

## Contents

Mom’s Journey.....	1
Preamble:.....	2
Introduction 1936 – 1940 .....	2
1940 – 1944 The “Tsuers” Started, the Hell Started.....	3
Deportation.....	5
Auschwitz .....	6
Slave Labor Camps/Gelsenkirchen.....	10
Slave Labor Camps/Sömmerda .....	12
Surviving the Death March .....	14
Liberation .....	17
Heading Home .....	19
Back Home .....	21

# Debora “Babciu” Sachs Jacobovits’ Journey

Compiled and translated by her sons Mayer, Rachmil and Gedalya Jacobovits  
based on their mother’s audio recorded testimony

## Preamble:

Mom recorded her Holocaust recollections in Yiddish on three cassette tapes, and we hired a relative to transliterate using the English alphabet. When Mom reviewed the transliteration, she added in her handwriting additional information or clarifications.

Mayer (oldest son) translated the tapes first and integrated Mom’s handwritten notes. Milu (Mom’s second son), more familiar in the religious terminology of Mom’s Yiddish expressions and often using a Yiddish to English dictionary was able to come closer to rendering into English Mom’s language and Yiddish expressions. We reviewed and integrated the two translations, thus greatly improving its accuracy and completeness, while still staying true to Mom’s voice.

We tried to stay as true to Mom’s taped voice recording as possible, so we did not try to improve sentence structure. Mayer used the transliteration whenever it was needed, and when mom’s handwriting was used it was indicated so.

We decided to leave certain words in original Yiddish, a mere translation of these words doesn’t fully convey them adequately. We provide some footnotes to try to bridge the gap, e.g. Tsures, Gliken, Plug, etc.

TAPE 2 STARTS WITH A REPEAT OF EVENTS IN AUSCHWITZ ADDING MORE NUANCE. 0:00- 6:30 THERE ARE NO CONTRADICTIONS WITH TAPE 1.

After sending the manuscript around to our children, Mayer got an email from Courtney and a reference to the city of Gelsenkirchen about the history of the Holocaust times there which documented and matched Mom’s story: [http://www.gelsenzentrum.de/gelsenberg\\_lager.htm](http://www.gelsenzentrum.de/gelsenberg_lager.htm). We used this information to correct dates; September 13, 1944 to September 11, 1944, of the bombing of Gelsenkirchen and documented the arrival in Sömmerda; September 16, 1944. This also finally clarified why Mom always used to say she was in “Gelsenberg/Gelsenkirchen”.

What became very clear from this memoir is that on arrival to Auschwitz, Mom could hear, but by the end of WW II, her hearing was lost. This is mentioned in the memoir with phrases like: “my hearing became weak” after the bombing of the Gelsenkirchen factory. It is obvious that her hearing disappeared gradually, and in order to survive, Mom instinctively learned to read lips. Her ability to read lips in different languages was so amazing that most people did not realize she was deaf. Mom was able to converse with others in five languages: Yiddish, German, Romanian, Hungarian and Ukrainian.

## Introduction 1936 – 1940 from Mom’s handwriting

Until 1936, I worked in a sweater (textile) factory in the city Sighet (in the county) Maramuresh. I earned well and could help send money to my mother (who lived in Polien.) <sup>1</sup>

(Starting) In the middle of the summer of 1936, I could no longer pay (even) my rent and everyday expenses. The one sweater factory in Sighet, still existed but would not be able to pay my monthly salary with which I could continue to live in Sighet.

In the meantime, I was offered a job with the company ICA, that was founded to help Jewish resettlement “colonisten”. Working in the village Barsana, 20 km south of Sighet (where ICA was located) did not pay a monthly salary better than the factory (in Sighet), but I got benefits from a milk farm with cows that the company owned and paid with milk and

---

<sup>1</sup> who lived in Polien (Polien-Riskava in Yidish or Poienile de sub Munte in Romanian

with other products, for example, sheep, fruits, etc. I was asked to take over managing the milk factory “Laptaria Barsana” (Barsana Dairy in Romanian), from the General Manager Emanuel, a famous agriculture expert “agronom” from Bessarabia, which produced (and sold) butter, sour cream, and cheese. The owners of the company ICA, were principled, educated men living in Bessarabia.

All other workers in the milk factory were girls from various other villages; I was the only one from Sighet.

## **1940 – 1944 The “Tsures” Started, the Hell Started**

### **(Start of Tape 1.)**

My Tsures (misfortunes) started in 1940 on September 5th. [I was employed] by ICA. My bosses had to return to Russia as they were exiled and left me the factory and all the machinery. I tried to continue working but was unable to work because I was on the same (employee) list as they, and as they were exiled, and I was to be exiled also. When it came time to request papers from Hungarian authorities, everyone needed to have citizenship, but when I requested [citizenship] papers they wanted proof of residence in earlier times, with witnesses, going back four or five years. Because I was on the same list as they [my bosses] I was [threatened] with exile. As long as it took me to get witnesses, with difficulty to show that I returned home to Polien Riskeva, because this happened in Barsana. And this costed me a lot of money.

**(Insert** about proof of citizenship requirement when the Hungarians took over the area from Mom’s handwriting.) Our situation got more and more difficult. We had to find documents to prove our citizenship. Whoever could not, was evicted even in the biggest snow and cold, over the border to Poland.

They wanted papers from my mother who was born in the former Czechoslovakia and to prove that her father whose name was Steinem had paid taxes before World War I (when the entire area was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire). I had to travel to “Chech Bisker<sup>3</sup>” (Bychkiv, after World War I belonged to Czechoslovakia) where my mother was born, where in the village hall I found papers going back to 1875, having paid taxes on their properties. I brought these papers to the city hall in Sighet, and my mother got her Hungarian citizenship.

Whoever could not prove citizenship, were expelled to Lublin, Poland. Many perished on the way from cold and hunger and the survivors were put in a synagogue and the Germans set it on fire. A big part of my mother’s family was killed in this fire. From 1941 till 1943, we heard daily news about deaths and killings, but by the end of 1943 we knew what the Germans were doing. We felt protected in Hungary but by March 1944 we were told we must wear the yellow star which was implemented with penalties on April 6 (and I knew what was coming). So, I decided to stay with my mother, and everything changed on Passover 1944. On April 15 we started our trip to leave. (End of handwritten **notes**).

They (the Hungarian Authorities) claimed taxes for the ten years the factory was in existence, but it was only working the last four years. The landlady demanded ten years difference in rent. [Presumably an additional six years of rent.] This was very costly and as much money as I had saved it was not enough to cover [all the expenses.] With the machines I went home, shipped with a man and alone. And as the man was [riding on the padded carriage] “divan” seat people were saying [mockingly] “Jidanul pe divanul” (a rhyming Romanian antisemitic slur.) Not only did I not get use [of the machines or my savings] the money that I saved I had to give away to cover the taxes that had to be paid. (Tape is stopped as this point, the 2:10 mark to make technical adjustments and resumes at the 2:34 mark.)

This was on September 5th to the 15th, until the 15th of September. I arrived home in Havasmező or Polien Riskeva with these machines. A month did not pass that we are informed from Barsana, where I had worked, about an inquiry to the Polien chancellery whether a certain Sachs Debora is to be found, who was the manager of the Barsana Dairy. If she is there [in Polien all are to be informed that] she must pay such and such an amount in taxes that her bosses had not paid. So much was demanded that it was not within my means to pay. If I did not pay these taxes, they would seize all the milk machines, the entire factory. Furthermore, that I, Sachs Dora, Debora, was on the same list as the Bessarabians and likely fled with the Bessarabians. When I was informed of all this, I had to travel to Barsana alone to see what is to be

done. Where did I have so much money to pay all these taxes? They claimed taxes for ten years and I did not have it. We negotiated [a settlement] of seven hundred Pengő. I also did not have the seven hundred Pengő. I gave them seventy Pengő and accepted that I had to pay it every month.

In the meantime, other Tsures started. The border with Poland opened and everyone ran away to Russia to the "Gliken"<sup>2</sup>. A lot of Jewish workers from Sighet ran away to the "worker's paradise" and the Barsana bureaucrats thought I did too, so they came looking for me. I did not go anywhere and in the meantime, it was November already. In November the Hungarian government<sup>3</sup> set up in Polien a work camp consisting primarily of professionals including many doctors and lawyers who had to work with munitions and had to dig out holes where they could hide them. The cold was big, and the snow was deep, the people freezing, the Hell started. There were about 300 professionals from Budapest and some of them did not even know they were Jews. Some had a Jewish father, some a Jewish mother and in a very short time the work camp was overflowing with them. While at the beginning there was enough food, soon the food became scarce even though they had the money to pay for it. Clothes for cold weather became scarce too and most were freezing. The Jews of Polien tried to do what they could to help. It lasted three months until February when the work camp was cancelled, and all the professionals returned to Budapest, and they let us know that they were freed. They are working again (back to their jobs), they are pleased "zufrieden".

It became the year (June) 1941, when the Germans went against the Russians. They (Hungarians who were allies of Nazi Germany) came to take those who could fight and many who could not fight (drafting all younger men in the village) to send them to the front to German Russia (Russian territory conquered by Germany). From our village suddenly, all the men were gone. It was only July when the wives and mothers were informed that a whole "Tabor" (Camp) of three hundred men fell. Two remained alive, they were lucky. One was a doctor that the hospital took him out, (from the tabor Dr "Fanto"). A mother cried because her son, a lawyer fell. They let us know with a letter, with a death notice, the whole village became embittered, devastated. The others have already seen grown educated children. My acquaintances only had a mother; we had our own Tsures misfortunes in the village. What was it? They set fire to a hospital and many from our Polieners (people from Polien and others were burned in the hospital. Every day we had bad news, more fatalities, we had orphans, we had widows, it was sad.

In July (1942) they let us know that we (our village) are occupied. They requisitioned our houses. Our stable was requisitioned for a kitchen and our house for dormitories except for two rooms. They filled our house with new arrivals, young men who left wives without money, without bread with children. There was more bad news from the front, letters, another tabor was overrun, I don't remember how many [casualties] had fallen. The Tsures kept increasing. We had neighbors whose husbands were killed; sons were killed. They brought injured and sick young men (from the front) who fell ill from hunger from Tsures. And they brought into our house two, three sick men. My mother (A" H)<sup>4</sup> (may peace be upon her), was so good at dealing with sick people, who happened to be Jewish and happy they were placed in Jewish homes. We had to help them, we for ourselves did not have enough to eat, but how much we did not have, we shared with the injured and sick young soldiers; not only us, everyone in our village. Every neighbor knew they had to help. What can one do?

---

<sup>2</sup> The term Gliken is an antonym to Tsures and literally means to "turn out well, to prove successful to prosper." Here Mom uses the term ironically because Jews who fled to Russia, survived perhaps, but experienced great hardship.

<sup>3</sup> The Jewish men were assigned to work battalions without guns. Officially they were soldiers but in reality, they were involuntary conscripts. They were sent to the front to serve in work battalions. See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour\\_service\\_in\\_Hungary\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_service_in_Hungary_during_World_War_II)

<sup>4</sup> Mom used the honorific Yiddish/Hebrew expression for the deceased Hebrew

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honorifics\\_for\\_the\\_dead\\_in\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honorifics_for_the_dead_in_Judaism)

There was one man, a notary “notarman”<sup>5</sup> in our house, who could not move, had to use crutches, kept on telling us how he left home a wife and children, without a piece of bread, they had a little money – a few Pengo (Hungarian currency) did not have anything to eat. He worked in a tabor for about three months – till September. And they took his tabor and moved the border to Kosice (today Slovakia).

It was already 1943 and more casualties, who fell, this one fell, the other fell. The whole tabor fell, we did not know who was left alive, and even if alive, we thought they died. A father of a son wrote that he knew his son was alive, he heard news from a witness, but it was not believed, we thought they just wanted to make him feel better. Like this it went till 1944, from one Tsures to the next.

Those who crossed the border to Poland were arrested and beaten; they were communists, they wanted to go to communism. They killed one; his name was Stern from Sighet. The mother came (from Sighet) to the funeral in Polien, and she cried, here in Polien he had to die, here they killed her son. We, the whole village cried along with her. They had the funeral.

At the Tabor as the border shifted a second Tabor (was formed) and one Klein Moshe died of a heart attack. And his mother also came to the funeral, and we and the whole village cried along with this mother. Everyone had somebody (killed) from the war, a husband, a brother, a brother-in-law, a son in law. Nobody was spared, no one could live with assurance that a Jewish family would be spared (casualties). This was the prevailing talk among us.

The last Passover eve, it was the 44th year (1944) they brought a camp; again, they requisitioned our stable for a kitchen. They did not place any people (soldiers) in our house this time. All were placed in gentile homes, because they knew that Jews, no matter how little they had, they shared, they helped. They only came to (us) the kitchen to take a little food. Shabbat “Chol Hamoed”<sup>6</sup> before “Isru Chag”<sup>7</sup>, they came and removed the kitchen while we were in the synagogue for the Yizkor of Pesach and people came to the kitchen, but the kitchen was gone. They came to ask us, where is the kitchen? We didn’t know. And they cried out: “Master of the Universe” Reboine shel Oilem”<sup>8</sup>, when will our Tsures end, we are hungry, and we are tired”. They all cried and prayed. In the end [it was discovered that the kitchen] was taken to the church and the school, the Ukrainian school.

And the next day Sunday morning, a neighbor’s tenant approached us, a tailor, a gentile woman asking us “Do you know what will be tomorrow?” We girls responded, “we do not want to know; we will know tomorrow.” She only wanted to [let us know the bad news] early. Another neighbor, an anti-Semite, also asked “Do you know my friend the Zipser, (ethnic German) is playing music? She is the one that you tutored all these years in school.” Jonkitsa’s sister Erjy, did not want to take part in the conversation, but Jonkitsa who spent four years in school with me played music (to celebrate) that we are being taken away.

## Deportation

Sunday morning came, they appointed the heads of the Jewish community Jankel Markovitch and Selig Gerl to go from door to door to tell us that in three hours we must go outside. We must abandon our homes. My mother, may she rest in peace, almost had a stroke. She paced back and forth from the door to the window and from the window to the door and cried “Reboine shel Oilem” - Master of the Universe, I accepted everything with love, and as long as I had my own four walls. Where should I go with my only daughter? At least she is near me. Where my son is<sup>9</sup>, there is no more hope

---

<sup>5</sup> Based on multiple mentions by Mom, a notary was a village official performing multiple legal and administrative tasks; from mayor to secretary to notarizing legal papers such as birth and death certificates – hence Notarman.

<sup>6</sup> (lit. “weekday during the festival”); the semi-festive intermediate days of Passover and Sukkot

<sup>7</sup> The day immediately following the three pilgrimage holidays—Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot—is called Isru Chag which literally means “bind the holiday.”

<sup>8</sup> This is just a Yiddish version of the Hebrew ריבון של אולם, translated as Master of the Universe

<sup>9</sup> By then it was assumed that mom’s brother was killed in a Jewish roundup in June 1942 in Czernowitz (Cernauti) as it was known then was in Romania, became a part of the Soviet Union and now Ukraine.

that he is alive. 'Reboine shel oilem' Master of the Universe we plead that you let me be!' The others (Jewish people) in the village went through the same.

There came the village Notary [to announce] that an order was made to postpone this deportation a minimum of two weeks maybe three weeks, because there was a typhus outbreak among detainees. And they stopped us (from being deported) and we hoped that in three weeks, God will take pity on us. And everyone was giving the Notary gold. I only had a single ring and a pair of earrings, which admirably I alone made, alone earned [bought with my own earnings] and I gave it to the Notary just only so we can stay another three weeks in [our] village. As it turned out they did not leave us in our houses, they took us to a house where we were two or three families in one small room. We still had some food; I was earning money but starting 1942 we never had enough food; we mostly went hungry.

And after the three weeks, an order came that in one hour we must all be at the wagons. In Polien we had a small railway station, only wagons. From there they took us to Leordina and from there to Vişeu (pronounced Visheu), where we stayed till June; eight days before Shavuot. We were on Tsures, we did not have a place to rest our heads. Nobody wanted to take us in, because we came from a place that had reputation of typhus. With difficulties someone named Daskal may he be in heaven, had pity on us and gave us a corner to lay our heads down.

**(Insert** about Vişeu from Mom's notes). My uncle, my father's brother, his name was Zalman Markowits with his family, a married daughter with 3 children were already in the Vişeu Ghetto three weeks and had a small room where they also had a niece with 6 small children and a sick husband. (end of handwritten **end insert**).

My uncle, from Borşa (pronounced Borsha), the wealthy man, who had his own lumber business did not have enough to eat. My mother had baked loaves of bread that kept and gave the uncle to eat. He left his possessions to a Pintas Albazanu, who brought us from time to time a little food, but never enough. Many were very hungry. We had what we prepared. I struggled mightily overburdened to carry a heavy sack of flour with all that we gathered to have something for the next day.

There came an order in (almost) June<sup>10</sup>, eight days before Shavuot that they will send us away, where – we did not know. My mother, may she rest in peace, took the papers we prepared, we had Hungarian citizenship so wherever we arrive we should have the papers to prove our citizenship. My mother put them (hid them) inside her bosom which (in the end) were torn out of her mother's hand (at some point probably in Auschwitz.) (The experience of being expelled from the country after Hungary reconquered Transylvania because of lack of citizenship documentation made mom and her mother Rachel believe that having valid documents would be of some consequence to their fate. Of course, by this point May 1944, Jews under Nazi control were no longer protected by any documents from the threat of annihilation.)

After three days and three nights we were traveling in the cattle car without a bit of water. The children kept asking for a little water. We asked the watcher of the wagons for a bit of water for the children. There is no water. The children were fainting for a bit of water, not to mention food. On a Saturday eve<sup>11</sup>, this was, we arrived in Auschwitz. Who knew about Auschwitz? We did not know; we did not know where we are.

## **Auschwitz**

They ordered that older people and mothers with children and those who are not well to go left and those who can work to go right. My mother who was still near me and not yet 56 years old, I stayed with her, we did not want to part from each other. When we tried to go right, they did not let my mother go. When we tried left, they did not let me go on. In the end with the five hundred people, they let me go with my mother left, so I decided to go with her and they did not stop me. Dr. Mengele, the one who had a stick in his hand pointed left or right saw me and called a soldier who tore

---

<sup>10</sup>Mom mentions June, but it was actually late May. In 1944, Shavuot began on Saturday night/Sunday on May 27/28, so 8 days before was May 20/21.

<sup>11</sup> This had to be May 20, 1944, consistent with the observed date of death (yahrzeit) of Rachel, mom's mother, on Hebrew date Yiar 28 which in 1944 was on May 20/21.

me from my mother's arms and threw me to the que going right. I cried in German, this is my mother, he said in German "there is no mother here". The que going right was full, there was no more place, so Mengele told the soldier to ask who wants to go with their parents. A young girl from Satmar, not a tall one and not a strong one, responded and they were very pleased that I, a stronger person, who was more fit for work, took her place. This child still stands before me. A younger child than I, and they put her in that place [in the que that went to their death.]

And they counted us and counted again. And my mother who stood in the same place, her hands covering her eyes, cried and prayed. She instructed me: **"You should know my child; a generation must descend from me (21:35). You shall not forget what I tell you, that my life's work "plug" will not be in vain. A generation must descend from me!<sup>12</sup>"**

And they took us on a march, and it was becoming dark, and they told us to go. We did not know where we are, where we are going.<sup>13</sup> We arrived at a place where they told us to take off all our clothes. And nothing should be left on. The Germans told us that it is a disinfection so we should be clean and look like people. They took hair from wherever a human has hair. And we were naked.

There were there two young girls from Polien about eighteen or nineteen years old. One a blond beauty, the other a brunette beauty. The mother's sister of one the girls was near her, and the sister had been instructed by the mother "Watch over of my Freidi, I am begging you watch out for my Freidi." The girl's mother was sent away with her four-five children and she (one of the beauties) the young girl came with her aunt, her mother's sister. When we went out there were counts and two were missing even after repeated counts. And people (among the inmates) started to ask and soon word got out among us that a German officer came by and took the two beauties away.

A relative of mine from Borşa, also a young girl when asked to undress refused to undress. And they shouted, "Undress you dirty Jew". She shouted back to the Germans "I am dirty? You are dirty, you are a cursed nation. How can you ask me, the daughter of a Talmudist to undress here with all these men around?" And they shot the child on the spot. Suri Klein was her name. (More Mom crying and blowing her nose on the tape.)

And they took us away. As we came to the "Block" (the barracks where the prisoners slept), a young, married woman without children, Blimu Moskowitz was her name cried out "here is where they burned our fathers and mothers. Here is where they burn our sisters and brothers, here, here". We do not know how she knew. We saw a big chimney tower, but we did not know what that was. After the deportation I met her and asked her "How did you know?" When she cried out, they shot her, but the bullet only got in her leg, and she survived.

They took us (inside the barracks); be quiet, be quiet "Nur ruhe, nur ruhe (were the orders)". It looked like a stable, exactly like a stable. There was moisture from above overwhelmed by the smell of urine and other human waste. They did not give us the possibility to take care of our basic (biological) human needs.

As I went out the next morning, I did not sleep, (I felt) not alive and not dead!

The next day we were told that we can choose our neighbors, so we looked for women and girls whom we knew from home, we became a group of 6 or 8 women and girls, we chose a place, a little comfort "Shtikel Yatzloch" like they say. (This group will stick together till they returned home.)

---

<sup>12</sup> On the tape mom was crying as she told this part. This is an oft repeated instruction from our grandmother transmitted to our mother and our mother to us. As we were growing up, Mom often relayed this instruction from her mother as a repeated plea that took place on the train to Auschwitz, hence our assertion that, in effect, it became her life's mission statement. This instruction possibly occurred both on the train, as we often heard it from Mom, and for the last time in Auschwitz when they were forcibly separated.

<sup>13</sup> As one can imagine, stress, hunger, confusion, disorientation brilliantly coming through in the recording.

They immediately call us to roll call "Appell". At Appell comes a Polish woman, Zlata was her name, and asks me: "Why did you come? Why did you not know what happened to us? We are here already five years. Why did you come? Why did not stand against (the Nazis)?" We did not know. They took away the men, they took away even the older educated men. They (the Hungarians) took them to work camps. Mothers with children and old sick men were left behind. We were worried about surviving. We did not know anything. We were told that they need us to work, they will take us to work. And the old people will take care of the children. We were just hoping to survive. (long pause, Mom is obviously terribly upset, trying to catch her breath).<sup>14</sup>

The next day, I met Zlata and she tells me she was 8 or 9 years old when they took her. The Germans treated the Polish Jewish children exactly like dogs. These Polish Jewish children now beat us (for no obvious reasons). If we asked why, they beat us more. I come out (the next day) and I see Zlata; she asked me yesterday "where is my father, do you know?" and I tried to console her today. (Not sure if she remembered me), there were 500 women there. Can you imagine what she did? She started beating me and slapping me. So, I asked her "What happened to you, you became crazy "meshuga geworen"? Yesterday you were so nice to me and now you are beating (obviously just for trying to console her) me. Calls out a woman from Satmar in Hungarian, a woman a physician in Hungarian "These Jewish girls have no Jewish heart left. They are exactly like (rabid) dogs."

**(From Tape 1 at minute 28:25, on and first 6:30 minutes of Tape 2 cover the same period. There is some repetition but no conflicting information.)**

I was among Polish women and, Slovakian women and as I was trying to find my place, I just sat down, and they call another Appell. And a whole day standing for "Appel" after "Appel after "Appel." This lasted until...and without food and nothing. They gave us some boiled barley soup and the barley soup had mouse excrement. I even found a mouse leg in the soup. When I found this out, I no longer wanted to eat. My (bunk) neighbor whose niece (the beauties) was taken away earlier, told me "I know I too am habituated (for cleanliness) like you (from home), but here you need survive and must eat. So, I started eating. When I ate the soup, I gave it all back, (probably through diarrhea) everything I ate since Pesach at home. My eyes became very red, my head started to ache. I asked the barrack leader, a very nice Slovak and a nice Polish woman, I don't know women or girls, to allow me to go the place where you could lie down [infirmary]. And I came there and saw only people suffering scarlet fever and typhus and other things. One girl from Satmar who recognized me complained to me bitterly that she is burning up so, burning up with scarlet fever. Complained to me so severely. While talking to her, I hear the block leader shout "Hinaus!" (everyone outside, "Hinaus, der Oberarzt ist hier!" (meaning head doctor)". I let the others go ahead, they were truly ill, I only had red eyes and a headache. The doctor, it was Mengele, asked in German "What's with you" and I answered in German that I have a severe headache. He says "Good!" and tells the barrack leader to give me medicine and "Hin Aus" send her out.

My acquaintances outside were already expecting; Babciu they referred to me both Babciu and Devoire, to be taken away (the usual procedure with sick inmates unable to work.) Everything was rumored. When they saw me walk out, they all surrounded me (as if for protection.). "You must not be away from us," they said, "I will stand at your back, so you don't get cold," said one who was taller than I. Another offered to stand in front of me. They showed such love and such devotion. Many of them are no longer here. They are truly missed. And we were there another six weeks without food, just with "Appels." With just a bit of hot coffee, they called it coffee, but it was just hot water. A bit of hot water on which we existed.

---

<sup>14</sup> Roll calls, Frequent "appells" was used to account for missing, prevent escapes and generally to dehumanize inmates forced to stand outside in all types of weather to be counted.



It came to be, that we were called to get our arms tattooed at the six weeks mark. I went to the office where number were assigned and was ask for their records what our names were, where we and our families were from and our professions and what was the name of our parents, and they give me a receipt with my assigned number.

I met an acquaintance who spoke German well, and outside Polish (detainees) were working on flower gardens. And one had the impressions this was a paradise of sorts with well-kept pretty houses. Not like us used to six weeks of mud and barracks. Dirty barracks surrounded by mud, and we forced to wallow in the mud, and here we were only allowed to wait in the queue they controlled, and many people could not bear to be there and left. This Ratze Mund asked the Poles in German what these numbers are for. And she told us that these numbers are our numbers in heaven. And then she came to tell us. We gave priority to older women, in their fifties, who already had numbers on their arms. When we heard that, we took our receipts with our assigned number in hand and scattered – all of us ran away. Because all 500 of us ran away we were punished and the next day we sent to the labor camp to Germany to Gelsenberg/Gelsinkirchen.<sup>15</sup> There were only like coals and burned chards, there was no longer a factory, nothing. Not only us, but there were also there other spies and mainly our camp of women. There were French and Polish captives and Russian prisoners of war, and we were worked like slaves.

**(Start of Tape 2. From here till next section Slave Labor Camps/Gelsenkirchen the same information is presented but not exactly in the same words.)**

The “Appels” (roll calls) were occurring every day, not only every day, but every hour. You had to stand for these roll calls, and you could not rest, you could not sit, you could not move, you could not know anything (why, or how long or what the reason was for these endless roll calls. You received these “Appels” roll calls from five in the morning until the evening, only “Appels” roll calls and more roll calls.

The barrack leaders, these Polish girls and Slovak girls, they were nice girls, but not from among the really young ones. The younger Slovak and Polish girls were as mean as trained dogs and if you were in any way not on point at the roll calls (not completely aligned, or in any way not completely standing at attention) they beat you with a belt buckle end of a belt. One time I became so enraged by one of them. She was a young child, of fifteen or sixteen and was just beating me and when I asked why she is beating, she just beat me some more, the more I asked the more she beat me and I was so angry and ready to start hitting her back. But then I thought she is just a young child.

Once they were serving some food, they gave some barley soup. One look at that barley soup and you could not eat it. My neighbor from the same village, Polien-Riskeve, tells me “Babciu why are you not eating? We must hold on, we must eat, we must hold out!” I was living on a bit of coffee and some margarine. Not on the bread which was like clay and the soup was dirty, with all sorts of debris. It had small rocks (pebbles) and worse than pebbles. She so enticed me to eat so I started eating but soon I gave it back (vomited and/or diarrhea) everything I ate home since Pesach. My eyes became so very red (bloodshot) I already said this? And my head started to hurt. I had hidden a head kerchief and I put on this kerchief on because my head was naked (hair was shorn off) and it had rained. I was feeling very ill. After I put on the kerchief one of these Slovak girls came over and dragged the kerchief off my head and took it away. When I asked why, I was beaten again. You were not allowed to possess anything, not even a needle. A trifle could not be owned.

It came to be that they were putting numbers on our arms. We came to the place where numbers were put on the arms you could not say that this was Auschwitz. It was a fine city with elegant houses, with elegant homes, music was playing and flower gardens. We did not know what this was, we looked around and did know where we were. The Polish men were working in the garden and cleaned the residences. This was set up to show foreigners that Auschwitz was pretty.

---

<sup>15</sup> There is no Gelsenberg Gelsenkirchen. Based on the City of Gelsenkirchen documentation: [http://www.gelsenzentrum.de/gelsenberg\\_lager.htm](http://www.gelsenzentrum.de/gelsenberg_lager.htm) Mom worked in a factory named Gelsenberg Benzin AG hence Mom’s combining the two names.

But our reality was mud and dirt and when we had human needs, we could only go when they let us and a lot of the young women could not hold out that long.

As we approached the offices there, I was handed a piece of paper that my number is A11770, I don't remember, 70 or 74, I don't remember anymore<sup>16</sup>. With this paper we waited in line until it came everyone's turn and my turn to have the number stamped on our arms. We gave priority [in line] to the older ones. In the meantime, one of my acquaintances from my town in Havasmező, Ratza Mund was her name and she stepped out to speak to the Polish men, she spoke perfect German, and asked what the significance of this number was. They answered that this number is from heaven. When we heard that these numbers are for heaven, we all ran away. If two or three had run away, they would be shot, but with five hundred fleeing women from our barrack they did not shoot. We were just punished. The next day we were taken away to join spy detainees and Soviet prisoners only (selected for harsher treatment) where our women had not yet been sent. We were among those punished.

The next day they took us to the train where we were beaten into wagons. I was lost from my compatriots and my compatriots were looking for me and I was looking for my compatriots. Among five hundred women it was hard to find them. I entered another wagon where I had acquaintances but not my compatriots and there, I sat dejected for three days and three nights, travelling. Fortunately, there were some Germans, old Germans. They were not "Hitleristen" who did not treat us as badly (as the young Germans indoctrinated with Hitlerism.) They were there to do their job and were not inflicting on us as much Tsures as the young Germans.

### **Slave Labor Camps/Gelsenkirchen**

(Insert about Gelsenkirchen from Mom's handwriting. In the city of Gelsenkirchen there was a place called Gelsenberg where they had tanks of gas or oil. Nearby they had housing from sticks and "Ploches" canvas for walls for us prisoners, just like stables., We were about 70 prisoners in such a unit. We slept on the floors, they gave us a bit more food (than in Auschwitz) and it smelled like bombs, but at least it was cleaner (than in Auschwitz). End of Insert.)

We came to a place (Gelsenkirchen) where there were only benzine pipes, with other such things, with ships, with bricks. And we were put into a new canvas barrack. But at least it was cleaner than Auschwitz, in Auschwitz it was only lice. There was new straw, new bunks and we were delighted that at least it was clean and that the lice are not feasting on us. There were five barracks, and I don't remember how many of us in each. They brought other people from Auschwitz, altogether we were two thousand women. They sent us out to work with benzines, in bombed out factories, bombed earlier, with brimstone and everything, with wheelbarrows. In the back there were watery ditches, in the front above narrow planks to cross them. I was given a wheelbarrow loaded with brimstone to push across these narrow planks. Many a time I felt like I was going to fall off into the watery ditch. It came to be that I was the only one assigned to wheelbarrow duty because I was tall, well-built, and strong, others like me were picked for heavy labor, and other strong ones like me, to do heavy loading of wagons. Whenever there were some heavier things to do, we were the ones picked to do it.

Once on Tisha b'Av<sup>17</sup>, we fasted. There, at least they had a little soup, clean; a little coffee, clean; we could support our souls "halten die neshomo". Still after such a hard work, it was never enough; we were always hungry. Water, they did not give us, to drink water, they did not give us. Whenever we did not work, they called Appels and more Appels. Once [that same] Tisha b'Av after work, I sat down not only I, others as well. were approached by a German speaking to an acquaintance saying, "What do you think where your parents and young siblings are." We were hoping that our parents and younger siblings might have been assigned to lighter work. "Do you think your parents and young siblings are alive? They are kaput – they were all burned." When we were told this, we were left so...[devastated] no longer willing to

---

<sup>16</sup> It was 11770, verified by document 499495 from the International Tracing Service

<sup>17</sup> Tisha B'Av is an annual fast day in Judaism, on which several disasters in Jewish history occurred, primarily the destruction of both Solomon's Temple by the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the Second Temple by the Roman Empire in Jerusalem.

work. "Shoot us now, immediately...shoot us all! What do we need this for, our strength is already exhausted (by the hard labor) what will be later!" Hungry and barefoot and naked! In Auschwitz I was forced into wooden clogs, my own new shoes were taken from me, and in these clogs was made to walk the narrow planks dragging heavy brimstones! We said "Enough already! Shoot us!" As soon as the (German's) superiors got word of this, he was immediately removed from among us, no longer to be seen because of what he told us. None of us wanted to work any longer... enough work "Shoot us here, at work!" This person was punished, and the others tried to calm us and told us that it was not true what this person said. Our parents are indeed working at caring for young children and talked us into believing that our parents are alive.

When this place was built up by all the prisoners, and others like us and work was done of building up and clearing the city we had found ruined with charcoal.

One day on September 13'th, when we were returning from the (day's) heavy labor, they prepared settings (packages) for us. A setting consisting of a portion of bread and winter socks because it was already cold there. When we returned from work, I went to wash up first and remove the grime from me from the dirty work I was overloaded with., others went to eat. Then I came upstairs to the third floor an alarm started, (it was so loud) that one could not eat. A young girl, a neighbor of mine from home, asked "How can you eat?". So, responded in jest, at least I will die sated, not hungry. After being hungry for so many months, now I want to eat. "Why did you not eat earlier?" I had to wash, who could take any food with such dirty hands?

As I spoke out, an explosion occurred that I believed that everything collapsed. I ran to the door where others also ran to get out. Others ran to get outside. When I came to the door, however many we were, I see I have no legs, I am all covered in clay. The grenades and the bombs that fell around the camp left me wondering if I will have [legs] to run with. Those above me who fell on top of me lost their bowels on me (hence the "clay" covered legs - obviously, Mom lost consciousness at the door.)

Suddenly, I come to (regain consciousness) and realize that I am alone. I am alone in the entire barrack, there's no one. I start running, and running so, to see where I can find some cover, and the bombs are falling. I run into a house that had a canvas awning and banged my head and fell to the ground passed out. I don't know how long I lay there. But when another grenade, a bomb fell, I regained consciousness. And further saw and ran out. I did not know if it was day. Chunks of brick and chunks of clay fell a lot – I did not know if it was day or night, in the middle of a bright day. Airplane leaflets fell and I picked up an airplane leaflet and I could not return to where I came from and entered the next barrack. There also there was no one, but I sensed somewhere there was some whispering and walked over to the canvas [wall] and saw there was someone moving. I lift the canvas and look out and see the last transport from the work arrived and see two officers running into the guardhouse and two girls run after them. And on that [guard] house fell a grenade [bomb] and everyone is kaput [killed.]

Exiting, after it quieted, I came out and see blood on the barbed wires and pieces of flesh are rolling about against the fence outside the camp. I walked to get closer and run into an acquaintance who is carrying a familiar girl in her arms and asks me "Please Babciu, come and help me. This is Buntza, she is so weak." This was Fraily Gross who was carrying – her maiden name was Wertzberger. And I go to help her. And there soon another acquaintance from another barrack calls out "Yoy, Friddush draga" [in Hungarian – Friddush dear – continuing in Hungarian] please come and help me. My leg, my leg." And she leaves me alone with this Buntza to take her to the infirmary. But I only saw that she was wounded in her arm. I look at why the arm is so weak. I ask the woman doctor, a Hungarian Jewish woman, why is she so weak and the doctor shows me that her heart is entirely outside [the upper left rib cage was blown away.] This girl and I were the same age and knew her well. As soon as I saw that I fell down and I no longer wanted anything.

And the doctor starter screaming at me [in Hungarian] "You must be strong. Not allowed! You must be strong! You must not give up! And she gave me two tablets and it no longer bothered me what I saw. Nothing I saw bothered me anymore. I amazed myself that I was no longer bothered – I used to faint at the site of blood, these tablets (were the

reason). I walked over to that guard house to see what happened with these two girls who ran into the guard house. What did I see? The girls were whole – but missing heads, the foreheads were missing. This immensely disturbed me. I knew these girls, young children of sixteen or seventeen years of age, we worked together. They were from Satmar. On that day eighty young women from our camp were killed and two hundred wounded.

I myself was badly shaken (traumatic brain injury?) But I did not want to say anything. My heart was nervous (agitated), my hearing weak. But I did not want to tell anyone. We collected all these (wounded) to take them to the hospital. We named one of our acquaintances who spoke German, Hungarian and Yiddish and Romanian, so the (wounded) could be understood at the hospital and to serve as a nurse at the hospital. She was a rich girl from home, her name was Hilda Stern. And she went with the sick and wounded to the hospital. I did not announce myself to be sick because those who were sick were already half-dead.

On the third day (after the bombing) they restarted taking us out to the work site. All that we had built up was no more. Before, I worked by ships and with bricks on scaffolding to the third or fourth floor – this was already the good stuff – better than pushing wheelbarrows of brimstone and glass fiber. They took me there again, but I reached the place I saw that the tracks from the ground had been blown to the second story by the bombing. On one side, I felt avenged (by the damage from the bombing), aside from the fact that so many of our women had fallen.

They took us out to work, but who could work. We were all shell shocked (nerfen attack is literal translation nerves-attack) who could help themselves, running from one place to the next, one place to the next and no one could get any work done. After they saw what happened here nobody could do any more work. The camp commander inquired to, we heard at Buchenwald, he inquired at Buchenwald about what he should do with us. From this hell we were taken out, again travelling three days and three nights, from Gelsenberg/Gelsenkirchen to Sömmerda, in the Erfurt area.<sup>18</sup>

(Translators note: For 15 seconds on Tape 2: 20:33 – 20: 48 – there is mention of Gelsenberg on the river Main, about Baden near Frankfurt and working on ships. Translators' best guess, as they were traveling by train is that the train went from Gelsenkirchen to Erfurt via Frankfurt am Main and there were signs with "Baden", which means baths in German, i.e., nearby Wiesbaden.)

## **Slave Labor Camps/Sömmerda**

We arrived in Sömmerda and were led to a munition factory. As I am knowledgeable on machine work because I always worked with machines, they gave me a machine and was given, and I knew immediately how the drill-bits go, the task of teaching others. And there it was the good [life.] There was a washroom with hot water. When others went to eat, I went to the washroom to steam myself, and blanched myself with hot water and lice no longer formed on me. You could live. You could sleep. But the barracks very dirty from the previous prisoners, the Russians, who knows who was there before. There was writing on the wall, evidently, even Jewish also. But the barracks were very dirty, the pillows and everything full of lice.

We came, I worked a day and night with others and then a day and day shift. A night shift followed by a day shift. The food was clean, but the barracks were dirty. There was a lot of work, as much as we could.

Once, the lead engineer spoke up, I forgot his name – I used to know his name. One engineer was a Romanian from Piatra Niamtz, an [ethnic] German who volunteered to help the Germans, he spoke Romanian and he spoke German. Nordmann, the German was named Nordmann. He stood up on Yom Kippur<sup>19</sup> night, we worked the night shift. None of us took a bite to eat. They brought us food but no one on the night shift took a bite. Nordmann, the German rises to give

---

<sup>18</sup> Gelsenkirchen and Sömmerda were both subcamps of Buchenwald  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/buchenwald-subcamps-1938-1945>

<sup>19</sup> Yom Kippur night in 1944 was a Tuesday night/Wednesday, however, when a Jewish holiday falls in the middle of the week it often creates a feeling of end of week because Sabbath and Holiday observances overlap in practices and restrictions.

us a talk. "That we Jews are an eternal people. We do not want to break the law [to fast] and take a bite no matter how hungry or tired we are." He continues "You are a worthy people to continue to exist." He already saw that this already is the end [of the war] and with that wanted to endear himself to us with – we are a worthy people to continue to exist. And "You will yet return home and will meet up with your near ones, you are entitled."

This was Yom Kippur night; the next day, it was Friday night, already the end of the week.<sup>20</sup> The following day we began the day shift and they drove us to work faster. I worked fast, An old German, Hitlerist [Nazi], planted himself next to me and showed me that he calculated that as many as I make in 15 minutes, I should turn out more work, more of the bolts. I showed him a ledger from the previous shift, the Russians, the gentiles, do not have half the output I did. He replies that I cheat the time. He says I cheat, that I can produce more. He was berating me. But what could I do? I had to stay silent. Then he came with a toothpaste, a toothbrush, and a small comb and "You are getting a premium for your honest work." They gave us more work, not more to eat just more work. But they gave us cabbage with barley, but it was clean and edible. Sometimes I got a little extra but most of the time no. While hungering, I worked like that until about after January '45.

Walking in the cold without socks and shoes just wooden clogs. With nothing to wrap myself to keep warm – I always felt that I caught a cold. I felt so ill and decided to go see the lady-doctor on a Sunday. I arrive at the doctor, and she tells me that she likes my appearance. "You are so clean, with a small but warm shawl, with a skirt and a jacket. Where did you get them?" What should I tell her where I got them? I cut pieces from every blanket and made myself a jacket. I already had some hair on my head, and with the white shawl on my head with my black hair, "yoy, you don't look [like inmate] from the labor-camp." I respond, "no, I'm hungry, I am always hungry. I work while hungry, always hungry. As hungry and tired as I am, I am requesting to be allowed to stay a day in the barrack." "No, you don't look sick. Go to work, there is no rest here!" So, I left.

In the morning some of the young Germans came, these were very the biggest Hitlerists [Nazis] and were beating everyone over the head with the belt. This was Hanukkah. Yes, we blessed Hanukkah candles. We extracted threads from the rags used to dust the machines and used [lubricating] oils from the machines. A girl from Ungvar, Agi – Berger Agi was her name, I don't know if she survived, sang the entire Hanukkah service for candle lighting and we all cried – [thinking] how Hanukkah was at home and our conditions here. I could not fall asleep. I [finally] asleep in the morning when these Germans came to beat us with the belts. As I was laying [in the bunk] with head on the isle side, I got a severe blow to the head that caused me to jump off from my sleeping place quickly to get [dressed.] What did I have to dress with? One gray dress and that piece of jacket that I made for myself. I came down to go to work and fell-down, swooning, but I did not faint.

And the barrack leader came in, he was an old German - a bit fair [proper or kind] not always but [mostly] fair. He asked "What's with you? What's with you?" I did not say anything. I did not say that I visited the infirmary. But someone who saw me there said that I had been in the infirmary and that I never complain and work well and that I was refused permission to remain on the barrack for a day. The doctor [referring to the old German] goes and asks which doctor, one was old and one was young, both Czech [inmates] women, from the former Czechoslovakia. He drags the doctors near me and says, mother speaking in German "What's the matter, she did not have cigarettes to give you and that's why you did not allow to rest a day. She is not feeling well [but] she is a good worker, she is a good worker, she is a good worker." Everyone knew. He comes over and asks me if I want to remain in the barrack. I said no, I am not remaining. I do not want to remain. I want to go to work and work as well as I can.

And went to work and when I returned from work, I find a commission in the yard to discuss the fate of the [bombing] survivors. There was a delegation from Essen looking for workers. Here there was no longer work and they need workers, and they selected the stronger women to take them to Essen. My compatriots did not want me to leave their side and talked me out of travelling. There was another who wanted to go, a weaker woman who was not selected, and

---

<sup>20</sup> Translators note: the next day was Wednesday, so we assume it was in the next few days.

we surreptitiously traded places. This one, what do you call him, a Gestapo, one of the Gestapo guards noticed me switching and with a pistol in his hand, screamed at me (in German) "What do you think you are at home and order [choice of where to go] is in your hands?" And wants to shoot me. One of my officers, who always selected me for the work, placed himself between me and the Gestapo man and says (in German) "What's going on here? All the good workers you are taking away and this one is a good worker, and I don't let her go. You will not shoot her!" This [officer] was a big anti-Semite but because I was a good worker took my side. The only thing that mattered to him is how much you did. He always looked for what needed to be done, this not done, that is not done, and always picked on me to get it done so then he placed himself between us and I remained alive.

But there was not much work. We worked another few weeks, there was not enough to eat, and we awaited other orders. Those left for Essen, I remained and the one with whom I switched left. And we remained but there was not much to do with us. And they left us mostly in the yard of the barracks. There were five barracks and wallowed in these lice infested wooden barracks, not made of canvas. We were more outside, as daybreak arrived, we went outside, and we lay down on the ground just not be inside the barracks. The camp commander came and told us "You should know, I don't know what to do with you. There are no more potatoes, there are no more beets, what should we give you to eat? We don't know what to do with you. I received an order to do what I want with you. But my conscience does not dictate that I do what other camp commanders do. I am taking you on the road. You will get orders to get on the road."

We wait and wait, and, in the meantime, I am so hungry and so weak when the doctor tells me, for next few days, go into the hospital. It was exactly Passover. I entered the hospital. In the hospital there was already more to eat. I received a "D" [We assume she means vitamin] tablet. At night I received a note [written in German]: "You should know, tomorrow we march. Where the sick people will go, I do not know. You are not sick, get out of here! Get out of here!" I read this, I know how to read German well and come out and the barrack leader heard overnight that I entered the hospital and runs over to me, she was from Körösmezö (aka Yasinia, Ukraine today) Paula was her name. She asks, "What is it?" [what's the matter with you] "It's forbidden to know the doctor wrote me a paper I should not tell anyone." I hand her the paper, and, in our barrack, they already started packing.

I emptied the straw from a pillow and made myself a little sack from the pillowcase, and I already had a shirt that I sewed for someone that I earned from my work. I received a portion of potatoes for some in the kitchen that I did some sewing work for them. By now I had a few things that I stuffed my sack with and was standing ready. When we are ready to leave, my barrack was the first to get ready because I came in the middle of the night, and everyone knew that we were going. The alarm, air raid siren was so intense, because the Americans started getting near and we could not go out

## **Surviving the Death March**

On April 2nd, 1945, by a lighter alarm we marched out from our barracks in Sömmerda. The sun was shining, and it was snowing, and to screaming (in German) "Only right, hurry, hurry, only right, only right!" I did not have the strength to drag the wooden clogs, I did not even bend [to take them off] and flung them to the side and walked in the snow barefoot. We arrived fifteen or twenty kilometers further at Fogelsruhe it was called. (Translators note – we could not find a place named Fogelsruhe but we found Vogelsberg which was in the right direction - see attached Death March Map). A German woman approached us and stopped us with a [raised] hand. And she said to the barrack, the camp commander that her son was a prisoner captured to England she wants to do something for us to return the favor. She can see on us that we are hungry. She boils up a pot of eighty kilograms of potatoes and everyone will get about ten. These potatoes were as big as hazel nuts. My share came to thirteen small potatoes. I was so delighted with these potatoes because earlier while on the run I ate a muddy beet that was pulled up from a hole in the ground, together with the dirt. I had small knife that I earned with my sewing and with it I ate that beet and that's how I kept up my soul.

As I sit there, I see all the hospital patients arrive by truck, a cargo truck. I approached the doctor who gave me the paper, and said, see I could have come by truck, but I came on foot, and I am already sick with a cold and see how blue

my legs are. We are approached by the head chef, the officer in charge of the kitchen, and says in German "What, what does she want? What? What?" Before, a German did not lay a hand on me, because I always worked diligently to avoid getting beaten. He gave me a blow to my back that I collapsed. I was not dead. Hungry and exhausted from the forced march, took a toll. And my compatriots surrounded me and cried "You lasted until now, now look here and look here." And they started to console me "Babciu, Babciu," my name is Debora, but they call me Babciu, "look here, you must live, must not give in! Why did you need to go? What for? They don't want to help you. They want you to remain underway." Many were shot underway. I don't know, all my acquaintances survived. (Blowing her nose from crying at the memories). (**Mayer insert** from my memory of what Mom told me about this event about being kicked out of the hospital in many other occasions; actually, many if not all the sick prisoners left over were shot and the truck in discussion probably only had German hospital workers running away from the front. Mom presented to mean the doctor actually saved her life and probably a few others that were not too sick. The chef that hit my mother protected the doctor, because if a Gestapo person would hear about it, the doctor would be shot on the spot.)

I came to and with the few thirteen small potatoes like hazelnuts, I started to eat. They were already peeled. My acquaintances peeled them for me and were feeding me like a sick child. And the next day, at daybreak, they had put us up for the night in a barn full of straw, the next day at daybreak we are told we must go. We must go. I heard told that five dead were left behind. Nobody bothered to look on these dead as we went further. My acquaintances [protected me] one went ahead of me one behind me, so I don't get cold. And the forced march starts "Nur rechts, nur rechts" (only right!) It gets dark as the German army come up to the front against the Americans. One said they were English, another said they were Americans and the German soldiers, give us a tug, once in a while (speaking in German) "Beautiful girl, come with me! Beautiful girl, come with me!" They tug on those who were on the side. We walked like that until nightfall. I did not see where they asked to rest, what was going on there, I did not see. It was so dark, that if a light flashed it made it worse to see. I want to rise from where they sat us down and I can't get up. My little rucksack, that I made for myself, with the few rags, is dragging me down, I can't [get up]. I took the little rucksack and threw it away. My acquaintance argues with me "you had something to dress with and now you threw it away! If you had given it to me, we could have shared in carrying." I answered, "If I remain alive, I will have [other clothes], and if I don't survive what do I need for. It was preventing me from climbing the little hill, I could not walk."

We march again "Nur rechts, nur rechts!" and we arrive in the evening in front of a large farm. It looked like a rich farm. And in front of the farm, a circling German dressed already in civilian clothes, he was missing an arm and tells us to come in. He gives us a barn but food he did not say that he gives and a water well. This barn could fit maybe five hundred [people] but not thirteen hundred. I was on top of others, others were on top of me. There were sheaves of wheat on the other side [of the barn.] I had the little pouch that I made myself out of the rubber [glove] fingers and I started collecting wheat from these stalks filling my pouch, not thrashed, and pulled the wheat from the straw and filled my pouch and ate it alone. I became another human being. I ate this wheat and drank water, and it was [good.] It was not yet daylight and they start running with us. Further running! Further running! There were no more legs. The legs were swollen, the heart was nervous, we go. Again, we are told of [dead] left behind, asphyxiated in that small barn with so many. But with the survivors they were fleeing.

We arrive at a place. I ate this wheat and after this wheat I needed to have water. I see some old Germans carrying water and approach them, not only I, others also, and ask for a little water. They respond, they are not giving a Jew water. These old gentile women don't give water for a Jew. I say to them that I am Hungarian, I'm not a Jew. No, you are a Jew they say, and don't want to give me water. They were carrying two buckets on a stick, one in the front and one in the back. I went and lay down I no longer had any strength.

A German woman, a young woman, if she is alive may she long live. She saw from an upper floor that these Germans are not willing to give us a drink of water and came out to tell us that we should sit in this place. It was like a ramp without trees, but not sandy, some grass was growing. We should wait here because she is coming down to serve coffee. When she sent down her maid, apparently, everyone rushed her, shoving their way to get a drink of coffee and a little

marmalade on a patch of margarine and everyone was shoving [to get some.] I no longer had strength I lay there to straighten my broken bones [resting my bone-weary body] and she spotted me from the upper floor that everyone is running, and I alone just lay there, I no longer had strength. She approaches me with a little pitcher of coffee, a pretty porcelain pitcher, and asks me (in German) "Why are you not eating?" I tell her, "it's all the same, we are kaput [finished], I no longer care for food." "No," she says, "you must live. You must live!" And proceeds to force feed me, forcefully pouring the coffee with the little pitcher. As my dry bones were moistened, I began to feel that I can attempt to stand on my feet. And she gave me a little bit of margarine with jam but this I could no longer take. From eating this wheat, was good to satiate me, but it required me to drink water [it dehydrated her.] For thirteen days we were on the road without a drink of water without a bit of coffee without anything.

We get an order, but suddenly a train wagon arrives, and it starts falling, below was a road, above a train track, and bombs and grenades start falling there and the train derails and rolls over a few times, including men and material and everything. We were left to the young Germans who kept shouting, "Nur rechts, nur rechts!" Beating us and yelling. I ran through there as well as I could, others also, that I saw. There were security fences with German soldiers standing with rifles, they were not looking at us, they were only interested in saving their own lives. I saw that I could no longer run, I thought it was only me, but there were others as well, and ran to the left and lay down in a ditch. A milk truck arrived and stopped near me where I lay in the ditch and a grenade fell on its front engine and the stink from the grenade [more likely the burning engine oil] and even though I covered my head with my rag coat I felt as if was being asphyxiated. I started jumping over, only the next day did I realize, five fences and came to.

### **(Start of Tape 3.)**

I jumped over five fences. At the time I did not realize that I had jumped five fences. I saw a German woman with children, and she was holding a white shawl on her neck, like a necktie, seeing her hold white in her I was reminded of what my mother had said about how one surrendered in the previous war (reference is to WW I) when one had to hold white in the hands to signify peace (or surrender). The German woman did not want to take me in. I neither had strength to run further nor did I know where to run to. So, I asserted myself (in German) "I am a zwangsmacher"<sup>21</sup>, an enforcer. After I told her that, she saw that I was getting upset she let me into the basement.

It was a basement like other basements, but it had a lot of old Germans, old people and children. They also did not have young people at home. I sat there for a bit and was thinking to myself what will be here among old Germans. They can grind me up and nobody would know what evil end befell me. I was embittered, I don't know, because I had run away from my group of friends. The young Germans that were force-marching us were ordering us "Nur Rechts" only to the right and I turned to the left and ran to the fences. This one (referring to the German woman) took me into the basement, I was there, I don't know, an hour or an hour and a half when others started to arrive. Not only I ran, but others also ran. From my labor camp twenty-eight young women arrived. She no longer allowed them entry; they (the Germans) would not be able to eat over us. When I was entering alone, she allowed me in but now she would not let them in.

She opened a door, and then a second door on another side into a wash basement and in the wash basement there was a big caldron that took up half the basement. She led me out there to be with the others and even though it was so tight I was pleased to be among, as is said, my own. These Hungarians, Jews were so dumbstruck with fright not allowing each other to say a word, not allowing anything. And they sat one on top of the other because there was no space, trembling [with fear.]

Night fell and it started to hear knocking and shooting, not far away there was an oil mill [refinery]. This mill was burning, and we heard knocking a whole night. As soon as dawn broke, who slept, who could sleep, who thought of

---

<sup>21</sup> We struggled with the translation here. We heard on tape "wangmacher" which has no meaning in German. We considered "wangenmacher" which means Cheek maker, which also makes no sense in the context. So we decided on "zwangsmacher" which sounds very similar and means enforcer, and makes sense in the context.



sleeping, thirteen days, from the second of April until the thirteenth, April, we did not know what day it is. We were on the run, only on the run, they ran us away. We were not all, together. One German [officer] ran with a few hundred [inmate] women one way, another, in another way. They themselves did not know where to run.

As it became day, the knocking ceased somewhat, I raised a paper curtain – the basement had a door and the door had a small window with a curtain and I slid it aside, and they all screamed at me. They were also Hungarian from the former Czechia Hungary they spoke perfect Hungarian. By us until 1940 it was Romania, I went to Romanian school, I spoke Hungarian but with lots of flaws. They started to scold me that I am this and I am that and that we will all be detained, and I should not look out the window, I should sit and not look out, not go. I was driven by hunger and driven by need. I did not want to sit on my hands as they were doing and I opened the door and they called me (in Hungarian curse words) cow, dumb, a nobody every Hungarian curse. I ran out and they did not. They screamed after me that they would not allow me back in the basement.

## Liberation

I ran to the gate and a jeep stopped, a jeep was driving by and it stopped to ask me why I am not wearing a white armband, showing me white and I have nothing white on me. So, I turn around and show him my patch, and on that patch is a number, my camp number. He asks me why I am so black. I gestured that I did not eat and with a trembling hand pointing to my belly that I did not eat, and he told a soldier to give me something, I did not know what he told him to give me. He gave me a box to go eat. I did not open the box to eat but took the box back to the twenty-eight other women and started distributing [the box contents.] I did not even know that these [soldiers] were following me. It was an American officer, he spoke Russian, spoke...only Romanian he did not speak, he also did not speak Hungarian... English. They came from the rear and saw me distribute to wafers to everyone, and took two for myself, some more were left and then started to distribute half-wafer to everyone, how are “ostyas” called in English? – Mayer inserts “wafer” (translating from Hungarian). And with this we held up. They themselves were wondering how I did this after they berated me earlier. In the back the American officer and soldier arrived and asked who can speak English. There were two daughters with a mother from Beregszász, the mother was not younger than my mother. I so envied these two girls that they had their mother with them. And they started talking, saying in English, how in thirteen days, from the second of April we are on the road only and did not eat, we are unwashed, and did not have a drink of water. This officer tells so, we should remain here, and he would leave with his men, and we will have food and we should not worry we should not take it to heart. Only we should not go out on the streets.

Only in the yard and the garden, the house had small garden and a yard and was two stories tall where the lady of the house had her residence. They [the women] sat down to wait. I was so dirty, because there was this caldron and I began adding water to the caldron and asked the old lady, the lady of the house had a mother, to warm some water and as the water got warm, I crawled into the caldron and washed up. As the others saw me crawling in, they also did it too. In that same water, a lot of water there wasn't, we threw in our clothes, we undressed and put on these overcoats on our naked bodies. I was in this same shirt and dress since Pesach. We boiled these clothes, all in one caldron and we went to dry them but there was nowhere to hang them to dry. I spread my hands, one hand I had the shirt on the other hand I had my dress, the grey dress and walked around like that in the yard. As I am in the middle, freshly washed, waiting to dress in these clothes, they [the Americans] arrive with a case, a big case of food. And they ask around, and the Germans are trembling, afraid to come out.

They are asked where they live, and they lead us out of the basement where they have, what you call a salon [living room] and a dining room upstairs. And they set us down there. We don't know if we are living, are alive or dead, are dreaming or what. We had not seen a residence like this since home. We started to “knafen” (kneifen – in German “give up” (worry), and they [the Americans] reassured us we should not “knafen” give up (10:44), we are alive and need not be afraid of nothing. We sat there in this dining room waiting to see, he then said he will give us to take into the mouth, we will have to wait fifteen minutes until we may eat. Everything was in cans. There was fish, there were soups and there were fruits there was everything. We were given cards and go to a certain hotel, and we will get what we want to eat when we presented these cards. (Hear Gedalya's voice in the background talking to a child.)

Others among us said they want to go buy their own food and cook for themselves. We did not yet say because we did not know where we can live, where we can cook anything, where anything. They thought that indeed the Germans would let them into their kitchen. No, after the American left, they said they have no room for us. They cannot have a place for us. We were these twenty-eight. I started to look for a place to live and I happen to meet up with my compatriots many of whom I did not know where they ran. Many of them were on the run until May the 8<sup>th</sup>, this was the 14<sup>th</sup> of April. Those were running until 8<sup>th</sup> of May, that was liberation day, all the way to Czechoslovakia. The Germans kept on driving them, and they were running as driven.

We remained in that small town it was called Reinholdshain.<sup>22</sup> A little higher I spotted an [apartment] block of residents. Others and I approached this block to ask if they would take us in to sleep there. One said she can't, others also no but an old lady, she was eighty and her name was Noble, she said she will make room for us. She said she has two rooms and a kitchen, and she will make room for us. I took six of us girls, we were two married and four single girls, acquaintances and lodged ourselves with the old lady.

When the landlord arrived, compared what we had been used to this was a good resting place, and when he arrives to see who lives there. He tells us that he was just yesterday released from jail, a German, released yesterday from jail, jailed because he did not want to become a Hitlerist [Nazi] and that this old lady is the biggest Nazi, and he is warning us not to live in her place because she can even poison us. We were not tempted to leave. After all, what can this old lady do to us. We took to start cooking for ourselves. The old lady said she will cook for us. We first said that we do not want that. She wants to cook for us, she said, because that way she can have what to eat, also. We said, good but before we tried to eat anything, we tested it by feeding it to the cat. The cat, because we were afraid, after what the landlord told us about her, including that she even has a revolver to shoot. When the American came to monitor our housing, we told them what the landlord told us and they warned the old lady that she should know that if anything bad should happen to us, she cannot be sure to stay alive. She did not harm us.

She did not think we were Jews, she thought we were Hungarian Christians, that is what we had told her and that is what she thought. Friday, I sewed, I had found a sewing machine at a neighbor and at the shot-up train I found material [fabric]. I started dressing everyone with a little dress. We were in this same room six, in the other room there were two girls from Visheu from among us, we were not acquainted, but they were with us in the camp. I started to sew, and the others cleaned and straightened out and helped her [the old lady] cook and everything. She says to the Jewish girls why are you cleaning/keeping house just like Jews? You are not Jews, but you conduct yourselves just like Jews. One of the girls among us, calls out, that's what we are. We are indeed Jews. You were not allowing us in the house, so we told you that we were Hungarian Christians refugees, we are Hungarian. But we here are prisoners - Jews. Yoy, she became so frightened, whom did she take into her house, Jews she allowed in the house? And this Dora, (speaking) of me, "impossible," she screams, "that Dora should be a Jew, her name is Sachs, her family name is Sachs, here in Saxony and she has such a fine character this Dora, this Dora speaks German so well, impossible!"

This one comes into my room laughing where I was sewing on the machine, her name was Ratza - she no longer lives. Listen, she says in Hungarian and tells me the story of how this old lady became so enraged that she took in Jews into her house and it's impossible that I should be a Jew. I come back to the room, and she falls on me (crying,) (in German) "Dora, it's impossible, you can read the Gothic script, that you should be [Jewish.] You know so well that Jews were punished because the Jews persecuted the Lord Jesus. That's why you were punished, and it's impossible that you are a Jew." I respond, "Don't worry mother," she wanted us to call her mother, she had a son in Chicago and no other children, and she wanted us to call her "mother." "Don't worry mother, those that killed will in turn be killed and those that did not kill will not be killed, whether they are German or whether of another belief, a mensch a human being one

---

<sup>22</sup> We heard on the tape "Rheinholtzheim" and for months we struggled to identify such a place until Werner Langbecker, Mayer's German friend who also provided us with a German translation from the English solved the mystery. The place is named Reinholdshain and the distance from Sömmerda matches a two-week march and is before Chemnitz. See Death March Map.

should be.” “We Germans are guiltless, believe me Dora, we are guiltless. You were only punished because you persecuted the Lord Jesus, G-d’s son.” I respond, “Let it be, mother, this is only a story, we will speak words about other things.”

This Ratza enjoyed bothering the old lady. Once they were sitting around the table and were discussing that the Germans will be dealt with as they dealt with us, we will cut them up in pieces and fertilize the fields. The old lady again ran to me “can you hear [what they say]?” I no longer heard well what they talked about, from the bombs and burdens. “Listen up” the old lady says, “listen up Dora what this Rosa is saying.” “Let it be,” I say, “she is speaking lies and it’s not true, one must be a human being, and must be this and that.” At last, I could not get others to go along with not bothering this lone old lady. She had told me that she took us in because she did not have what to eat and that’s why she took us in.

She did not allow anyone into her room but me. She even showed me where she kept her small collection of gold jewels. When I told the other girls about the collection, they wanted me to take it from her, to compensate for what was taken from us. I refused saying I don’t need her gold and I won’t take anything of hers, even so. They would not leave me alone in their desire for restitution, but I would not. Because she did not allow anyone else in her room, I slept in the same bed as the old lady and avoided having to sleep with two or three others on a bed.

At the end of June, an order was issued, it was June 22nd, that we must depart, the war was still on. In Chemnitz, not far from Reinholdshain, one night they counterattacked the Russians at Chemnitz, and were afraid what will be if the Germans will reoccupy our place and we asked the Americans to lead us away from there, immediately. “No,” they said, “we are here.” They were living blocks away and security details were patrolling the streets. “You do not have to fear anything,” the American said, “as long as we are here you need not fear anything.” We said we hear shooting at night, almost as if it’s here, and if the Russians come it will not be good, if they counterattack the Americans, what will be?” The Russians gave the Americans an order that the border is in Chemnitz and that because we are Easterners (from Eastern Europe) we must be turned over to them. This labor camp that they liberated by them (by the Americans) must be turned over to them (the Russians.) What happened, a few days did not pass before we were turned over the border to the Russians in Chemnitz. What, yes, it was after we were freed on May 8th. When we were freed on May the 8th there was a houseful of Americans because the custom house was in town. In Chemnitz there were both Americans and Russians and there were others, and we did not know what world we were in.

After the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, it was already the beginning of June and the Americans fed us and clothed us but turned us over to the Russians. At the Russians, whenever they saw a woman, they did not let her out of their hands. We thought after so many years of living under Communism we thought they might be menschen, but they were just wild animals. We were afraid of them. There was among us a young girl who was big (for her age) but they made nothing of her. We women decide to stay together as a group and started, mostly walking, towards Bratislava. (From Chemnitz to Bratislava - 500km)

## Heading Home

We arrived in Bratislava, we had not eaten, the Russians had not given us food or anything, and we went into houses, Slovaks mainly, but others also lived in them and asked for food and mostly we were given food. But we had nothing to go with – the Russians had not given us anything to help us get home, no food, no transportation, nothing organized. We are able to catch a train going to Prague and we got on.

When arrived in Prague the train stopped. There were Poles on the train, and some said we have to go one way another group said we had to go another way. There were these Polish men, Polish Jewish men and they informed us that this train is not going anywhere, and we must get off. We need to get on another path. The Russians did not care about us and when we asked (for directions) they laughed at us. We women got together, there was a bunch of us women from our labor camp and we started going. We rode a while and walked a while and rode a while and walked a while. We

rode on what happened to go by. Many a time we were not traveling in the direction we need to go. There was no way to know.

We arrived in Bratislava, and I spotted a doctor who was in the 1938 labor camp near us, he was part of a group of Jewish boys from Bessarabia, his name was Feldman. I walked up to him, and he recognized me. He asked where we were coming from. I said you don't know where we are coming from, you know from where [our appearance makes it obvious.]. I just want to ask one thing of you. Please see to it and arrange that we do not have to be with these Russians. These Russians are wild animals. I do not know where to go and the other girls with me also. Some of the others were better speakers than I. And he led us to, this Dr. Feldman was a full commander and had a big [core under his command] he was from Bessarabia from Kishinev and led us to the Romanian soldiers [to lead us.] As the Romanian soldier will return home, so will we. And in these (the Romanian soldiers) you could have more trust (in not misbehaving.) He spoke Romanian, we also spoke Romanian and got on to ride their train.

Where was there room to ride inside? [We rode] In between trains, between the railcars. There I had some clothes that I sewed from those the Americans gave us and the ones I made myself and I was able to have something to dress in. And there we were, we divided ourselves in groups of four women, and there were others also and I slept a little, others too and one or two would stay up to serve as watch guard while others slept. What did the Romanian soldiers do? As we caught a snooze everything was stolen. And we rode further. We rode further until we arrived in Vác<sup>23</sup>. Vác, we rode for four weeks (from leaving Chemnitz), is before Budapest, until we arrived in Budapest.

In Budapest I already started meeting acquaintances. In Budapest the Jewish Community already embraced us and arranged places to sleep and provided for a meal to eat and a bit of money. We were there a few days.

Then suddenly as I was standing around after dinner, there were no Jewish men from our area just Polish, arrives Shimon Jacobovits, my current husband. He was the first man that I saw from Maramuresh, an acquaintance. Many times, I thought who knows who else [from our area] survived, so when I saw him, it was for me like the resurrection of the dead<sup>24</sup>. He was also in such a [concentration] camp that was liberated by the Russians. And there we discussed that we would travel further together. From Budapest we travel further together, as we would be able, and we stuck by each other. My acquaintances (referring to the women she traveled with to Budapest) wanted me to stay longer, until the documents (e.g., identity cards etc.) were ready. I said no. What meal cards and some food I had I shared with him because all the offices were already closed. When you give a hungry man food and he no longer wants to distance himself from you. He could not forget that, and he did not want to separate from me. But I travelled ahead with my [women] compatriots.

We got underway again and again there was nothing to eat. We arrived in the end in Satu Mare. In Satu Mare the Jewish Association, the Joint again gave us to eat and a place to sleep. We started to look for way to get home (to Sighet.) From Satu Mare to Sighet you could only get on some kind [horse drawn] wagon or find some way to get on some kind of "auto" car or truck. Someone shows up that she met an acquaintance who came to pick up a load of bread because in Maramuresh there was nothing to eat. A piece of bread... I was so hungry since Prague I hardly had anything to eat. We get on this truck, and eight of us girls from my town, Polien Riskeve, sit on this truck and we are hungry. This Jew, poor thing, had bread he bought at great expense, I am not sure he made earned enough to cover his costs, and took us into his care and gave us fresh bread to eat. He cuts us each a slice of bread and say he has nothing spread on it except oil, so let it be oil. And I ate this oil with bread, and I got such a fever, this fresh bread and hungry.

---

<sup>23</sup> Vác (Hungarian pronunciation: ['va:ts̩]) is located 35 kilometers (22 miles) north of Budapest on the eastern bank of the Danube river, below the bend where the river changes course and flows south. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%A1c>

<sup>24</sup> Mom actually uses the often Yiddisheized Hebrew Expression "Techiyat HaMetim" Revival or resurrection of the dead; one of the fundamental beliefs of Judaism. <https://www.ou.org/judaism-101/glossary/techiyat-hametim/>

## Back Home

We arrived in Sighet on Saturday afternoon, to the Joint. There was there a sweater factory where I had worked for a few years before and every corner was familiar to me. And everyone from years before came to mind, but none were there. Where were they, I did not recognize a single acquaintance from prior years. The few who had returned told me that Russians took them away. And they were fearing as the Russians returned and the Russians will take others away too.

On Shabbos (Sabbath), as I sit waiting as we are about to eat, as I sit, who can eat already, I was so sick, one of my acquaintances, a former neighbor with whom I was on good terms, arrives. He had been in Alba Iulia<sup>25</sup> during the war and he says to me, "Babciu come to my house." I ask him "Is your wife Risa home?" "No, she is Alba Iulia she went to get things." He came to Sighet to inherit property from his uncle, Mr. Shlomovitz. I knew him well because many times I provided him products, milk products when I worked [the dairy.] I respond, "How can I go to your house a [married] man alone, what will people say?" "Babciu you are ill, you don't see. I won't eat you, I am Jewish mensch, come to me, you must come."

I came [to his house] and he called a doctor, a Dr. Katz, an older man without a family. This Dr. Katz takes one look at me and says that I have a high fever from eating this oil with the fresh bread with oil made you sick and immediately gives me an injection and tells me I must lie down. How can I lay in this man's house, he is indeed a compatriot [from the same village] but how may a woman lay sleeping under the same roof with this [married] man? I dragged myself down from the first floor where he had just one room, did not have more. The rest of the big residence was overtaken by gentiles. The entire big courtyard from his uncle was overtaken by gentiles and he still had to put these gentiles out. I went to the outside gate and looked who was walking by who is available.

A cousin's groom goes by, and I ask "Shmil Elya, where are you sleeping?" He still doesn't have a place to sleep. "Come, come and I will make you a place to sleep." "Where?" he asks. And I tell him about my acquaintance [whom he did not know] because he was from the next village from ours. "Wait," I say and see another acquaintance and ask him where he is sleeping, and I tell him we make a place for him also. There were only two beds but there were more bed linens. There were four men, and this Poliener (man from Polien) Yosl there are already five men. All four men slept on the floor, I am given the wife's bed to sleep in and he [Yosl] sleeps in his bed. At night arrives, Sunday night, the wife arrives and sees me in her bed and wants start hollering "Yosl!" sees the four men sleeping on the floor and hollers "Yosl, where am I, where am I in the world?" I am covering my face in shame as he responds "Sha, Sha, you remember I once told you about a Babciu? This is this Babciu, don't upset her. She is an honorable girl, only don't upset her. You should know she is ill." The next day the doctor came, and the doctor related about how he knew me and who I was and what kind girl I was and not just anybody off from the street. This quieted the matter somewhat.

I started to drag myself out of bed, they got the rest of the residence and started opening their uncle's store to the street, the Jewish Street. She tells me "Listen, Babciu I want you to cook, prepare, lunch for me." I did not cook [at home] my mother's only and she did not ask me because I always had a job. I was the conductor at the milk [head of the dairy] and, I was a conductor [a manager] at the sweater factory and I did not really know how to cook, but if I am asked to cook, I will cook. I did not want to have to wait with bowls in hand at the Joint, to get [food] in the bowl. I started cooking and everyone was pleased. They brought provisions and I cooked. Not only for them, but they also had a cousin where they ate earlier and lived in another house somewhere else. I knew this cousin with her husband, so I cooked for two families, aside from the occasional visitor who turned up hungry. And I kneaded challahs, and fish cooking and all these he ordered. These Bigels (name of Yosl's family) provisioned/ordered everything. Friday came and the wife brings me flour to bake. There was no oven [in the house] one had to go bring it to the baker. I kneaded and braided the challahs and asks me to bring them to the baker. I said no, to the baker I will not go, you will have to take it yourself. For

---

<sup>25</sup> Alba Iulia stayed in Romania after the Transylvania partition, so the Jews were not subject to deportation to Auschwitz. The Jewish population of Alba Iulia increased during World War II, however, as Jews were sent there from the surrounding areas by the authorities." From <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/alba-iulia>

the little food I get I do enough, you will have to take it to the baker. I do not want people who know me to think that I hired myself to be their housekeeper.

This lasted for a while. My girlfriends came home from Polien and in Polien Riskeve there was a tragedy. Polish people crossed the border looking for food and the locals opposed them and did not want to give the Polish food. The Poles returned with weapons and did not say a thing, and they rounded up fourteen people from Polien and brought them under the Copilash (the local mountain) and killed them all. So, it was no longer possible to return home to Polien.

My girlfriends stayed with a brother-in-law, he was the husband of a sister, who lived in Bistra. And I could not decide what to do. I found a second cousin, in Petrova, who also could not return home because of the tragedy of having fourteen young Jews killed. Three women, three sisters and the father, the sickly father, who was left in the house, and took away his three girls, taken out together and killed along with the eleven young men. My cousin says she is also stuck there, she could not go home, and that I should come stay with her.

It's again good. I was welcomed with pleasure. I am also a seamstress I know how to sew. Three brothers and a sister returned home [from the Holocaust], they were the Stobers, the father once had a bank, a rich family. But I did not feel comfortable there. I just was not used to it [living with abundance.] They were feeding everyone, those who went up and those who went down. They did not let a Jew go by without feeding him. I was there two months. I had plenty of work, dressing everyone. For one I made a dress, for another a shirt another this and that. There were sewing machines.

My acquaintance Shimon Jacobovits, whom I met in Budapest, came to visit there his family [in Petrova<sup>26</sup>] and found me there. Where they did allow me to meet him. They felt more superior and that "you should not get together with him because he was not for us." The more they opposed it, I said "I know his family from his home better than you do. His father was an honorable man, and his brother and sisters were honorable people why should I not get together with him. Why should we not meet? They tried to order me around so much I told my girlfriend come, my friend was a prosperous daughter, from a family that owned lots of property and lots of cattle, come let's go home I said. They obeyed me and we sat down, we were not in the camps together, but two others who were with me in the camps, Chaitso Deutsch and Kahan Yolán. And we all sat down in this house, the house masters knew me and stayed in their place, some were my school colleagues, and they knew that during the war when I did not have what to live on, I would take out the needle and the machine and earned myself what I needed. Everyone called on me to sew for them. They had machines in their homes the sewing machines in Polien were taken from Jewish homes and I went to these homes and sewed. I sewed like this almost the whole winter (of 1945-46).

In short, I went to Sighet and my acquaintance Shimon Jacobovits, came to see me and said: "You know what, it's better to be in your own home than to be hired help for others." Others came to tell me also. I did not know what to do, how I should be. I did not have a home. My house in Polien was stripped, doors and windows were removed. The gentiles from the village stripped everything. In short, I did not marry for pleasure but for "tzures" driven by misfortune. But B"H<sup>27</sup> (Bless the Almighty) until one hundred and twenty years. May it endure until 120 as it has endured so far. My husband came home to landholdings, but he did not find anything. All possession that could be carried away were gone, holes were dug in the house and all over the property. They [village peasants] believed that his father was [prosperous] proprietor and went looking for buried valuables and buried gold and left holes all over the property looking for this and that. I began to repair the house and with my husband I lacked for nothing. He had wheat and fruit [harvests] and everything. I sat there [on my husband's property] as a bride, I did not want to sit in Polien so that they would claim that they married me off. Some came to me for the wedding. My [childhood] friend Baili Fried was my [chuppah] escort, she was the "mother", she was the "sister" and she was the cook. A cousin from Romania came, who survived, with his family and he helped. I found other relatives who could come. He was a first cousin, his mother and my father were sister and brother, and he was there to help make the wedding. B"H (Bless the Almighty) we lacked for nothing because the farm was there, and we only had to be its good stewards. That's how we lived for nine years in Nanesti and two sons

---

<sup>26</sup> Our father's mother Gittle Pearl was from Petrova.

<sup>27</sup> B"H (Bless the Almighty) is a direct translation from Hebrew. Baruch Hashem is directly translated as Bless the Name (of God).

were borne to us there in Nanesti. (Tape concludes with mother addressing father "Shimen" and trails off referring to a white rope.) (Mayer added - A third son was born in Sighet -**Thus, you fulfilled your mother's dying wish.**)