information on the family background, only from marginal remarks in the second part of the interview. Her father had some kind of retail business in Révay Street in Budapest. Her grandmother was Viennese, and the language at home was German. She mentions but does not talk about her mother and a sister, Marika, seven years her junior. She went to the local public elementary school and visited the Kanizsai Dorottya high school for girls in Ujpest (another small town near Budapest).

She described the anti-Jewish legislation beginning in the late 1930s and the ever-greater restrictions on her family's life. Her father was called up for forced labor sometime in 1943. In March 19, 1944, at the time of the German occupation, she was 16 years old. Her family failed to move to relatives in Budapest, where Jews moved around more freely than in the countryside, to which Rákospalota belonged. Her family also did not manage to hide their valuables in a way that could be recovered after the war. She was still going to high school for a while, but had to wear the Yellow Star. Once, on the way to school on her bicycle, someone struck with a whip. The director of the school, Zoltán Porcsalmi was very good to her. Among the teachers, there were some "Arrow Cross" or right-wing sympathizers, like her German teacher. Her house was designated as a Yellow Star house, with a big sign on the front—traces of which were visible long after the war—and three more families moved in. Among them was Vali Grausz and her two daughters, with whom her fate became intertwined in the coming years. The neighborhood was not Jewish. One neighbor family, the working class "Communists" Kelemens offered to hide her family—they rescued another Jewish family, named Kornis—but her mother reacted too late and missed the opportunity. All of a sudden, the gendarmes appeared and the Jews had to pack their belongings. The gendarmes took them to Budakalász, to a brick factory, located next to a railroad stop and across from the gendarme barracks. It had a roof, but neither walls, nor toilets, nor washing facilities. They had food from home. They were there for a short time, entrained on July 8. Gendarmes guarded them at the brick factory and at the train. It was very crowded in the train, there was no water, and the journey took some days. She was close to the door and saw Kassa (now: Kosice, Slovakia) and the Tatra mountains. They were sent to Auschwitz. Upon arrival she saw her mother, grandmother, and sister for the last time. She describes (and repeats several times later in the interview) how she saw the huge

flames coming out from the crematorium close to their arrival place and prisoners already in the camp saying: "Your parents are burning there now!" After selection, they showered, their heads were shaven, and they received shabby clothes. Weeks later, she was tattooed: A-11032 –she shows the number on her left lower arm. She was relieved when tattooed because she thought she would leave a trace, if she had a number. She was assigned to Block 5, one of the huge number of barracks, with ca. 50 other women. She was together with Vali Grausz and her older daughter, Edit, around age nine at the time. Thanks to her perfect German knowledge, she became a *Schreiberin*, a scribe, a privileged position. Her task was getting everybody out for *Appell* three times a day, record and submit the number of prisoners, and distribute food. She also described this position as *Blockälteste*, the leader of Block 5. She used her privileged position to save Vali's daughter, Edit as long as she could. She told Grausz to put her daughter in the middle of one of the five-person rows at *Appell* and have her stand on a brick to look taller than she was. In the end, Edit perished in Auschwitz. She also translated for the SS, questioning prisoners, but did not elaborate on this. She mentioned that there were a lot of Jews from Carpathian Ruthenia, and she "never thought that Jews could be that primitive." The prisoners worked; she, too, had to do some digging and shoveling. Hygiene was bad, they had lice, and everybody was starving. They tried to avoid the *Revier*, the block for sick prisoners, because the sick ended up in the crematoria. There were selections at *Appell* as well. It is not clear, in which part of Auschwitz-Birkenau she initially was, and when and why she was transferred for some time to the *Frauenkonzentrationslager*, the women's concentration camp [set up late 1942 in Auschwitz II]. She was not beaten in Auschwitz and did not see any executions, but was aware that people were killed all the time. The women prisoners had female guards, who were crueler than male guards.

In mid-November 1944, she and a lot of other women were evacuated from Auschwitz, put on trains to Zillerthal, Czechoslovakia [correctly: Zillerthal-Erdmannsdorf, a sub-camp of the concentration camp Gross-Rosen in Lower Silesia. Now: Mysłakowice, southwestern Poland]. She lied that she had finished high school and thus was allowed to work on the weaving machines in a textile factory, the best work available. Other women worked in the basement, in water, in the cold.

On February 14, 1945, she left Zillerthal with hundreds of other women on a forced march. They marched through the towns of Seidorf and Petersdorf. She could see the *Riesengebirge* in the distance. It was extremely cold, deep snow. They wrapped themselves in blankets. She met up again with Vali Grausz. For a short while, they stopped and stayed somewhere, worked again, but she does not remember well where, and the place name, she vaguely mentioned, is not understandable. Then, sometime in the spring, her group was on the march again. This was toward the end of the war. She noticed that the guards began to shed their uniforms and insignia. She rebelled and yelled at them, and at an opportune moment, she fled, followed by four or five other women. She led the group in the direction from which they heard fighting. Finally, they met American soldiers. She knew English well and served as a translator for the

Americans interrogating German officials and POWs in the liberated area. She mentions an episode several times, when a German mayor of a small town soiled his pants in front of her, because he was scared of the Americans. She was taken to Leipzig, to an American camp, and from there she left for Hungary by train.

In July, she arrived home. She found her house occupied by strangers who were very unfriendly to her. At Rákospalota, at the train station she met Vali Grausz, who was there to meet and greet survivors coming home. She went to Budapest and first stayed with Vali, and then with her two surviving aunts who already had opened her father's former business. She worked in the store, and later on, a survivor named Lieber came to the store and told her that her father had died of blood poisoning on a forced march toward the West.

She met her husband, Sándor Heller through Vali, who was his distant relative. They married in 1946. Her husband survived forced labor and was in the same march as her father, but they did not know each other. She and her husband lived first with her mother-in-law in Rumbach Sebestyén Street. She has two daughters, Mari, born in 1951, and Zsuzsi, born in 1953. Then they moved to their house in Buda, to Bimbó Street 120, where she still lives.

Two cousins also survived, hiding in Buda. She finished high school and studied German and English languages and literature, and French as a minor subject at the university. A great uncle, who lived in the Soviet Union, a medical doctor, László Polacsek helped her to get admitted to the university. She teaches these languages ever since.

She said that her knowledge of languages saved her life.