

NATIONAL

Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY**

MARGARET AUGSTEIN

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and Jennifer Wingate

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F136 Side A

Can you tell me your father's name please?

My father's name was Ernst. And my mother's name was Freda.

So we will talk perhaps first about your father and then we will talk about your mother. Could you give me details of your father's family?

Well, my father's family could be dated back to 1820, when my grandfather was born. My grandmother's name was Babette. But I can't remember anymore. At the moment I can't remember. My grandparents had 16 children. And they lived in - in a small Czech town by the name of Laun. That's where my father was born.

What did your grandfather do. He was a doctor?

No, my grandfather was not a doctor. My grandfather was a merchant.

And your father was one of the 16?

One of 16. And my father had a factory in - a weaving mill in Teplice.

Could you give some idea of his status or wealth in the community?

Well, you know - we were comfortably off. I don't think they were terribly rich, but we were very comfortable. My father had a big factory and we had a house in - in a very nice neighbourhood. It was some sort of - a big villa sort of thing. On four floors. And we occupied the first floor. On the ground floor there was a Doctor Polacek. On the second floor was a German. I can't remember anymore the name. He was a Director at Schicht, in Aussig. (Now Usti). And on the fourth floor was a family called Srulavitz, which moved in after I married. Funny enough, I met one of his daughters here, in London, and her name is now (INAUDIBLE) And that was very - And then I married and have lived in Prague.

Then what about the religious affiliation. Were your parents religious?

No. Then they went to the High Holy Days to the Synagogue.

But what about Friday evening?

No. No. No, and not an orthodox home either.

And what language did you speak?

Well, my mother came from the German part of Czechoslovakia, so we spoke German - at home. But my father came from the Czech part. And in 1930 there was a census taken and my father's nationality was Czech, he put down Czech. For his wife and 3 children, German.

We are still talking about your father. Political affiliation and activities?

I don't think my father was very political minded.

Any anti-semitism experienced do you think?

Not really, not really during my - actual stay in - only after Hitler came to power, but only shortly before Munich.

And did you have much contact with non-Jewish neighbours?

Yes. Yes.

Now then, your mother's name?

Freda.

And her origin?

Her origin is from Konigsberg on the Ager. That is a very small, old town on the Ager, which is one of the principal rivers in Bohemia. And that was nearer to - very near Carlsbad. Between Carlsbad and Ager.

Did she have any job before marriage?

Well, as a matter of fact she worked with her sister. She had an older sister who lived in Francisbad. There are three spas very near each other. And my - the oldest sister of my mother married - she was very much in love with a man who was no good. And her - my grandparents, to help her, enabled her to have a shop in - a textile shop of some sort. And my mother helped. And that's how she met my father.

And after marriage did she work?

No.

And again, religious and political affiliations?

Not at all. I don't think so - my mother was not - not very political minded either. And - no. My grandparents were not religious either, which is very - for that generation, very unusual.

Now the role of the mother versus the father in the family, in household routines. In child rearing?

Well, you know, I think - my father was very much preoccupied with his factory. And it was left to my mother to see to the house and - and - well, you see, we had - we had some sort of - we had a maid. And for the first maybe - 6 or 7 years of my younger brothers life we had some sort of kinderfraulein, as one used to say.

Can we just describe your family. You had brothers and sisters?

The sister was older than I. 8 years older. And my brother 9 years younger. I was in the middle. There are great differences of - of - time in between. My mother really wasn't very keen on having children at all.

Did you have a mazuzah on the door?

No.

How were you treated by your parents in terms of severity?

Not at all. I was a favourite of my father. I was very good in school. You know as it was a school when I went into - in the Gymnasium. At the end, you see, it would say in the paper - in the first or second - was under the Vokzugsschulerin.

Favourite?

Yes. Not favourite, but - best

Who did best?

Yes. There were always four or five and I was amongst them and once I wasn't amongst them, so my father didn't go to the barber because he was so ashamed.

But was the upbringing gentle on the whole?

To me yes. My father, unfortunately, his upbringing was - as he was so much younger - that's a tragedy which one can't - that would be a long story to - you know, he was in the way of everybody in a way. My parents were too old for him, they didn't have the patience. He was in our way. My sister had her boyfriends coming and there was a little child crying. So she would have a tantrum. And he knew that - the poor fellow. In later years my sister and I would cry about it. He had no life whatsoever. My parents were - were - you know, my mother was in her forties when he was born and my father 50.

Yes, because the difference in age between the eldest and youngest was ..?

18 years.

When did you start school. How old were you?

Well 6.

What type of school did you go to?

Well at first to an elementary school. That was 5 years one went to elementary school. And from there one had to make an exam and then one came into higher education in some sort of Gymnasium.

Did you encounter any anti-semitism?

Not really, not really no. No, I would - I would lie - we were not - five - we were - I don't know - exactly - five or six Jewish - people in our - you know - school. No anti-semitism. The only one who maybe was anti-semitic was the Turnlehrer.

The gymnastics teacher?

Yes. That was - you know - who - maybe the Jewish boys or girls they're not as - nimble as the others.

And did you take part in outside school activities?

We didn't have so much outside school activities that we have now.

Did you attend the Cheder, Talmud Torah?

No. My father never made a Seder. If we went then we went to my uncle. My father's brother was more - religious - than he. So we would go maybe sometimes there. But sometimes my mother just made a meal which would be according to - you know -

But that might be the only particular meal. Or would she also make a special meal for the High Festivals?

Oh yes. Yes, yes. And my parents would have, on Yom Kippur, would have, I think, - till 4 or 5 they wouldn't have eaten.

And they would go to the Synagogue?

Yes, oh yes. We too. Us too. But we, in between, went to Konditorei or something.

And was your brother barmitzvahed?

Yes.

And what about Zionism, did it play any part?

Oh yes, my father - that I must say, he bought, very early on, in the early '20s, a piece of land in - in Israel. And he was the guardian of - he had an older sister with 7 children, whose husband was - in an asylum. And he was a guardian of these children. And one of his - his favourite niece went, in 1923 or '24, to Palestine. And - with her husband, by the name of Schliesser. She married him there. Anyway, but they were the founder of a kibbutz, by the name of Sarid.

Did your family visit them?

No. Never. But she came - several times. And my father, I think, paid her fare.

Did you yourself join any Zionist organisations?

Yes, for some time I was in a Blauweiss group. Yes. Yes.

And did you go out together?

Yes. We went out for walks and - you know, hikes and so on. Yes. Not very long. Maybe for - before I went to Prague where I had a job and met my husband. So inbetween school and there I was - not very active, but, you know, occasionally.

Were your friends mainly Jewish?

No, not - mainly, yes. Mainly. I had non-Jewish friends too, but mainly Jewish, yes.

Did your parents emphasise the need to marry a Jew, or was that understood that you would marry a Jew?

Well, as a matter of fact, I wanted to marry a non-Jew. And my parents - were against it. They wouldn't have been against it if he would have been the same - class, in a way, than I. He was a very good looking man, but he was a salesman for cars. A car salesman. My father used to say that 'he's like a pferd handler'. If he would have been - which happened very often, there were a lot of inter-marriages, but where people married the same class. Then he wouldn't have objected.

If you had any illnesses were you mainly treated by Jewish doctors?

Yes.

What was your favourite meal?

Schnitzel. Schnitzel mit, or - kartofeln with potatoes. And - I always loved cakes.

....families during the First World War came - a number of - maybe 90 families - from the East. Because we had a Jewish mayor during the First World War. And so there was quite a number of orthodox Jews. But I can't remember that we had an orthodox restaurant. At least I can't remember.

But you didn't have much contact with those 90?

No. No.

Is that because ..?

And I had a bit of contact, I gave one Krauthammer. He also went to the same school as I did, but he was no good in mathematics, nor was I, but I still gave him some - nach helfestung.

Remedial teaching?

Yes.

What sort of things did you do as a teenager. Did you go much to the cinema, theatre?

Played a lot of tennis.

And was there a lot of parental control about mixing with the sexes?

Yes, yes, a bit yes. Yes. Yes. And you know it was a very nice life, you know, I went to dancing classes, you know, when I was 15 and - and from then on, of course, I had - I went for walks and they were invited, some boys, and we went skiing together. Yes, there was always - I always had a lot of - boyfriends, but in a very nice sense.

And there, whether they were Jewish or not Jewish was not important to your parents?

Not terribly, no.

How did you meet your first husband?

I met my first husband by chance. In Prague. Do you want to know? Well I tell you. One day I was employed and with one of the girls which was there, and another girl, and we went to a restaurant which had - on top of a big building. And everything was full up, it was in the evening, it was very hot and - and - then somebody in the back, you know, in the back of the terrace, and shouted that there were 3 chairs. So we went there. And we had a chat with the two men. And they said that they would come every so often. But they never came. But Christmas - a fortnight before Christmas, I went to the mountains for skiing, and I - I had to book a seat on the coach to go to Spindemuller, in the Erzgebirge mountain. And when I had paid I looked up and there he was standing. And he went with the same coach, and that's how it started.

And how long afterwards did you marry?

Oh - a year later. A year and four months later.

And where did you marry?

In Teplice.

Where did you live afterwards?

In Prague.

And was your family pleased at the marriage or not pleased?

Well - my father and my mother thought - I - I should marry, you know, at least a - a Rothschild. My husband did very well. He was an engineer, he was - he was a - constructional engineer, but he had an office with an architect. In Prague there was a fantastic - building boom, because the Czech government at the time was, you know, the best government in the whole of Europe. They, for instance, if you built a house with, say, 10 dwellings, you got on a certain plot. You got - for 20 years you didn't need to pay income tax. If you - if on the same plot, for instance, you could make on the same plot instead of 10 or 12 dwellings, 15 dwellings, though for 25 years you didn't need to pay income tax. So - and you could borrow money, 6 percent, for instance, and you got 9 percent return. You see. And that - my husband, not being an architect, as an art loving - An architect is an art. And civil engineering is science. So he was very good at projecting as many units out of the plot as possible. And then - and though of the young - especially Jewish architects, I think he was one of them. And I met him for the first time after we came back from the mountains. We had the first rendezvous. He showed me seven different houses.

How old were you when you married?

25.

And he was?

33.

What year did you marry?

In '37. In April '37.

And did you continue to work after marriage?

No.

Was he Jewish?

Yes. He came from the Eastern part of Czechoslovakia. His mother was religious, but he wasn't. He was less religious, I would think, even than I.

So it was not a kosher household?

Not at all. He never went to a Synagogue. And - you see these intellectuals in our country were rather on the left - the left side, you see. And that's what he was.

Was he interested in Zionism?

Not really, no, no. Never spoke of it - at the time, no. No. Less than my father. But maybe my father because of that niece of his.

What was your job when you were in Prague?

Before I married. I was a - a secretary.

Did you do the Arbitur

Yes.

You did the Arbitur, and then didn't go to University?

No.

When did you start becoming aware of the Nazis and anti-semitism?

Early in - in - in - early in '38. Then one became - one knew, you know, one - we lived so near the frontier you know, we knew all of - from '33 onwards - there were a lot of refugees, German refugees in Teplice, and in Prague. A lot of them.

German but not necessarily Jewish?

Oh yes, Jewish.

Jewish Germans?

Jewish German refugees in Teplice. A lot of them. And in Prague also.

And did your family discuss emigration?

Yes. After Munich.

And did they take any serious steps about it?

Oh yes. Oh yes. Just before Munich I went to my - parents-in-law who lived in Kocice, and I registered the whole family - there was an American Consulate in - Kocice. I registered us all. And my husband got very early an affidavit, he had very rich relatives in America, and he got an affidavit. And - so we hoped - that we would be able to go to America. And we tried to get for my parents a visa to Cuba. We paid but we never got them.

So that would be in 1938?

Late in '38 and in '39. More in '39. But I registered the whole family in '38.

And how quickly did you experience anti-semitism?

Oh, you know, one of my best friends was the daughter of the head of another school, you know, a technical college. And she was one of my best friends. And in May '38 I went to Sorovens, and at that time they mobilised the Czechs, in '38. May. And I met her in Sorovens. And I wanted to go towards her and she crossed the road to the other side.

That was your first experience?

Very painful. And these people who lived above my father. In our house. In early - in early '38 they should have paid their rent into the Zivnostenska Banka in Prague. Where my - or wherever, maybe in Teplice. I can't remember anymore. It was a Czech National Bank. But his - on the slip it would have been in Czech. And he said he was a director at Schicht, and he said he wouldn't do it. He wouldn't pay anymore into that bank, he would pay into a local bank. Not that he didn't pay his rent, he paid his rent, but not to the Zivnostenska Bank.

Did the other people in the house ...?

No, the others underneath were Jewish. Doctor Polacek. And top floor was also Jewish. So it was only one non-Jewish tenant my father had.

How did he behave towards you?

Oh he behaved very - very - non-committal. No, he would have been polite and so on.

And how soon were you aware about walking about, being Jewish?

In Prague. I was in Prague. In Prague that was not - not so. Only after Hitler moved in. But as long as one didn't wear - these stars or -

You didn't have a feeling that people were already looking out for Jews?

In Teplice, yes. Yes, in Teplice, yes. In Teplice, yes. My father rang me and said "There's a big procession and it's awful". And I said to him "Pack all up and come here". But you know how it is, they didn't want to leave everything behind. And so they waited and waited and waited and in the end they came with two suitcases. To Prague.

Why do you think they waited. Because they couldn't give up the things they had or they were worried about ..?

Worried about how to live there. Then they were refugees. In- you know, the ones who did were Germany. The protectorate was another country.

What do you remember about the local people towards the German occupation. Not necessarily the Jews now? Both in Teplice and in Prague?

In Teplice they were all for it.

They were for it?

Oh yes. Oh yes. In Teplice they were for it. In Prague they were not. The Czechs were not. But there was not - no opposition, in a way. No real - real - military

opposition. Then on the 14th March '39 the Germans marched in. There was sadness you know, and compassion, but not real opposition.

And once they marched in, what now happened?

Well, the - nothing immediately. Nothing happened immediately. There might have been cases, I don't know. That I don't know. Nothing happened immediately to us. We were already very unhappy because my family, my sister who lived in Reichenberg (now Likerec), with her husband and child. So my family was already more or less refugees in - in - in parts, living with me. And that - and tried to - to - get out. We all did that.

You registered with the Americans. And did you go back continuously to the Americans to see ..?

No. But in our house where I lived, it was a house which my husband had built, lived his cousin, who was a secretary at the American Embassy. And she married in January '38, '39, and she said that I should make her wedding reception in my house, in my flat, and then a lot of people from the American Embassy, including the Consulate, would come. And I would have, you know, a relationship with him and could get easier a visa. Which we did. And on the 15th March, when the Germans had moved in, Aranka was her name, she came from the same town as my husband, rang and said "There is an American visa for you prepared". Half an hour later my parents came crying and said, you know my brother-in-law, Rudi, had, before he married, an affair for many years with a German girl, a non-Jewish girl in the Reicheberg. And when he married my sister, the brother of that German girl came to him and said - Freugenfels was his name - "You will one day regret that you didn't marry my sister". So my brother-in-law - so my parents said he would commit suicide, he would jump into the Moldau. And you must give him, there is a child, you are two people, you will somehow get out, you must persuade Aranka, she, instead of you, - my sister and my brother-in-law will get the American visa. And I unfortunately - well - you know, I did that. I persuaded my husband to - to give them that American visa. And so we never got out. My sister and my brother-in-law went to America. He was a very - wonderful man in a way, you know. Not 'in a way', he was a very wonderful man. And because he was as he was, he was a soldier of conscience, the moment I came to Auschwitz I knew that he would survive.

So after you had given the visa to your sister's family, what were the next events of what happened?

Well, you see, that Consul - it was against the statutes of the United States of America, that we got the visa. It was not yet our turn. And - and - in April, when she said, you know, every month there was a certain quota of visas, and Aranka said "All right, you will get the first visa in April". But by the time the visas came that Consul had lost his job, somebody - we never got a visa.

So what happened in your daily life?

Well, you know, Slovakia, at that time, was an independent State. The Germans occupied only Bohemia and Moravia. And Slovakia was an independent State. It was a Fascist State. And as we were - my husband came from Slovakia, so we - we - immediately the Germans - these laws didn't apply to us, we didn't need to wear stars. But a year or so later, nevertheless -

That would be?

In 1941, or '40. '40 or '41.

Did your husband meanwhile continue in his work?

Yes. He continued his work. He - he - he event built you know. He built a house for a Senator, a woman Senator, by the name of Plaminkowa. And he built a house for - you know in our house lived the brother of Leon Feuchtwanger. Our next door neighbour. And he emigrated and he went on transport to Palestine. And his girlfriend, a German, stayed on and my husband built her a villa outside Prague. And - we had then a man, a German, threw us out of our flat.

Even though Slovakia was not yet ...?

Yes. Yes. He came and threw us out and we had a flat then in an outer suburb of Prague.

So you didn't feel that you could resist when he said get out. And your parents were with you?

No. My parents stayed partly with us, but then they had - you know, they had a little flat. And then they were thrown out of that flat and they stayed for a few weeks with me in that flat in the outer suburbs. And then they got a room, you know, there were certain areas where people had bigger apartments and - and they had a room there.

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Fl37 Side A

.... When you came into the barracks. Into that hut where there were maybe six or seven others. And nearly all of them without hair. It was a terrible shock.

You were still wearing your own clothes?

I had my own clothes. Very good clothes. At the time.

And had your own hair and everything. Was it exceptional that new people came or ..?

Oh yes. Oh yes. It was exceptional. They came all the time.

And somebody allocated you a place to ...?

Yes, to sleep with four or five other people on - on a bunk. Which was was maybe 3 foot or 4 foot wide. Maybe 4 foot wide.

Could you turn at night?

Sometimes not. Sometimes there were even more. But when we were only, say, four or five, then one could maybe turn. And when we arrived - in the first, you know - there are certain memories which you never forget. The first morning, you know, we were woken up very early, you know, you had to go to an appell. And then you saw - as I was on the top, these very thin, emaciated hands going up into the dusty air you see. And there was only one little lamp on one side of that hut and one little lamp on the other side of that hut. And you saw these women without hair, but still, you know, you saw they are women. And I thought at that time, the first morning, "that is Dante's inferno". You know. You know, there are several things which I have forgotten, but some things which are never, you know. One got used to it also later on, it wasn't a shock anymore to see them. But the first day -

And so in the morning, how did you go to the lavatory?

There were latrines.

Latrines outside. Now at night, because so many had diarrhoea ..?

No, one couldn't go. I - I - at night, you know, some people might have gone, but you know people who got diarrhoea didn't last long in any case. I - said once to a German doctor that I think initially - initially, I survived Auschwitz because all of my previous life, and still, I suffered of constipation. And that's why I never got diarrhoea.

So the people with diarrhoea, is that because the diarrhoea was visible and the guard could see that this person had diarrhoea?

Oh no, no, no, they just died. You know you got - the food was so - bad, even if you had food, you know - I was less hungry in Auschwitz than I was in Theresienstadt.

But in Auschwitz every day I prayed to God if I ever said anything against the Jews and if my parents and my brother and my husband would survive, I would stay for the rest of my life in Theresienstadt. I never thought of Prague, I never thought of Teplice. It was so far away. Theresienstadt was a heaven in my imagination in Auschwitz.

So you were no longer the same person that lived in Prague?

I never thought of Prague, I didn't think anymore.

You never thought of ordinary life?

For me Theresienstadt was a wonderful life. It had been a wonderful life. It's only Jews. And there I was not with - especially in that - in that initially two months - or nearly two months - they called that a ?day. We didn't go to work. And that was the most horrible place one can imagine. We had to stand for hours in the appell. Always five women in one row. The first woman got a bowl with soup. We got each a piece of bread. The first woman got - and we passed it on. For days I didn't eat. You couldn't, you know, - not a spoon. With your mouth you had to - grab some food. I didn't eat at all.

Did the first woman just take her share and then left it to the next and the next?

I didn't care, I didn't eat. I ate my bread.

And that is all you had?

Bread and some - on the latrines, you know, there was some water, you know, in the latrines and one could wash one's hands and one could - if one had the desire you could wash yourself. If you had the desire and could stand in the queue and - and make an effort.

Did most people try to do that?

No. And those who didn't, didn't live.

And did you try to do it?

I tried to do it.

Right from the start?

Right from the start. Right from the start.

Were you conscious that through your effort you could make a difference?

You know I forgot to tell you that amongst us was a Hungarian doctor, a woman. Who came not from Theresienstadt, but from Milan. She lived in Milan. How I became friendly with her I can't tell you anymore, but immediately the first two or

three days she befriended me, or I befriended her. And - she helped me. She was also Jewish. She helped me. And she was then with her son. Her son was a young boy. And she said to me "My son won't live. I know that he can't live". And I knew that my husband won't live. Then there were some Czech women in my barracks with whom I got very - quickly in touch. And they said - they were there a bit longer than I was. And they said, you know, "You must try to get to a woman called Schmidt who is the head of the Bekleidungskammer". How would you translate it into English?

Who issued clothes?

No, not the issue, no. You know all the people who arrived in Auschwitz their luggage was confiscated obviously, taken away, and deposited in - in each camp were these Bekleidungskammers. And there were sorted out. And she was the head. And she said if you can try to get to her. But we were in quarantine and we were not allowed to leave our barracks unless we went to the latrine which was behind, and only on certain times you see. And so to pass a Lagerstrasse, unless you had a job to do or were in a group of people who came from work and marched along that Lagerstrasse, you couldn't do it. So one day, you know, after being there maybe for four weeks or so, I took my life into my hands and went to that Bekleidungskammer and said to that Czech - and she said yes, when the quarantine will be over she will find out when we were released from the quarantine. Most people when they were released from the quarantine were sent to outside commandos, you know, they had to go in the morning at 7 o'clock after the appell, outside the camp, to do some sort of - shifting stones or - And in the evenings they came back. And they survived. Mrs Schmidt said - she was the head of the distribution office of clothes. And she was in a concentration camp already since 1933. That's what she said. She said that Benes, our President, sent her to Germany as a spy. And there she was arrested and sent already in 1933 to Ravensbruck. So she knew from that moment on - and she was persona gratis in our camp. She was the highest authority. Higher than the S.S. If somebody from the S.S. wanted some clothing he had to go to her. So I went to her and told her that I was Czech. And she said yes, she will find out when we are going to be released from quarantine and she would take - And that's what she did. And then I moved into a very superior hut. The same size as our hut, where there were seven or eight other women packed together. And that hut containing maybe 250 the same size. And everybody had a little mattress or a narrow bunk for herself. Also on three tiers. But you didn't have to share one bunk with many. You had your own - maybe if it was only 2 foot or whatever, but you had your own -

By that time did you wear a uniform?

I had - no, I didn't have a uniform. I had for a long time my own clothes till they were stolen from me. And I had then some rags. And when I arrived in that clothing department, so to speak, I got - I could get myself some clothes.

Could you wash your clothes?

Not only that, She - Mrs Schmidt took us all - we were maybe a hundred women who worked with her, or maybe only 60, and she took us every evening to have a shower.

She was like a sergeant major. She walked around with a whip. But she never hit us. But she drove us -

She was Jewish?

No, no, no. She was from Bohemia, a German Bohemian. I never found out if she spoke Czech at all. She was - well, it was - we were under a roof, it didn't snow on us or rain on us. But we were next door to the gas chambers. And so from morning - the window - a stream of people go in. Mr Mengele standing in front of our window. And if he lit a cigarette, then maybe the people went into the camp. And otherwise he selected those who could stay. And in that crowd I thought my goodness, maybe my parents, my brother. And I said to myself every day I couldn't be human that I can still survive and see what's going on. These hundreds and thousands of people every day being killed.

When you saw them walking along there, did you have a feeling that they knew exactly where they were going?

No.

They really didn't?

No they didn't. So much so that - you see between that building where the clothing depot was, that clothing depot is better. And the wire which divided us from the track where the people are going, was some sort of low - some sort of yard or whatever, and at the end of that yard there was a latrine, you see. And there were times when we could go to that latrine, and had maybe another ten minutes or quarter of an hour before we had to go back to our work. And there were, with us, some women from Slovakia - because by then Slovakia was not anymore a Sovereign State. And one of the women saw suddenly the grandmother, her sister, her brother-in-law and her baby - the baby of her sister, going in one row. And she - she begged to be given the child. You know, they recognised each other. She looked quite well. And she said give the child to grandmother. And the grandmother and the sister and the child went into the gas, you see. She begged her, she ran along, you know. Other women who were there as well shouted "Please, please give the child to the grandmother". There you are, they didn't. The husband, he - they selected him, he was young and strong, whether he survived or not I don't know.

And did you see anybody that you knew?

No. But once I had the coat of one of my cousins in front of me. But she survived. A very nice coat. You know, we folded them and they were sent to Germany.

What kind of work did you actually do?

Sorting out clothes. Out of these - you know - the luggage which people brought into Auschwitz.

And was this distributed to the other people in the camp?

No. No, no, no. No. They went to Germany. When transport arrived - sometimes or the transport left sometimes, we went with - or some of us, went with Mrs Schmidt to those transport and giving them - blankets. And sometimes clothing you know. Their own clothing would be taken away from them and they would get rags, you see. That - that we did.

The food, did it continue as before?

No. We had then our own - the food was not not - was not better. It was quite plentiful - plentiful. We got bread and sometimes we people who worked in that depot would get extra rations of bread, you know, in these - sometimes in these trunks were pieces of bread. So she would give us, you know, if it was a whole loaf would distribute it to - for two or three people.

Did she have favourites?

Oh she had - she had all the favourites. I'm sure she was very well treated and she had her own room and she was very well dressed.

Did she have favourites among you?

Oh yes, yes, definitely. I was not one of her favourites, because I could, two or three times, get my husband - I could bribe - it was very difficult to get clothes out of - you know, because she would see if somebody had something on them. She would - and the person would be dismissed, which would be a catastrophe. But it happened that I - if you really are desperate, you know, then you can somehow hide, you know. One would know that she is in a hurry this evening, for instance, and wouldn't take us to a bath for instance. Then one could smuggle something out and bribe one of the Kapos, who would come - you know there are always men coming to repair something in our - we were only a womans camp. And I had a cousin who was in the - there was a camp only for people from Theresienstadt, there was only Jewish people, and she was in a camp next to the camp where my husband was. Do you know there were 20 camps. And they were all divided by a wire you see. And there she saw my husband. And she was very friendly with a Polish woman who was in another camp. And there was even a sort of post. You know Christian inmates could get - could write to their families. Not me, not the Jews. And so there was a sort of post - service - a postal service. And she was very friendly with a Christian Polish woman who was in that postal service, you see. And that Polish woman - at that time I was still in the - in the quarantine barrack - or hut. And that Polish woman came into that quarantine hut, she was a very nice woman, and gave me a little piece of paper and a little pen, or a little pencil, and that I should write to my husband, that my cousin Annie, who is there then, would communicate with my husband and tell him where I was. And I sat, you see, - there was on each end of that hut a window, and I sat down there in front of that window to write only a few - I can't remember anymore. And when I looked up there was an S.S. man standing there looking at me and asking me to whom I write and how I come to have - he had a revolver in his hand. I said he should shoot me because I would rather have been shot by him than go through to the gas chamber. And when I came back to the depot, you know, that clothing depot, he was one of the

guards who came, you know, there always came guards, that we were not all left by ourselves, they would go up and down and see what we were doing. And if somebody offended he would go to Mrs Schmidt or so. And he was one of the people also who came, and he recognised me funnily enough - two or three times he was there. He would stop and would say "At least you are not - du bist keine feige Juden" - 'You are not a cowardly Jew'. And I would always say in Czech "Berlechingen (Schiller)". ('Lick my arse'). With me worked, on the same table, a woman called Samal. And her father was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Czech Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the hut where I - where I went afterwards when I was in that clothing depot lived also Mrs Michaelczick. Her husband leader of the Polish government in England. A lot of Polish Christian women, wives of officers in the Army here, and daughters and wives of Polish politicians. So when I arrived on my bunk the first day you see, in the evening, and in between there's a bunk - two bunks next to each other, always there's a little road and then another two bunks. I was there, next to me was a Polish woman and here, on the other side, was another Polish woman. And over my head they spoke French to each other. Because they wanted me to understand. They couldn't speak any German or Czech. But they thought I would understand French. And that woman, not the one who stayed next to me, would say that she is cursed, and she has to breathe the same air with Jewish people. Nevertheless, she prays every night a whole rosary for those who go into the gas. The one next to me - you know that's always one of the few peoples names I remember, that was called Hanka Heidl, and her father was a Minister and came from Krakov. And he was shot in Auschwitz, and her brother. And she said she rather would stay in Auschwitz her whole life than that the Russians would win the war. And there was another depot for the linen cupboard for the S.S. That's where these Polish women worked. And they washed and ironed the linen and the shirts for the S.S. And she would give me - one evening I would come home and I would have, you know - you know it was straw, you know, straw covered with some very coarse material. And at this end was a little pillow. And a blanket. That was what you had. In that other we didn't have any pillows. I came and there was a white cover on my pillow. And there was a sheet. And that's what she gave me. Hanka Heidl. Not that one, I never spoke to her. Never. Later on, once or twice, she started to speak to me, I never answered her. I couldn't allow myself to quarrel with her, you know, because I was in a much weaker position. But she was all right, but she told me how anti-semitic - she told me, for instance once, that on her first ball she - her mother bought - or had her ball dress made by a Jewish dressmaker, and when that Jewish dressmaker came to her house with the dress an hour before the ball, and her father saw a Jewish dressmaker, she was not allowed to go to the ball and the woman had to take the dress back. And her father was a Minister in the Polish government. She was all right. But still she would rather stay her whole life in Auschwitz than that the Russians would win the war.

When you were in the better hut, were there sort of groups?

Yes. Definitely. There were some Jewish - much less Jewish people then, not Jewish people. There were maybe - if there were 200 women, then there would be maybe 60 Jewish women and the rest would be non-Jewish women.

And would they sort of be together usually, or would people just go to their bunk and be on their own?

One would be - I, personally, wanted to be rather on my own. Some people were - were - you know on Sunday we didn't work. And - I didn't make any friends.

Were you allowed to leave the hut on Sunday?

Yes. Yes. Not very - you know, there was not much to - well yes, we were tired. I didn't make any special friends. Not in Auschwitz.

And when you came back from work, the food was then in the hut?

In the hut, yes.

And then when would you be finished with the food?

Well, not - not - they would turn out the light very soon. Then you slept. Then you had to get up very early you know, you had to go down the appell. And then every day you were counted. Before you go to work. So you had to stand, you see, you stand. I had very swollen feet, I stand you know - working you know, we had to stand, we could never sit down, there was nowhere to sit down, unless you sat on the floor. We were standing all the time you know. In the morning very early we had to get up and stand in the appell, and then we went to work.

You had about, what, an hour or longer?

When we were in the first - in the quarantine. We stood all day more or less. We stood and went to the latrine and came back and stood. Went to the latrine and stood. Maybe then if it was pouring we were -

Could you describe the average diet?

Well, in the morning you got coffee and a piece of bread. The coffee was not really coffee.

Would you have more than one cup?

No. But didn't want it. Some people could organise themselves better. I never could. Then you got - a soup. Which was not too bad. Not too bad. There was always a bit of - you know there came - I was there when all the Hungarians came. Hundreds of thousands of Hungarians. They all had masses and masses of schpeck, of Hungarian, you know, that - paprika. And one found sometimes in the soup a bit of that schpeck. But most people they stole it, you know, the Kapos, and so the good pieces, and so.

Would you just get enough in your bowl?

Oh yes. Oh yes. I had already, after a fortnight or after 10 days, my own bowl. But then it would be stolen, somebody would take it from you. But then one could

organise again one. You know in the quarantine, when I was in that hut, the Stubenalteste - that is a woman who leads that - is in charge of that - was Polish. They were always Poles. All the Kapos, everybody was a Pole. But as I spoke very, very French and she spoke very, very, - I don't know what she was.

She was also educated?

She was educated yes. And she - you know she was not too bad, she - you know, I would get another bowl from her. Which eventually would always be stolen.

And then in the evening did you have another soup?

Yes.

And again a piece of bread?

I think so.

Were you very conscious of being hungry?

I was not hungry in Auschwitz.

Did you lose a lot of weight?

Oh yes, oh I was skin and bone. My cousins who later on, when they came - you know the Thersienstadt stadtlager was solved(sic) maybe in July or so of '44. And my cousins came through that lager, and they were in much better shape than we were. Much better, they had hair and they were -

You had been shaved, had you?

No. I've never been shaved, because that Italian doctor with whom that Kapo of our hut was also quite friendly, she knew that they would come and shave our heads. That our leader of our hut knew that that day they would come to shave us. So she told her and she told me and she gave her scissors, and behind the latrines she cut off most of my hair. Well not all, but very short, so that it looked as if I would have been 3 months or 4 months earlier shaved. So I never had a shaven head. I don't think that many women who had shaven heads ever survived.

When you say they didn't survive, was this because ..?

You see human nature is such that if one degrades somebody in such a way and is dirty and maybe has diarrhoea as well, the S.S. and the Kapos didn't think of it as a human being, you see, and were very cruel and very - and took away whatever they had or didn't give them any food and these people just couldn't live. But if you have some sort of dignity, if you could master it, and I thought always my hatred gave me that you know, I was so - if somebody would have told me in Auschwitz you can save yourself by becoming a German, I wouldn't have done it. I would have - it's the same as if somebody had become a cobra. I wouldn't want to be a cobra. I wouldn't want

to be a German. But I was never beaten in my - never. You know there were times when we were all, you know, in one way driven into some sort of - I don't know - somebody would - from the back - as one wife when she went by - and he jumped or that, would smack her. I have never been smacked.

Were you conscious of needing to walk well. Of needing to impose yourself in some way?

No, not conscious of - because I didn't want to be degraded in such way you know. I thought I would - I would - lower myself in front of these animals you know. I thought of these Germans as animals. I thought - I couldn't imagine that I would die. I couldn't imagine that I would be forcefully - put to death or die. On the other hand, I thought that nobody could allow, no German could allow anybody to survive and to give witness, because in Auschwitz itself I saw no civilised person ever sit at the same table as a German. Nobody will ever sit.

What kind of people, if you can make any generalisations, were people who gave up?

For instance, as I tell you, then in June '44 when the invasion started, hundreds of French women, not Jewish, they were picked up and sent to Auschwitz, they all died. They shaved their heads, they never washed, they would sit and do nothing and don't go and try to wash and gave up. They came very boisterously, in fact the war is going to be ended very soon because the allies have landed. Then they came and shaved their heads and that was the end of that.

Was there an attempt in your hut, for example, to encourage people to wash. Or for people to look after other people?

No, no, no. No. No. Then when I was in that better hut that is a different story. There Mrs Schmidt - you know, she forced us to - to - I remember there was one woman who smelt. And she said "Oh, stinking, whatever", she said to her "If you stink again I - you'll have to leave", or something like that.

When did you hear about your husband?

Well, you know, I - I bribed several times - very often Kapos to bring me - because I knew in which camp he was. And which number he had, you know. Which hut he lived in. Three times he came. Twenty times he didn't, you know.

When he came, was he allowed to come?

Well, he would come with one of these troupes of people who worked. And once, you know, they worked very near our depot. And Mrs Schmidt saw me speaking with him. And she was angry. And the second time when she saw me she threw me out. That was already in - end of October.

Did she know he was your husband?

I think I told her. I must have told her. But she still, you know - beginning of November '44 she threw me out.

And what happened then?

Well, by then I had befriended a Mrs Glass, who was the - she had something to do in the infirmary. There was an infirmary. She was not a doctor, but very beautiful, and I had the feeling she had an affair with an S.S. man. And she took me in.

Into the hospital?

Into that - into that - But by then it was already November. It was very - it was very cold.

Was that Mengele's outfit or not?

No. Mengele was never in that - no, no, no. He must have been - when one said that he did some experiments, that must have been before '44. When I came he was only standing and - and doing the selections. But when she took me in - Auschwitz was nearly empty already you know, most of the people were gone. You know one heard already the guns of the Russians were nearly near. And I stayed there till - under her protection so to speak from the middle of November till the middle of December '44. And in the middle of December '44 there were - it was that I remember too - Yes, before that, maybe two months, five months earlier, I found a woman whom I knew from Theresienstadt. A woman from Prague. And she was laying in the gutter with only a little raincoat on herself and nearly dead, and I got her some clothes. And got her to wash and - and gave her some food which I - always, you know, you had a little bit of bread in your pocket. And she - when I was thrown out of that - Mrs Glass took her also in to that hut, where she was. It was not a hut, it was a sort of - feldlazarett. And one Sunday morning, that was in the middle of December, there was appell. Appell was everywhere you know. And Mengele came. And said he would need - I don't know - ten nurses and five doctors. A doctor, I can't remember exactly. And as a nurse I lifted my hand. So he said I should come and he took off my star, my yellow star. And I said to my friend - she was also a nurse - And he took her. And all the other people they were not Jewish. The doctor's not and the other nurses are not. And we went to the railway station in Auschwitz and on an ordinary train, more or less, - mind you we were fifteen people and we were in one compartment. You see. All fifteen. And we went to Carlsbad. It took a long time.

With food or without food?

I think - I can't remember. We survived, we survived. We arrived there. There must have been some food. I think we got some food in Auschwitz when we left, you know. And it was shortly before Christmas. There was a lot of snow and we had to walk up into the Herzgebau. And there a place called Neu Rolau. And there are very famous ...

End of FI37 Side A

Fl37 Side B

.... Next day these two women, these doctors, - all five of them and the other nurses went the next day to Dresden. Only my friend and I and two other women, Polish non-Jewish women, stayed - I can't remember anyway, that's immaterial. Stayed there in Neu Rolau. And everybody went - there was a big camp of men and a big camp of women. They all worked in these two factories. One of the factories did parts for Messerschmits, and the other very, very coarse ceramic things, utilitarian - you know, bowls and things. And he called me and my friend and said "You won't go to work". When they come home from work, you know, there was a big hut with wash basins, you know, with maybe ten wash basins. But the plumbing was all outside you know, and everything was frozen because it was in the middle of winter, in the highest mountains, a thousand metres high about. So there was a little iron stove and a pile of wood and coal, and you will heat that and will make sure that the water will be running and when people come back from work that they can wash. And that is what we did. And there that is what we did about till, I would think, end of February.

And were you in a big hut again?

Yes, a big hut. But with a little bit better food. We got even every day a piece of bread and a bit of margarine. And soup. It was much better. And there were no Jewish people at all. We were the only Jewish people.

Did you have to wear a star?

No, we didn't have a star, but it got around that we were Jewish you see. There was one S.S. woman who stood in front - who called us and said "So, you are Jewish, I thought they were all dead". We said "We are not Jewish". Well there was no point in - in what circumstances to be proud, that we only had Jewish husbands we said. Anyway, I don't think she believed us, it doesn't matter because there were a lot of German women.

Did you ever hear a kind word from the non-Jewish people about Jews?

Yes, yes, I told you. That Hanka Heidl gave me these - these - Oh yes, oh yes, in fact where I was with Mrs Schmidt there was, you know, mostly non-Jewish women. You know, I worked together too - they were not only Czech people, there were Polish people as well. I worked with two mother and daughter who were in prison before Auschwitz already for many years because they distributed, or produced, - money, they were money -

Counterfeiters?

Counterfeiters. And they would sing always a song, in Polish, which meant - one could organise, you have to be clever to organise. It was a song which existed already before - before Auschwitz. They were great organisers, they had everything, they had food and - everything. Not that they ever gave me anything, but at least - Oh yes, yes, they were not all - But many. Many.

So then you were in this new place in Neu Rolau. And then what happened?

Well, then there was also a sort of hut for people who were sick. Which was - there was a Yugoslav doctor there, a woman doctor, and one day she was gone. And before that I heard him say "Diese Esmeralda. Konnte dich ausstehen". He called her Esmeralda. And one day she was gone. And he called me. And that from today you will be a doctor. "You are a doctor" he said. I said "No, I am not. I'm a nurse". And from Carlsbad came a military doctor. Because you know in those days all the workers in most factories in Germany were prisoners. You know, they needed them, they needed their health too. So I said "What happens if he comes and finds out that I'm not a doctor?" "I say you are a doctor". So I said "Well if I am a doctor then I have to have a nurse", and my friend again came. And we arrived in that - we established ourselves in that - military - in that - field hospital, so to speak. The field hospital was smaller than that room. There was two little rooms. But in the morning these women would come. Polish women. Lots of Russians were there actually. You know in those days when I had not anymore the same - one was not anymore so much afraid of these Russians. On Lenin's birthday they said they didn't go to work. And nobody could help it. And they celebrated and they sang Russian songs and - and - and had a flag. And I remember that once there was a woman called Srilankovar, who was an M.P., a Communist M.P. who was there with us in Neu Rolau. I don't know if you have heard of the Heidrich thing. And that priest, you know, who hid them in the church. His sister was there. I remember when we arrived there she said to us "You are very well hidden here. You are here better hidden than anywhere else in Neu Rolau". So - when we came then there was the old instruments which were there, maybe two scissors and some empty covers of the straw mattresses. And from the very first moment we arrived we were in that revier hut. We had time on our hands and we - for instance I had a coat, a navy blue coat and on the back of that coat, we got in Auschwitz a big cross. So I started loosening the - the seams, that if I could run away that I could turn it round, that one didn't see it. And she did the same of her coat. She had a coat in that pressed velvet thing you know. And we made ourselves bags you see. And we had some - a few bits of linen in that. And we had some bits of porcelain, you know, which we could, you know, in case of escape, you know, need. And we had thread and a needle. So when we eventually, in the beginning of - when the Russians came, you know, we were for instance in Neu Rolau when Dresden was bombed you see, and that is how the crow flies, very near, the same mountain. We saw, you know, these carpets of - of flames, you know, carpets. It looked like - The S.S. - at night we got up and went out of the hut, you know, to see it, they drove us back. But still, you know, one stood and ventured out again. Once we had, I don't know why, I can't remember anymore. So we were already in a higher position my friend and I, but with some of the Czech women we had to empty the latrines and carry these piles onto the field which was there. And there, you know, on the tower where the S.S. man stands, they were all around that camp obviously, even a bit further. He called down to us in Czech, "Don't be ashamed of that work, it won't take much longer". And Mrs Srilankovar, you know, that M.P., called up to him "That won't help you, you will still hang". And she dared say it, and he didn't do anything about it you see. But that was, you know - And then we were evacuated.

Who evacuated you?

No, well -

Who liberated the camp?

Nobody. They - they dissolved the camp. The Russians were on the way, they were very near there. And we - they dissolved the camp, everybody was driven out down to Carlsbad to the station, where we were joined by a very tragic - that was that sort of hunger march, you know. The men from Johannjorgenstadt. It was written about them, and lots of - they were really, you know, the most - poorest of the poor. And we went on the march, you see, towards Dachau. We were supposed to go to Dachau. On the way - we were first again in some field wagon, but they didn't have an engine to drive us. So we were unloaded and marched off. Where the men were I don't know. It was only the women. The mens camp - where it was I don't know. Of course there were more men than women in that other camp. And we were not - that camp is not far from the German border actually. Maybe 50 kilometres, 60, 70 kilometres from the German border. And there is wooded countryside inbetween. And not very far from Carlsbad, which was our first stop, there is a Stift Tepel, very famous. What is a Stift - it is an Abbey. An Abbey. A very big one. And the crowds, enormous crowds, and it was snowing, and it was bitterly cold, and my friend and I we were huddled together under one blanket. And there the next morning fifty or sixty people were dead. And these monks never gave us anything to eat. And the S.S. men who went with us didn't have much food either. When they started they had stocks. And after the Stift Tepel, they didn't have any stocks anymore. But we walked through that countryside and never was there anybody that one saw that people were sorry for us.

How many days did you walk?

Well, maybe - five, before we run away. We had nothing to eat.

Everywhere people died, did they?

They died - and on the walk not so much, but in that Stift Tepel you know, only the fittest walked on you know, the rest died. We were there, you know, because it was such a bitter cold night, it was snowing, snow on the floor.

And you were in the open?

In the open. You know. And these monks never showed us - And it was known afterwards, you know, they were I think all evicted in any case. It was Czechoslovakia now. They were all evicted in any case. And then we walked in this wooded countryside. And in those days there was a curfew from 6 in the evening till 6 in the morning you were not allowed to be in the woods for instance, and you could be shot without any - Of course there were lots of deserters and partisans and so on. And the whole atmosphere was like the end of the world. You saw maybe one ambulance drawn by horses, and around that ambulance maybe a hundred wounded soldiers who supported each other. Germans. Then there were thousands of refugees from the East of Prague, you know, streaming West. And one evening - in the

beginning we were on these main roads where we could see that, but on the third or so, we went on through wooded countryside.

Were there still many guards with you?

Oh yes. So for every - I would say for every - we were always in fives. Maybe for every - forty people would be one guard in front and one guard at the back. And towards the evening one day, you know, the road turned and I said to my friend "Now we try to run".

This was after you had already walked for five days?

Well, maybe - yes, yes, yes. We had nothing to eat for the last two days. We had previously a few potatoes, you know, cooked potatoes somewhere. And maybe a piece of bread. But we knew, both of us, we knew that we - we couldn't do it for very long like that. But we were not so under-nourished because at least the last six weeks or so in Neu Rolau we had more to eat than before, because we got rations for the sick, and maybe there were no sick. You know. They would say that there are two more people in the hut, and there was nobody. You see. No ill people at all.

So you were a little stronger?

We were a little stronger. And I remember that one day one of the women you know, which we always met as well the others, would say to us "Oh, look at them", you know, enviously, "How they peppered themselves up, how well they look". Or we could sit when we had nothing to do in front of our hut and - in April sometimes in the mountains there was a bit of sunshine, you know, and we got a bit of sun on our faces.

So you came to this turning?

We came to this turning and I said to my friend "So, and now". And as a matter of fact - well everybody gave me the idea, because there were all the time people who were running away. But mostly they were - as long as there were dogs, they couldn't. But they always tried to get them back you know. Those who ran away. Oh there were some men who were running, so there must have been men with us. Anyway, the guard who walked part of the time with us, said to us that he - nobody will catch him, under his uniform he has a civilian suit.

He told you that?

Yes. And he has some sort of passport. I can't remember what kind of passport it is. "They won't catch me", he said. "They won't catch me". And what I told him that my mother comes from this part. He said to me "You are silly that you don't run away if you know that part so well". And I said "I will run away". And he said "Well if you run away then I will shoot you, I have to shoot you". And so we did. But they heard us you know that we - it makes a noise if you go into the wood, because it was after all dry wood, it was the winter. But very near there was - you know there was - a ditch, and the ditch was full of leaves you see, and we hid in that. And he and another

- they always whistle you know, and the whole troop stands. And two S.S. men and - "You pigs, you sows, cowards". They ran past us. We were hidden. And for about half an hour, an hour, we didn't dare move. And then they left. They went. And we went up a hill, it was like a little - a hill. And very dense wooded and fir trees. There was a little lake, a very small lake. And when we arrived up there, by then it was nearly midnight, it was a clear night, very cold, it was still snow everywhere and a big deer came, enormous. Because you know nobody dared to shoot, you know you couldn't shoot any - any - any moose, because you were not allowed to shoot. And he stood there you see, and my friend said - there is very famous opera by - by Smetana, which is called Rusalka, and that is a mermaid - not a mermaid, a man in a lake, and she said "Look, it's like in the Rusalka. And when she said that I thought well that's all right. If she can remember Rusalka in our circumstances, then it's all right. And we sat under the fir tree, huddled together and loosened our backs you know, under the shine of the moon and sewed them in, you know, that one didn't see our crosses. She was in velvet in front and the back was - She, poor thing, she had no hair, or she had very little hair. She got shaved in the last moment you know. And she was in a terrible state, she had a little scar - she was in a terrible state. And, well, next morning we went down the hill and saw in the distance one of these policemen, you know, the military policemen. And we walked straight on to him and he didn't take any notice of us. Then we walked a bit further and then we saw a man, a Frenchman, a French forced labour man, working in the - it was a rural country. And we asked him if he had something to eat. And he said he hadn't, but we should go to the next village to the poorest - to the poorest house and there we would get - don't go to the rich farmer, go to the poorest farmer, there you will get something. That's what we did. There were two women and both had big goitres. Mother and daughter. And they had some sort of coffee, it was not real coffee, but on the kitchen stove. And bread laying there. They gave us each a cup of coffee. And the bread we couldn't even eat. A little bit, you know, we were so - And then you know, by the time - the first night we slept in a barn.

In their barn?

No, no. We walked further on. I have a very good - sense of direction. And I knew you know we were near the German border in Western Bohemia. I didn't want to go to Prague. I wanted to stay there because it was chaos. And also that woman said you are already - these people from the East also begged for food. And that's what you heard everywhere. But my friend had something wrong with her lower part, you know, she had some infection. And her feet, she had wooden clogs. And her feet were in a terrible state. I had shoes, you know, because I was in that depot, you see, I was - in comparison I was well dressed. And so - next day, you know, we came to a little stream, a little brook, and there she could at least bathe her feet.

What month of the year was it?

It was in April. Because we were already in Prague on the 24th or so, of April, so it must have been. It took us a long time to go to Prague. And we went - the next day, or two days later, I can't remember exactly, anyway we had these bags you see, and in these bags we had a lot of porcelain and some - and some linen from - we had all the time you know, we hardly could drag ourselves, but we wouldn't get loose of that

treasure. And we passed also a little farmhouse and the woman hung up something near the fence, and we asked her for bread, or for something to eat, and she only abused us you see. We would say, if somebody would stop us, then we would say we were on forced labour in Hamburg and that we were - that our factory was bombed out and we were on the way home. Of course my friend spoke with a very pronounced Czech accent. We both didn't look Jewish. And - when she saw that we had these big bags, so she called us back, what we had in that bag. So we said well, we have all sorts of things which she can use, we would give her for food. And so she called us in to her kitchen you see, and there in the corner was sitting her son who was an idiot. But he liked my friend. And he made, you know, signs that he would like her. You see. And that woman would have wanted my friend to stay with him, because she was very overjoyed that this idiot who sits in the corner has some feelings in him. So she brought out food and all sorts of things, you know, and she gave us a little bit of money. And we said we would come back. And we had some food in our bags. We didn't have any porcelain anymore. And we had a little bit of money. And we thought that we'd go to the next village and try to get for - a pair of shoes for my friend, she couldn't walk on anymore in those clogs. And - oh, we had all sorts of adventures and then we met one of those carts you know, these farm carts, on which sat one officer with one eye, one eye was covered with a black patch, and maybe four or five in that cart officers who were blinded. And one horse who hardly could walk. And they wanted to go to Salzburg. And they thought two Czech women would protect them from whoever would -

These were German officers?

German officers. And my friend could sing very well. And she said she was an opera singer. And they allowed her to go on to that cart you see. And they gave her some cigarettes and - I could walk quite well, you know, I had good shoes. Anyway, and then we went to a shoemaker and all our treasures we had to give him everything. We had a few cigarettes and - we wanted to buy ourselves a comb. You couldn't get anything in Germany in those days. Nothing. You couldn't get a comb, you couldn't get a mirror, nothing. Even if you had the money to buy it, there was nothing to have. And that shoemaker had a few old shoes which people didn't collect. And we sat for hours before he parted with a pair of shoes which were old and not good, but better than her clogs.

And you didn't have stockings or anything?

I had stockings. I don't know if she had stockings. I had stockings. I had stockings and I had shoes. I was not so badly off. And then we went and we came to the border of the Protectorate and the Sudeten. And the Protectorate was under Germany, but it was called the Protectorate. And they were sitting on - on wood, on logs. And I thought, you know, I'd rather wait here and try to get - not to go to Prague. She had an aunt in Prague, a Christian aunt, and she knew that that aunt would take us in. And she was in a very bad state, and she wanted to have a bath. Because her condition, you know, was very bad, you know, she had an internal infection. And so they're sitting there and a railway man came to see us, a German railway man. And we asked him how could one get into the Protectorate. He said "That will be impossible without papers". And we were speaking to him and a woman with a boy came by, it

was starting to rain, and he - they both had these cans which you carry. These food cans. And the woman went, and the boy who was about 10, winked at us that we should follow him. And we said goodbye to that man and went after him you know. And then when we were far away, also in wooded countryside, so the person asked "You are Czechs?", in Czech. And we said "Yes". So she would take us into the Protectorate. And we came to that village. That was a village of miners, a miners village. They were very poor. And in the night, in the middle of the night, the Mayor came and said we would be the - the witnesses against Hitler. The first people he saw from a concentration camp.

They gave you bread?

They couldn't give us much. Gave us food. And they let us have a hot bath. But they didn't have a bathroom, they had only, you know, these wooden troughs.

And they filled it?

And they filled it and we had together in that a bath.

And did they let you sleep then in the house?

Yes, we slept overnight. And they gave us a few crowns. And so we went on. We stayed there, I think, a day or so. And we didn't want to endanger them either you see. And so we went to Pilsen. And Pilsen, you know, that was the next stop. We came to Pilsen just when they bombed the Skoda. That was the only time when I thought oh, now that's that. We could never hide anywhere, you know. We stood in a bank. There was a bank - nobody was to be seen, there was an alarm. And but, you know, we survived, as you see. And finally we - we arrived, on foot, it was a long walk, it was about 200 kilometres.

So from the time you left Neu Rolau to the time you arrived in Prague, how many weeks?

It would be - it would be maybe 3 weeks.

And then you arrived in Prague?

We arrived in Prague. Early morning, 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock in the morning, we arrived in Prague. There's a hill which is called the White Mountains, where the 30 years war started. And we took the tram and these people in that Czech village sent us - gave us some money. But we thought, you know, when we had left Prague it was one crown, you know, from there to there, but by then it was two, and he was very surprised that we wanted to give him only one crown. And when we arrived in that vicinity, you know, in the road where her aunt lived, she was standing in the queue with a glass mug for milk. And when she saw us it was such a shock that she dropped it. And completely took us into her home. And in the next - I think we stayed - we slept - we didn't eat anything, any food or anything, we were so exhausted. But the next night, or two nights later, in the middle of the night the doorbell rang. And one was afraid. And there came an old gentleman, we never knew who he was and we

never found him again, with a beard, and said that they know that we are two women from a concentration camp and we should go, he told us where we should go to have photographs taken, and we would get ration cards.

And this is what you did?

That's what we did. Yes.

And then you continued to stay with the aunt?

We continued to stay with the aunt, till the 5th of - of the 5th of May - or the 4th of May - between the 4th and the 5th of May, we ventured into town.

You had, by now, clothes from the aunt?

Very little. But I had clothes where we had lived, and I wanted to go there. And I went already before to the best friend of my husband who was a Czech, also a construction engineer, non-Jewish, to get some money from him we had hidden with him. And then the revolution started you see, on the 5th of May.

And who lived in your flat?

Well, on the 9th of May - there was a revolution in Prague. We - we over - when we ventured, on the 4th or 5th - on the 5th of May, we ventured - she met a friend, or a woman who she knew from before the war, who had a Jewish husband. And she said to us that we should go to the - I can't remember anymore which Palace, but one Palace in the old town, where the Red Cross was repatriating people. And distributing food. So we went there. And we got a nice parcel of food. And suddenly somebody burst in and said "The Americans are already on the castle - mount". So everybody embraced. It was on the 5th of May. But that wasn't - it wasn't so, you know, the Americans only came on the 9th. No, the Americans didn't come at all, the Russians came on the 9th. And so we - we went out, you know, somebody took us, one of these - he was a councillor, and gave us - you know, when you said you were from a concentration camp, you know, there were no people yet from concentration camps in Prague, you know. He took us into a room and gave us some drinks you know, sherry or whatever. And some more cigarettes. And so we wanted to go back to - to that - Ashka was the name of that aunt, but we couldn't get so far because she lived very far. There was a lot of shooting going on you see. And so I remembered that there was a Doctor Schenk halfway to where she lived, who was in Prague. He had a German wife and he was one of the few people who was not sent to a concentration camp. And so we knocked on his door at 12 o'clock at night. But when he saw that we were packed with food you know, they were very glad to have us. And that's where we stayed you see. And the next morning, you know, there were big barricades and the people came shouting, "Oh, there are two women from the concentration camps, they should come on the barricades". But we didn't go on the barricades, we had enough of war and - let the other people build barricades.

Did you already begin to feel physically quite well or not?

Better, yes, yes, much better. And then on the 9th, when the war was ended and the Russians came - the Russian tanks came, then I went to where I had lived, to the government - to the - you know, there was the - the Town Hall for my district you know. And when I came there and said that I had lived - and I came from a concentration camp and had lived in number 4, so and so, he took his hat and went with me, left everything and went with me. And the man who actually had evicted me was hanging outside on the lamp post. And, you know, when I came on that day from one end of Prague, you know, there was no conveyance, on foot, one end to nearly, you know, not the other end, but a different district, it took me a long time. And you saw, you know - people. You know, you saw a crowd of people, you knew that in the middle of that crowd would be a German or a collaborator. I would make a great detour, I wouldn't want to see any - I had seen so much horror that I didn't want to see anything, and I wouldn't have wanted to do anything. You know, didn't want to touch any - you know, like you don't want to touch - a snake. And I was actually the only person in the whole house that was - a modern block of flats of five storeys, but there were only - before the war there were mostly Jewish people. They were all evicted and the Germans lived there. And I was the only person. So when I came into my flat - everything which said 'German' had - you know, was packed in - in crates. And lots of food, you know - Glasses with preserved eggs. All sorts of things. Crates of food. And I still hoped against hopes that some of my family would come back, and of course they would come - they knew my address where I lived before the war and they would come there back. And I worked, you know, the lift was not going, there was no electricity. So I had to walk down, you know, unpack and make it a bit habitable. Everything was there, you know -

Even your clothes were there?

No clothes. She apparently had gone with clothes off a bit before him. And he had hoped that he would still be able to take these crates with him. No clothes, I don't think so. But there was linen and everything was already there. And on the third day after work, I found myself laying on the floor and I dragged myself into the bed and the German had a thermometer in his - and I took my temperature and I had, I think, 40 degrees or something, and I thought now I'm going to die. You know, I was suddenly full of spots and so I thought I had that spotted - typhoid. And nobody - no telephone was going.

And your friend was with the aunt?

End of F137 Side B

Fl38 Side A - Part one

You were ill and entirely on your own?

On my own. Till somebody knocked at my door, and these were the people who had lived above me. Who had come from Theresienstadt on a - on a Russian tank to Prague. And their flat was ransacked. There was hardly anything there, only big pieces of furniture. I didn't have typhoid. I had some sort of skin rash. And it was exhaustion and so on. But then they told me that a friend of mine, with whom I lived in the same room in Theresienstadt, had also come back. They called her and she came and stayed with me. And then the only sister of my father who had survived, and who came to live with me. People who came from Theresienstadt heard that I had my flat back. And knocked at my door and wanted to stay. You know, there were people from the German part of Bohemia, you know, where I came from, who didn't want to go back there, to Teplice, or wherever they came from. And wanted to stay in Prague and wanted to get flats first, you know, and stayed with me. One day I had 18 people staying in my flat, mostly on the floor, you see. I couldn't - I had two beds in the bedroom and a couch, and one room where my aunt stayed. And several easy chairs. Everything was occupied, you know. But in those days one didn't - you know, it didn't matter in a way, it would matter to me now, one person matters to me if they stay with me. And my aunt, who had a very good heart, always would say, you know, "We have so much food, give them", you know, we had a lot of food. But you always gave somebody some food to take with them.

Did they come in a very bad condition?

No, from Theresienstadt they didn't, no, no, specially not - they were already under the supervision of the Red Cross, it was after the war. You know, they must have been the first people who came from Theresienstadt, which would have been the 15th of May. And the later ones would come even later because there was also a quarantine. There was that type of typhoid was in Theresienstadt which produces these spots and some people died there. So they didn't let everybody get out. Only if they found a Russian soldier who would gladly give them a lift in his car or tank or something, you know. But the normal exodus was maybe a month later you know.

What was your mood like. You knew nothing about your parents and you knew nothing about your husband?

No. But they then - you know I knew in the depth of my heart that they wouldn't have survived. But for certain that my husband - I knew that my brother - later on one knew that they were all immediately put to death already in Theresienstadt. And I knew that these old people were immediately put to death. Specially when I came to Auschwitz I knew it you know, because people were there who - you know, I met people who were there already since 1942, or '41, in Auschwitz. They all knew, you know, that these old people immediately - But they didn't even come. I found out now, when I was in Givat Chaim, that they went to Treblinka. My brother and my parents, they were put to death immediately, I hope, I hope. And no, my mood in the beginning - it was some sort of euphoria. I would think it was some sort of euphoria.

Was it a kind of feeling that you could do anything now?

Yes. Yes. Well, you know, not immediately. Immediately one - one still, you know, hoped against hope that one would find somebody alive. That's why I worked like - very foolishly, you know - in fact I should have gone to bed and - and - and not tried to clean up everything and make it shipshape. But yes, then, you know, a month later my two cousins with whom I grew up, came, survived, and - and one had, you know, and these Czech friends which one had, which were not Jewish, rallied around one, you know. That engineer, who was one of my husband's best friends, he was really a wonderful friend you know, he would have done anything - not his wife, his wife was - very hostile. But I had several Czech friends who really would have done anything to help. Not that I needed so much. You know, started to come also - my sister sent me - tried to send me parcels immediately, you know.

You had written to her?

Yes. No, no, no, no. We - that was different. We were sent very early, my two cousins and I, from the government, on recreation to Francesbad, which was one of these -

To get well?

To get well. And that was under American - it was occupied by Americans. Western part of Bohemia was under American occupation and Prague and the Eastern part under Russian. For instance, this was an interesting thing, very early, round the corner where I lived, - well early, maybe the end of May, when I got better, there was a little shop round the corner who used to make underwear for me. And I went there. And in came a Russian captain. Who looked like a typical Russian, you know, with the round head, big head, a bit greyish, lots of decorations. And she said to me - at the time I spoke quite well Russian. Because we were so many Russian and Polish women together. And she said to me "He's billeted with me". And she said to him "You know that woman was in Auschwitz". And he said to me "Why were you in Auschwitz?" And I said "Because I am Jewish". And when I said that, his face became Jewish. I have never seen anything like that. He ran away - he said "Wait, wait, wait here, I come back in a few minutes". And he came back with a huge parcel of food. And as I lived only around the corner, so I said to him "I can't carry it, you must come and help me carry it home". And he wouldn't enter the lift. Also he was an electrical engineer. But he never went in a lift in his life. He was from Moscow. And his wife and one or two children were killed in an air-raid. And he wanted to marry me. And he would have loved to stay in Prague. And well, nor would I wanted to marry him, nor would I wanted him to stay in Prague, nor would I wanted to go to Moscow, nothing of the sort. He wasn't long in Prague. They sent him away very soon. And he was very - very sad, you know, he cried bitterly when he came and said goodbye very shortly afterwards, you know. I think I saw him three times altogether. He didn't go back to Russia, but to another part of Czechoslovakia with his regiment, somewhere else. And - but that was very - Then I went to Teblitz, you know, already in May of '44. And when I came into the factory of my father there was, on his desk, sitting the man who - you know, factories were in Aryan hands. And he was the one who - And he got up and said "Madame, if you shoot me now, you would be

right". And I was very ashamed of him. And behind me came two men from the provisional government, and arrested him. And in the evening came his wife to me, to the hotel, and said she is quarter Jewish. And he was a nice man. He actually bought the factory from my father and gave him a valuation. That valuation I could produce when we had the - restitution. As I said, it's the only person who has a valuation from a German, a German valuation of the factory. But, before he could pay anything, my father was already arrested, he would have paid if my father would have stayed in Prague, he would have actually paid him what - after the valuation was. You know. He was a nice man. And he came several times to Prague to my father. You know in the beginning, you know, when he came, he said, "You know you have to sell me this factory". The machines were old, my father - they had to - to take the machines out, and my father thought they could get into the Protectorate. But they were confiscated at the border. So the factory was empty. And an empty factory deteriorates, the weather and so, you know it was raining inside. Some - some pipes were frozen up and broke. So he came to Prague and said to my father "You have to sell it, because otherwise after the war when you really come back it will be a ruin". So, and he several times, you know, tried to get money to my father, but he couldn't. He would have done if my father could have stayed a bit longer, or if they would have allowed that contract to go through earlier, then my father could have - Then I went with her again to the provisional government and said they should let him out again. I think they let him out again. And when I left Czechoslovakia in 1948, he was still in Teblitz. What happened to him later on, I don't know. Then I went to the house where I had lived. And the German who took over my father's - our apartment, was there, and said, you know, "I have Russians billeted here". So - and there were the Russians, they were in one of the rooms. So I went there, they were sitting about 8 or 10 Russians, and I looked around, I thought that one could look Jewish and I said to him he should come with me. And we went into another room, which was nobody in, and I said "Aren't you a Jew?" And he turned round and said "You don't need to know that I am Jewish". You see when you are in a concentration camp and the best people - the best Christian people I met, and the ones who helped in the face of the S.S., were Communists. The real political prisoners. They would even defy and rescue a beaten Jew. And would help. And even later, you know, that Mrs Michaelczick - You know in Czechoslovakia the Communist Party was legal you know, there were - And she was also a very nice woman. So one looked at Russia with very favourable eyes. And then, you know, I was surprised that he looks round when one says to him he is a Jew. "Why - you want to live in a Socialist Republic where everybody is equal, why do you look round?" One is more equal than the other. One soon became disillusioned when one saw the Russians - not that in Prague itself, the Russians did some mischief, because there was an elite army in Prague. They didn't steal -

And they didn't rape so much?

Oh no, not at all, not at all. Not in Prague, they would have been shot actually. Because they wanted to keep up appearances, you know, it was in the provinces, in Moravia, or outside you know, where they did - Not to Czechs. They raped the Germans. Not - not - I don't - I never heard of - a Russian soldier raping a Czech woman. No, I never heard. They stole watches, you know, and all sorts. And there were some - some were stupid. And, you know, my cousin for instance, she had an

old fashioned camera, you know. And she, you know, partly as a lark and partly to make money, with another friend, they would position themselves with that camera, without any film - oh no, you had these -

Slides?

Yes, yes. On a vantage point, you know, where people would go and sightsee, you see, Russian soldiers. And these Russians, she would say, "Well, I take your photograph. Do you want a photograph taken?" And they would, you know, brush their hair and position next to each other, you know. And they would say "Well, you must give me something on account, because maybe tomorrow if I come back with the photograph you won't be here, and I've wasted my film and my money and my time". And they would give her some in advance and the next day she would go to the other side of the town with her camera. And she did that, you know, not very long because one day they would have found out. But several times. More for a lark you know. These people would say they'd never seen a laboratory. We had a friend - a friend whom we met after the war, you know. A Czech. A very good looking man. Also he walked around in Czech Officers uniform. He must have had some sort of bad conscience. Not that he did something to a Jew, but that he slightly collaborated. In any case, he had with him a Russian Major in tow, always. Whenever he appeared there he was, as a shield. And that's how we met that Russian Major. And we played cards with him. A card game, I don't know now what it was, I know only the name. And that was? "Nines". Nines were trump. The nines. And once in a while we played cards with him.

You had already been in touch with your sister?

Yes.

And your sister sent you parcels?

All the time.

Was she able to send you an affidavit?

I didn't want to go away. On the contrary, I wanted my sister to come back to Czechoslovakia.

So you wanted to stay?

I wanted to stay. I knew, from people who came, that my sister worked very hard, my brother worked very hard. They had a very small apartment in New York and were not affluent in any way. And I wanted her to come back. I got the factory back. My factory - the factory was, at that time, not anymore a weaving mill, but a machine tool - they made machine tools.

So you became the owner of the factory?

That man, Mr. Muller, who had the factory next door, that was called - they made -

Ball bearings?

Ball bearings. And in the factory of my father which was a very large size, very roomy and a modern factory. They made for tanks some sort of these rope -

Round the wheels, instead of the wheels?

Yes. And it was a machine tool factory. And they made also other things. And I got that back. And it was in full, and so I thought that my sister and my brother-in-law would live there - or he could go back to Reichenberg, (now Likerec), where he came from. And I got for him back his house, you know. Also in early May I went to Reichenberg (now Likerec), and tried to reconstitute his firm and - So - And very early, people, you know, partly soldiers and so forth, came, who knew - my sister sent them, and told me about her circumstances. So I wanted them to come. But she was a member of the B'nai Brith and from all sorts of parts of B'nai Brith people sent me parcels. I had plenty of food and cigarettes, you know. There were always cigarettes in those parcels and plenty of food and I had also money. I got money back, which we had hidden, with that friend. And we all political prisoners got a pension from the State. And I got from that Mr. Muller. Because he - he - the Czechs left him in charge of that factory. And he gave me some sort of - I don't know in which way - Anyway, I had - I had money and I had food and I had a very comfortable home.

And a lot of people that you still knew?

And - and some people which I knew.

When did they actually tell you about your husband?

Well, there was a doctor who came back rather late, because he must have been also ill, and he was in Dachau with my husband, and he was present when my husband died. And my husband told him to - He knew that he was dying, he told him to go - if he survived - to tell me. He died in January - in January of malnutrition and dysentery or whatever.

And then did you start a job again?

I gave some French - I gave French lessons. We had very soon - very near where I lived was a college where they prepared for the - for the Arbitur in French. And I had several girls from that school who came and took French lessons.

And you met your second husband?

Well, my second husband had lived in the same house as I did. And his - the factory was not in Prague, it was - he's a metallurgist and they had a firm called Kalzium. It was a limited company and he was one of the directors. And it was in the same block, their offices, in the same block. So when he came, he came maybe in November or October '45 -

Did he also come from a concentration camp?

No, no, he was in London. He was in London, but came back, bought his factory back and - not his flat. His flat was in the meantime occupied by some other Jewish people. He was a single man, so they didn't give him a flat. If I would have come much later my flat could have been occupied by somebody. But as I were there, you know, immediately, you know - Families got flats, you know, or married couples got flats, but single people, unless they were very clever or came a bit earlier than my husband came. And his brother, who had a wife and two sons, he got immediately his flat in the same building where the Officers were. And, well, his mother survived, in Theresienstadt, and his sister, and they lived in Neugedein where he was born. They had a big farm and the factory actually was also in Neugedein. And well, then he - I had my aunt with me and he would come - I wouldn't be at home, you know, he would come to my home and my aunt would give him - make him a cup of coffee and they would sit together, you know, in between his office, you know, and would converse with my aunt, who was a very intelligent, very unhappy woman, because she had seven children. One child, one daughter, was in Israel, and all the others - they're dead. And all her grandchildren and all her in-laws, the son-in-laws or daughters-in-law, nobody came back. And she would sit for two years before she died, at the window. And her oldest granddaughter was a girl, very beautiful girl by the name of Anita. And she said "Anita will come back. I know that Anita will come back". But she never came. And two years later she died of a broken heart.

Did she stay with you all the time?

Yes, she stayed with me for two years.

And then you married?

I only married him here. He would have married me in Prague, but I didn't want to marry. I wanted to go to America. In the beginning I didn't want to go anywhere. I wanted to stay. I - I - I was quite comfortable. When the Russians went back, left Prague, and left a democratic Republic. But it - it became worse. Politically. Not - not - materially. But politically it became worse, and my sister was adamant I shouldn't stay. I would have not gone away from Prague without that - Communist - when we got a Communist regime in February '48. And then, you know, I - I, you know, I wanted to go to America. My husband went in May '48, back to England. And I went in end of July, beginning of August '48, to Paris. Because I thought I might get easier an American visa. It was my idea, you know, very optimistic, I might get easier a visa in Paris, as a displaced person or something, than in Prague. But that was a fallacy. And my husband wrote I should come here. And I came to England on marriage papers, so to speak. They wouldn't have let me in unless my husband, who had already permission to stay here. So in October '48 I came to England.

Was he already English by that time?

No. He became English in - he became English in January '49. A few months later. Because - you know - And then I came here and married him.

So we became British actually in 1949, as my husband was, during the war, in England. So we had the right to ask for British citizenship in January 1949, and got it. So not only was my husband British, but me too. And I went to English classes. Learned to make hats. And - for maybe 2 months previous to that, I worked as a nurse in a private house. Not live-in, but as I had nursing experience from the war. It was to add to our income. Then I started - I went to the hat classes and to English classes. And maybe in 1950 I started making hats. And I must say was not unduly unsuccessful. It suited me because I could please myself timewise. If the weather was fine I could go for a walk or meet somebody, and could work in the evening instead. And my clients were mostly people of my own background, more or less. I had very few English clients. And they came to my - we had furnished flats - we had six furnished flats, till we moved to Chorley Gardens in 1952.

One flat after the other?

Yes. And - but there, in those furnished flats, I made hats, and people liked to talk to me and I think sometimes - thinking back, they came to me more for entertainment than - maybe the hats were quite nice too, which I made, but they would sit and watch me doing the alteration and fitting it again and -

Where did you learn to make these hats?

In SCC classes. I went very intensively for several months, morning and afternoon, and you could use a spartery there, you see you could block your hats there. And so if I had - and then, you see, it is like that, people needed a hat very urgently for a cocktail party on Sunday. And they came to me on Wednesday, "I need the hat for Sunday". So I would go into town and buy the material and then in the school, at the beginning, with the help of the teacher, I concocted the hat, and maybe I sat till 12 o'clock, and it was ready, you know, and they came for a fitting and stayed for another fitting, and by Sunday the hat was ready.

Were these cocktail hats or everyday hats?

Cocktail hats encrusted with all sorts of beads and sequins. In those days, you know, you - everybody wore hats. And there were lots of cocktail parties and to these cocktail parties people wore hats. And my hats were much cheaper and, as I said, at least everybody, you know, when they bought me a piece of material from the dress or - I could make a little hat out of it.

And this was the first time you had ever done that?

It was the first time I had ever done it. So much so that my best friend who actually got me that flat and who also lives in Chorley Gardens, when she sat in the kitchen with me before I moved into Chorley Gardens, and watched me doing the hats, she would say "I never thought you would do anything like as delicate as that, ever". You know, because I was not really the type to do that. And I did that for ten years actually, in 1960, then I retired from doing hats.

Did you always do it privately?

Only privately. Only privately and only at home. I never had - I wouldn't say that I could have supported myself. But I - I could clothe myself and had a bit, you know, for luxuries which otherwise maybe, at least in the first few years of my marriage, I could never have afforded.

And it was a sociable thing to do as well?

Very sociable. And even now I look sometimes back with nostalgia. It was very rewarding in a way. You see you get a piece of material and you can form something out of it. You see, there's - there's something which goes underneath, which one could in those days even buy ready-made. Then you make pleats and - You know maybe a hat's a gift, you know, I put it on the head and try to form it, that she looks a bit prettier. Women are not easy to please, because there are some which think that the hat can make them beautiful. That is not possible. Or the profile can get more pleasing. But I got on very - very well. But in the end, in 1960, I was really sick and tired of - not of the work itself, but of women customers.

What about your husband. Was he working?

My husband, yes, as a metalurgist. And - he was in the foundry business. And - when, you know, as he was very industrious and so on, so he got on. He was in partnership with his brother. And they had - I don't know if you know what that entails you see. He would go with these foundry supplies, maybe in the back of the car, and I learned to drive in 1955, and from '56 onwards I went to collect him in his office sometimes and drove him to the East End where there were a lot of these - bell foundries and foundries which made - statues.

And railings?

There were bigger things, but even small ones, need also supplies of all sorts - all kinds. Then from 1960 onwards I didn't need to work.

Your husband made quite a good living?

Well, you know, I wouldn't say that we were - prosperous, but - it covered our needs. And by then we had a car and we could - I went to congresses with my husband. He was a - a member of the Institute of British Foundrymen.

Where were you living then?

From 1952 we lived here in that flat. In 1952 we lived here in Chorley Gardens. We moved in in - Christmas - just before Christmas 1952. Up till then we had, as I said, six different furnished flats.

All in this part of London?

Yes, all in this part of London. One flat was in Cricklewood. Otherwise we were - our first flat was in Cleve Road. Then I went to visit my sister in America. You know when I left Czechoslovakia - I could leave Czechoslovakia only with an overseas visa. And I got a visa for Colombia. England wouldn't have been a country where you emigrated to. I wouldn't have got a visa to go to England or to France or to Switzerland. But, you know, to Colombia -

Colombia in South America?

In South America. And not only I got a visa, I got also a ship - a shipping - a ticket to go there, you see. From Prague to Paris and from Paris to - wherever I should have gone onto that ship, maybe in Cherbourg, and from there to Colombia. So when I arrived in England I said to my husband, you know, "I have that ticket for the P & O Line", or whatever line it was, I can't remember anymore. "And that will help me to go and visit my sister there and back". It would have been the same price you see. And my husband agreed to that. I registered, after the war, to go to America. My sister wanted me to go to America. But at the beginning I refused. As long as Czechoslovakia was a democratic Republic and I got immediately my flat back which I had before the war. And only after, you know, we had free elections in 1948 in February, and there the Communists won. And afterwards I considered going to America, because I didn't want to live again under a - a dictatorship. And then I only registered, not before actually. And then when, for instance, in June '48, we had another election and when I arrived - the polling station was not very far from where I lived, I went there and there was sitting the tobacconist and the woman who sold the milk, when I came in they greeted me, "Oh, Mrs. Lanzman" - was my name. And there was an urn for 'yes', and there was an urn for 'no'. And I had no choice then to put my voting paper into the urn for 'yes'. Because they greeted me, you know, they knew who I am.

And they were watching where you voted?

It was open, it was not behind a curtain or something.

Hardly a free election?

This was not a free election. Free elections were in February 1948. June '48 was not anymore a free election. You had only to say yes or no. And I don't know how many people dared to say no. And that put on the stamp, you know, then I said all right now. I was very comfortable in Prague, I had a - my apartment was nearly as big as that one and in a way more modern and I had friends and I had enough money, I got - And it was a great decision to go. And I went to Paris. And I thought that I would get the American visa easier, quicker, on the quota. There was a quota system in those days, in Paris. But it was a fallacy, it was exactly the same. I was born in Czechoslovakia and I was on the Czech quota. And then my husband, whom I knew already from before the war and who lived before the war in the same house as I did, and who was already in London, and he wrote to Paris I should come and marry him. And I said "I marry you under the conditions that when I get my American visa that I can visit my sister - I have the means". In 1950 I got the visa and went to America and stayed four months till I got the first papers you see. That was the - because I - in

those days I was not happy here. It was more austere. Life was more austere in England than it was in Prague. I lived in much worse conditions here than I lived in Prague. I had a little furnished flat in Cleve Road, which was - you know -

You had a lower income here

Not only a lower - very, very low, but the living conditions were - very, very bad. You know, I never saw anything like it. There was a carpet which I washed every - every so often, every week at least I washed it. It was always the same blackness. The kitchen had no window, it was a little kitchenette. And, you know, I scrubbed that cooker in and out, it never got clean. I lived there for one and a half years, it never got clean. The only thing which was good about it, it had some sort of terrace overlooking a wilderness of a garden. And 1949 was a very hot summer and on that terrace, you know, we had - our friends came because there was a big garden and a terrace, and they were very nice people in that house actually. That was very - interesting house. It consisted of - of six or eight furnished flats. On the ground floor were three. We had our own entrance door with a bell, which was - and we had a little very primitive bathroom, of our own. And then the big room from which there was a little kitchen, if you can call it a kitchen, it was just unbelievable. Neglected. There was a wall, you know...

End of Fl38 Side A

Fl38 Side B

We bought a huge painting. I remember that very well, you know, it was - and now I wouldn't have - I wished I had kept it. There was a hay wagon and with hay, and on the hay were sitting people. And some hens and a farmer and a boy, and all sorts of thing. The frame was - we had to paint it. And that patch. And everybody - all our friends laughed and said "The Augsteins, they haven't got much but they have a painting". Years and years later, maybe in 1960 or '62 or '63, there were two boys one day came from the Scouts. And said they want a job. A bob for a job. And I said "Would you like a painting?" Because, you know, it was in my way in that cupboard. And they said they would take it. And he was a little boy, I gave it to them. Ten minutes later they came back, it was too heavy for them, they couldn't carry it. So I - there was an antique dealer in Finchley Road, I had, you know, enough of it, the painting. So I took it to him and said if he wants to sell it for me. Buy it. He said "I can't give you a price". I said "You don't need to give me a price, half of what you get you give me". Two or three months later I went there and said "Did you ever sell the painting?" "Yes, yes". And he gave me £80. I was amazed. £80. Was it 1961 or '62. But years later I saw that same painting in - in Church Street, in Kensington Church Street. And it was, I think, £1500 or £1800. And if I would have kept it maybe it was a masterpiece of some sort. Anyway, and to come back to that Cleve Road flat. There was an old gentleman living above us, by the name of Rothschild. He came from Frankfurt. And he used to say that his family was much more distinguished than the family of the Baron Rothschild. And he was really very cultured and he became our very good friend, and he would come on Sunday mornings, you know, when the sun was shining. Clad - he was a very old man - as he would be - he went always to Marienbad and Carlsbad, and to Badenbaden. Nice motoring places. And he would walk around in white shoes with black, with brown, and he would have a white jacket and a flower in his buttonhole. And that's how he would come down and take breakfast with us. He was very - very - very nice -

So you had a communal dining room?

No, no, no, not at all. He would come for breakfast. Onto our terrace you see. He would bring something, or he would bring more than we gave him actually. It's only - an anecdote.

When you went to America did your husband want to go with you?

Well, no. No, no, no, that was out of the question. I said I would go alone and see if I could like it, if I could - he - from the beginning he said "I'm not" - First of all he had a mother here, and a sister, who were in the camps during the war.

What was your husband's name?

Augstein. John. John Augstein. And his mother and his sister and her daughter had survived the camp. And when they left Czechoslovakia his brother and his brother's wife and his two children, they were in England during the war. And my husband was in England during the war. But in May of '48 when they left Czechoslovakia, they left all together with the mother, the sister and the child of the sister. And he was

a very devoted son and brother. And I was not very happy in England, I must say, at that stage. Not at all. You know, that flat in Cleve Road was something - an abomination.

You didn't have children?

No, I never had children. I would have had children. I had children at the beginning of the war - I was pregnant, but I - had them terminated because of the circumstances. And - so I said to him, you know, - maybe I could have persuaded him, I thought, to come - to go with me to America.

Where did you go in America?

To New York, where my sister lived. And - I personally liked it very much. But knowing the character of my husband and his devotion to his family - when I came back - I would have come back in any case you know. That was - that was a matter of - of course. And I told him all about it. He had very - my first husband had very - relatives in America. And they would have helped my sister and my brother-in-law were they not in good circumstances. And that was also one of the reasons why I thought if they didn't make it, maybe we wouldn't make it and the responsibility would be too great. And in retrospect I'm very glad that I didn't persuade him. I could have if I - because he loved me very much and if I would have said "Oh, you come or I go alone", he would have come, or gone. But a few years later I was very glad that I didn't. He wouldn't have been happy.

But you said before that when you were in New York, you stayed four months and you got your papers. What does that mean?

Yes, you know, that is - if you have immigration - you know, immigration papers, and I got my - my - I was an immigrant, you know, an immigrant into America. And after so many weeks you got your first papers which means that even if you leave the country, you don't forfeit the right to come back. If I would have gone earlier, left earlier, then I would have to go back into a queue. But the first papers that you get, some sort of - you know, with your photograph and that - I would have had to come, I think, every six months I would have been again in New York, or every year, I don't know exactly anymore. Now I think these laws have changed in the meantime.

So you decided when you were there that you didn't want to stay?

No, no, I didn't. But I knew that I would have to come back to England. I wanted to come back to England in any case, and - and discuss it in - in - with my husband and with his family. And my sister-in-law had her relatives in America. I thought if she would go maybe, that would be for my husband also a reason also to go. Not only, you know - in a way he felt responsible for his sister. Because the Augsteins were a rather prominent family in Czechoslovakia. And when my - when these two emigrated to England and they war broke out and England was an enemy of the country, so my sister-in-law and his mother were arrested and were sent to a camp in Czechoslovakia, which was Svatoborice. Where there were only people whose relatives were in England. Jewish and non-Jewish. There were quite a number of

Czech people whose, say, sons or brothers had fled with the Army to England, or were in the Army in England, or pilots who were in the English Army. Afterwards they were transferred to Theresienstadt. My sister-in-law and her mother. And my husband and his brother, they felt in a way responsible. Also, in a way, it saved their lives, because people who came from Svatoborice to Theresienstadt were not deported further East. Stayed there to the end of the war. And whatever anybody will say about Theresienstadt - when I was in Auschwitz I never thought of Prague or my home town, I longed to be in Theresienstadt. For me I would have given a written undertaking that I would stay to the rest of my life. If my parents and my brother and my husband would have survived, I would have given a written undertaking to God that I stayed to the end of my life in Theresienstadt. And to be amongst Jews. Are you Jewish.

Yes?

You know people who were never under those circumstances with non-Jewish people together as I was, for one year, or nearly one year, don't know - what it's like. You know, they would say to me I'm a racist. Maybe I am. But in Theresienstadt people tried to teach their children to help the - I was a nurse in Theresienstadt in the surgical department of the - you know - And they operated from morning till night and tried to help and to alleviate, to - And then there was only the piece of bread and who had better muscle.

Because of course when you were in Auschwitz you were not among Jewish people. If you had been, it would have been less terrible I suppose for you?

It would have been yes. Maybe I wouldn't have survived, maybe, you know, one could have said, I don't know. But to be not - you know, because you see these non-Jewish people would say to you "Oh, you don't need bread, you go to - to - to the chimney, you don't need your - you don't need water, you don't need - what you have on, you don't need a blanket. Tomorrow, the day after, you will go through the chimney in any case. What do you need - what do you need - to clean your teeth, what do you need to wash? Go away, you go through the chimney in any case".

But did that make you feel even more determined to survive?

No. It is not that. Because I, I personally thought - I couldn't imagine that they would kill me - somehow. I don't know why. On the other hand, I couldn't imagine that anybody would let anybody - if the Germans would let me be a witness for what they did. Because I thought to myself if I survive and tell the world what's going on here, no civilised person on earth will ever sit on the table with a German. They will Balkanise - they will Balkanise Germany. They will annihilate it. That's what I thought. On the other hand, you see, I couldn't imagine how will they kill me, I couldn't imagine it you know. I couldn't imagine it, that they kill me, and I wasn't afraid of it, not at all. I never wanted bread or something, what I would have wanted was a machine gun to - to - to - to defend myself, to defend these people whom I saw going into the gas chambers. And when I saw - that could be my father, my mother, my brother, husband. I knew that my husband was alive in Auschwitz at the same time. But -

So many years later, looking back on these feelings you have just expressed, how do you feel in view of the fact that that is not how the world reacted when they learnt?

In a way I was the same - as the world. You see after the war - when the war ended, the day the war ended - you know we were hidden till the 9th of May and on the 9th May - well - well it was officially announced that it's over, and I went through - you know, there were no trams, nothing was functioning, so I walked from one end of Prague to where I had lived, and I saw, you know - you know - a circle of people. And one knew if you see a circle of people that in the middle of that circle would be some Germans who would be - I couldn't see, I went the other way. You know, I would never like to see. Then I went - you know, there was, in the beginning, there was no government in Prague, but every district had a revolutionary council, so to speak. I went to that revolutionary council where I had lived before the war, and the chairman of that revolutionary council, was the first person he saw who came from Auschwitz. Took his hat and went with me immediately to the flat where I had lived, around the corner from the Town Hall. Very nice district. And the man, the German who threw me out of my flat, was hanging on the lamp-post outside you see.

Had he hanged himself. He had been lynched?

No, no, no, nobody can climb up and hang himself. No, they hung him up.

He had been lynched?

Yes. They - they - you know - yes.

You yourself did not ...?

No. I couldn't have, I didn't want even to touch them. The first - when I went with my husband to a congress in Vienna in 1964 or '5, we went by car through Germany, I was physically ill. You know, I didn't want to see any German, I didn't - we travelled before and there were already Germans in Switzerland, you know. When I saw a German I - even the young ones - even now I don't speak to anybody, even if I go to - I've been now in Austria. I don't speak to the people in German.

But do you have feelings of revenge, because you mentioned that before?

No. I haven't got that in me. I wouldn't have touched anybody.

No, not personal revenge, but you obviously ...?

At the time, yes, I thought - not even revenge. Revulsion. I wouldn't have - you know, in Auschwitz if I would have had a machine gun I would have tried to shoot. But - no.

So how would you say you've come to terms with your terrible experience?

No. No.

You haven't come to terms with it?

No. No.

You still have a great deal of pain?

No. You see you are - you will find a lot of people, when you interview them, who will be sorry for themselves. Believe me, what is past is past. You don't feel anymore the hunger, you don't feel anymore - your anguish. What you are sorry for is for the people you have lost. But a lot of people - If you survive, you survive, you know, other people have also terrible experiences and survive. But that what they did, not to me personally.

You feel bitter about your losses?

Of course, sadness. You know, I had a young brother who was 20 years old and he was very good looking, tall. My sister was quite good looking, but - and I was quite good looking, but he was the best looking of us. And they killed him when he was 20 without - you know, you can be killed in a war without - you know, that's a different thing. But to be killed without - being able to defend yourself. That is - nobody can - If there are people who think now one has to forget and forgive, they are barmy. They are absolutely barmy. You can't and you shouldn't and - and -

Do you think about those times a lot?

No. I think about it, of course, one has a brain, one thinks. But -

You have actually come to terms with it. To a certain extent?

Yes. Yes, yes. But my personal experience, yes. Definitely. The only thing which pains me is - is the anguish that my parents had such a terrible death. That I couldn't help. You see, that's more, because in a way I stayed in Prague - my first husband could have gone to Hungary and I could have gone with him, but I thought I will be able to help. And I couldn't. Couldn't do anything. And sometimes I think maybe if I would have done so and so and so and so, that is what I think, you know. I blame more myself than - than - in some - If my parents would have come back, and my husband and my brother, I wouldn't have forgiven the Germans for - it was unforgiveable. But my own - I survived - all right - I was hungry and I was - but I survived. Other people - you know - prisoners of war in Japan, had also terrible experiences. I wouldn't be - I was not sorry for my - I wasn't sorry for myself. You know, most of the people - lots - not most, but lots of them, you know, they are so sorry for themselves, and that I think is - if you survive then - then you have enough stamina not to need to be so sorry for yourself. Be glad that you have that stamina.

Were you tattooed. Did you have a number tattooed on your arm?

Oh yes, yes. And lots of people wanted, free of charge, doctors to take it away. And I didn't, because I feel that this is the - the grave of my family.

Do you ever dream about those times?

Yes. Very rarely. You see one tragedy - I lost my husband under very sad circumstances. That is more - of - much more painful - after it's - it's so many years, 44 years ago. It's a long time.

But you don't still have bad dreams about it. Does anything recall those times to you. A smell or a sensation. I suppose when you meet a German, as you were saying before, you think of those times?

Yes, well, I think well, I don't want to - maybe - For me the Germans are all the same. Young or old, I don't like them.

Do you feel you can put your experiences in the context of your present life, your present comfortable life in England?

Well - as an experience you mean? You see in a way I have to emphasise that. I don't think I would survive again, you know, nobody has the same stamina twice. But - it's - every experience - if it would have been - you know, as I told you - if I would have been alone in that experience, say. I would think that every experience in a way adds to your - life you see. You - it is something unique. Or - life didn't go - you experienced - You met also - wonderful people. Some at least are still - I have a friend in Holland with one of the few, apart from those who I knew before the war, you know, in Theresienstadt, there are lots of friends there, you know, because everybody was there.

You still have those friends?

There are some who live here in England, yes. Not that I - you know, but that one with whom for a month, you know, we - my first husband, as I said, came from a place called Kocice, which was annexed by the Hungarians when they dismantled Czechoslovakia in March 1939. That Eastern part of Slovakia was annexed by the Hungarians. Because during the Austrian/Hungarian empire, it belonged to Hungary. Before the First World War it was Hungary. When Czechoslovakia was formed in 1918 it became Czechoslovakia because the - the greatest part of the population are Slovaks, so not Hungarians, Slovak. So my husband's parents, who lived in Kocice, were again Hungarians. And they got us through - there was a - a cousin of my husband who had - was a lawyer in Budapest and had the same name as my husband. And there was another lawyer in Kocice, also a cousin. They went to - they were - Hungary was a Sovereign State till '44. In March '44 the Germans marched in. So they went to Foreign Office in - in Berlin, which we heard afterwards, and got my husband Hungarian papers so that he was born in Hungary and that he is a Hungarian subject, and that he shouldn't be in - in Theresienstadt. And in February 1944 we and nine other Hungarians and two Swedish boys - they were Czech boys, but the parents were in Sweden - left Theresienstadt and went to Belsen. Which at the time was a sort of international - there were a lot of - of prisoners of war, a huge amount of Russian prisoners. But that a small camp of people with foreign papers. And there also some people from a camp in - in Holland, which was called Westerbork. And it

was not bad, we had the same rations as prisoners of war. And with a woman called Ellen Lassali, I - for a month I - we picked potatoes next to each other. And that woman I am very friendly with. She survived, her husband didn't. But she was lucky, her son survived. And she lives now in Holland in Amsterdam, and she was here, she is older than I am, but I am still friendly with her.

When you do get together with your friends who you knew from those times, do you talk about those times?

Yes. Yes, we do. But with my Czech friends I don't - I don't have any German friends with whom I could speak about it. No. I am with my Czech friends, we sometimes laugh about things which happened to us. You know. Because there is no such things, even in the greatest tragedy, even if you are 9 months I was in Auschwitz, there were also once or twice incidents which we could laugh about. If you want to - I tell you one for instance: When we was in that - depot, clothing depot. There was - there were some Czech people and also some Polish people. And there was one Polish girl by the name of Shura. She was not Jewish. But she had only one aim, to barter things. And why Mrs Schmidt liked her, I don't know, but she did. And she sent her - Mrs Schmidt - who was since 1933 imprisoned, you know, in '33 she came to Ravensbruck and she had a higher standing in Auschwitz than an S.S. man. First of all she was an intelligent woman and secondly she was a kapo and she had all the experience and was head of all the clothing depots of that huge Auschwitz camp. Where there were hundreds of thousands of prisoners. And every day trains came with loads of luggage and that went, not all through her hands, but a lot of it. We were only for women's clothing. But she could - she was head of all of it. And she sent that Shura sometimes to other depots, you know, to other camps. If you - from one camp to another there was a hut. And one of these watchtowers. And when you came to the hut you had to state who you are and where you are going and what you are doing. So - a day or so previously somebody - some men came to our - you know, there were things to repair, maybe plumbing or something. And there was a Czech man and I said is anybody from Czechoslovakia coming, I always wanted to know, my brother or my parents. And he was also, you know, sifting - when people came off the train and he said "yes, two boys, Petshau, and they are my cousins and they're working on - in that camp. And it was already the end of - beginning of October, maybe end of September '44. And in that region it's so cold, you know, windy, you know, very disagreeable climate. And so that Shura, who worked - she said I'm going tomorrow to that camp where these two cousins of mine, these two boys, were. They worked together with my brother in Theresienstadt, so I thought maybe they'd know of something. So I said - I begged her to take me along. She could take somebody. And she had a big bag. She had - I don't know exactly what she carried, maybe mens clothing, into a mens depot. But she had a big sack of things that she wanted to barter with, you know, because we had all sorts of things there. And I said don't do it you go again, let me take for these two boys some jumpers or shirts or whatever, I can't remember. I could take those. But she had to have that sack. And when we arrived to the end of our camp, where the next camp started, you know, - because we had to say who we were and we were sent from Mrs Schmidt. That S.S. woman or whoever, a man, looked, "What have you got here in those two sacks? Put them there". And she said "Mrs Schmidt said we should send these two sacks. So I will call Mrs Schmidt". So she went to call Mrs Schmidt. There were these two sacks. And on

that watchtower there were always two S.S. men, you know. It must have been the end of their shift, they came down, looked at the sacks, took out all sorts of things. The two men who were supposed to go up there looked also at the sacks and also took things. By the time Mrs Schmidt came, the sacks were empty. Mrs Schmidt came, she always carried a whip. "You - you - " - she had a good voice you know. "You - you - " - as she would say, "You - you - bloody creatures", or, "You bloody so and so". You know, very, very, very coarse. "I'll give you, I tell you". When she arrived you know. And that was one of the rare occasions when we - we lived in the same hut at the time when I was - in these months when I was with Mrs Schmidt, I was in a better hut.

You didn't get those clothes back?

No. I never saw these two boys. And she never went anywhere anymore. Shura. She could work, but she never sent her anywhere. She knew exactly what had happened, Mrs Schmidt, she was not stupid.

One thing I would like to ask you, you didn't explain your first entry to Auschwitz. How you arrived there and how you were tattooed. What happened to you when you first arrived. And when was that. Do you remember?

You know, I think on the 5th or on the 6th of March 1944, Hungary was occupied. When we arrived in early February in Belsen, our men were sent to the commandant of the camp and he said "You will get to Hungary, but it's not up to us, it's up to the English. The English have to barter for you". You know. There was a sort of - I don't know how many tanks or whatever for everybody they wanted from the English. Then we would have gone to Hungary. But when Hungary was occupied we were called again and were said we are not anymore going anywhere. Hungary has been occupied and we are going somewhere else. And we were going somewhere else with lots of other people. All mostly these Polish. And these Polish people who were in - in Belsen at the time had also foreign papers, they were mostly industrialists and - and - lawyers and doctors, who could afford to buy foreign papers in order not to be transported to Russia, when Poland was - a part of Poland was where the Russians went. And these people told us of these horrors which exist in Poland. And my first husband, who was a university graduate and very intelligent, he said, "I am glad that we're leaving. You know. I can't listen anymore to those stories of these people". He was in a mens camp and I was - we didn't sleep in the same barrack. "These men, they must be mad, they bring all these stories". You see, that's the human mind. Also we were already for two years in - in Theresienstadt and - he didn't believe that something like Treblinka or - Auschwitz was not a question. When I arrived in Auschwitz I saw what it was. On the first day -

You were in Belsen. How did you get from Belsen to Auschwitz?

By cattle truck. 50 people or 60, I can't remember anymore, in one. You know, a whole - a whole train of - of - prisoners. A whole train of cattle trucks filled with prisoners, and it took ages, because you stood and went and stood and went, and there were air-raids and so -

When you say 'ages', how long?

A fortnight.

And you were in the trucks the whole time?

In the trucks.

And were you given anything to eat or to drink?

We had a bit of our own food which we took with us. And we might have got every day, because every day at some stage, they must have emptied these buckets which - you know - And they gave us some - a bit of soup or something.

Did people survive that trip. Did many people become ill?

In that truck where I was, nobody died, everybody survived. Initially. But - the - on the - on - you know, one only heard - people speaking outside, you know, the train drivers or officials or so, they would ask what is going to happen to those people. And they would say "Oh, they are going to be killed, they are going to be thrown into the - into a quarry, or -" All sorts of things. I was the only German speaking. My husband was - he spoke better Czech than Hungarian.

You were in the same truck with him?

Yes.

And were all the other people Jews?

They all were. We were all Hungarians. 9 Hungarians. And Poles. Polish Jewish people.

All Jews?

All Jews. And when we arrived in Auschwitz there was standing somebody with a list. All our luggage - we had still our luggage with us from Theresienstadt, nobody took our luggage away. But when we arrived in Auschwitz we had to leave everything behind.

On the platform?

No, in the truck. Came out. Somebody stood there, had a piece of paper in a hand, and called our nine names. The Hungarians.

The Hungarians were separated from the Poles?

Yes.

Were there dogs at the reception?

No. No. No, in Auschwitz there were no dogs.

Was it daytime or night-time?

Daytime. It was daytime and we came into that - you know - That, of course, is when you saw these - these emaciated people. And - as a matter of fact I never knew that I was tattooed. Days later I saw it. I never felt anything, I was so - when I woke up the next day in that camp, you know, with - there were hundreds of women and - shaven and half naked and - uh, that I remember sometimes. That was the worst experience, the first two or three months in Auschwitz with all that humanity.

You were in shock?

Terrible.

Could you tell me your Auschwitz number?

A5111.

Do you know what that meant. Did anybody tell you?

No. There were people who had not 'A' numbers. They started again you know. They must have run out of - and started with 'A'. There were some guessers you know. Some of these women, you know - not Jews. "Oh, 'A', oh". "You will find out, you will find out if you have an 'A'". Terrible things you know.

But they didn't know what they meant, they were just frightening you?

I don't know, maybe they heard of some - you know - where they made experiments and so on. That's what they meant. I only knew afterwards you know.

You had heard terrible stories about Auschwitz, had you?

Not that. Not that. No, before I came I didn't. I didn't know that Auschwitz existed.

But you were saying before that when you were in Theresienstadt with your husband, your husband wouldn't believe those terrible things in Treblinka?

No, with those Poles. That was already in Bergen Belsen when we were in with those Poles together.

So when you got to Auschwitz did you know what might be in store for you?

No. Well, a day later I knew, yes.

End of F138 Side B

Fl39 Side A

Well, you know, and then my husband didn't want to go to America. And in retrospect I was very glad that we didn't go. And - I have never lived anywhere as long as I have lived in England. And I feel very patriotic in a way. And I love life here and I'm also glad that I didn't go. Now I'm very glad. In the meantime, unfortunately, my sister has died - in America. But I have got a niece. My sister had one child. Between us we had one child. And I'm very close to her and she comes quite often to England and I go once a year or so to America. Yes, I have friends and I never feel lonely. And - I lost my husband 10 years ago. That is in a way - overshadows - because he suffered so much, that his suffering overshadows the suffering during the war. When I have - bad dreams or - or - depression. Depression, in a way I wouldn't say that I - but very acute sadness, the memory of his - the six months when he was - you know - after the stroke and couldn't speak. And couldn't swallow and had to be fed - That is more of pain to me than my wartime experiences.

How old was he when he died?

He was 75 when he died. And - you see there always is, in everybody's life, - or maybe it's me, I always feel that I failed in a way. That I - you know, we went to California on a holiday and I think if he wouldn't have gone it wouldn't have happened to him. Or - you know, all sorts of things - and that is - that gives me great - pain. To remember his six months when he couldn't speak. That is a terrible thing, if you can't communicate, if you can't know what - what goes on in him, you see. And I remember that he was in the Royal Free. They were very good to him, I wouldn't say they were not, but - I didn't know what happened to him at night, I couldn't be there, you know. I know that sometimes he understood.

He knew you?

Sometimes yes, sometimes not.

But watching him suffer, did that bring back terrible feelings that you had had during the war?

No. No. No. Had nothing to do with the war at all. It was only his own - you see I sometimes think - I hope that - I hoped, you know, for a long time - that my - my husband, my first husband, unfortunately had - had to suffer long. I hope my parents - I only found out now - I was in Israel in November - and there is now a Kibbutz called Givat Chaim, where they have all the archives of Theresienstadt. And there I found out that my parents perished in Treblinka. That, of course, you know, was a terrible shock to me. And my brother most probably - I don't know where, but it says Treblinka, but that I don't believe.

Why?

He must go somewhere else, because he went with the special transport, I think. And I would like - because the - one of the people who work in that archive in Givat Chaim comes from a place called Neu Rolau, next to that place where I was for the

last month of the war. And she had never met anybody who was there. There was only one other woman and I, another Jewish woman and I who were there in Neu Rolau. We were in Neu Rolau, she was in Alt Rolau. And I promised her to write to her. There is going to be on the 5th of May this year, a gathering of people from Theresienstadt. In Givat Chaim.

Are you going?

I don't know yet. One of my cousins who lives in Australia is going to Israel for that meeting. I don't know. Because - I think there will be nobody - of the people I knew - there - anymore.

But this lady you know. How is it you know her?

She is a cousin of mine. A daughter of a cousin. And she's at least 10 or 15 years younger than I am. I don't know if any - it hasn't been publicised. I think only - another cousin of mine who came out in '68 from Czechoslovakia and lived there for 5 years, and who took me there, he - that's how I came to know about it. I didn't know about Givat Chaim. I don't think many people know. I know here two women who were in Theresienstadt at the same time as I, or three. But I don't - none of them knows about Givat Chaim. They didn't publicise as they should. Publicise it in the Jewish Chronicle or something.

Do they want a lot of people to go?

I don't know. It's a very nice Kibbutz. It's a lovely Kibbutz. They have a big concert hall for functions, which were donated to them by the Jews of Vienna. Very big and elegant and - and they have functions and concerts and from surrounding villages also people come there. Very prosperous Kibbutz. As much so that they have to help other kibbutz, because it's some sort of - co-operative or whatever. But that is a real Kibbutz.

Where is it?

It is on the way to Haifa from Herzlia. Where you go from Herzlia towards Haifa, it is in that direction. It would be - you know where Natania is? So if you go towards the sea from there, in a straight line, you would come to Natania.

And you said that you wanted ...

And I promised that lady who keeps that archive and is from Alt Rolau, - I promised to write to her, you know, about my experiences in Neu Rolau. But maybe I can do that if you give me a tape. I spoke about that. You listened to my tape, didn't you. And you heard about that part of Neu Rolau. You know in - my - my life here - that is - you know, you see my surroundings, I'm quite comfortably off. I - I - travel and I can please myself and can do what I want. I'm not - not that I don't miss my husband. But I wouldn't have - now - you know, I wouldn't want to have - other relationships.

After you had finished all your wonderful hat making, which sounds wonderful, in 1960. Did you do any work at all?

No. Not really. I - I - not really, no. No. No, I did a bit for my husband and - as I said, I - was sometimes his chauffeur when he - you know - for instance he went very often to Lewes. There were a lot of foundries. Unfortunately, all these - the foundries have - half of the foundries which existed in England - closed down. The foundry industry has shrunk. Because there were new methods and - and - I went with him, you know - He had customers in Halifax and all over the place. And - and then -

But in Britain. You didn't go abroad on business

Yes, also we went. My husband had - was a licensee of a firm in Market Harborough. The firm was called Harborough Construction Company. And they produced all sorts of things for the foundry industry, but also electric trucks. Small - all sorts. And there are several places in Switzerland. Notably Vengen and Muren, where there are no cars. And they had these cars from - they were called Harbilt. And they were from that firm. And my husband helped in the sale of those trucks. And two years ago I went, for the first time again - For 13 years we went every year to Vengen. And my husband was so proud, you know, everybody - Every hotel had one of those little trucks, you know. And one man said, and he had some sort of lever to negotiate -

So this is a truck to sit on?

No, it was mostly for the luggage, to - to - You know, when you arrive at the station you had luggage. There was no cars and every porter had one of those trucks.

A little electric truck?

Electric. Only electric. And they carried supplies as well. They were - they had bigger electric trucks as well. And milk floats. They were not from Harbilt. But now when I came there two years ago, I didn't see a single Harbilt truck anymore. All were from Japan or Germany. Unfortunately.

So you travelled a lot with your husband for pleasure and for business?

And for pleasure.

Did you find when you travelled that you made friends easily with the people you met there?

Yes. Yes.

But in London most of your friends are Czech and Hungarian?

Yes, I used to have - you know when I was in these hat making classes in 1949 and '50, there were a lot of society ladies who made hats for themselves. There were not so many hats available you know, it was still austere and maybe they were even on

ration cards. And I met there a Mrs Kitt, her husband was a recorder, so nearly a Judge. And we became very friendly. The first - in 1949 the first Christmas - no '48. I started late in '48 to - to - part time to - she asked me already if somebody would invite me for Christmas. And we were invited by one of my best friends who lived in Chorley Gardens. And then that Mr Kitt took me once to the opening of the local - he went also in the robes. And one day she rang me - I don't know if you are too young, you might not remember, there was a German Prince who wanted English citizenship because he was related to Queen Victoria. And that Mr Kitt was the presiding Judge in that trial. And - he rang me in the evening and said - Clifford was his name - and said during the trial I had to think of Margaret Augstein. And he didn't get that English - British citizenship. And I can't remember anymore the name of that - something Rupert, I don't know. A German Prince. Wanted British - after the war, British citizenship. It must have been 1950. And apparently that was in the papers even, that he applied for that.

I would like to ask you a little bit now about your Jewish community activity.

Well I am a member of the Liberal Synagogue in St Johns Wood. Dr Rayner is the Chief Rabbi -

John Rayner?

Yes.

Did you go to synagogue right from the first time you came to London?

No, not at all. We didn't, no, no. I always - my husband's office was in Coxburgh Street, and I used to collect him on mid-day on Yom Kippur and we went together to - to Westminster Hall. There was an overflow of one of the West End synagogues, for the - On Yom Kippur evening the - the dead - the -

The Kaddish?

Not only Kaddish, its a prayer for the dead you know. We were not members of any synagogue. Only after my husband's death I thought that I would become, and I went to the Liberal Synagogue, because it's nearer to my - life philosophy. I'm - orthodoxy is against my - principles and beliefs. And I must say it's best now its - unfortunately they have torn it down - and theyre now - they bought a church and so they are re-building the place, because it was too big unfortunately and it's a very valuable site. I'm very angry about it. They are right of course, but I am angry. That's a very valuable site and they were building. And I don't know when it's going to be - it will take a long time to build a big block of flats and there will be flats and offices and underneath will be the synagogue.

How often do you go to synagogue?

I went always to the Kol Nidrei service, which is very beautiful there. And to - once - well to - to - maybe on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Maybe once or twice a year. I don't go very often. I went the first year, when I became a member on the first day

of the death of my husband, Kaddish. But not anymore. I thought maybe - but then it's very difficult to reach that thing in Neu Rolau. The day of my husband's death is on the 18th of this month. And I think I just buy flowers and go to - the crematorium.

Where is that?

In Golders Green. In Golders Green Crematorium. I go there quite often. Several times a year.

Do you have close family living in London?

No. I have one cousin. Our mothers were sisters. He lives in Southgate. And I love him very dearly. He is a bit younger than I am. And very nice - very nice - man, and very dear to my heart, and his wife has two children. We are not - not strangers, but would say - in a way, with - he has two boys, I don't know if that interests you, but - he used to live, when I came to England he used to live in Finsbury Park. And his boys went to the local school and they were the best pupils in that school. And both of them - first the older and then the younger, got places in the a school which is called Christs Hospital School in Horsham. And that has a charter, you have to be Church of England. And from parents who are not well off. And the best in your school. And that - my - so - he let them go to a Church of England school. I - I made him put his - he was not sure if he should let his boys go to that school at first.

They haven't been brought up as Jewish boys?

No. No. Maybe they were - no, no. But - when he - I said to him, "But eventually you will have to tell them that you and your wife are Jewish". Yes, he will tell them after they finished school. Because now it would complicate their lives. I understood that. So when they - when they finished school and one was already at university, he said he would go with them on a walking holiday and there he would tell them his life's story. At the time he was a nurse in a psychiatric hospital. When he came here to England as a young boy - he wanted to become a doctor in Czechoslovakia, but he had to leave it and then he went into the Army and he married and - before he demobilized in Czechoslovakia his wife was pregnant and he had to make money and so the best way for him to make money was to become a nurse in a psychiatric hospital, which was better paid than in an ordinary hospital. Anyway, but at the time he didn't have a telephone, and he would ring me from work. And for 2 or 3 months I didn't hear from him, so I wrote. And his wife rang me and said he - Walter is his name - had a nervous breakdown. So I got into my car and went there. And just when I parked the car opposite his house there came a priest, and rang his doorbell. He opened up and looked in a very dishevelled and - and - and sad condition. And I waited till the priest left and I came in. He was very glad to see me. And I said - "Did I see a priest come out of here?" "Yes", he said. "Helen and I, we got baptised". That was the end of it. Then he was in such a state I couldn't approach the subject anymore. Then came the Six Day War. And his son, the older son, was in the Imperial College studying to be an electrical engineer. And I invited him for dinner and - it was about 4 weeks or so after the War. And the son of a cousin of mine who was from Israel rang me - this is the same evening - and I said to him "Gaby, I pay you the taxi, do come here". I wanted him to see that I had Jewish relatives. And he

said he would come. And when the boy came I said to him "You will meet a war hero". That very moment I - smelt my schnitzel, you know, to burn. So I went into the kitchen and apparently he - very - in a very excited manner, he asked my husband, "How come that you know these people?" And my husband said "We met him on holiday". And didn't say he is the cousin of Greta. I didn't speak because I waited for that Gaby, who never arrived. I gave him some schnitzel to take back, he was staying in London in Southgate where his parents live. Next day his mother rings to thank me for the wonderful dinner I gave him and that he enjoyed the evening. And I told her. I told her that my husband John, said, "I met that Israeli boy on holiday". Whereupon she said "Yes, I know that John is very tactful". That is the end of the matter.

So they still don't know?

In a way they are both very intelligent. The younger one is in Huddersfield in a hospital as a biologist. The older one is in - lives in Coventry. On the telephone not long ago he told me he's become a church warden and he plays the organ - they are both very musical. He plays the organ in church.

But do you ever feel that you want to talk to them about it. You are their nearest family really, aren't you?

And I'm the only one from - from - the only - from his father's side who lives. No. Because of my - my - he says he doesn't want to.

Doesn't that cause you a lot of pain?

A sort of estrangement. Not with my cousin. He knows more about Judaism than I. Sunday afternoon, I always say I have a ? I have all sorts of people. I have a very good friend who - who comes also from my part of the world and was even less Jewish brought up than I am, but he became orthodox. And there are all sorts of debates going on. But I don't see them. Now I haven't seen them for quite a while. Since I have given up my car - as long as I had my car I used to go to Southgate, it was nothing you know. In 25 minutes on the North Circular Road.

Do you think perhaps they know, but they're worried about talking about it?

I think -

Or they think you don't want to talk about it?

No, they think what I think. They know exactly, and they don't want to cause their father pain, the father doesn't want to cause them pain. So they are tactful all around, because I can't imagine that grownup people, you know, one is 36 and the other is 38, wouldn't know somehow. When the older one - the younger one is not married - when the older one got married, he married a girl from some sort of working class family, but she's very intelligent and very nice, and her parents also. Also - working class maybe. But very nice. They gave a very beautiful wedding in Derby. My husband was a star in that wedding. I have a wedding photograph. Tails and - no, no tails. No, sorry. Very elegant. He always was, bow ties. And I was elegant.

Everybody kneeled, you know, we were the only ones who didn't. My cousin - then there was communion, because three Bishops officiated, because he played the organ already in London you know, and he was very friendly with an Indian who is a high priest.

Your cousin?

No, the son, the son. He has a bit of a religious sort of thing in him, you know, the son. And there was communion after, and my cousin started kneeling, you know, halfway through the church. My husband and I, you know, we were the stars of that wedding. Everybody, you know, came and introduced themselves to my husband. What a man, he was a very impressive looking man. What they thought, I don't know. The fact is that we didn't kneel down at the wedding.

Because you were your cousin's only family?

Yes.

And he was very happy to have you there?

Of course.

He wasn't embarrassed or ..?

Not at all, he invited us.

But he was Catholic then?

No, no, no. No, no, Church of England. They have communion.

End of Fl39 Side A

Fl39 Side B

No, I only can say - that - life didn't pass me by, put it that way. I have said - in a way a positive attitude to - to life in general.

What has been your feeling about being interviewed. Has it been a difficult experience for you?

No.

It hasn't awoken any memories that have ...?

No. No. I was prepared for it, first of all, and - you know I have been at that - symposium or whatever it was, in - there was once in - in the Institute of Architects, a very - you know there was that symposium, or whatever you might call it, which Mr Maxwell - Robert Maxwell -

'Remembering for the Future'.

That's it. Last year. And there was a man also from Prague. A Professor Bauer. One of the speakers.

Yahuda Bauer.

Yahuda Bauer. Very nice man, he comes from Prague. And he said "One should give it on record". Up till now I never did. I did once, partly only, because you know when you ask for your compensation you had to go to a doctor. A doctor which was enstated by the German Embassy. Who had to interview you, examine you, if you had suffered any harm. And according to his testimony you would get a pension for - for health reasons. And that was a man called, Lehman, Dr Lehman in Camden Town. And I came there and he wanted to know - you know, a sort of interview - "When did you go to Theresienstadt? How long did you live there?" When I said I went -

When did you go to see him?

That must have been in 1958, maybe, or so. And when I went - when I started - and then in March - I came to Auschwitz. He said, literally, "Oh, that must have been terrible. There were so many revolting Jews which made it even .." - something like that. I got up and said "Are you Jewish?" I wanted to - to - to strangle him or something. "Yes", he said. I took my handbag and went. I couldn't speak to him anymore. But you're revolting, revolting.

But he knew you were Jewish?

Of course. And I was in such a state at that time that I went on foot home. And my compensation file was with a man called Dr Bobasch. When I came up here, West End Lane - he lived around the corner. Somebody - "Mrs Augstein" - you know, I was so dazed. And I told him the story. Oh, you must come immediately tomorrow

to meet his partner at the time, Dr Kusch. And he said that he knows that he is - he knows his attitude, he was - there was a group of German Jews who - wanted to become, you know, Nazis, or something like that. And he apparently was - that's what Dr Bobasch told me, he was one of those. And you must come and you must sign a testimony and we go with you to the notary. And we went on holiday the same day. My husband by the car, he waited downstairs, and we went on to the coast. And when we came back I had a letter from Dr - from Dr Lehman, where he wrote - I have all the files here. The remark he made to me was misinterpreted, he wanted to cheer a depressed patient, he wanted to cheer me up, because he had met on holiday just now, Mrs A of B, who was in Theresienstadt and she has there to suffer mostly of the bad behaviour of her fellow Jewish prisoners. That's what he wrote to the German Embassy. And the German Embassy - Dr Bobasch sent my written affidavit to the German Embassy. Whereupon I sat down on a Sunday - we arrived back on a Friday - and I wrote about five or six pages of them. How badly the non-Jews behaved in comparison to the Jews. And if no Jew would have survived, including me, if he wouldn't have found somebody, another Jew, who helped you if you fell down. And if that fellow Jew wouldn't have helped you to get up you would have had it. And in the end, you know, - when Mengele - There was a woman called - because Mrs Schmidt by then had thrown me out of her 'bekleidungs kammer'. And she helped me - a Jewish woman, and you could never have survived unless you had a Jewish friend.

Tell me, did you get reparation?

Yes I did. And then he went to a professor at the University of - a Professor of Law of the University of London. A Professor Korner. I don't know, I don't think he lives there anymore, this was in 1958. But he was at the time, people said, a real personality. And he wrote to me a long letter, I should forgive him, and should consider it as a lapsus linquae. But the letter which I wrote, six pages of it, to Dr Bobasch, they rang me afterwards that I should - if I would allow them to publish it. But I didn't. At that time I didn't want to ... Now I can speak about it. All my friends said the only person who never speaks about her - her - wartime experience is Greta. But now I speak about it. Now it's history, you know. But the first - years, 20 or 30 years, I couldn't.

You got your reparation then in 1960?

Except when I retired. I got it when I - then I retired.

How much did you get?

At the time I can't remember. Now I get - for my - for - I get now - I get now much more. At the time I don't know. Maybe I got at the time £50 a month. I might have got £50 or £60. But in 1960 when I got it, - I didn't earn more with my hats. You see. I got other reparations too. I got, you know, my parents had property and - and - which I would have inherited, with my sister together.

Does this come automatically or do you have to reapply?

No, no, no, you have to - of course, nothing comes automatically, you have to work hard. Files and files you have to write and - I was lucky enough with my fathers factory that the next door neighbour of my - my father had a weaving mill, textile. And next door was a machine tool factory. And my father - they thought they could transfer the - machinery to - to the Protectorate at the time, you know. And so - but at the border it was confiscated and my father's machinery didn't get into the Protectorate. And then the factory was empty. And he - there was a Mr Muller, was a good friend of my father, a German. And he went to Prague and said he would buy the factory, and my father should sell it, because the roof leaks and, you know - no central heating worked, nothing worked. And so he bought actually - a price - how do you say when you want to have the price of something -

A valuation?

A valuation. And I had that valuation from a German you see. My father never got the money. He wanted to - because my father imprisoned before all the things were - But I had the valuation. So, you know, some people could - fantasise or something. I didn't need to have any witnesses because I had the valuation, and what they actually wanted to give - the Germans - to my father. It was less than was the real value. But this is immaterial. I got some of it.

What I really wanted to know is, does the reparation from the German government come automatically every year?

Every month.

You don't have to continue to go to a doctor?

No, no, no, only to sign that you are still alive once a year.

You don't need to go to a doctor anymore?

No, no, no.

That was only once, was it?

They wanted to send me once more to him. And I refused. I said I won't go, I don't want to see him anymore.

It had to be Dr Lehman, you couldn't go to Dr Bobasch?

No, I had already my pension, but maybe two or three years later they wanted to check on it. And they sent me then to Dr Lehman. You know, they had it on the file at the German Embassy. I said I won't go. And Dr Bobasch and Dr Kusch wanted to force me to go to him. I said no, I'd rather forfeit my pension, I won't go, I don't want to see that - that face anymore. You know, he looked like a German, you know, he must have been in one of these combat duelling fraternities, you know, he had scars on his cheeks. He looked a bit like a German you know.

Despite the fact you didn't go, you still got your pension?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Well they must have written to the German Embassy that I refused to go because of that - to - And that was the end of it. I had never to go, only that once. I never got very much, I got only 25 percent. There are people who got 50 percent. Like disability or something like that. I got the lowest. But -

Finally, I'd like to ask you how has your health been as a result?

Well, quite good, you know. I - I - have a bit of... No, I never had any - serious trouble. I had a bit of - after my husband died, you know, I fell twice, you know, broke my ankle and - It was all due to that stress I think. No, I'm all right, for my age I'm all right.

That's splendid. Thank you very much indeed?

I thank you for listening to me.

End of F139 Side B

End of interview

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Ref. No.: C410/012

Playback Nos: Fl36 - 9 inc.

Collection Title: Living Memory of the Jewish Community

Interviewee's surname: AUGSTEIN (nee Heller) Title: Mrs

Interviewee's forenames: Margaret

Date of Birth: 12th February 1913

Sex: Female

Date(s) of recording: January to March 1989

Location of interview: Interviewee's home

Name of interviewer:

Professor Hilde Himmelweit and Jennifer Wingate

Type of recorder: Marantz 430

Total no. of tapes: 4

Speed: -

Type of tape: C90

Noise Reduction: dbx

Mono or stereo: Stereo

Original or copy: Original

Additional material: None

Copyright/clearance: Full

Interviewer's comments: The interview was started by Professor Hilde Himmelweit and completed by Jennifer Wingate

Fl36 Side A

Parents Ernst and Freda; father one of 16 children, in LAUN (Now LAUNY) in Czechoslovakia. Grandfather a merchant, comfortably off. Father had a factory. They had a nice house in a good neighbourhood. Not orthodox, but went to synagogue on High Holy day. Spoke German at home. Mother from Konigsberg. Worked with older sister in Francisbad. Did not work after marriage. Neither parents, nor grandparents, religious or political. Mother ran the house. Had a maid. Sister 8 years older; brother 9 years younger. No mazuzah on the door. Father's favourite; always among best at school; once when she wasn't, father was so ashamed that he did not go to the barber. Started school at 5. 5 or 6 Jewish children. Only anti-semitism was the Turnlehrer (the gymnast teacher). Did not go to Cheder with father, but sometimes went to uncle for a Seder. Mother sometimes made a special meal, and would fast on Yom Kippur and go to synagogue. But in between they would go to a Konditorei. In the 1920s father bought some land in Israel. He was guardian to sister's children and sent a niece to Palestine to live on a Kibbutz. They did not visit. Margaret was for a time in the Zionist Blauweiss group. She had mostly, but not only, Jewish friends. She wanted to marry a non-Jewish man; parents objected, but mainly to his class. They had a Jewish mayor during World War I. 90 orthodox families came from the East, no contact with them. She played tennis, had dancing lessons, went skiing with friends, including boys. Both Jewish and non-Jewish, which parents did not mind. Met first husband in Prague; and then skiing, an engineer. She was 25, he was 33. Married in April 1937. He was a Czech Jew from religious background, but not religious himself. She did not work after marriage. Left wing, not interested in Zionism. She had been a secretary; done the Arbitur, but did not go to university. From 1933 many Jewish German refugees. Family discussed emigration after Munich. She stayed with parents-in-law and registered with the American Consul. Husband had relatives in USA; got an affidavit in late 1938. Paid for it, but did not get a visa for parents to go to Cuba. Old friend crossed a road to avoid her. Father's non-Jewish tenant made difficulties about paying his rent. There was a procession where her father lived, but Prague was still all right. Parents came to Prague. Feels there was no real opposition to the Germans. Sister and brother-in-law given the visa Margaret had arranged for herself, and went to America. She and her husband, being Slovakian, did not wear the Yellow Star at the beginning. He carried on working, built a house for a Senator. A German threw them out of their flat and they went to a suburb. Parents with them for a while longer.

Fl36 Side B is blank

Fl37 Side A

[Possibly some of the interview not recorded. What follows is presumably in Auschwitz]

She came in to barracks, where most heads were shorn. With 4 or 5 to a bunk, she could still turn. Thought 'This is Dante's inferno'. She had always suffered from constipation, so did not get diarrhoea; she thinks this helped her to survive. Less hungry in Theresienstadt than in Auschwitz, where it was only Jews. Called to the

appell. She did not eat all she was given. Tried to keep herself clean. By contacting a fellow Czech in the Bekleidungskammer, she got into a better hut with own bunk. She had own clothes until they were stolen. This woman took them for a daily shower, and although she had a whip she did not hit them; she was a German Bohemian. They were next to the gas chambers. She saw Mengele; if he lit a cigarette, that meant something. Feared for her family. She worked at clothes sorting, and once saw her cousin's coat. These things went to Germany. They received more, not better, food. There was an inter-camp postal service for the non-Jewish prisoners. She was caught writing to her husband. The SS did not think she was a Jew. Worked with daughter of the Czech Chancellor of the Exchequer. In same hut wife of leader of Polish Government, then in England. Many Polish Christian women. Spoke French to her. Anti-semitic woman still said rosary for all those gassed. These women laundered for the SS; one gave her some fresh bed linen. One woman, daughter of Polish Minister, would prefer to stay in Auschwitz, than that the Russians should win the war. In the better hut 60 Jews; 140 or so non-Jews. Did not work on Sunday. Did not make friends. There was the morning appell and then work. Would stand all day in the beginning, when still in quarantine. In the morning non-real coffee and bread, then a soup. When Hungarians came, they got Speck. Would organise a bowl for herself, which would be stolen. All the Kapos were Polish. Got more soup in the evening. Was not hungry. Got very thin. Never shaved. An Italian doctor cut her hair very short so that it looked as though she had been shaved at one time. Thinks that few people who were shaved survived, because of loss of dignity and gradual treatment as less than human. She was never beaten. Could not imagine dying, nor of anyone ever being allowed to survive. French women arrived in June 1944; were shaved, and 'gave up'; all died. She saw her husband a few times. Was thrown out of her hut. Taken into the hospital by friend. Saw Mengele making selections. Could, by this time, hear the Russian guns. Chosen as a nurse by Mengele, who removed her Yellow Star. All others not Jews went to Carlsbad.

Fl37 Side B

Two camps in Neu Rolau, one for men and one for women. Factories, one part for Messerschmits, other ceramic utilitarian objects. She did not work, but kept the wash basins from freezing, to facilitate washing. Big hut, butter food. She and her friend the only Jews, but did not admit it. She was appointed as a doctor, even though she was a nurse, and got her friend to come as a nurse into the field hospital. Many Russians there. Sister of Heidrich - the priest who hid people in a church - was there. Saw carpets of flames from the bombing of Dresden. Camp was dissolved and all went to Carlsbad. Joined by men from a hunger march. They marched towards Dachau. Stayed outside an Abbey - Stift Tepel. The monks did not help them. Very cold; many died overnight. No one on the march helped them. Saw many refugees and wounded German soldiers. She escaped from the guard. They turned their coats; her friend had a shaven head. Went to a poor village house and were given coffee, but could not eat the bread. Her friend in a very bad way. She was better. They had taken porcelain with them from the factory, and linen. They did not look Jewish. Sold the porcelain for food and money. Met up with some German soldiers. They

took her in their cart as they thought Czech women would give them protection. They wanted to buy, and could not, even a comb. Got shoes for her friend. Helped by a Czech woman and boy to go into the protectorate. The mayor said that they would be 'witnesses against Hitler'. Stayed with them, then on to Pilsen. Arrived in Prague. Found friend's non-Jewish aunt, who took them in. Got ration cards. On 9th May, revolution. Before that, got Red Cross food. Russians came in on the 9th. Shooting in the streets. Went to a doctor she knew who took them in. Barricades were up. Went to government office to get her home back. The German who had been there had hanged himself outside. Got rid of everything German in the flat. Saw crowds of people and knew that they were taking revenge on Germans or collaborators. Avoided it. Got high temperature, thought it was typhoid.

Fl38 Side A

Neighbours came to her from Theresienstadt; she helped them with accommodation and food. She herself felt sure that all her family were dead. She met a Jewish Russian soldier who gave her food and wanted to marry her. Many non-Jewish Czechs helped her. Her father's factory had been taken over by an 'Aryan', who had intended to pay her father according to a (German) valuation, but had been prevented when her father was arrested. Returned to her father's flat, in German hands, with billeted Russians. The best Christian people she met in the camps were the communist political prisoners. The Russians raped German women, but not Czech. Her sister had sent her food parcels from the USA, but Margaret did not want to leave Czechoslovakia, and wanted her sister to return. She got the factory back, making machine tools, and some money; had a comfortable home. Met a man from Dachau who had seen her husband die. She gave some French lessons, and met her second husband from London. Married in England. Had wanted to go to the US. Politically worse when the Russians left. Could not get visa for America, so came here on 'marriage papers'. They became British in 1949. She learned English and made hats for ladies. Also did private nursing. Husband was a metallurgist, visited foundries. Made railings. After 1960 she did not work; husband comfortable. Got a visa and ticket to go to Colombia in South America. But came to England to an unpleasant small flat.

Fl38 Side B

She had no children - had terminated pregnancy at beginning of war 'because of the circumstances'. Had wanted to live in New York and took out her first papers, but would not have suited her husband, so returned to England. For her, Theresienstadt had not been a bad experience, as she was among Jews who all helped each other. Could not imagine how they would kill her, so she was not afraid. Even now will not speak to anyone in German; but no feelings of revenge now. Has not come to terms with her experience, but it is in the past. She was in Belsen February 1944; hoped to be bartered for by the British with tanks, but not possible after Hungary occupied in March. They did not believe the stories they heard in Theresienstadt about the Polish camps. Travelled from Belsen to Auschwitz by cattle truck; took two weeks; all in her truck survived. Overheard people outside saying that they were going to be

killed. Hungarians and Poles. Left luggage on the truck. Hungarians and Poles separated. Does not recall her tattoo being done - 'A5III'.

F139 Side A

Glad they did not go to live in America. Husband ill for 6 months before he died. A reunion of people from Theresienstadt at Kibbutz, Givat Chaim in Israel, in May 1989. After she finished making hats she did very little except drive for husband who visited foundries in Halifax, also Switzerland; electric luggage trollies, e.g. in hotels and stations. Travelled for business and pleasure with him. She knew the judge who presided over the case of Prince Rupert, who wanted to get British citizenship on the basis that he was related to Queen Victoria. She is now a member of Liberal Synagogue in St John's Wood. Has some family living in London. Her cousin converted to Christianity and his children know nothing of their background. She was prepared to be interviewed. Had gone to 'Remembering for the Future'. Had seen a doctor to apply for compensation. She received reparation. Also separate reparation for the property. Comes every month. Feels her health is quite good.

End of Interview