

**NATIONAL**

# Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH  
COMMUNITY**

**EDITH BIRKIN**

Interviewed by Katherine Thompson

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



## **IMPORTANT**

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F201, Side A

Could you tell me where and when you were born?

I was born in Prague. In November 1927. And - we had a flat. We had a three bedroomed flat. And we lived there with my sister who is older. And - a maid. And I have very happy memories of my childhood.

What was your father's name?

My father's name was Max Hoffmann. My mother's name was Irma - Irma Hoffmann. And my father was a - a lawyer. And he worked for the Union Bank in Prague.

And what was your mother's maiden name?

My mother's maiden name was Altschul. Her parents were Klara and Karl Altschul, my grandparents, whom I knew very well. But my father's parents were dead when I was a child. I never knew those. But I knew my mother's parents. Who were very kind and nice to me. I've got very happy memories of - being with them.

They lived in Prague as well?

They lived in Prague. And before I went to school, before I was 6, my grandfather used to come every day, in the morning, and take me out for a walk. Or skating. Or take me to the park and we would feed the birds. He always had pocketsful of sweets for the other children. They all loved him, they all followed him around. Talked to him and - we had a very lovely time with him.

Did you get on with your sister?

No. My sister was much older. And I think I came as a bit of a surprise to her when I was born. And we always were quarrelling and fighting and - We get on now, but -

only just. We get on and we talk to each other every week, but we don't get on if we are together an awful lot. We never really got together that well.

But your home life you remember as a happy time?

Well, my home life was very, very happy. I think most of the Jewish children in Prague had a very happy time. We lived very near a park, Letna. And I went to a Jewish primary school and made a lot of friends there. We were only about 16 in one classroom. So I knew everybody very well. And the parents all knew each other. And - home was very happy. My mother was always there when I needed her and wanted her. And she always had time for me. And she was a very kind and warm and understanding lady.

Did you have a Jewish background?

Well, we weren't - we weren't orthodox. I didn't know anybody in Prague who was orthodox. I don't think anybody was, before the war anyway. We had a few orthodox people coming in from Germany when Hitler came. But there weren't any orthodox people and - But we did keep the festivals. The main festivals. We went to synagogue on the main festivals, we kept the festivals. And I went to a Jewish primary school. And we had a sort of Jewish background, but not an orthodox Jewish background. Not a kosher, we didn't eat kosher or anything like that. But we knew we were Jewish and we were proud of it. And - most of my friends were Jewish.

Did you have any non-Jewish friends?

Well, I was friendly with them. We played at school or in the park. But we didn't go to each others homes really. All my friends were Jewish, and - most of the time I was just with one. I had a friend who lived very near me and we were always the best of friends. And then there were a few others, but - My real best friends were Jewish. Because we went to school together. But I did know, I did know - non-Jewish children who I was very friendly with, but then when Hitler came and we weren't

allowed to go to school they didn't want to know me. If I said hello to them they wouldn't answer. They didn't want to know. Got very anti-semitic.

That was quite a shock?

Well, it was at the time. But - it was happening to everybody, you know, they - changed altogether.

Did you speak Czech or German at home?

I spoke Czech. My parents sometimes spoke German. But I never spoke German at home, although I could understand it and speak it. I never spoke it at home. And - I spoke Czech with my parents, although they spoke German together sometimes. They always spoke Czech to me.

What was the language at school?

Czech. Oh yes. We learned a little bit of Hebrew, but we didn't speak it, just sort of for the prayers or something like that. But we spoke Czech.

And did you keep all the Jewish festivals at home also weekends?

No, no, no. No. No, not the Saturdays, just the big festivals.

What happened at Christmas for example. Did Christmas mean anything?

No, we had a maid, a Christian maid. And we had a little Christmas tree, which was very pretty. But - for us it was about all. We didn't have presents or anything like that. There were chocolates on the tree. Nice things like that, which you could eat afterwards. But we didn't really sort of keep Christmas. I suppose the maid went to church. I really don't know. But we kept Chanukah. We had our presents for Chanukah. And not for Christmas.

Could you tell me a little bit about your grandparents?

Yes. Well I - when I knew my grandparents they were retired. But I knew that my grandfather had a big - shoe factory. Not in Prague, in Ceska Lipa. Bohmisch Lipa as it was called then. And they lived there. But that was before my time. And they had a big house with a walled garden, because I went there and they showed it to me. But they just had a flat and - lived a very contented life. I saw them every day and my - grandmother either came to us or my mother went to see her, it was my mother's mother. And my grandfather used to take me out a lot and - we were in constant touch, you know.

Do you know anything about your paternal grandparents?

Well, not really because I never met them. They were dead when I was born. And, you know, honestly I don't even know what they did, because I was too young to be interested in that sort of thing, in somebody who was dead. If I - if my parents had been alive later I am sure I would have asked questions later on, I would have wanted to know what they did. But I didn't because I never knew them, they didn't mean anything to me. You see. So I don't know anything about them.

Can you tell me a little bit about your home life?

Well, I can remember back - to when I was a baby, you know. I remember when I was in a pram and my mother pushing me and smiling at me, I remember that. And - yes, we had our meals together. We - started school at 8 o'clock, and my father started work at 8 o'clock. So - we had breakfast together. Which was a sort of proper continental breakfast with rolls and butter, coffee or cocoa or something like that. And - then I went to school. And we had lunch at 2 o'clock. My father came home for lunch, there was a sort of siesta. He was home between 2 and 4 every day, and we had our main meal at lunchtime. And - in the afternoon - I would go out to play, swimming or skating or to the park, it depends on the time of the year. I was very sporty and I loved going skating and swimming. And my father went back to work

and then we had another meal in the evening at 8 o'clock when he came back. And we all sat round the table and talked, everything was discussed at the table.

That is very interesting. Did you discuss political or religious ...?

Well, you see I was really quite young at the time. Yes - I think a lot - a lot of the conversation between my parents was about his work. This happened and that happened and - so and so annoyed me and so and so was nice and that problem. So problems were discussed. And, you know, my mother might tell us whom she met and whom she saw and the local gossip and - who she talked to and who was ill and who died and who was born and - all that sort of thing. And - then of course when - Hitler came - and, you know, one got interested in politics things were discussed, yes. At the table you know. About what's happening in the world and - what might happen. Not what would happen to us. We never dreamt about anything like that, but where sort of Hitler would go next and what he was up to and - what the rest of the world would do. Politics were discussed, yes.

So there always was a communal ...?

Oh yes. We were a very close family, a very happy family. I always felt very - not spoilt and I wasn't actually over-protected, I was one of the very few children who had a lot of independence. You know, I could go to school on my own before anybody else and all that. I was trusted. But I felt very secure and I knew my parents were there when I needed them. And they always were, they always had time for me, which was very nice. My father took me out every Saturday afternoon, just the two of us together. At first my sister and me, and my father took us out Saturday afternoon. Looking back on it now I think it must have been arranged with my mother, you know. Because he was at work so much, to - have us alone, you know, so we could talk to each other. And then when my sister got older and she had other things to do, it was me and my father. He used to take me out every Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. And we would go for a walk, go to the zoo or go skating together or swimming together. It was just the two of us, which was very, very nice.

Can you remember your first day at school?

Yes. Yes. Actually I can remember before my first day at school, because it was a Jewish school and the Jewish school was only just starting, it was a new Jewish school. And - that year it was just our year, we were the oldest, but every year there was a new class starting. So we were the only one. It was on the top floor of an ordinary school. Ordinary primary school. And we had the top floor. And we went to school a few days before it officially started, to be introduced. And instead of the teachers being there to talk to us, there was like a puppet theatre and the teachers were behind these puppets in this theatre, and the puppets were talking to us. Welcoming us, you know, saying what fun we are going to have and how nice it's going to be and - So that when school actually happened we were all looking forward to going to school thinking we were going to have puppets all the time. But it really was a lovely school, you know, the teachers were like uncles to us. And very, very nice. And - you know, our parents thought all we did was playing all the time, but we really learnt in a very modern way, in a - play way in a way, instead of sitting rigidly and repeating everything after the teacher, we did it in an interesting way, with games and all sorts of - so called toys, apparatus and building things and counting at the same time, you know. It was very, very nice.

You were 6 when you started?

I was - about 5 and three quarters when I started.

When you said you were on the top floor, did you mix with the other children?

Well, we didn't see them, no. They were on other floors. We weren't allowed to go to other floors, you know, we were on the top floor of an ordinary primary. There were three floors. There was a ground floor, a middle floor and the top floor. And our school was on the top floor. And we went up there and stayed there until we went home. We didn't see the other children. We didn't go to a playground or anything like that. Because when it was break we were just going round and round the corridor, you know, round and round.

The other children were non-Jewish?

On the other floors, yes. Yes.

Did you stay until 11 at this school?

Yes. Yes. And then we took a test. To go to the secondary school. Which I passed.  
And - then I went to this gymnasium.

That was a Czech one?

A Czech one, yes. And there was about - 8 Jewish children in our year.

Did you come across any anti-semitism in those years?

Well - no, I didn't. I only went for one year you see, and then I wasn't allowed to go to school anymore because - Jews weren't allowed to go to school. To any school. The Jewish school wasn't allowed to exist. And -

What year was that?

1939 I think. Yeh. I was born in '27 and I must have been 11 in '38. That's right. It was 1938. '38, '39. And after that I wasn't allowed to go to school. Well you see after that the German soldiers came and lived in the school. There was no school for anybody for a long time. That was the second year of the gymnasium, we hardly had any school at all. And we were given homework. We went once a week to some meeting place. And we were given homework for the week. And then we went back, gave in our homework and got new homework. And then we weren't allowed to go to school anymore.

Did your parents help you at all with your work?

Homework. No. No, they didn't really because I didn't ask for it. Well sometimes, you know, if there was a mathematical problem my father might help me. But on the whole I did my homework by myself. Though we spent a few hours at school, maybe one afternoon a week, and they explained things. We had books. We had to learn from books. It was all explained in the books. And they said, "Now you learn page so and so, about France or geography or mathematics", you know. It was all explained in the book and we had to do it ourselves. It was quite interesting, quite useful. I usually did it with a friend, together with a friend, we'd be together in our place or in her place and - do our homework together. If I didn't understand something we'd try to work it out together.

Did anyone have any idea how long, whether you would be able to take matric or ..?

Well no. I had stopped going to school, so I knew I couldn't do anything. It was the end of education so far, except that I just - got hold of books and read by myself, I said I am not going to be defeated. And also there were a few Jewish children, there was eight of us - together, and - one of the parents found us a teacher. And we had private lessons a couple of times a week. We would go for half a day, for the morning. And had private lessons to keep up with the same year where we are supposed to be. But it was all very secret. And we weren't - and the rest of the time we had to do homework by ourselves. And then we would discuss it with the teacher, which was - quite useful really, because once we knew we weren't allowed to go to school we were terribly keen to learn. So we did. And after that - we went to the camp.

Before we come to that. Can you tell me a little about your activities outside school. Music or theatre?

Well yes, I went - to the opera sometimes with my parents. To theatre sometimes. Not very often. I was only - you see by the time Hitler came you weren't allowed to go anywhere. I was 11. You weren't allowed to go to the theatre or opera or - or anywhere like that you see. We weren't even allowed to go to the park. We weren't allowed to go anywhere.

How did this affect your parents?

Well - the cultural side, I don't really know. I managed very well I'm sure. The reading, you know, you could always read and so on. But my father, of course, lost his job. And I think financially it must have been a great worry. Because although I think he had some savings, he was only allowed to take so much out every - week or month. So I - I - you see they didn't show their worries so much in front of me. My sister went to England in 1939. And I think they tried not to show too much worry in - although we discussed a lot, I think there must have been much more than I actually knew.

Did they ever think of leaving or emigrating?

Oh yes, but it was too late you see, because - at the beginning no, and then when we saw how bad it was they wanted to emigrate, but it was very, very expensive to get out and we didn't have the money. And I remember there was a family, friends of my parents, who were very rich. And my father suggested we all go out together and they pay and my father would repay it, where we were going he was going to work and repay it. And they said no. And they didn't go and we didn't go. They died in the camps. And my parents did. And what happened to the money. And they were just too mean to help out. And they had a lot of money - somewhere. So we didn't go. But - who could have known what was going to happen. We knew that we are going to have a bad time, we knew people are going to be anti-semitic. We knew that - we weren't allowed to do anything and be very, very careful. But who could have predicted something like that?

Did people think eventually one day this would be all over ..?

Yes, it will be over and we'll go back to normal. We didn't know we had to get out of our homes. We thought we'll stay in our home, we'll be restricted. We had to be very careful not to say the wrong thing, because people did go to concentration camps, anybody went, you know, even the Czechs or the Germans, if they - you know, said

the wrong things against the government. So one had to be careful and put up with anti-semitism and then it was going to be over and back to normal. Nobody could have known - what was going to happen.

As a child, did it worry you?

No. No. It - I mean it wasn't nice, but I - you know - not knowing what was going to happen, it did, and I said, "Well, one day it is going to finish, we put up with it", you know, because I still had my friends and my family. I had my home, I had my friends. It wasn't so bad, you know, - it depends how you take it.

Did you talk about it with your friends at all?

I suppose we must have done. Not too much. I think we tried to escape from it. We played and we -

How did your sister come to go to England?

Well actually she went - she went - first to - to the gymnasium, the German gymnasium, then she went to an English school. And she was going to teach English you see. And she was coming to this country to learn English properly, to get used to the speech and - to learn -

She just came on an ordinary visa?

Well, she was going to be like an aupair you see, she was having a job with some children. In Ireland, in Northern Ireland, in Londonderry. And she got this job as a sort of children's nanny or whatever you call it. And she was going to learn English. And she was going to come for a year. And so she had all the visa, everything ready. So when the time came - and Hitler actually came, she had all her documents ready and she got out.

So she got out after Hitler marched in?

Yes. Yes. She got out in 1939. And just before war broke out and I was supposed to follow her. And I was going with a children's transport. And I had everything ready packed, my suitcase was packed, everything was ready. But two weeks before the - transport when the war broke out, and I didn't go, and I was very happy, I didn't want to go. So that's how she got out. She was going anyway.

Could you have any communication with her?

At first, yes, via Switzerland.

Red Cross letters was it?

I don't know. My parents had some friends in Switzerland, and they must have given her the address and if there is going to be a war you can write to them in Switzerland. I don't know all the details, but I know that we did get letters - from her, from Switzerland.

For how long?

Well, until war broke out. I don't know exactly. After war broke out or maybe - I don't know if one could get letters after that, I can't remember exactly. Because in 1941 we went to the camp, so there wasn't an awful lot of -

1941?

'41 we went, yes. One of the first ones to go.

How did that happen. Did somebody come ..?

Yes, somebody came. We were actually the third transport, so we knew it was going to come. And I think my parents sort of got ready for it. Got things packed, the most

important things, you know. The warmest clothes and bags of rice perhaps and things like that, in a suitcase. Things that keep. And - yes, somebody came in the night.

In the night?

In the night, knocked on the door. Gave us this pink card. To come to this sort of assembly place in a few days time, there was a date. I think it was in three days time we were to - to come and assemble in this - Veletrzni Palac. Do you remember Veletrzni Palac? A thousand of us at a time.

What did they tell you about where you were going?

Oh, we were going to go to Poland, to Lodz. They told us where we were going. And they said there is a ghetto there and you are going to live in a ghetto. And even then, you know, we thought well all right, so we live in a ghetto, all the Jews together, at least we wont have to put up with insults from the other people, you know, and from the Germans and from the - other friends I had who didn't want to know, we would all be together there and live in a ghetto. I was only a child, I didn't think it was that bad, I think my parents probably did. And my mother was very depressed, I think she saw things coming then. But she didn't really say. But - not to me anyway. But she was very pessimistic then. And -

Before you went did you have to wear the yellow star?

Yes.

When did that start?

I can't remember exactly, but I think it started when Hitler came, or soon after. But I honestly don't remember exactly.

You had to wear that whenever you went out?

Yes. Yes. I think when Hitler came or when war broke out, I - I don't remember exactly. I know we had to wear the yellow star, but I don't know - when it started.

Did it bother you as a child?

Well, yes, I suppose it did.

Did you ever have any unpleasant confrontations with the Germans in the street or ..?

No, I was always very careful I didn't get in their way. If I saw any Germans walking in the street I - vanished somewhere in the crowd. That's how I survived the war I think, I always vanished out of their sight. I said if they don't see me they won't do anything to me. It's a good policy you know.

It was a policy of survival?

It was a policy of survival for me anyway. Stay out of the way, if they don't see you they can't kick you. Or they can't kill you. I mean they could have done, because they sent whole transports to be killed. But on a personal way, you know, they - didn't see me, so - I always stayed in the middle, you know, never in the front row or the back row. Always in the middle behind other people. Hiding away.

Almost instinctively you did this?

Oh yes. You had to be a bit clever. I mean it wasn't everything. You could be clever and if they took a whole transport and sent you to the gas chamber you couldn't do anything. But apart from that, you had to - you had to be a bit clever. You had an instinct for it. You could recognise their moods, you knew what they were up to, you know, when you could take a bit of liberty. I mean you couldn't -

You must have learnt that fairly early in life?

Oh yes. Oh yes.

Do you remember anything particularly unpleasant about these first time before you went?

Well, no, not - not - except that, you know, my friends wouldn't know me. I would say hello. And they - they didn't want to know. And I also know that a lot of Czech people who - give you away. If you did something wrong - they'd give you away for a bag of oranges or something like that, you know. Collaborators. I knew they existed. So you had to be very, very careful. You couldn't trust them.

Was there nobody who was helpful or nice?

Oh, there were one or two people, friends of my parents, who - who they could trust, yes. They were usually - relatives of mixed marriages you know. You might have - a Jewish friend of my parents who married a Christian woman. And her family. You could trust them. They were Christian people and - But we didn't know many of them.

Did you leave some of your belongings?

Well, we did. My mother had a fur coat. She had a Persian lamb fur coat. And she left that with somebody. I didn't know that, but when I came back I got it back. This person came to me and said, "Your mother left the coat. You can have it". And I took it to England with me. And - we were very, very poor my sister and I, and we sold it - at half the money. And I went to college, I went to teachers training college, and I had five shillings a week pocket money, which was very little. From that I had to pay my fares to college, my stationery, my - everything, you know, and left no money to go out somewhere. So we sold this coat and it gave me a little bit of pocket money to go out on Sunday afternoon to the Albert Hall to a concert or something like that. So that was useful. But - we had to get out of our flat. And - we had to go to a tiny flat. And - there wasn't enough room for all the furniture we had, so we stored it - in a sort of cellar. And we were very friendly with a sort of - keeper, you know, who looked after the block of flats. And we hid the things. And we had lovely -

Turkish - not Turkish - Persian carpets. And lovely furniture. And all sorts of - treasures. And - I knew they were there. Because later on we had to move all to one room and we still stored all those things in that cellar there. And when we came back - when I came back, I went back to that place you see. Because I was very friendly with them, they had a daughter and I was quite friendly with her. And I said, "What happened to those things?" She said, "Oh, the Germans came and took it all away". And I saw those things scattered about her flat.

End of F201, Side A

F201, Side B

When did you have to move out of your flat into this smaller flat?

Well, first we moved into a smaller flat because - the house that we lived in, we lived in a flat, and there was a row of these houses with these flats, they were newly built when my parents moved in before I was born. And they belonged to some German company. And they wanted all these houses free of the Jews, to have German families move in. So we had to get out and get something smaller. So we got a small flat in a new block of - fairly new modern block of flats. And it was really a tiny flat with one sitting room, one bedroom, tiny, tiny kitchen and bathroom. Like a sort of bachelor flat, like a studio flat. And then we had to get out of there and go and live in what was a sort of ghetto in Prague, you know, the old -

Where was that?

That was in - not far from where you were born. You lived. You know, in - in - Prague Five. Where the old ghetto was. You know, the old synagogues and - You know where the old cemetery is. And the old synagogues. Well around there, we were allowed to - to move. But we had to move in with a family that were already there. And all we had, the three of us, was one room.

For the whole family?

For the three of us, yes.

That must have been quite a change for you?

That was a bit of a nuisance. But I - you know, I took it all as a bit of an adventure really. It didn't bother me that much. As long as I was in Prague, it didn't bother me that much. I had my friends and we went out and - We couldn't go very much, but we were out in the streets, walking and - talking and flirting and - God knows what.

Did people make their own entertainment as they weren't allowed to go perhaps to theatres, in their own flats or did they get together more?

Well, not in our house. Well friends came, yes. Came in for a chat you know. My parents played bridge. Had a bridge party maybe once in a while. But not entertainment, not in our house, no.

Was food getting difficult?

There was rationing.

Was it different rationing for Jews?

No, I don't think so.

The same for everybody?

As far as I remember, I don't really know. As far as I remember it was the same for everybody. It was - it was scarce. I remember I was all the time hungry. Probably knowing it wasn't there you know. I remember eating a lot of bread with jam on it, not butter, there was not enough butter, but bread and jam. I was at that age when I was hungry anyway. So yes, we did feel it. But, you know, we didn't go thin or anything like that. It wasn't that sort of - hunger, you know. It was just you couldn't get the same things as you did before. It was probably quite healthy I should imagine.

Can you tell me a little bit about how it was when you actually had to leave?

Yes, well - we - all gathered in this big hall. And were given numbers, we all became a number. 118, 119, 120, I remember that. That was on the suitcases as well. Painted on the suitcases. And we slept on mattresses, there were mattresses all over the floor, we slept on these mattresses. And - then three days later we went on a train, an ordinary train. And that was about - I don't know, about a couple of days or so.

Well, we started off early in the morning. I remember going through the streets and it

was still dark and empty. Very early in the morning we went to the station. And arrived, I think - the following day in the evening.

And there were about a thousand people did you say?

There were a thousand people exactly. Every transport had a thousand people. To Poland. There were five transports altogether. Ours was the third transport. And they were all professional people. The men had some sort of a - profession. Like a doctor. They called it 'the doctors transport'. They all got this title 'doctor'. Whatever they were it was 'doctor somebody'. And so they were quite interesting people. Lots of friends amongst them.

Were people depressed or worried?

Some were. There was one suicide I think, or suicide attempt. My mother was very depressed. My father was very optimistic, he wasn't. And I wasn't too depressed, I had a lot of friends there. We went on the same transport and we just sort of walked around together and talked and - perhaps flirted with the boys a bit and - it wasn't so bad, it was all a bit of an adventure. You see I was very active myself, I was a very active child. Very sporty. Liked to have a lot of fun, a lot of adventures you know, and - it was a bit of an adventure. Still didn't realise, you know, we are all going to die. We just thought we are going to be in a ghetto and we are going to have the same sort of rations, you know, and - the war will be over in a few months time and we will come back. I think my parents probably knew it wasn't going to be as good as all that.

Did you have any food on the train?

We had - food in that exhibition hall and we were given - I think a loaf of bread each, and - some sausage or something like that. We had a few things from home. I think my mother brought a few things to eat.

Any drink?

I can't remember about drink. We were alright, on that journey we were alright. I think we had thermos flasks.

Were the Germans unpleasant in the way they treated you?

Not on the journey, no, we were just sitting in an ordinary train and - having a bit of a sleep and - chat, you know, people just talked to each other all the time. It was a sort of compartment it was open, it wasn't all separate compartments, it was sort of open and - people just either knew each other, got to know each other, and talked. It was quite lively.

So where did you actually arrive?

We went to - to the Lodz ghetto. We arrived there, it was in end of October, beginning of November.

1939?

'41. '41. And - we arrived - in the evening. It was dark, it was - maybe 5 or 6 o'clock, but it was really very dark and it was snowing a bit. And we arrived outside the town, outside the ghetto. And I remember walking for a long, long time, it might have been two or three miles, something like that, or it seemed a very long way. And we walked and walked and walked through this dreadful weather. In the dark. And then we came to the ghetto. And there were these terrible - shabby - houses, with broken windows. And people coming out, they heard us come, you know. And they came out of the houses and stood outside. And they had been there, these Polish Jews, they'd been there for - about two years. And they were - they looked so terrible, you know, they were so shabbily dressed, with blankets over them. And - very, very - uncivilised they looked. And I was quite frightened. They really looked like animals. And - they were begging and putting their hands out, wanting us to give them - any food if we had it. It was really quite frightening. And - we - walked for some time through these streets, seeing these people on both sides. And then we turned into a school, what used to be a school. And there wasn't any furniture, any bunkbeds or

anything. And there were fifty of us to one room. And we were very tired, we wanted to sleep, we didn't sleep the night before on the train. So fifty of us in quite a small room. And we were like sardines. We had to sleep on the floor without a mattress or blanket or anything. Just slept there. Just right one next to the other, you know. A room about the size - of this room, you know. And - then you could see that things weren't to be so nice. We didn't quarrel really very much, but you know it was - very difficult to sleep, because you were so squashed, you know, and if somebody turned everybody had to turn because, you know, you didn't fit into each other very well. People sort of slept feet to head, you know, to make a little bit more room. And it was very, very uncomfortable. You sort of had your head on your rucksack. They took the suitcases away from us.

Did you ever see them again?

We actually did, but we didn't think we would. We saw them a few weeks later. They took the suitcases away and I said, "Oh, we will get them later, they'll come back to us because we can't carry them". And we didn't see them for weeks and we thought we would never see them again. And it had our clothes in it and a little bit of food, semolina, things like that, peas, dried things that would keep. And - I remember one incident, before we went to the ghetto, when we were about to go to the station and we were all lining up and - we used to have a piano at home. And I was very keen to learn, but we had to sell it, or they would have taken it away from us. So I got an accordion, a piano accordion, and I was learning to play that, and I was very keen, and we were going to take it with us, I wanted to take it with me. And my father was holding it. And the German came along, took it from him and slapped his face very hard and said, "Who do you think you are to take something like that with you?", you know. And that was very - sad, and I didn't like to see that of course, my father being slapped. And so we each could take just a rucksack, we had a rucksack. And so when we were in the ghetto we sort of had a rucksack for a pillow, that was all.

Did your parents sort of comfort you at all or did you just not say anything ..?

I wasn't complaining. They were there. They were a comfort just by being there. And they didn't sort of push me away or anything. But we were all in it together and - I remember going for a walk - with my father on the first morning. Being very, very frightened, because the people were so - animal-like. They were thin and - savage sort of, you know, so uncivilised. You see we came all from Prague. You know what Prague was like, well dressed and civilised. And they were so - strange, they were orthodox you know. And they had these strange - garments on, and hats and caftans and lice crawling all over them. The men with their beards and the sidelocks and - the women with their wigs and shawls and all sorts of things. But very, very shabby and dirty and - lice.

And they spoke Polish I suppose?

They spoke Polish or Yiddish. And that was very frightening. I know I held on to my father.

What happened to the original inhabitants of this ghetto. Because you said these people had been there for two years only?

Well, I think there's always been a - not a ghetto there, but sort of Jewish quarter there. But people had to make room for others. They had to get squashed. Whereas before a family might have a flat. Now they were only allowed one room, so people - you know, the family were allowed one room. So they got very squashed.

So what happened that first morning after. Did anybody come and tell you where you were going to live?

Well - my - my aunt and uncle - and my cousin - and another aunt and uncle - and another aunt, they came by the first transport. And they had been there, so we found out where the first transport was, which school. So we went there to see them and they had been there for about - two weeks. So they told us a little bit about it. So we found out - about the life there. And -

What did they tell you?

Well, they just told us what is happening. They just answered our question of course, you know. Where do you get your food and what is it like and what do you do and..? Just the sort of thing one would ask - when you want to get to know a place.

And what was it like, the life. How did you exist there?

Well, at first we were in that school. And we were given - we didn't have rations, we were given so-called food, which was just soup. When you came to the ghetto there was this dreadful, dreadful smell. It was in the winter. And it was freezing. And you could smell - rotten cabbages - and beetroot. There was a smell of beetroot. And - what you were given was beetroot soup, which I couldn't eat at first, it was so awful, it wasn't the sort of good beetroot, it was terrible beetroot soup, it was just water with bits of beetroot swimming in it. And I couldn't eat it for a few days, but then I was so hungry I ate it and didn't get enough of it. Or it was cabbage soup made of rotted cabbage. And I think we got a loaf of bread a week. And - I think a little bit of sugar - we got sometimes. And then we got what they called 'coffee'. It was just sort of brown water. It wasn't really coffee. And with that you cleaned your teeth and did everything. There was a courtyard of that school and there was a pump. And we all had to wash from that one pump, so you queued up, somebody was pumping, you know, and you washed -

In public?

In public, yes. Somebody was pumping and you were sort of - washing yourself.

In the winter?

Yes. Men stripped to the waist. And - I think - it's funny you asked that, because I never think about that now. But I think we probably took a little bowl of water up to the room and then just sort of had a quick wash when nobody was looking, you know. And then there were toilets. Maybe we washed in there. Do you know I - it's funny, I

never thought of that again. I remember that pump where people were washing, the first day. And I think we had these little saucepans, we each had a little saucepan that we brought from home somehow. Where we got our soup into. And - we would bring water up - to - I think there were some sort of - cloakrooms, toilets, or something like that. And we took it up there and had a little wash. And - I know we tried to keep ourselves clean. Washed the clothes and all that. I'm trying to think how we washed the clothes. - It's funny you know, I never thought much about it, but I - I don't even remember now how we - I never thought about it, how we washed the clothes. But we did, we kept ourselves very clean and civilised, these Czech people.

You stayed very much as a group?

Mmm.

You didn't mix with the other people?

No.

You couldn't speak to them properly?

Not the Polish people, no. They talked in Yiddish. Well we could sort of - with German and Yiddish, which is very similar. We could make each other understood. And they tried - when you went out in the street they attacked you, they wanted - not attacked you - to beat you up, but they wanted to buy things from you, you know, they sort of crowded you, "Have you got something to sell? Have you got any clothes to sell? Have you got any jewellery to sell?" You might sell it for a bit of food and so on, because although they were very hungry these people and there was rationing, some of them had means of getting things over the fence, you know, they had contacts outside. So they might have a bit of food and they'd give you a slice of bread for a pair of trousers or something like that. So they did crowd you when you went out. Any transport that came and they saw somebody decently dressed, they would come and ask - and pestered you. They were like savages. Another thing I remember that first day is that - cart where they picked up the dead people, you know, the - when

people died they came and collected all the dead people from the - rooms, or out in the street, just shoved them onto this sort of - like a cart - took them away. And people standing outside wailing, you know, if a relative died. And get these people to collect them and then they stood out there wailing. It was very, very frightening, because - people didn't do that in Czechoslovakia, all this wailing and - moaning and shouting and crying and screaming and all that.

It is part of the religious ...?

I think it's quite a good thing psychologically probably. But that's what happened. It was very, very frightening. Seeing these dead people put on these carts, you know, wrapped in sheets. Sort of arms and legs hanging out. It was our first day in the ghetto.

It must have been a severe shock?

It was a - it was a very, very big shock. And - you know, I'm painting now - memories of the Holocaust. And I am painting all these things. I've painted this - first day in the ghetto, and I've painted this funeral cart, this cart coming for the dead people.

Does it help you if you paint?

It helps me to paint these things, but it also does me good to know that I am - leaving a record of what happened. Something that - wasn't photographed, the camera didn't reach. And also in memory of those people who - who died. Who wanted to be remembered. You see they always used to say, "If you survive..." - You know the older people said, you know, "We won't - survive. But if you survive you tell them what really happened, because nobody will believe what happened, you must tell them". So -

These were the Polish people who told you that?

Oh no. No. Anybody. Anybody who was in the camps. Would say "You've got to tell people what happened, what these Germans did". So - I am painting all these things.

Did you have any contact with Germans while you were in Lodz?

Oh, they came sometimes, in a coach, you know, coach and horses. And ride through. The ghetto, you know, the big fat - Germans in uniform. And - they - if there was a deportation, of course, they would come. Every so often they would deport - somebody. The first deportations were more or less voluntary. Anybody - they made promises that where they would go they would get work and better food and factories and they'd work and have a better standard of living, better housing. So people used to say, "Oh, it can't be much worse than here". Because we really lived in dreadful conditions at that time. So - there were these posters which said people could go. So the - Germans would come with lorries and pick people up if they wanted to go. And the next deportation I remember was - incidentally, these deportations, my aunts went. My uncle and two aunts went. And we never saw them again. And we heard - much later after the war I heard that they were all taken out and shot. These people voluntarily went - they took them - I think on a train - and somewhere outside, you know, they just - shot them. And - and - and buried them in mass graves. They found these graves later on.

Did such news ever get back to Lodz, that this is what happened?

Well, not to me. Whether the grownups knew and didn't tell us, didn't want to frighten us - that I don't know. I didn't know.

How long did you spend in Lodz?

Three and a half years. Three and a half years.

What was life like. I mean eventually it must have evolved into some sort of routine?

Yes. Well you see - after some time - you see after that winter, we came at the beginning of the winter. It was a very, very severe winter, people didn't have fuel, they didn't have food enough. They got diseases. They got typhus and typhoid and dysentery and - all kinds of diseases. And lots and lots of them died. Thousands of people died that winter, specially older people. And so rooms became vacant, so we then went - out of the school - into - private rooms. And - the three of us. Plus a girl - who was with us in that school, who I made friends with, she was on her own. You had to have at least four people to one room.

How old was this girl?

The girl was a bit older, she was about 17.

How was it that she was there by herself?

I don't know. For some reason she got - I don't know. Her parents weren't there, she was on her own, she came on her own, she was on her own. And she was about 17 at the time. And - you see what happened, we were in that first school and we were on the floor I told you about. But sometimes later that winter we went to another school and there were bunkbeds. And they were on two floors, you know, downstairs and top. And - you had two people to one bunk. They were only small ones, really for one person. And this girl shared this bunk with me, bunkbed with me. So when we then moved to the rooms she came with us and she shared the bunk with me again. There were two bunks, like beds, you know, - single ones. And my parents were in one and we were - in the other. But she then volunteered to go with a transport, you know, so I alone on the bunk. The three of us then. Yes, so we were in this - room. It was much better because there was a little bit of a private life as a family. And we then had rations. And - very poor rations, terrible rations, but, you know, we had rations and we - cooked a little bit. Or you could cook soup. Otherwise there wasn't enough.

You cooked yourself?

Well, we cooked ourselves. You went to these gas kitchens, there were gas kitchens. And - it was like a room with gas rings on shelves, there was like tables all round. And these gas rings. And you hired it for a certain amount of money. And you cooked your soup there, your meal there. And then you took it back, or you wrapped it in a blanket and took it back home. We had a little stove, it was a little sort of like a cylindrical stove with a pipe going through the room. And occasionally we might light it if it got very cold, we would take a plank out of the bunkbed and chop it up and - and burn it. And - cook a little bit on there. But usually we went to cook every day to this - this kitchen. And then the suitcases arrived you see. There was just this little bit of food there, so we used to make soup with a bit of rice in it or semolina, something with a little bit of nourishing in it.

Did you begin to feel weaker or ill?

Oh, frightfully weak. That - that winter, that first winter we were on these bunks in the school. I had gland trouble. I had swollen glands, which was a deficiency of vitamins. All the time hungry and very, very weak, very tired all the time. Sleeping most of the time. Sleeping a lot. There were a lot of - children my own age whom I knew, in that same building. And we did sort of - we found a place in the - there was a sort of attic. And we used to gather in the attic and sort of play sing-song and make up plays and - talk and - all kinds of games and - amused ourselves. We never went out for a walk together somehow, for some reason. But I remember being in that attic and singing and - dancing a bit and - making our own amusement.

What did your parents do?

Well, my father - was in the administration of that particular transport. And they had a little office. A few of the men together. And they were in charge of - whatever needed doing, you know, distributing the food - messages, you know, they - every transport had an office, and the messages from the Germans would come and then they had to tell everybody what we have to do and don't have to do. You know, they were like leaders. And my father was one of the administrators there. Helping people. Listening to them. They talked to him and so on.

And your mother?

My mother - didn't do anything in particular. She just did what everybody else did, you know, just - did a bit of cooking and tidied up the bunks and washed the clothes and - preserved her energy as best she could. Talked to other people and went to visit her aunts, or they came to us. In the spring then - we used to go for walks. There was a - place just outside the ghetto, but it was still in the ghetto, you know, it was in the boundary of the ghetto. But it was like a sort of waste ground, there weren't any houses. And we used to walk around there a bit.

Were there any trees or green?

There was grass. Very bad grass. But it was a bit green. And occasionally there was a tree. Because I remember trying to eat the bark of a tree to see if one could eat it. But you couldn't. And there were a few trees, yes. So we used to go there. And through the barbed wires you could see a bit of countryside, so we had walks in the spring.

Did the people from outside ever have any contact with you?

Not with us, but some of the local people there, the Poles, they had some sort of a contact. Illegal. Quite a few of them got shot. Even children, they would crawl through the wires and try to bring food in, because they had friends and -

They were helping in fact?

Some, some were, yes. I suppose they got paid for it somehow, you know. I don't know what happened, but I think some of the Jews who used to live in Lodz anyway, you know, who were in the ghetto, they might have deposited some money with people and - made some sort of business. Or had some money themselves. I really don't know. But I know they smuggled things in. They even had little shops. If you had money you could buy - bits and pieces of things. A bit of bread or a bit of food

or - They had little restaurants where you would buy little meals, you know, if you had lots of money or clothes to give away, or something like that.

End of F201, Side B

F 202, Side A

Can we go back to Lodz perhaps. I wondered a little bit about the religious influence, whether there was any sort of pressure on you?

Oh no. People didn't have the energy to pressurise you or to be pressurised. We were much too busy trying to survive, you know, to find food and - and to reserve energy and - oh no, - anyway we were with these Czech people all the time and we were in the - schools. When we lived there, they were all Czech people and Czech people weren't orthodox. And -

Was there animosity from the orthodox section?

No, they didn't care what we did. The only thing that I observed, because I'd never seen orthodox people before, I found it - amazing to see these peculiar men with - beards and sideboards and curls and - hats and these black coats with the lice crawling, you could see everything on those black coats you know. But what I found - really amazing, was - these - people praying, you know, these men. Because when we lived in the - in the private rooms, they were like - big houses with - where we were it was a big house with corridors. Like in a hotel, you know, single rooms coming off the corridor. And each family had one of these rooms. I really don't know how they lived there - before how it was. Whether - a family had one corridor with all these rooms or what, I don't know. But anyway, we had a room. And all around were - these Polish people, these orthodox - Polish people.

You were the only family on that ..?

On that corridor, anywhere, I think in the whole house we were the only family there. And we could hear them pray, sort of - loud, that sort of chanting. Chant, chant, you know, and they'd be crooked all week, you know, try to cheat you and get things for nothing and steal if they could steal anything, and then they'd go and chant all Saturday, you know, and I found it so disgusting, so - false, you know. And then they thought we will pray on Saturday, everything's going to be all right, I can steal all

week and then - then - then pray. So that didn't impress me very much. I didn't really come across any religion amongst us at all. There was no synagogue, there was no -

There was no synagogue?

Not as such. Whether people got together for prayers, you know, I don't really know. But there wasn't a synagogue that you went to.

What happened on Jewish holidays?

Nothing, you forgot about them. You know, you were so tired and so weak and so hungry. You didn't even know what day it was more or less, you know.

If you were ill was there some sort of organisation or medical care?

You see we came with the third transport, and this was a transport of doctors. So there were quite a few medical doctors amongst them. And they did go around. Didn't get paid for it. They did go around and - examine you. And if you had a temperature they might give you a bit of advice. There were a few aspirins around and sort of basic medicine seemed to have been there, you know, very basic. But at least they recognised what was wrong with you and they'd tell you what was wrong with you and - give you a bit of advice and -

Did you have any epidemics?

Well - never stopped. We had typhus, we had typhoid, we had jaundice, we had dysentery.

Were people isolated?

There were hospitals, we actually did have a - an isolation hospital. We had two hospitals there. One was an isolation one. And it was mainly typhus, I think, and

typhoid. I went to hospital with jaundice. And they did actually have hospitals which were quite clean. With nurses and doctors. Which were also prisoners. And they had some medicines. Because I remember when I had - typhoid, I went to hospital -

You had typhoid?

I had typhoid, I had everything. I had typhoid and I went to hospital and I was getting some injections actually. Strychnine or something like that. So some kind of quinine or - something for the - typhoid. And they had pain killers. It was - that was in the ghetto. Afterwards, of course, there wasn't anything. But -

You say 'afterwards'?

Well, when we left the ghetto. But we'll come to that later. But - yes, there was some medical care. And if you were young and strong you had a chance to survive. But - the older people, you know, didn't have much chance to survive.

Did your parents get ill?

My parents got ill and they died in the ghetto. My - father died first. He - when we were moving from the - school to the private houses - they had these like carts. We didn't have any horses or anything, people had to pull the carts themselves. And they put - by the streets, as people moved to different streets, they put all the carts from that school you know, for the people in that street. And my father was helping anybody who needed help, you know, some old women -

What did he put on those carts?

Well, first carry their suitcases downstairs, because we were on various floors. Belongings and suitcases and bags, down onto the cart. He was up and down those stairs helping. And he got a bad leg and it went sort of gangrene into it. And - so he got very ill. And he had a doctor who put something on it. But they didn't have really the proper medicines. And then he - got very weak and he got dysentery. And he

went to hospital and he died there just of weakness and this - this gangrene. And my mother got - typhoid. And she went to hospital and she died.

How soon was this after you came to Lodz?

Well, we came to Lodz in - end of October. My father died in July. And my mother died in October. Just a year after we went.

So then you were left alone?

Then I was left alone.

This must have been a terrible time for you?

It was the worst time in my life, because - my mother was so ill and - I was so frightened she was going to die, and she did in the end. And it was quite devastating because, you know, we had such a good family life and they were so important to me. Security and love and - everything. Suddenly there was nobody there.

How did you react?

And I had just come out of hospital, because I had typhoid as well, I had just come out of hospital, I didn't know she had died. When I came back a stranger told me more or less. And - so I had to sort of look after myself.

Was there anybody, did you have friends or anybody to help you?

I had - well - I thought I had friends. They didn't want to know. But a friend of my fathers - well of the family - was a bachelor actually. But a friend of his, he - came - and came to see me and talked to me and sort of - made me feel I had somebody. And - in the end I moved in with him. He sort of adopted me. In a way. You could adopt people in the ghetto. And he adopted me. Officially actually, in the ghetto.

Did that involve some paperwork?

It involved some paperwork, yes. And we sort of - shared a room together. Half a room. It was a room which was about the size of this without the other bit there.

Two and three square yards?

Well, there was one room - like that. And - in the middle was a row of wardrobes. In one half lived one family. It was a mother with two daughters lived there. And we had the other half of that, the two of us together. And we had a string with a blanket in between us, the two of us, you know, for the evening, not during the day but in the evening. We had these two bunks and we slept in that same room together. And - that saved me, because he was an absolutely wonderful man. And - he was very, very kind, he couldn't do an awful lot for me, but at least I wasn't quite alone. And - the peculiar thing was that - there were a lot of so-called friends in the ghetto, friends of my family. And this person who took care of me wasn't very well spoken about at home.

Why was that?

Well, he was my father's boss. And I don't know, he - there were things said about him, not very nice ones quite often, you know. And he was the one who looked after me. He was absolutely wonderful. And the so-called friends didn't want to know. Had problems of their own, you know. And that was the most important lesson I learned in my whole life. You know, it was the most important lesson I learned. That you don't listen to what other people say, you make up your own mind. If people say bad things about somebody or good things about somebody. You judge for yourself, you find out - what they're really like. You don't listen to bad - rumour or anything like that. And - people under different circumstances behave quite differently. And even today - not consciously, but when I meet people, you know, I immediately put them in that situation. And make up my mind how they would behave in those circumstances. And I find out who the real people are. Who - you know - who - who - have some good qualities and - decency.

A valuable lesson?

Very valuable lesson, yes. Very valuable lesson. But whenever somebody says something bad about somebody I say "Well, there are two sides to every story". And I'm sure it's true.

What happened to your aunts and uncles?

Well, they were -

They had already gone?

Well - as I said before, some volunteered to go - somewhere else and got shot. But one couple, an aunt and uncle and a cousin - stayed behind. My aunt died. And - my uncle became very, very ill. And was all by himself. And - we didn't know about it at the time because, you know, my father was ill and he was - you know, we were busy looking after him. That it's not like a family in normal circumstances where you sort of phone each other up and tell each other the news and visit each other. We lived about a mile away, a mile apart. Somewhere else you know. And we were busy with our lives and we didn't have time to look after each other - at the time. But when my mother went to visit him he was in a terrible state, because he was on his own and ill and looking after himself.

What happened to your cousin?

And my cousin - then at the time - they were deporting all children under 10. That happened at the same time my uncle was ill. Because my cousin was sort of looking after him a bit. But he couldn't do much, he was 10 and he was - or 8, no, he was 8. A little boy of 8. Who did his best. But my mother, you know, called the sort of ambulance and they took him to hospital and - and he died. He was very, very ill and she went over to see him. And - I met my cousin in the street once and that was just about the time when they were deporting. What happened was - they came for all the

children under 10. And took them away. And they were never heard of again. And that was one of the worst days in my life, or anybody's life, in the ghetto. When they came for the children. Imagine.

You saw that actually?

Oh yes. Because you see we lived - in that room, on the third floor. And it was like a courtyard, there were four houses round a courtyard. And all the children had to go down into this courtyard. And the Germans came with lorries and they came and kicked every door down and went into these rooms to look for the - the children. And just tore them out of the mother's arms and - and -

The children screamed?

The children screamed, the mother screamed. The men were tearing their beards out and their - hair out and - banging their heads on the floor. They went down in this courtyard. All these men banging their heads on the floor. And the women saying "Can I come with them? I want to come with them". You know. And they wouldn't allow them. And there was all this screaming and - imagine, a child being taken away. All the children under 10. And that was a terrible day. And -

Does one know what happened to them?

Oh, I never saw again. They went straight to the gas chamber. They went to Auschwitz into the gas chamber. Transport and transport, thousands and thousands.

Did they already have gas chambers at that time?

Well, that was 1942. I think they did. Well anyway, they eventually ended up in the gas chamber. But they went to Auschwitz. Most of them. Anyway, none of them came back, they all - died. One way or the other. But -

It gradually must have filled you, still as a child, with terror, all this?

Well, it was a - a - dreadful place, that ghetto, you know, because although you weren't sort of beaten and you didn't have the Germans over you all the time listening and - trying to kill you and so on, they killed you off by - hunger and disease. Hunger and disease in the - in the ghetto. And these terrible things when they came for the children and then they came for all the old people. One day they came for all the old people who couldn't work. And then they went to the hospital and liquidated - the hospital, all the sick people - went, put on lorries and went and they weren't seen again, you know, all these people went to - be exterminated in one way or another.

Did one realise it at the time?

No. Well I didn't. I didn't know whether the older people did. I didn't, I didn't know gas chambers existed. I knew there were concentration camps. But I thought in a concentration camp if you - have a strong will you just have to go through it and survive. I didn't realise they had these -

You must have had a pretty strong personality even as a child?

Well, I did. I - I was - Well from these transports that went to - Lodz, those five thousand people. Only one percent came back. And I was one of the one percent. So I was very strong, very strong willed. And very strong physically I think, because - Well, I was always strong, but, you know, I was very well looked after, very well fed and I was also very sporty. I did a lot of sport. Which is good for you. I was all day long in the fresh air on my feet, you know. If it wasn't skating it was athletics, running or volley ball or - swimming. Every day there was some sport. I loved sport. And - so I was pretty strong and very healthy. I mean I wasn't healthy in the ghetto, but to begin with I was healthy enough to be able to - survive the typhoid in the ghetto and jaundice in the ghetto and dysentery in the ghetto. And - you know, the lack of vitamins, I had these swollen glands. And temperature.

Did you ever get any fruit or vegetables at all, or meat?

We had rations. In the ghetto. Which were very, very meagre. But there were rations. You got - at one time I remember we had a loaf of bread a week each. Which seemed quite a lot, but when you are very, very hungry it goes in a day you know. A loaf of bread isn't that big when you're very hungry.

Could you prevent yourself from eating it all?

No. No. I couldn't. Some people did. They had a slice every day or twice a day, you know, they had it all worked out to have their seven days of bread or eight days of bread. I couldn't. I - I - ate it in one day.

Your parents didn't stop you or ..?

No, we each had our own ration. We had to, you know, you couldn't as a family have things together, it wasn't fair. Everybody had their own ration to do as they liked with, that was the only way you could - you could do it. That's how everybody did it. Because everybody needed their ration. And - if we hadn't had our rations I think my mother wouldn't have eaten anything, she would have given it all to us or something. We had to insist that everybody had their - little bags of sugar we got. We would have sugar, just eat it by the spoon. Bread, each had a loaf of bread in our own little suitcase.

Black bread was it?

Well sort of black bread. Very coarse, very coarse. Quite nice actually. Well it seemed so at the time. And - occasionally a bit of oil. We never had margarine. I don't remember margarine or butter. But we had oil. And that oil tasted terrible. But what we did we used to put cloves of garlic into the oil. And that took that bad taste away and it tasted of garlic and then you put a few drops on the bread.

You got some garlic?

We got garlic and we got paprika and we got sort of spices. And we got a ration - of turnips or - beetroot or something like that. Usually the sort of - vegetables that nobody else would eat outside, you know, rotten ones. That got frozen and rotten and - occasionally we got potatoes that got frozen. Have you ever had frozen potatoes. Not out of a freezer. But they go all hard. You can't get them soft, you can cook them for hours and they will never get soft if they have been frozen. I don't know how they do these potatoes in the freezer, because I think they cook them first, don't they, a bit. And you have these frozen chips and I think they're cooked first. But if they're frozen raw, I don't know what would happen, I don't think you can freeze potatoes raw. So you could never get them - get them soft. They were always hard. And we didn't have enough of that. And -

Meat?

Very rarely we got some meat. It was horse meat. And sometimes we cooked it and sometimes I was so hungry I ate it on the way home. Raw. Yeh. It tasted quite good when you are hungry, it tasted quite good. And -

Did you get salt?

I'm talking now about the time when I was on my own in the - When - when the family were there, one brought the meat home and cooked it for the family, made a soup out of it. You made soup out of everything to make more of it. Put a bit of meat in and a bit of vegetable, you know, and a bit of paprika, sort of goulash soup sort of thing. Which was very rare, but you got meat sometimes. Some horse meat. Probably dead horses from the war or something like that. And - occasionally some carrots. Mainly vegetables. Which didn't fill you up very much. If you are very hungry it doesn't fill you up much. It's all water. Your stomach swelled up, because it was all water. One had water all the time, you know. We had to boil the water because it had typhus in it, it had typhoid in it. You had to boil all the water, because you got it from a pump. And if you drank it - or cooked with it, you had to boil it.

You had means of boiling?

Well, we had these gas kitchens. Where we went. And -

When you shared the room with this friend, this man. Did you cook for him?

No, it was a girl.

The friend who looked after you?

Oh, oh I see, afterwards. Well that was later, yes. No, I cooked for him. We had certain rations separately, you know, like bread and - sugar and - little things like that. But the vegetables - I used to go and collect the ration, because he worked, I collected the rations and I cooked. You know, we had turnip and you made a turnip goulash, a turnip sweetsour and so on. Because we got these - crystals of - black acid, you know. Acid crystals, like lemon - It was - looked like glass, broken glass, like crystals. But it was sour.

And you were provided with that?

Yes. So you made sweetsour cabbage or sweetsour turnips or whatever you had. It made it sweetsour. And we got garlic sometimes and - caraway seed. And herbs we got. So you - lived on turnips for a few months. So one day it was turnips with caraway seed and one day it was turnips sweetsour. You just - got inventive and I think I've sort of stayed inventive with cooking ever since. I like cooking. And I find that you can do anything with anything. And if you spoil something you can always sort of - save it somehow.

Was there any sort of schooling or anything like that?

No.

Nothing at all?

No, not that I know of. And certainly not amongst us. There wasn't a school. Well we worked. We all worked. Anybody who couldn't work had to leave the ghetto, was deported. Anybody who was no good for work.

So what was your work?

Well, mainly in the ghetto it was - tailoring, you know. The factories for making uniforms for the Germans.

So did they come one day after you arrived and say "you are going to work"?

Well - not at first. For a year or so I didn't work. And - then as the local people died off they needed us, needed new volunteers. You volunteered. You didn't have to work. But you volunteered for the simple reason that you got a bowl of soup a day. You went to work for a day. You got soup and you also got money. Ghetto money. And you needed ghetto money to buy your ration. The only way you could buy a ration -

You had to pay for it?

You had to pay for it and you had to pay with ghetto money and to get ghetto money you had to earn it. So you had to go to work.

So people who couldn't work starved?

Well, somebody in the family would work and make enough money for - There wasn't that much food, you made enough money to - to buy these rations.

What happened to the ghetto money, who got it ..?

Well, no that was inside the ghetto. You see I suppose it was printed somewhere. Given to the places of work. Some accountant or something. I suppose every factory

had an accountant. And then at the end of the week you got your - your wage. So many Mark it was. And a bowl of soup every day. Halfway through the work.

So they told you you are going to work at the tailoring shop?

Well, I think I volunteered as far as I remember. It was a children's factory that I went to. And we only worked half day.

All children working there?

Only children working there. And we did military - trousers and jackets. Well we got it cut out already. We had a sort of foreman, a proper tailor. And he told us what to do. He was sort of making sure we did it all right. But we learnt very quickly. We had to learn how to use the machines, the pedal machines. Sort of Singer pedal machines. We learnt that very quickly, how to - thread it and how to use it. And - it was all cut up, and we were in a chain. One did one thing, one did another thing, and one did the - fly and one did the pocket. All you did is all the time the same thing, one particular part of the trouser or jacket. And they were all right. And then at the end there was somebody who had a good look at them and made sure that - everything was right. Otherwise you got it back and had to do it again if something wasn't quite right.

Was that a comparatively pleasant occupation or did you hate it?

No, I didn't hate it, because - there were - you know, girls my own age, or boys. And - they were actually very nice, we talked a lot, we were good friends. And we chatted quite a bit beforehand, we came a bit early and - There was a sort of stove in the winter, there was a stove in the middle, and we all sat round this stove getting warm, you know. From the journey getting there. And we chatted. And - at the end of the session we got our soup, because we only worked in the morning. And then we went home and I went to sleep. Anytime that I wasn't working, doing something, I was sleeping. That was when I lived with this man. He was at work all day.

What did he do?

Well, he was actually in the administration of the ghetto. He had something to do - with the administration. He was - I know what he was, I remember now, he was a sort of - inspector of kitchens, to see that there was hygiene, in these soup kitchens, in these factories. And he went round to see, you know, that hygiene was kept as best as possible. Because there was no reason why things should be absolutely filthy. They could still keep it clean. And he was a sort of inspector going round. But he didn't get anything. Didn't get any - food or anything like that. Nobody gave you anything.

He got money, did he, for this work?

Oh, just the normal thing, but because he went to these kitchens he didn't get anything. Not as far as I know anyway, I don't think so.

Was there a certain amount of sort of underground supply of ...?

Well, I think it must have been amongst the local Polish people, but we were the sort of - immigrants there, you know, and we didn't have the contacts.

And they didn't tell you?

Well, we didn't have the means. You see you - in order to do these underground things you've got to have contacts. They had contacts with people outside somehow. Some of them did. But we didn't know anybody in Lodz. Didn't have the contacts.

And they wouldn't share with you or ..?

Well, there was no point - we weren't clever enough for - throwing things over wires - we'd get caught. They were very sly, very clever, very cunning. We were too - refined, you know, the Prague people, to know how to do these things. But, you know, - we - we used to sell. You know, we had these suitcases with clothes and

things. Gradually you sold one thing after another. You got ghetto money for it. So - when my father was very ill and he needed food. I mean food would have saved him. He just really died of starvation. My mother sold her wedding ring for bread. She said, "What's a wedding ring good for me when I don't have a husband?" So she sold this wedding ring and got a loaf of bread and fed him. It was too late. And sold clothes and - all sorts of things. Anything you could sell you sold, you know. And in the end there wasn't anything left to sell.

Did you talk to your mother sometimes about conditions, about possibly how you were going to survive, or hopes or despair?

No, you just got on with it. I mean we talked, but - she would tell me more about the past, and about the relatives and - things that happened, you know, then when I was older she could tell me all sorts of things about the relatives that I knew. I mean we didn't know they were all dead, but - maybe she knew somehow. Felt it somehow. I think she felt it because she was a very sad woman. Very depressed and sad. I think she had the - burden of the whole world on her shoulders somehow. She could feel it.

Could you help her at all do you think, by being supportive or ..?

Well I tried. I tried. We were supporting each other. When my father died she lost interest. You know. She - could see that there was no future for her, she didn't want to live without my father. They loved each other very much, they needed each other. And I don't think even if she survived she couldn't see herself having a happy future, so she didn't really want to live somehow, she gave up. And I tried terribly hard to - encourage her to - you know - to get herself well and - But - she - she then went to the hospital and she died there. And that's when I - stopped believing in God. Where - you know - I - when she was so ill and I was so frightened she would die, I prayed and prayed and prayed. Then when she died -

You did actually pray to God to somehow save her?

Yeh, yeh, yeh. I just prayed, just to save her. Just to save her. To let her live. All the time. And she died. And I said, "Well, there isn't a God. And if there is one he doesn't care about me, why should I care about him?" And that was it, I never believed in a God since. Especially after - Auschwitz, you know, and after the camps. How can you? How can you believe in a God?

End of F202, Side A

F202, Side B

I wonder whether you could give me some sort of idea about the size of the ghetto. Maybe in comparison with the city?

I would say it was about - about the size of Hereford. As far as I can tell, you know, with walking through it from one end to another. I would say it would be about - sort of a couple of miles in diameter. Something like that. You could walk easily from one end to the other. And the difference was, of course, that - you had a family in each room. There was a flat, or a house or whatever, in each room you had a family. I can't remember the exact population, but I think it was - over a hundred thousand, something like one hundred and fifty thousand to begin with and then people were -

That is when you came there?

Yes, when - at the height - First of all there were just the Polish Jews there and then all the other immigrants came from - Germany and Czechoslovakia and Austria mainly.

Oh, they came from other countries. That was after you got there?

Well, more or less at the same time. It all started at that time at the end of 1941. And - they came from Prague, five transports from Prague. And then there were transports from Germany and Austria.

Did all these people stay very much in groups, they didn't intermix at all?

Well - I don't think so, no. Because at first they lived together. The transports always lived together in a school. Or in - some big building. And then they moved to - the rooms. As people died out and the rooms became empty they moved to the rooms. I can only talk for the Czechs, I think the Czechs mixed with the Czechs.

And was the language that you spoke amongst yourselves Czech?

Well, yes, amongst ourselves Czech. But I did learn Polish very quickly. And when I went to work we spoke Polish, because I was mainly with Polish people.

All the other workers were actually Poles?

Most of them.

What happened to the other Czechs?

Well, they were somewhere else. There was a lot of - I mean there were lots and lots of factories.

What else did these factories make?

They did some electrical components. As far as I know. And - lots and lots of clothes factories. Because Lodz in itself was very famous for textiles. And I think there was a lot of tailoring going on anyway. And so they concentrated the - machining there. I don't know what else there was. I know my mother went to work for a while somewhere. And they were splitting some - like slate. I don't know what it was for. Little pieces of slate they were splitting. But I honestly don't know what that was for. It must have been a component of some - something.

It must have been quite hard work?

It was all in little pieces. You know, you did it on a table with a knife or something. But I don't really know, I never saw that. And then there were workshops of course, you know, people had to - mend shoes and - all kinds of repairs.

Repair shops?

Yes.

Did your father ever have to work?

No, I told you -

Of course, he was in the administration?

Yes. And then he died, so - He didn't go to a factory or anything like that.

One thing occurred to me, you were a child when you came there?

13.

And you had grown. What happened about clothes?

Well, I didn't grow very much, because I didn't have the nourishment. I - I - I didn't grow and I didn't develop. No. I grew a little bit. And I remember actually wearing my mother's clothes. But you see when I was 13 I wasn't that much smaller than - later on. So I didn't grow afterwards an awful lot in height. But I - I remember wearing some of my mother's clothes when I did grow a bit.

Was that after she died?

Yes, after she died.

Was there anywhere one could buy clothes or exchange goods for things that were needed?

Oh yes, if you had the things you could manage anything. Well, within reason, you know. But you didn't have the money or you didn't have the things, so - We sold everything we could spare in the beginning, because we needed food, you know, to save my father. And - my mother. And - because we were hungry. So we sold what we could. And then there wasn't anything left really. So all you had was the - money you earned in the factory for your ration.

And if you made clothes was it possible sometimes to get something out of these factories?

Oh, they were - they were military uniforms. And you couldn't - you couldn't - take that. I mean it could have been quite useful to wear, but you - you couldn't take it. It was all counted and - it was quite impossible. Oh no.

I know you were there for three and a half years. But could you give me some idea of what a day looked like. The washing, as you said, was very primitive indeed?

Well, it depends where we were. You see when - well, wherever we were there were pumps in these courtyards. When we lived in the rooms we were up on the third floor. We had buckets. And - we had to fetch the water in a bucket. And take the dirty water down. And the latrines down in the courtyard - and they were absolutely dreadful. They were indescribable.

Was that the only place you had?

The only place we had was one latrine for all the people. There were four houses round the courtyard. And about three floors high. And in every room there was another family, so - you had three floors and on every floor there must have been about eight families. There were twenty four families by four, that's - about a hundred families, you know. Using - using - one latrine.

How did you cope with that?

Well, we did. In the latrines there wasn't just one, there were about three. But they were so filthy you didn't know where to put your feet, you know, to get in.

Was there nobody ...?

Oh there were, yes, they were being emptied and cleaned. But - not very often. Actually these people who were cleaning the latrines and who were emptying them, there were special containers for these, like sort of - big - drums, you know. And - people had to push them on carts. And emptying and taking it somewhere. I don't know where they took it. But the people who did this job they got an extra ration of - of food for doing the job, so you had people actually volunteering to do it. They spent their day clearing out the muck as they called it. It was terrible. I actually made a painting of that. Of them.

While you were there?

No, no, no, since then. Of the people pushing - people pushing that.

It is so clearly in your mind?

Yes, and I also have some books, you know, with photographs in it. So I use the photographs for reference.

Who could take photographs?

The Germans.

The Germans actually took photographs ..?

The Germans took photographs to have a good laugh I suppose, you know. And they were found in the archives. But you did have people who did take photographs. Especially in the ghetto. In the Lodz ghetto there was a man called Grossmann. I didn't know him, but there is a book out - which is called 'With a Camera in the Ghetto', or something like that. And he took those pictures and he hid them. And he actually died, but somebody, a friend of his, remembered, and found these - photographs and they're in a book now. He used to take them - he didn't have the camera outside, he had it in his coat with a little hole through. And just took those photographs.

So that he wouldn't be discovered?

That's right. And there are some very interesting pictures, interesting shots just of everyday life.

Did he do his own developing?

I suppose so. I think he was a real photographer. I don't know if these were negatives or if they were developed at the time. I don't know. But he was a real photographer and he - he could - actually see what would be of value after the war, you know, just ordinary everyday little scenes.

So that was in a way the start of the day to have to cope with these horrible latrines?

Yes. Well you had to cope. In the winter, of course, it was much worse. You had to cope with the dreadful cold. You had your bucket of water and the top was frozen, so you had to hack away through the ice.

Did you have any heating at all inside?

Well, we had these stoves there, but the only fuel we had was if we cut up some pieces of the bunkbed you know. Or the flooring or something like that. Which you were not supposed to. Or a chair or whatever. If you're desperate you burnt a chair. If you were lucky to have one. So - it was mainly these bunkbeds, because they had - those slats. You know, those wooden planks. Solid. So, you know, you left every other one and there were little - well quite big gaps in between. And then we had these straw mattresses on top, so - we managed. And out of one of these planks you could - you know, you chopped it up into quite a lot of little pieces. Got a bit of heat and sometimes a bit of - cooking on it. But it was so cold. You didn't make a fire in the morning because you went to work. So you had to hack away through that - ice, to get a bit of water and wash a bit. And dress in this freezing cold. And - then you went to work. Usually without any breakfast.

Did you get anything to drink at all when you got there?

Sometimes you had what they called coffee, which was just a sort of brown water. I think it was made with roasted figs or roasted chicory or something like that. They called it coffee, but it was - it was - very light brown, transparent sort of. But it was hot, it was hot.

You got that when you came to the factory?

Yes, sometimes. And - at the factory actually they did have a stove going, because we couldn't have worked with frozen hands and all that. So the first thing when we came in we all stood around this stove warming our hands and - having a bit of a chat and getting warm and then we - had to work. And we worked -

Who was the overseer. Was that a German?

No, no, no. It was a Jewish man, a proper tailor. And the one I remember where I worked was really a very, very nice man. And they were all children, you know. From about 8 onwards, to - 16 or so. Little children - sewing on those machines. Very little children. I mean I was about 14 then. So I was all right.

Did you work the whole time while you were there, in this factory?

Yes. Yes.

Did you have a sort of pause in between or a gap?

Well, we only worked in the morning, from - you know - I can't remember exactly. It was early in the morning, I think there were shifts from - 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock - until 12. And there was another shift from 12 to - 6, something like that. Another lot of children, you know, 6 hours at a time. I don't think the children worked at night.

And the six hours you had to work ..?

Solid. As far as I remember, solid through. But you see he was a very, very nice teacher and he took - he - spoke - Polish or Yiddish, which I understood as well by then. And - he said to us if we finish early, if we get everything done early, he will tell us a story, or something. And so we managed sometimes half an hour early to get through everything that we had, and he would educate us sometimes. Tell us some interesting things. And teach us something. Or he would read to us some Yiddish stories, you know, the - Sholemlech and Sholemlechemi - sort of stories in Yiddish. Or he actually taught us, and I think that was part of the work, he taught us - dressmaking, you know, he taught us how to make your own pattern and how to measure - people. Men and women. To make your own pattern on the material and how to cut it out. Trousers as well. And sleeves, you know, how to do sleeves. And it was more difficult, now you can do it all straight. But they - you know, set-in sleeves and puff sleeves. And he taught us how to do dressmaking. Which was very useful. Because when I came back to Prague - first thing I made myself was a ski suit out of a blanket. Because I - I had the opportunity to go to the mountains. But we didn't have any snow, so I never skied that winter, but it was very nice just the same. Anyway, I knew how to do it without any pattern or anything, these trousers and -

Can you still do it?

If I had to I would, yes. I hate sewing. Not because I was in that factory, but I - I just hate sewing. I'd rather, you know, make a wardrobe out of wood or something like that. But I don't like sewing and I don't like ironing. But I can do it. If I had to make myself a dress, you know, even without a pattern, I could do it.

So then you had a bowl of soup or something?

And then at the end of the shift you got a bowl of soup. And then you went home. And when I got home I - usually went to sleep. And - then I tried to cook something for when this friend came back. You know, we had rations, we had turnips or

something. I went over to this - gas kitchen and cooked us a soup or something like that.

When you slept did you have blankets?

Oh yes. We had - feather beds. I think we all brought a feather bed with us. Strapped to the suitcases, something like that. I had a very good feather bed, we all did, you know, and when you were in bed you were warm. Eventually. Yes.

So then you had your meal when your friend came back. Did you sit and talk or ..?

Well, we sat and talked for a while and then we went to bed. You were so tired, you just wanted to sleep. And I suspect - we were told afterwards that they put bromide into the soup to keep us calm. So that made you even more sleepy. Sometimes we sat and talked. Well, we did - we sat and talked a lot.

Just with this friend?

Yes. Well, there was this other family, you know, in the same room. The other half of it. A woman with two daughters. And the younger daughter I was very, very friendly with. We were great friends.

So you did make a friendship?

I made a friendship with her. The other daughter was older. She was about 18. But this one was about my age, about 14, and we became very great friends. We very often - when we - you know, when I came home from a shift, she came home from another shift, and we used to sort of cuddle up together in bed, you know, and just lay together and talk and - you know, it was - nice and warm and comforting to be - with somebody in bed. And she was a lovely girl. But she didn't come back. I did try to trace her after the war. Because you could write to the ghetto in Poland, to Lodz. To trace people. After the war. I wrote to an office in Lodz where - all the people who

came back registered - from Lodz. And - she didn't. So I suppose she didn't come back.

Could you write at all to anybody while you were there during the war?

Occasionally we were allowed to - write - cards to Czechoslovakia. But they were censored, so you had to be very careful what you said. I think we could write cards. There was a time when you could get parcels. If you had somebody there who would send you a parcel. And this friend of mine who looked after me, the friend of my fathers, he occasionally got a parcel. The only thing was that by the time it arrived everything was mouldy. So what we did - say it was a loaf of bread and it was completely mouldy, all green you see. So what we did, we soaked it in water and all the green came to the top. And then we ate the rest of it. You know, sort of dried it out and ate it or cooked it or something.

And was it edible?

Well, it had to be. It was, yes.

It didn't taste horrible or ..?

Well, it did, but it was better than nothing. And you see we had penicillin and we didn't even know it.

Could they send tinned food or anything like that?

I don't remember getting tinned food. I remember getting this bread. It was mouldy a few times, but we were quite pleased to have it. Probably one or two other things, they were not big parcels.

How often would you get a parcel?

Well, it was only at one particular time. There was a period of a few months or maybe a year - where - I didn't get any, I didn't have anybody. He maybe got three or four parcels in that time. But it was always mouldy. Whatever it was, you know. I mean they had rations as well in Czechoslovakia. They couldn't spare a lot. I suppose they could spare a loaf of bread. But instead of getting there, say, in a week or something, it might have - taken eight weeks, I don't know. And - it wasn't much of a help really.

Did you write to anybody in Prague while you were there?

No, I didn't. Because - all my friends who stayed, my friends were Jewish, and they weren't there.

Your grandparents had died by that time?

No, no, no. Well, my father's parents did. My mother's parents - we left behind when we went. But then they went to a camp as well and they never came back.

You couldn't communicate?

No. No. I think they went to Theresienstadt. Soon after. And - died somewhere. But we don't know where.

Was there ever any sort of - let's say people made music or gave a concert?

Yes. Yes.

Can you remember any particular one or how often?

Yes, in one of the schools I remember we - because they had - a stage, you know, and - and - hall. The hall must have been used for something, it couldn't just have been empty. But I remember that particular time there was a cabaret. Anybody who

wanted to perform, could sing a song or dance or tell a joke or - just as cabarets are. Quite a lot of talent there. Sing and - make up little plays or -

Did everybody go then?

Well, a lot of people went. It was very nice really, because as I said, there was an awful lot of talent and people improvised, clothes and all sorts of things, and it was - a bit of a relief.

How often would that happen?

Well, I remember only going to one myself. But there probably were more. I don't know. I only remember going to one. But I remember - as I think I've told you - before, when we were still in the school, we children went up into the attic and we sort of got together there, the young people, and we used to make up plays and little concerts, and then the parents would come and watch us, you know. Songs and so on.

Would people read books aloud or anything like that, in the evenings?

No, but there was actually a library. And we could borrow books. But they were all in Polish. And I learnt to - I learnt Polish - the language, through reading the books.

So you did read quite a lot?

I read a lot, yes.

When did you read?

Well, when I got home. Say if I went to bed I might read. Or I might go to bed and sleep. And when I woke up I might read or - In the summer it wasn't so bad as in the winter, you weren't in bed all the time. You sat down and read. Because I only worked half a day. I always loved reading. When I was at home in Czechoslovakia I

was reading so much. And - I stayed in the habit of reading. And also, you know, people brought books with them, so we exchanged.

Was this a system of exchange?

I don't think so. But you just - you know, borrowed from each other. Some people had books.

Could you do any painting while you were there?

Well - you could have done, but I didn't paint in those days. Didn't have any materials or anything. But some people I think painted in camps, you know. Especially people who were in their own country - you know, they got hold of some water colours, because there are lots of paintings. Mainly water colours and drawings, that were done actually in the camps.

Did you ever feel you wanted to paint?

No. No, I wanted to write.

Did you write at all?

Not in the camp. I didn't have the material.

Not even paper and pencil?

No. I - I - I - occasionally wrote a story or something like that, but nothing very serious. Because I didn't have the energy. You know, you wanted to sleep, you were so tired all the time. And so hungry, you know, I - I didn't have it really in me and I didn't have the materials for writing and - I didn't really - as I said - my greatest recreation was to just read and escape, just escapism. You know, adventure stories of some sort. I read Senkievich a lot, you know, in Polish. And went through Polish literature, with some very good adventure stories, you know, big books.

Can you remember any particular book that you really enjoyed?

Yes, I read Quo Vadis in Polish. I enjoyed that. And - I don't know what it's called in - in English. Another Senkievich. Through - Through Fire and - Through Fire and Salt it would be translated. But I don't know what it's called in English. I don't know if it ever was translated.

Were there any special friendships. You did mention this one special friend you had?

Yes. Well, she was a - a bosom pal, you know, she was my - great friend.

Were you interested in boys at all at that stage?

No, you didn't have the energy for these things, you know, you - you - you put your energy into surviving and getting food and - And remember, we tried very hard to keep clean and civilised. So you washed your clothes, you dragged the water from the pump and you washed your clothes and you took the dirty water down. Or you washed them down there if you could.

Did you get soap?

I think so. I think we must have done, yes. And you ironed. And you washed your hair. Curled it up to try and look nice. And, you know, tried to - keep your appearance, that you don't let yourself go like some of the people who were there before, who looked like animals. We said - you know - we must never become like that. Sort of keep our self respect. You could always - you know, when you went in the street you could always tell the Czech people, because they - took particular care to stay as smart as they could.

Even more than the Germans or the ..?

Even more than the Germans. The Germans were a little bit dowdy, the ones who came. They were clean, but a little bit sort of - dowdy. But - the Czechs tried - to keep as smart as was possible. As was possible. Clean anyway. You didn't see any of them going around like - tramps, you know.

Can you remember any other special events which sort of impressed you in those three years. Either good or bad?

Nothing on the whole, it was sort of one day like the other. The summers were very hot. And the winters were frightfully cold. And - I talked about the deportations, that were sort of these big events. I remember when, towards the end of the ghetto, when - we heard - fighting in Warsaw, and the Russians were coming. And - we heard all the - the cannons, you know, the - the - explosions.

You could actually hear that?

We could hear the cannonballs.

Did that cheer you up?

Yes, we could hear the fighting and we could hear the bombing and we could hear these explosions. It wasn't that far, it was about fifty miles or so, you know, from Warsaw we were. It was very near. And - I don't know how news got into the ghetto, but we always knew what was going on in the world. One person told another.

Even in the West, you had news of what was going on?

Oh, we knew when there was landing, you know. Invasion of France. And -

You were still in Lodz then?

Yeh, we knew what was going on, we knew how the - you know, the British and the Americans were advancing, where the front was and - and the Eastern front and the Western front and - I don't know how it got in, but it got in. I think people had radios. And it spread. And this friend of mine, he had - some contacts, having the job that he did. And - we knew. And then of course we heard this fighting. But before they came to Warsaw we knew they were advancing. And they were advancing very quickly. And when they came to Warsaw, he said, "Oh, another two or three days and they'll be here". So everybody was getting very, very happy and people were all friendly with each other and optimistic and - whistling and singing a bit and thinking it was going to be the end. That was in the summer of 1944. And then of course they stayed there for six months. And then the Germans realised they weren't coming, you know, so they evacuated us.

When was that exactly?

That was in the summer of 1944. July or August. I think it was August.

How did they go about it?

Well, the Germans realised that, you know, they had a bit of time left.

End of F202, Side B

F203, Side A

You were telling me about the evacuation and how that started?

Well - when the Germans realised that - a bit of time left. I mean they didn't know they were going to stay there for six months. That there was an agreement. But they realised it wasn't going to be as quick. So they then ordered us, you know, block by block - to go to the railway station.

All ages?

Anybody, everybody. Road by road, you know. We went. One day it was this block and then it was another block. And we had to go to the railway station. Just take the luggage that we could carry. And we were put on a train. A cattle truck. About fifty to one.

Were these open cattle trucks?

No. No, no, no, no. Shut in. Shut in cattle truck. Or goods train, goods train.

Did they tell you where you were going?

They didn't - or they said we are going somewhere else, to another ghetto, where we are going to work and it's going to be alright, you know, and - more or less made us volunteer. It wasn't exactly volunteering, but they said, you know - Tried to keep us very calm. I think they wanted to try to stop people from either revolting, hoping that the allies would come. Or hiding or whatever. So they said, oh, we are going to another ghetto and the conditions are going to be good and we are going to work.

The German officer actually came and talked to you?

Well, they would - either have posters. You see you had these announcement posters. Which told you. And you also had - Germans who would come in the street

and stand on a table or platform and everybody had to come out and listen. But - it was mainly by poster. And it would tell you when you have to go, you know. Then when your turn came there would be the Germans there making sure you all get out and -

Was there a search?

Search. Oh yes. Well, they kicked the doors in and made sure nobody stays behind, you know. That nobody was hiding and they looked in all sorts of corners and cupboards and - wherever. And - made sure everybody got out. And - then you went to the station. People who couldn't walk were taken on - lorries. The station wasn't - very far, about a mile away, just outside town. And - we were given some food. Some bread and some sausage I think, as far as I remember. To keep us happy. And it was very hot, it was in the summer, in - in August. And we were so crowded, what I remember it was really, really hot. And we didn't have enough water, we were very, very thirsty. But the journey didn't last that long. Because it was - we went to Auschwitz and it was - We didn't know we were going to Auschwitz, but Auschwitz wasn't that far, it was also really in Poland more or less.

Did you know of the existence of Auschwitz?

I didn't. No, I didn't. But I think this friend of mine, I think he did.

Did he come in the same transport?

Yes, he came with me and we went together. And - I think he -

Did you have to stand in those trucks?

Well no, we sat down. We sat down. But, you know, we had to sit anywhere. It wasn't just round the sides where you could lean on something, you just sat anywhere and at night you tried to sleep, everybody was leaning on everybody else.

How many hours ..?

Well, I think it was sort of - more or less twenty four hours, you know, because there were a lot of breaks, we stopped, you know, and -

Did they bring you any water or anything?

There was a bucket of water or something, you know. And when that was finished that was it. Everybody had sort of a bit of water. But I remember the thirst more than the hunger. And - it was something - we left one day and got there the next day, I remember we had one night. And I didn't know about Auschwitz. But this friend of mine he - he knew. I think he knew about Auschwitz. And he could see in the direction we were going and he realised that we were going. And I think he knew what was going to happen. He had information, he never told me because he didn't want to frighten me. But he had information, I could see he was - very frightened. He didn't - tried not to show it. But he tried to give me all sorts of advice which I understood later.

What sort of advice?

Well, he just told me to be brave and he - he said that we might be separated. I said, "Of course not". He said, "You know you are young, you've got life in front of you, but I haven't. And when you get back to Prague you go and look up so and so and so and so". And - a bit of advice for when I come back. I said, "Of course you will come back, we will be together and all that", you know. And I think he knew. It happened like that, you know, we were separated and he went to the gas chamber.

Do you think he knew about gas chambers?

Oh yes, he knew everything. He knew - he knew. I don't know whether he knew about gas chambers, he knew that he was going to get killed somehow. Because - later on I've thought about the things he told me. And he knew he was going to die there. That they are going to separate us. And that I might have a chance to live. He

said, "Make yourself tall. Make yourself big. Make yourself strong". So he knew. And he knew that he didn't have a chance.

How was it when you arrived?

When we arrived - in - in Auschwitz - we all had to get out. And then you had the doctor there. Who - selected us, who looked at people and when he saw that you might be useful for work you went one side. And if you were old or ill looking you went to the other side. And women were somewhere else and men were somewhere else and the children were with the women. There were all different groups of people. And luckily I went with the - young and so-called healthy women. I made myself big and tall and strong as he said. I soon realised, you know, it was probably wise to do. So I went with these - girls. They weren't really women, they were young girls. I think anybody over 20 had it, you know, because they didn't need that many for work. So from what I remember - nobody was over 30. I never met anybody over 30 - after that. And - I knew a lot of these girls from the ghetto, because we all came together. And when we were going to the - to Auschwitz - we tried, all the Czech people, you know, to be in one - one wagon together. And so I made friends there and stayed friends ever since.

Were they mostly Czechs in your group?

In that group, I mean there were I think about a thousand of us going to Auschwitz. But when we were selected there were these young girls in one group and I was among them. And amongst them were some Czech girls. They were not all Czech. But there were about ten Czech girls whom I knew and we stuck together. And we stuck together all the way right through until the end of the war. The ten of us. Wherever we went - we were together. Luckily we could stay together.

And that was a mutual support?

Yeh, we had a sort of - commune, you know. We called ourselves a commune. We shared everything. If anybody got anything we shared it, and - we were really good friends. Support group.

So what happened when they separated you, where did they take you?

Well, they took - took us - about a thousand of us. You see there were people coming in from everywhere. And there were about a thousand of us - so-called healthy people. Work - able people. Into a barrack. And we were on concrete floors, Birken Auschwitz. Well first they took us - we had to undress completely and leave all our clothes behind. Then we went into a shower to get washed. And then we went and had our hair cut. Shaved.

Completely?

Completely shaved. And then we had some new clothes, you know, it wasn't new, but clothes that other people left behind that was washed and fumigated and all that. And they just gave you anything, you had to wear whatever they gave you, it was completely unsuitable, you know. Whether it was long sleeves, short sleeves, short or long, whatever, you know. One girl might have something that goes down to her ankles and another might have something that goes - like a mini dress, you know. Just whatever they gave you.

What did they give you?

I had a little blue dress, light blue dress, which was - quite nice. It had puff sleeves, short sleeves, and went up to my knees. And it was - quite pretty. It was - I remember, it was pale blue, sort of woolly dress. But - of course I had it right through the winter. That same dress, you know. So it wasn't so suitable anymore after that.

Did they give you underwear or stockings?

No, no underwear.

Or stockings?

No, not at the time, no, they gave us clogs. To put on our feet. Wooden clogs.

And no pants or ..?

Nothing. Nothing. What we did in the winter we used to put blankets over us. And we used to tear our blankets and bandage our legs with it instead of stockings. But from - from there -

Were you frightened when ..?

No.

You weren't?

No. I was - very - either very innocent or very naive or very arrogant. But it never occurred to me that I wouldn't survive. And looking back on it now it's such escapes, you know. I had such escapes, so many things could have gone wrong. If you think that millions of people died and one percent came back, and the other ninety nine didn't. I was extremely lucky. But I thought, you know, at the time, if I am - going to pretend to be strong - and use strong will and - do what they tell me to do and work when I need to work, or whatever I need to do, I'll be all right. I'll be clever, you know. Didn't realise that - luck wasn't always - I mean luck was the thing because nothing could help you if you were unlucky. So from there we went to these barracks. And there were about a thousand there, on concrete floors, there weren't any bunkbeds or anything. We had no -

All in one room?

No, it was a big barrack, it was a long big barrack. With these concrete floors. There was a corridor in the middle and - and - these concrete sides, and - there were a

thousand girls there and we had to sit on the floor in fives, one behind the other. In fives, you know, going back. But hundreds of these rows of fives. And - at night when we slept, we had to sleep in each others sort of - your head was on the other person's tummy and somebody's - you had your legs apart like - you had your legs apart -

They forced you to sleep like that?

Well, it was the only way you could sleep. There was just no room, because you sat five behind each other. Very close to each other. And right next to you there was another five. See. So you were - you had no room, except one on top of the other. So you sort of opened your legs and somebody - put their head on your tummy and - and you went between somebody else's legs and put your head on the other person's tummy.

I suppose you were so tired ..?

You slept. Slept better than I sleep now. And we slept. And -

What if somebody was sick or ..?

Well, at the time they weren't, but - occasionally we all said we are going to turn on our side. So the whole five of us had to turn on our side, you know, somehow.

Did you have to wake each other up to say ..?

Well, somehow we did, I don't know. Somehow it happened. But - mostly we were on our backs sleeping like that.

Did you have a blanket?

Nothing. But it was in the summer. So it wasn't so bad at the time. And we sort of warmed each other up. And we were there - for ten days. Luckily we didn't have any

- tattoo put on us. On our arm. No number. Not us. And - we had - to get up very early in the morning. Very early, about 4 o'clock. Everybody had to get up. Then we had to stand roll call. Outside. And it was very, very cold at 4 in the morning, even in the summer. It was very, very cold. Freezing cold. So we sort of warmed each other up a bit, stood close if nobody was looking. And we had to stand roll call - also in fives. Everything - once you got to Auschwitz everything was in fives. That's how they count easily you see. Stood in fives. And -

Who took the roll call?

Germans came, about a couple of Germans at a time.

Men or women?

Men. To count us. But that was about 10 o'clock in the morning. We stood and stood and stood, saw the sun rise.

From 4 till 10?

9 to 10, anytime, could be anytime. And you saw the sun, you know, getting light. Sunrise.

You had to stand outside for all these hours?

Outside. From the dark. It was still dark in the summer. For hours and hours and hours, until it got light and until it got warmer. And then when they came to count you you could go and get breakfast, which was a so-called coffee. And if you were lucky you had a slice of bread.

Not always?

Not always, but usually you had a slice of bread with your coffee. And then you could more or less do what you like, you know - do what you like, you - in your little

piece of territory you could walk around or you could sleep. You had to be outside, as far as I remember, I don't think you could go into your barrack. But you were outside, it was quite warm and it actually got quite hot by that time of day, it got very, very hot. I remember we had those shaved heads and our heads got very hot in - in the blazing - Because there were no trees or anything, it was blazing.

But your hair started to grow again, did it?

Well, not in ten days. It - it gradually grew, yes, but it took many, many months. And the fashion wasn't short. Nowadays it wouldn't matter. Nowadays after three months you'd be quite in fashion. But in those days the fashion was long hair. And of course we didn't have it cut or styled or anything, so it was sort of all shaggy all over as it grew, you know, down your neck and - so on. But - then we had - soup sometimes during the day. Which was water with a bit of - turnip in it or something like that. We were there for - ten days, but of course we soon realised - there was this big chimney, you know, out of which came a lot of smoke and - the sky was red. The sky was red all the time. And - you know, when we asked what it is, they told us. We couldn't believe it. Well, the Germans didn't tell us, but the other prisoners told us. We said, "What's this - what's this smoke? What's this - fire? Why is the sky so red? What's - what - what is this - all about?" We couldn't understand. But then - then we were told, very soon we were told, and we saw these - transports of people coming, all the time they were coming, one transport after -

You saw them?

Oh, well yes, they came on the train and they came past us, because there was this - lagerstrasse, you know, this road that was going to the gas chambers from the train, and they came past. All these transports came past, you know, thousands, thousands of people. And they never appeared again, they just disappeared into this building, you know.

It must have been terrifying?

It was, but - somehow, you know, you just - got used to it. You were there, it's more terrifying thinking back on it now. In a way. Then again they said, you know, they are giving us bromide in the soup to keep us calm. But things were so bad and you lost everybody that it was just another blow, you know, you just - sort of - accustomed -

Almost immune?

Immune to - to these things. But it was pretty horrifying to know that. And -

Did you talk about it amongst yourselves?

We almost joked. We said, "If you don't behave yourself you go up the chimney", things like that. Actually laughed about it. Peculiar, but that was one way we kept going, by joking about everything. We - we actually had a terrific sense of humour, we laughed an awful lot. Probably a sick sense of humour. But it helped, because we had a few laughs and we tried to take things a bit lightly. We talked about food an awful lot. At roll call we talked about food, because you - when you talked about food you felt you were actually eating it, you know, it was nice just to imagine you are eating it.

Did you think of things you used to eat?

Of things we would like to eat, yes, and - made up meals and feasts, you know, and parties, and talked about it and - for a while you almost believed you were eating it, it actually helped, you know, - you would think that it would make things worse, but it didn't, it - it was quite pleasant to talk about it. And -

You didn't hear anything, did you. Hear people scream or ..?

No, and we were a little bit too far away. But other people who were nearer they used to hear the screams. But I must say that Auschwitz was very - frightening in a certain extent, because it was full of Germans. Because until then we didn't see a lot

of Germans in the ghetto. Only occasionally. It was full of Germans and with Germans with dogs and there were these barbed wires with electricity in it, you know. Discipline, very strict discipline. This feeling of death, all these people going in the gas chamber, it was a very - weird place. Very weird place. There was this atmosphere of death all the time, you know, this - unbelievable situation of - people being - you - you could smell - you could smell these people being burned. All the time you smelt this - it was a little bit like, you know, when people used to boil glue. It was the bones. That smelt like glue. A lot of books have been written about that.

Did the Germans sometimes mis-use those girls, use them for prostitution?

Well - they didn't mis-use them, but you had volunteers. Who would go with the Germans. And get - a bit of food. And - there were what was called the - the kapo and the block leader. Because every - every - of these huts, it was a block, it was called a block, had a block leader who had a little cubicle all to herself.

That was a woman?

Well, with the women a woman and with the men a man. Because there were only women in our block. We were separated then from the men. So the men had men and the women had a woman. And it was like a - glass cubicle. So they could see us. And - you could recognise them because they were - not starved, you know, they looked normal. In their faces, in their bodies, they weren't hungry. They had enough to eat. And they had reasonable clothes on, they had good clothes on. So - you knew who they were, and they were very - sadistic and very cruel and they treated us, the other prisoners, very, very badly.

What sort of things did they do to you?

Well, they just pushed us around, if we did anything a bit wrong, weren't in the right place at the right time, they'd beat us, you know, and - hit us hard. Sometimes they had whips.

Were you beaten?

I was once, yes. I was in a way asking for it because I slapped her.

Really?

Yes. I tell you about that later because that was in Belsen, that wasn't in Auschwitz. Because as I told you I - I preferred to stay anonymous, you know, that was one way I knew I wouldn't be noticed and they couldn't do anything to me. But these kapos they were the worst. They were worse than the Germans because they were prisoners like us, they were Jewish and some of them even Czech and -

They were Jewish?

Oh yes.

The people who looked after you were in these glass cubicles ..?

Yes, the kapo were Jewish. They were prisoners like us, but they had privileged positions you see. They were usually very beautiful girls. Who - got friendly with the Germans, with the men. And - not only did they do favours for the Germans, but they helped to look after us you see, keep us in order and discipline and torture us and beat us, which pleased the Germans.

What sort of tortures?

Well, torture you know, they might - not give us food if we didn't please them enough, if we did something wrong. They stopped food for a day or - or - beat us or - all sorts of things, you know, whatever they pleased - to do. So - that was absolutely awful. But mind you a lot of them paid for it at the end. At the end of the war, you know, there were people who beat them and - and - and killed them and - and - tortured them and did all sorts of things. I know - I know one woman had her breasts cut off with a knife. You know. By men, not by women. But - they - they asked for

it in a way, you know, they - they were - Unbelievable, we were so - we hated them so much, because they were like us, you know. And instead of - all right, so they wanted favours, you know, they wanted food and clothes from the Germans and they went with them, you could understand. They didn't have to do these things to us, you know, they did it because they wanted to. Because their job was to keep us in order. Their job was to make sure we got up in the morning and we stood in fives outside in roll call, you know. And their job was if - you know, to keep us in order, to be in a certain place at a certain time. See that we don't fight over the food when it comes, because you get these great big - urns of soup come. And somebody was distributing them so, you know, nobody starts fighting over it. That was her job. But - her job wasn't to - look for things, you know, where they - had an opportunity to beat us or kick us or - have our hair cut off or whatever, you know, things like that. They were - they were definitely sadistic.

How did you wash?

Oh yes, we had to keep very clean. There were washrooms. With taps. Big sort of huts. With taps. And we had to go - every morning after roll call. I think it was after, I don't think it was before. Anyway, in the morning we went to these huts, all of us, and - and had a wash. I don't know if we all went together, maybe in a group going, and then the other group went. There may have been about a hundred taps at a time, you know. And we had to wash and we had to keep ourselves clean.

Brush your teeth?

Oh, you couldn't brush your teeth, no, except with your finger perhaps. We didn't have combs, we didn't have anything. We had a little saucepan, you know, for our food. That we kept somehow. And - you went to the latrines all at the same time, whether you wanted it or not. You know. Went in groups - again there was these big huts and you had about a hundred latrines all in a row. And - so you had to go at the same time.

What if you needed it at some other time?

Well, you had to beg for permission. You had to ask permission. But at night it was very difficult if you needed to go. Not many people went at night, but if you needed to go you had to again ask permission and - report when you came back, that sort of thing.

Did you get some more clothes?

No.

Still only that one dress?

Yes. It was only ten days. It wasn't very long.

What happened after that?

Well, one day we had to go on a parade, undressed, we had to undress. Go on a sort of naked parade in front of some Germans. And they again did a sort of selection. The fittest looking. And - we were all like skeletons, you know, when you say the fittest, nobody was fit. But again I tried to make myself very straight and very healthy looking and very sort of, you know, alive. And we were selected for work. And - we - didn't go back to the hut. There was a group of us of about - a hundred. I think. I don't know exactly, it was a group. And we weren't taken back to the hut. We were taken back to - a railway line - somewhere, to wait for a train. It wasn't THE railway line, where all these prisoners came, you know, the ramp where they came to the gas chamber. It was somewhere further away. And we waited for the train to come to take us away to work. And the train wasn't coming and it wasn't coming, and we had to spend a few nights there.

At the station?

It wasn't a station, it was like a field, with a railway line running, like a piece of waste ground. Just on the edge of the camp. It was still in the camp, but it was on the edge

of the camp. And - we slept there a few nights, all curled up together, because it was very, very cold at night without any blankets or anything. And - the German who was sort of looking after us, I think it was a woman, said, "If the train doesn't come tomorrow you all go in the gas chamber".

She actually said that?

Yes. But the train actually came the next day. So - we went - we went on the train, again a cattle truck. I think there must have been more than a hundred. But I really can't remember how many. And we went on this train - for quite some time. You see the - the railway lines were bombed. And so we had to find detours to get to wherever we are going, we didn't just go straight on, it could have been a few hours. We went for some time, I think about a couple of days, but I can't tell you for sure. We went for something like - like two days.

In the cattle trucks?

Yes.

With food?

We got a bit of food. You never had enough. But we got a bit of food. And - we went through some very beautiful German countryside eventually. We didn't know where we were going. But eventually we came into - Silesia in Germany. And - we got off the train. It was in a forest. And we walked for some time. For about, I don't know, half an hour or so. And we came to a camp -

Did you have shoes?

We had those clogs. Those clogs. And - we came to this camp, which used to be a Hitler-Jugend holiday camp in the middle of a forest, a clearing in the middle of a forest. There were these wooden huts there. And there were some people already there. Altogether we were in the camp about three hundred of us. And I think there

was this hundred of us that we came, two hundred were already there. There were some Czechs there and some Hungarians and some Poles there already. And then there was us mainly Czechs that we came. And - it was very, very beautiful. And it made a lovely change, although we were in a camp, it made a lovely change to be in a very beautiful place, because I always loved the forest, you know. And it was really nice to - you know, as a place. Then we had bunkbeds. And we slept two again on one bunk, which was meant for one. Two at the bottom, two at the top.

Did you get a blanket then?

We got a blanket. And I think there was a straw mattress. And in the room where I was - we were all Czechs. Which was quite nice. We were about fifty to one room.

Did you know some of them?

Oh yes, I knew quite a lot of them and the rest I got to know very quickly. But I knew - I knew a lot of them. And - we were all very friendly, you know, we didn't have any - hostilities or bitchiness or fights or anything like that.

End of F203, Side A

F203, Side B

You were talking about the camp?

Well, that camp was called Kristianstadt. It was part - there was a big camp called Grassrosen. Which was a - a group of camps, of labour camps. And it was called Grassrosen. And there were all kinds of labour camps with different nationalities. They were not all Jewish. You had - Poles and Dutch people and -

Political prisoners?

No, all kinds, yes, from the occupied countries, you know.

Labour camps?

Labour camps. And I think we were the only Jewish one. Our camp was all Jewish, wherever you came from they were all Jews.

Could you communicate with the other groups?

Oh yes. Yes. We - we went to work, we worked in three shifts. Well, when we first came it was - early autumn. And the weather was still quite good. The first job I - there were different groups. You see you had roll call in the morning. And - during roll call you were put into different groups, so many groups.

Each day a different group?

Well, it was sort of for the week. And each group went to a different type of work, wherever you were needed. In my group, we were about fifty of us, we went to dig clay. There was a brick factory. And we were digging clay for this brick factory. It was very, very hot during the day. And it was like a field, you know, with this sort of clay pit there.

Very hard work?

Very hard work and very, very hot, because there were no trees or shade or anything, we were in the sunshine all day long. Digging this clay with pickaxes. And shovels. And putting them on little wagons -

Did you have the strength to do that?

I didn't, but I had to, I had to find the strength. Didn't have the strength, no. But it's amazing what you do - with willpower if you have to. Just had to. And -

How many hours?

All day, we were there from -

Did you have breaks in between for food?

I think we had soup mid-day. As far as I remember. I don't remember - I remember lots of things, I don't remember these things. I know that we had a - breakfast in the morning, a coffee and a slice of bread. And I think we had soup at mid-day. And - we came home in the evening. And we could have a shower. I think we had to have a shower. We had a shower. And then there was a dining room which used to be this Hitler-Jugend dining room. And - there we would get - either more soup. Sometimes we had boiled potatoes in their skins. Maybe five little boiled potatoes. And - then we went to our - our huts and went to sleep. But we had one day a week, I think Sundays, we had off. And I remember when it was still nice, it was end of August, beginning of September, we used to just sit out in the forest, inside the camp, inside the wire. But we used to sit in the forest and just talk, it was so nice there, just lay under the trees and chatted.

So you almost recovered a little perhaps?

Well - sort of morally. Because the ghetto was so ugly with these dreadful people and dreadful houses. Auschwitz was all death. And there this was such beautiful countryside. The huts weren't bad, they had these bunkbeds with the mattresses. Facilities were quite good, there were these showers and proper toilets, because it was this Hitler youth camp. Proper dining room with tables and chairs if you wanted to sit down to eat your soup. Or your potatoes. So - on the surface it looked quite civilised, which was quite nice. And we were kept clean. We managed to have a shower every day.

Did you get some clothes there?

No, we had the same clothes, and I think we - had - I'm sure we must have had to wash it, but I can't remember anymore - how we dried it if we had nothing to - I think we possibly put these blankets on top of us.

You slept in the clothes?

Oh yes, you couldn't change. I think we washed our clothes and put it out to dry on the grass and put a blanket over us or something. Because we each had a blanket on our bunk. And when it became colder later on - during the winter when we went to work, we had this blanket over us instead of a coat. You weren't really supposed to, but we did, and - nobody really stopped us.

Could you work with this blanket over you?

Well - when we worked in the - in the clay, it was hot, we didn't - need it. From there I went and worked - in another part of the forest, and they were clearing this part of the forest, clearing away the trees, and clearing away the topsoil. And they were going to build another factory there. I must tell you about these factories in a little while. I did that for some time. And then when it became winter and the snow came - which was something like November I think. We worked in the munition factories. Now you see this camp, all this Grassrosen camp in this forest, was full of underground munition factories. And what happened was, the trees that I was telling

you about in the forest, the tree trunks were bare up to the top, it was like an umbrella, only the top was there. So that if the enemy aircraft came they couldn't see, they only saw the forest. They couldn't see in. But you didn't have any branches except at the very top. And you had lots and lots of factories, munition factories, which were almost underground. There was just a little bit on top so that you can sort of walk in. And - but there were pipes running through the forest, sort of thick pipes, running - you know, about sort of - six feet above the ground, right through that forest, and they were humming. I don't know what was in these pipes, whether it was - steam or -

Possibly steam?

I don't know, but it was humming all the time. The whole forest was humming with these pipes. So - when - when winter came - we went to work in these - factories. And we had to walk there, you know, we had to get up in the winter. We had shifts.

It was not near the camp?

No, it was very far. And we walked about an hour. It was about - three or four miles away. Through the forest. And we had shifts, from 6 in the morning to 2. From 2 to 10 at night. And from 10 to 6 in the morning. And we had to walk through this cold forest, whenever it was, you know. We walked through this forest. I mean during the day, if you had your day shift, you went in the dark, you walked through this dark forest in the snow, it was peculiar.

Did you have torches?

No, I don't know, we just walked, I don't know, we didn't have torches.

Somebody must have been leading you?

Oh yes, we had a German woman who went with us. No, we went in the dark, the snow was there and the sky was there, you saw a little bit, you had the road in front of you. A path, not a road.

It must have been snowing sometimes?

Yes. And - we walked through this forest. And if we hadn't been so hungry and so tired we would have enjoyed it. It was really beautiful. You know, your morale went up when you were in such a beautiful place. I always loved the snow anyway. But you see we had these clogs and they started sticking and you were like on stilts, getting higher and higher and you had to knock it off and start again.

They allowed you to stop?

We had to because we couldn't walk, you know, just knock it off and you caught up. And - we tore pieces off our blanket and made these bandages round our legs instead of stockings, it was very cold. But when we got into the factory it was very warm there actually. And we made - these little hand grenades. And in our factory some made big bombs. Well, what happened was, there was this machinery - and where I was there was a sort of like a big - disc, and I sat under this disc and that disc had holes in it. And to these holes were screwed these - cases for these - hand grenades, you know, the outside cases. And those had to be filled. Now this disc - had this liquid - gunpowder mixture poured onto this disc and it went into these holes and filled these hand grenades. You see there were all kinds of machines right through the factory. So some where it was being mixed and then it came and was pouring onto this - pan there, and then it went into these holes. And what we had to do every time - one was full, you had to unscrew it. When it was full to the top. My job was to unscrew it. And pass it on to somebody else who cleaned the thread. And then I think it was - put a lid on or something, it was covered, you see. So what we did when nobody was looking, we didn't let it go right to the top. And then they put the lid on and nobody knew. So it wouldn't go off you see. Because it was meant for the English and the Americans. So that was our little bit of war effort, you know, a little bit of sabotage. That was very nice.

Was it never discovered?

No. We didn't do it all the time. You daren't do it all the time.

It had to go to the top in order to explode?

That's right. So I wonder who got saved? You know. I mean they didn't all go off, did they, these hand grenades?

How long did you do that for. All winter?

Well, I'll tell you in a minute.

Which shift did you do to start with?

Well, we did all shifts, you know, in rotation. The night shift was the worst, of course, because you see we were at home all day. And we came home in the morning about - well the shift finished at 6, we got home about - 7, half past 7. And then we had sort of a breakfast. And a wash. Not much of a wash, in the winter we weren't that dirty you know. And - then we went to bed to sleep. And then in the afternoon we might sort of just sit around and chat. We actually had stoves, you know, and we could take the wood from the forest. The little branches and things.

Stoves in your rooms?

Yeh, there were these sort of cylindrical stoves with a pipe going through. And we could go and gather little bits of branches and things that we could find on the floor. And - and we could burn those.

Did you have matches?

I think we must have had. So we sat round the stove and just talked. And then you got drowsy again and tired again, so you went to sleep. And then you had to get up. About 8 o'clock, you went to sleep about 5 or so and you had to get up about 8 o'clock. And before we went I think we had - well I think about 6 - When the

people came from the shift, the 6 o'clock shift, we went to have supper, you know, a few potatoes or something. Then we went to sleep and then we had to get up and walk in the night through this forest. And in the morning it was still dark as well, coming back. But I remember we used to sing whilst we were marching. And the Germans said, you know, "Sing, sing". And we used to sing these Czech songs, we sang parodies on Hitler and the Germans, and they didn't have a clue, you know. Because there were all sorts of parodies in those days. You know, about Hitler's head being chopped off.

Can you remember any of them?

Well - some of them in Czech, yes. And - so we had quite a bit of fun in that way. We were hungry all the time, we just got enough to eat to keep going.

Did you get any food on the night shift in the factory?

No.

Nothing at all?

No, I think we got a bit of coffee, but I'm not sure - definitely no food. No.

Was it strenuous work?

No. No, no, the worst was the - the clay. And also the digging in the forest. Some people were cutting down the trees, we didn't do that. There were actually men coming from other camps to cut down the trees.

Could you talk to the other people?

Well, in the factory, in the factory - under the same machine as I was there was a Dutch man, not Jewish, he - he was - a Dutch man. And they were allowed parcels, you know, and he sometimes brought me a bit of food. Which was nice. He'd bring

me a big slice of bread. Usually it was bread or - something like that, you know. He was very nice. Very gentle, very, very sweet.

How old would he have been?

In his twenties. Early twenties or - he seemed very grownup because I was about - 16, you know, and he was in his twenties somewhere. Very, very nice. I've liked the Dutch people ever since.

Did you keep any contact with these people or lost contact completely once you left?

Which people.

You worked with in this camp?

What, the Czech people.

Also the other nationalities?

Oh, not the other nationalities because they went back to other camps you see. They came - and then they went back to their own camps. But we could talk. I think we talked in German - with them. Everybody had to speak German. We had to speak German to the Germans and they spoke German to us.

What did you talk about. The war or your experiences?

What happened when we were children. What was going to happen. Our dreams. How we were going to live and what we were going to eat and how many children we were going to have. And - I don't know, jokes and - songs, we'd sit and sing a bit and - I don't know. We just - talked. About the Germans.

The Dutchman, would he tell you things?

Oh, we couldn't talk a lot because we had to work. We couldn't talk a lot. Because there were overseers, the Germans, you know. Actually civilians. In that factory there was a sort of German foreman, a civilian.

What were they like to you?

Well, that particular one wasn't too bad. He made sure that we did our work but he wasn't sadistic. He was strict. But he wasn't sadistic. I know we had a break half way through. And I used to go to sleep. That quarter of an hour. Just lay down and sleep. Specially on the night shift. And then they wake you up and - you carry on. It was very hard. We so much wanted to sleep, you know, and you have to get up and work. That's what you wanted to do most of the time was to sleep. I think it was the bromide - and - and the weakness of course. But I think it was the bromide.

So really the worst memory, apart from the immoral thing, was the hunger and the cold perhaps?

In that camp. In that camp. The worst memory was - yes, having to go to work when you were tired and sleepy and - and being hungry. But we - did a little bit of stealing. From the Germans.

How did you do that?

They had stores, you know, of food. And we found ways of getting to those stores and - You know what I just remember now, I did have a coat. I did get a coat. Yes, we did get coats in that camp. I know we still had these blankets, but we did have a coat, I remember that now. I had a black coat which was very long. And I used to steal things and put it in the lining, I had a hole here on the side. Made a hole on the side in the lining. And - if I stole a few potatoes I put it down that lining, but I only stole from the Germans. I never stole from anybody else. And we used to do that. And - hide it inside the mattress. Make a little hole in the mattress and hide it in the mattress and then we would sometimes cook it in that stove, you know, on the ashes. We would bake a few potatoes. It wasn't very often, but occasionally. We always

shared it. If anybody managed, you know, if you stole six potatoes you shared it out amongst six people or so.

What else could you steal apart from things like potatoes?

Potatoes I think was - potatoes or vegetables was the only thing. Because they had these heaps there, you know. And they had it - they had these heaps - in a - sort of cellar. And they had tools in the cellar and we'd say, you know, can we go and get a shovel, we want to clean our - outside our hut, or something like that, you know. They must have been stupid, or maybe they - knew and -

Did they never discover it?

They never discovered it. Maybe they didn't - Maybe they didn't bother, why should they, they had plenty of it. Because there weren't that many people to - to - to - you know, look after us. There was one - there was one woman there who was a sort of chief overseer, and she lived - in the main house, you know, where the canteen was there was like a house. And she lived there and she had a little son, who was about - 3 or 4. And we only saw her when it was roll call and she would count us and so on. But she was very sort of - distant most of the time. And when we were there in the autumn she washed some underwear and hung it on a line and a pair of knickers disappeared. And I remember standing roll call all that Sunday instead of having a rest on a Sunday, having a day off. Had to stand roll call all day, we had to stand there until those knickers were found. I don't think they ever got found. Somebody stole them. Nobody ever found them. But with that food, nobody ever got discovered. I don't know how many people did the stealing. I remember asking permission to go for these shovels, you know. Inventing some sort of work we wanted to do and - take a few potatoes. It wasn't very much, you know, it was once in a while a few potatoes. It helped.

So in some ways this particular camp was not the worst?

The best of the camps, you know, because it was pretty, it was clean, we stayed clean, we didn't have any lice. In all the other - well, in Auschwitz we didn't have lice because you were sort of fumigated. Cleaned. But - in the ghetto there were lice, you know. We all had lice, there was nothing you could do about it. It just spread. And you had lice. And - you had your clothes fumigated, you could take it to be fumigated and a few days later somebody drops one on you in the factory or something. Head lice and clothes lice. But in that camp you didn't have that, it was clean.

How long did you stay there?

We stayed there - until January. A very peculiar thing was happening actually during that winter. One after another we were getting this - like - like epileptic fits. We would just fall - you know - without knowing, just suddenly you fall. And start foaming at the mouth and shaking, you know. Just like - it was epileptic fits. And there was like an epidemic there. And - my theory, and I don't know whether it is so. I have two theories. One is that the gunpowder did something to our brains, possibly because we didn't have food or something, you know, it might have activated something in the brain. Either that. Or when we were in the forest, it was still happening when we were in the forest, you know. We were picking mushrooms and eating them raw. And there may have been some poison. They may have looked real mushrooms and they may have not been, you know. That's possible. Or, you see, these mushrooms, they were covered in this like gunpowder. And we were washing it - cleaning it off, we couldn't wash it, so we might have been eating some of it. Nobody ever knew what started it, but I thought later on, you know, what brought it on. Because we didn't have it afterwards, once they sort of - once we left that camp.

How often would that happen?

Well - I had it - on about two or three occasions. But on each of these occasions I would have a few fits, one after the other. I might have about five fits in the same day. And then maybe a few weeks later another lot, you know.

What did the Germans do about that?

Well, we actually had a little hospital in the camp there. And you went to hospital, you couldn't go to work.

And was that a sort of relief to be in that hospital. Could you sleep and ..?

Yes.

Were you properly looked after?

Yeh, there was a Jewish doctor. One of the prisoners. And a Jewish nurse. And you were quite well looked after, yes.

And clean?

And clean and in a bed. You had two in a bed. Which was nice.

And you got food?

Well, more or less the same as -

And medical treatment. Could they treat that?

They couldn't treat that now. No. But if you have other things they could treat some other things. If you perhaps had an injury they dressed your wound. Cleaned it out and dressed it. Or - perhaps if you had flu or something they gave you aspirin or something like that. Just very ordinary things. Or a minor operation. If you had a boil they might have cut it open. Something like that.

Did you have injuries from that work?

Well, not often. But everybody gets - cut or hurt sometimes, you know. Nothing serious.

You went to hospital with that?

Well - you didn't necessarily stay, but you had it cleaned out and put a plaster or something like that on. Little bandage. You know, it was - better than the other places. And - the Germans who were there were - strict but not sadistic actually. You know, you didn't feel that you have to be afraid all the time. As long as you stayed within the rules you didn't have to be afraid all the time. You didn't have to hide away like in the other camps. What they would have done if they had found the stolen things I don't know. We - we found out that they - from time to time they had a search. For stolen things, you know. Somehow you found out about it. And so we quickly took everything and - and buried it in the forest, made a hole and buried it quickly. Then you went back for it. They did look under mattresses and in mattresses. Somehow we managed it. I don't know. There were not enough of them you see, in the camp. And you had a group of people who would sort of stand around and somebody would make a hole meanwhile, you know. Just bury it under something and - We could have got into a lot of trouble, but - somehow we had an instinct what we could do and what we couldn't do.

So no serious punishment?

No, the main punishment was standing roll call, you know, for hours and hours and hours. It was very tiring and very cold. You know, and you lost your - day off when you could sort of rest and - chat and - do what you liked.

Did you make any special friendships there?

Yes. Yes. I had a - there were - nine of us.

All Czechs?

Nine of us all Czechs. And for some reason there were two Dutch girls who were with us. I don't know how they got there. Dutch Jewish girls. And there was a group

of eleven of us and we stayed together til the end. And - in January the Russians were advancing again. And we had to get out of the camp. They didn't leave us there to be liberated. So we had to go on the so-called 'death march'.

What did that mean?

Well, we had to just walk away from the camp.

You walked?

We walked. There were lots of them from every camp, you know, from the East, because we were fairly much in the East, we were in East Germany. Near Breslau it was. Which is now Poland actually. So when the Russians were advancing we had to walk West. Because first of all they wanted us away. And the Germans themselves, you know, they thought if they get caught, they'd rather get caught by the West than by the Russians. Rather get caught by the English than the Russians. Anyway, we walked. One side the - the Western people were coming, the armies. And on the other side the Russians are coming. And we walked up and down, you know, between them, trying to - keep out of the way. And -

So you went West and then back East again?

Well, North and South more somehow. Well, we were really making our way West, but not in a direct line. And in the end we were avoiding the troops and we were avoiding all sorts of people. The actual Germans they were also running away, because they didn't want to be captured by the - by the Russians.

Who guarded you?

Well, we had German - men. German - old - old German soldiers who - you know - weren't fit enough to be in the army I suppose.

Were they cruel?

On the whole they were not. But they had their moments. They had their moods. Maybe if things went badly politically or something happened they didn't like, shoot anybody who - was out of line.

Did people try to escape?

They did, and they did escape actually. But - we walked. We didn't have to be strictly in fives. And gradually it sort of - went into a long line, you know. Because people couldn't quite keep up. But you had to keep up because if you - if you fell down they shot you. But you just had to keep up. And - the bloke who went with us - well, we had a few. We had a few sort of elderly soldiers. They - they - they, you know, they didn't beat us or anything like that. You had to be careful. And - We actually walked, and not in a direct line, up and down. We walked West, but in a North South direction all the time, zig-zag sort of. And we walked from East Germany all the way to Bavaria. I think it was 600 kilometres.

What happened at night?

Well - we slept in barns if we could. And the problem was that you had a lot of Germans going as well. And they always had the privilege, you know, to - to sleep in the barns if they were the first. So we had to sometimes go from one village to another to find a barn. Where we could sleep. And we were locked in those barns, a thousand - You see we had other groups - 300 of us started off from our camp. There was 300 in the camp. But somehow - sometimes other groups went to these barns. Sometimes there were lots of us in a barn.

You must have met people from all sorts of different areas?

Oh, I met people from Poland, Polish people. In the end they joined us. And we didn't like that very much. At first there was just the 300 of us. And we were very civilised in a way, you know. We were quite sort of cultured people and we tried to keep up certain standards, even in the situation we were. But these Polish people

were like tramps and they were so - they could steal from you. You had to be so careful they didn't steal from you, if you had a ration of bread you had to -

Were they Jewish Poles?

Jewish people, but if they could steal they'd steal from you. And - they'd have fights and - terribly uncivilised. They looked like old witches these women did. I don't know, they - they - lowered the tone. If you can call it that, you know. I mean we were all in a terrible way. But somehow we managed to - keep our morale, you know, and we never stole from each other or - did anything, we helped each other when we could.

What time of year did you start this march?

In January. In the snow.

In the middle of the winter?

Yeh. Mind you the countryside was so beautiful. If it hadn't been so bad it would have been a pleasure. It was - it helped you, you know, that's what helped you through. To be in this beautiful countryside. The mountains and the forests and the fields and clean houses everywhere round you. Saw normal houses, you know, normal people sort of sometimes. And dogs and -

Did you actually speak to these people?

No.

You were kept apart?

Oh yeh, well they didn't like us. I'll tell you about that next time.

End of F203, Side B

F204, Side A

We were talking about the death march. I was wondering whether you could tell me a little bit about how it started, how they organised it?

Well, they just - when the Russians were coming and they knew they were coming, obviously there was communication between the camp and - other places. And - we were just told one day, you know, tomorrow we are going. There wasn't any packing to do or anything to do, you know. Tomorrow morning you are going.

Did they tell you where to?

No, they said we are just going. You know, we'll have to leave the camp, evacuate the camp. So -

Did you have any idea that it was because of the war?

Oh yes. Oh yes. Somehow, you know, news always - spread. When I worked in the factory the - other prisoners who were there, non-Jewish, they somehow found out what was happening and - we always knew what was happening. And -

So you just started off in the morning?

I think there was a sort of roll call to make sure everybody was out. We - bandaged our legs with - with the blankets. Tore up bits of blankets and bandaged our legs. Put the blankets over us and that's all we had. And off we started marching. It was snow and ice. It was in January. And - off we went. And we weren't the only ones you see, because all the Germans who lived in the East - of Poland, they were all marching to the West, so we were on the road with ordinary Germans, called the Hochdeutsche. But they had carts and horses, or oxen, or something like that, to - to pull the carts and they had belongings there, you know, a bit of furniture, a bit of - pots and pans, feather beds. And they were sitting on top and - and they were going West as well. So there was like a - big sort of exodus.

Did they talk to you at all?

No, they didn't talk to us. I don't think they liked us very much, no. And we had to have the - yellow star showing all the time. And I think we had it actually - on the blanket, I'm not sure now, but we had to show the yellow star. And - we just marched and marched and marched. And sometimes when we came to certain villages or towns there was like soup kitchen, they were distributing soup out in the square, for anybody, for the German - refugees and sometimes we got some as well. Or some coffee.

But if there wasn't, did you have anything with you or did they stop and give you something?

Well no, you had to rely on getting these - we usually had soup once a week, occasionally we had a bit of bread.

Once a week?

No, once a day, sorry, once a day. And -

And you said you usually spent the night in a barn?

Spent the night in a barn, yes. But the barns were often - full up with the other Germans you see, there was no room anywhere, so we had to keep going another three kilometres, another five kilometres, another two kilometres, you know, until we found somewhere to sleep. And sometimes we had to walk all night if we couldn't find anywhere. I - I remember sleeping once in the open, in a field. There was a field - there was snow on it, but they had a sort of - storage place for - straw and hay, which had a roof on. It didn't have any sides, but it had a roof on. So we slept in that straw, in the open air. And it was quite warm. Straw is very, very warm. Straw is very warm. So we slept there. And on other occasions we slept rough outside somehow, you know, in straw and hay.

Was it a very bad winter?

Oh, it was snow and ice, yes.

Was it snowing or raining?

Sometimes it was snowing, yes.

Did people gradually get ill or fall by the wayside?

Well, you see by the time - we went, it was - mainly young people who had survived a lot. And seeing what was happening in the world gave us incentive to survive, because we knew it wasn't going to be much longer. We knew that perhaps a few months or - you know, we knew it couldn't last very much longer, because the Russians are coming on one side and the - English and Americans on the other side. And they were advancing and - you know, that made us happy, so we just sort of - tried to be cheerful and carry on. It wasn't easy. But - we somehow found the strength.

Do you remember any particular happenings on this march?

Oh yes, a lot. We quite often, some of us - I in particular - used to escape for the night. If we were in a barn - my friend and I - would - would escape, try to get out, or escape before we actually got to the barn. And go to the village, turn our blankets inside out or whatever, and pretend we are - those other Germans. Because I spoke German very well and I picked up the accent very quickly. And my friend as well. And my friend was a bit older. And we pretended to be mother and daughter. And we would knock on the door of some Germans and I would say could my mother warm herself up, she is not very well and she'd got wet feet and - you know. And - whether they knew who we were or not I don't know. But very often they asked us in. And - gave us something to eat. We had some marvellous meals in that way. And sometimes they invited us to sleep. I think they must have believed that we were

Germans. Because you see these other Polish Germans they didn't look so good either. And we spoke very good German, so maybe they believed us. So they would - give us a good meal and a lovely - bed to sleep in, with a feather bed, you know, and - nice and clean, really lovely.

How did you manage to escape without the guards realising?

Well, there were so many people - walking. It wasn't just us, it was the other Germans as well you see. And you just suddenly slipped off. You see we didn't have many guards. We had one guard, or two guards, for the lot of us. And we were sort of struggling, we were all in fives like we used to march. And -

Weren't you tempted to escape altogether?

Well, yes, we could have escaped, but we said where shall we go. You see the thing was we knew the war wouldn't last much longer and we didn't want to risk to get shot. Because if they found - found us escaping and discovered who we were, some German in uniform would catch us and say, "Who are you?" And all they needed to do was to strip some of our clothes and see. And with our cut hair and all that. So they would have shot us. So we didn't want to risk it. You see there was nowhere to go, we didn't trust anybody.

So how did you manage to get back unnoticed?

Oh well, either unnoticed, we would wait until the transport was coming out of the barn and join them. Or we would actually report to the - German who was accompanying us, and said we stayed behind because this other person she was - had something wrong with her foot and I was bandaging it and we lost our way and were catching up. We tried to stay with our transport because we had friends there and we tried to stay together. But - we escaped quite often, had lovely sleeps, lovely meals. And very often we were given something to take with us like a loaf of bread. And once I - I got a whole poppyseed cake.

So on the whole the people were kind?

Some of them were. But I don't think they knew we were Jews. I think they were kind to the other people. When we came back to the transport there was about - there was 11 of us friends, we always shared, if we got something we shared it out so you all had a slice of poppyseed cake or bread or something.

Did other people try that as well?

They tried it as well, yes.

Did you ever get a refusal?

Well yes, sometimes I think they guessed who we were and they wouldn't let us in. But to get rid of us they'd give us a loaf of bread or something. Say, "We haven't got any room, we can't let you in", or something like that. But usually they did something. But on the other hand, you see, when we went as a transport - and they knew we are Jewish, you had a lot of - trouble for instance with the German children, who would throw stones at us and - spit at us and throw sticks at us and - the parents would look on and they wouldn't say anything. You know, or the mothers and fathers weren't usually there, but - the mothers - you could see they were very anti-semitic, all of them. And - I remember once - a little boy came along and tried to beat me with a stick. And I said, "You stop it. How would you like somebody to beat your mother like that?" And he actually stopped, he actually went away. And - sometimes we managed to steal something from these Germans. Occasionally, I don't know why, but they had their doors open, you know. And I remember once a door was open and there was a - I don't know whether they did it on purpose, it never occurred to me before, only now, whether they did it on purpose, I don't know. There was a cupboard with some food there and the door open, I sort of dived in and grabbed something, a sausage or something, a salami, you know.

And nobody noticed?

Nobody noticed. I wonder whether they did that on purpose. I doubt it, but it's very peculiar that they should have this cupboard there. Sometimes there would be a pile of - potatoes or onions. So we would grab some, steal some, and eat it raw. I remember eating raw onions like apples. Anything that you could eat you - you had. Or raw potatoes or - whatever there was. We didn't mind stealing from the Germans. It didn't give us any conscience.

Did you manage to wash at all?

Occasionally, not very often. Not very often. We washed a bit with the snow. Washed our - faces with the snow. We never washed our hair or - our bodies. I can't remember. When we went to these houses, mind you, when we ran away and went to these houses we did wash, yes, we got - we got - lovely hot water, you know, and a jug and a bowl. We had a good wash and - I think somebody once gave me some shoes, I got some decent shoes. Instead of these clogs I got some shoes. And once we actually got some clothes. But it didn't have the - you see they didn't see our yellow star because we used to hide it. And once we got some clothes without the yellow star, so we could have run away. But there was just nowhere to run. It's not worth risking, not worth risking.

How long did the whole march last?

It lasted six weeks. And - we went West and we actually - we didn't know where we were going. But we actually went through Czechoslovakia. We went first of all - to Dresden.

Did you actually go into the town?

We didn't actually go into the town, but - on the very evening that we arrived outside Dresden, it was on fire, that was when it was bombed just before. And the whole sky was red and the whole of Dresden was on fire. And we were so happy to see that. We were in a barn just outside Dresden and we saw it happening, and it was a wonderful sight for us. And I thought about it since quite often because there were a

lot of things written about that bombing of Dresden, you know. And actually some years ago, many years ago now, there was a lot of fuss about that. And I remember writing to - I think it was the Observer, which was running this article about Dresden. And told our side of the story, you know.

Did they publish it?

They did, yes. How happy we were to see that. And - we were in this barn just outside Dresden for the night. And - one of the women she had a baby there, the baby was born, she was pregnant and none of the Germans knew, because we had these blankets, so she kept it a secret. And - one of the prisoners who went with her she was a doctor. And she knew this woman was pregnant before we left. Anyway, she had a little kit with her, you know, she carried a little bit of a first aid with her, from that hospital in the labour camp. And -

It was the doctor who carried it?

It was a doctor. And she had scissors and some disinfectant. She had a little sort of first aid kit with her. And when this baby was born - that was at night. And - and somehow she had a candle. And by this candlelight this baby was born in a heap of straw. And - she - she did all that. And of course you couldn't keep that secret. So in the morning we had to tell - this German who was with us. He wasn't too bad that German, he was not sadistic. He did his job. But he was not sadistic. He was older. You see the older people were not so bad as the young people. I think he must have served in the First World War. And he was too old to serve, I think he was about 70. He was too old to serve in the army, so they had jobs like that. But - they were a little bit more human than the young Germans, who were really sadistic. And so we had to tell - it was one of the Czech women who had the baby, one of our group.

Who was the father, did you know that?

Well, that must have happened in the ghetto still you see. Because that was February. So that happened in the ghetto. So she was pregnant all the time through the - labour

camp and all that you see. And so this doctor who came with us she knew about it. And we all knew about it and we were shielding her, she was always in the middle somewhere so nobody could see. And - in the morning we had to - tell this overseer of ours about the baby. And he took the baby and the mother, he said, "You are going to hospital". So we weren't very sure about that. But we hoped that - being so near the end of the war, you know, they might be a little bit more lenient not to get a bad name, you know. And actually after the war we met up with her and the baby, in Prague.

They both survived?

Yes, they survived, the baby and she survived. They did go to the hospital, they were looked after. And after the war we met her in Prague. I remember going to see her in a flat and saw the baby.

The baby was fine and survived all that?

Yes. And survived all that.

She must have been doing heavy work while she was carrying the baby?

Yeh.

Were there many cases of pregnancies?

Not on that death march. In the ghetto. But not - You see when you came to Auschwitz, anybody who was pregnant - and showed - was immediately put in the gas chamber. So obviously it wasn't showing when she first went to Auschwitz. You see the thing was we all had big tummies because of the food we were eating. It was all water what we were eating. Potatoes and turnip and vegetables really, you know. And - we were so thin and our tummies were quite big, so in a way we all looked a bit pregnant. So she managed it.

Did she ever see the father of this child again?

I don't think so. She was living on her own when we saw her. I think it was her husband who - was the father. But I don't think he came back.

Because you were separated, men and women?

Oh yes. Oh yes. I just remembered now. Sometimes we slept in factories. If we came to towns - I think we went to Essen on the way, is that possible. I think on the way we went to Essen. And they had - a factory there of some sort. And we slept on the floor in the factory. And I remember there were some - German communists there. They were alright, you know, they weren't Nazis. And we were left in this factory locked up, but they were working there in the factory, somehow they managed to stay behind and there were two or three men there, these communists. And - they - came and talked to us. The Germans weren't there, somehow we were locked in. And they had a great big sort of like a kitchen there, with a great big - boiler, like a pot, really big, you know, for the whole factory I suppose, to cook something in. And he cooked us mountains of potatoes in this boiler. And we were eating - all of us were eating these potatoes at night.

Hot and cooked?

Hot and cooked. That was wonderful. I don't think it was everybody, it was a - By that time some Polish people joined us. And there was this group of us Czechs, these ten people, you know, eleven people, who could speak German. And in spite of the way we were dressed we still were quite civilised, and we could talk to them. I mean they couldn't take 300 people into this kitchen, but they took us, and fed us. And they offered one of the girls, she was a very attractive girl, offered to - to go with her. One of them said to go with her you see. And she actually went. It was a risk. But she actually went with him. And we met her after the war as well. She was alright.

But she stayed there then?

She went with him to his home. And he hid her or something, she was quite an attractive girl.

He had a home actually, where he lived. He was not a prisoner?

No, he was not a prisoner, he was a German.

He was a communist?

Well they didn't know he was a communist. That was secret. He worked in the factory. But he was a communist. And we were not going to tell on him. And - and he fed us. And that was very nice. And -

Did they ask you about where you came from?

I suppose so, yes. We talked all night really. And we had some sleep. Once we were in a - factory where they were making bulbs, electrical bulbs. I remember all these bulbs about. And also we were locked in. And I remember at night breaking as many bulbs as we could and putting them back in the boxes. So a bit of sabotage. Yes. I mean it was awful, but in a way we tried to make it a bit of fun, you know, we tried to enjoy it as best we could. Because there was a certain amount of freedom. The countryside was lovely. We knew it was near the end. So we cheered up a bit.

I think you must have survived just because of your spirit?

Yeh. Yeh. We had a lot of laughs. In spite of everything. That's because we weren't locked in behind wires. And because the countryside was so lovely, you know, it boosted up our morale.

Any other special memories of this walk?

Yes, I remember one. I was with this woman again, you know, who was supposed to be my mother. She was only - she, for some reason, I don't know how she managed to

get through - she was sort of in her - thirties. She was about 37 or something like that, but she must have been very young looking. And I was only about - 16. And I could have - passed for 13, you know, I was so undeveloped. So we could pass for daughter and mother. And - we stayed the night somewhere. Again we - we walked - we ran away and we didn't go to the village, we walked out into the country a bit and we saw some of these sort of little houses, little villas they had, like cottages. And we went to one. And - they had us in. We said again - I think by this time we had all these other clothes, so we could pass, we said we are Germans and we were fleeing from these terrible Russians and - so on and - said my mother wasn't well and could she just have a little rest and warm herself up in front of the fire. We never asked for any food or anything, just could she warm herself up in front of the fire, you know. And - I usually did the talking to begin with. And they asked us in - and they asked us in for a meal, they were giving us a lovely meal. I don't know anymore what it was, but it was a good meal. And - people started coming in and it was these Germans - German soldiers kept on coming in and they kept on gathering round this table and round that room. And at the end there were about ten, twelve of these German soldiers there. And we just kept on pretending, you know, we are Germans and - talked German to them and told them all these stories about Poland and all that. But what happened was, this was a Post Office. And they were coming for their letters, for their mail. And they just stopped and talked. And we had a very lucky escape there. And we were actually given a bedroom, the two of us, with lovely feather beds, you know, those thick ones. White, snowy white and clean and hot water to wash ourselves. And possibly some shoes. I don't remember the details, but I know it was amazing. And we lay there together in these twin beds, you know, in these feather beds. It was - it was wonderful.

Nobody ever queried where you came from?

Well they did, but we just told them these stories about being Polish, Polish Germans and running away from the Russians and the communists and - because there were so many there they believed us. They were really young men, you know.

What did the German soldiers talk about when they came in?

Well - the thing was that - although it was already sort of February, you know, not far from the end of the war, and we knew what was happening. They were still talking about winning the war. They were still thinking they were going to win the war.

"Oh, we'll do this and that", and Hitler said in his speech this is what they're going to do. And they're going to chase the Russians away and the British away and they're going to win the war. And they were singing songs and, you know - very boisterous and - probably had a bit of drink I suppose. And - tried to be very optimistic. They were talking a lot about the war and about the good things that are going to happen, and all that, and -

They never mentioned concentration camps?

Oh no. I don't think they even knew.

Did they come from the Russian front?

I have no idea.

They didn't say then?

I can't remember. And - the next day we got up and our transport had left. And - we wanted to join them, but we somehow - got - it was in the countryside, it was beautiful countryside, it was sort of - not mountainous, but hills and - fields and snow. It was very, very beautiful. And I remember us walking and we were - going - I think we were going to - catch up with our transport in the next village. We were going in the direction they went. And we were going to catch up with them in the next village.

How did you know where they were going. Just general direction?

Yes, you knew where all these people were going. We were going to find them. And catch up with them. And - it got a bit foggy. It got quite a bit foggy. And we were walking and walking and walking all day, and we didn't see anybody all day. Well

eventually we came to a village you see. And we said well, we've got to stay the night at this village, because it was dark very soon - in the evening. When we got to the village we realised it was the same village where we were the night before. We were going in a circle. And we just laughed, it was silly. After walking all day, you know. And I remember we crossed - like a little river, like a big brook. And there was a - a tree trunk across it and we had to go with the tree trunk and we just sat down and made - astride like on a horse, and made our way across this stream, because we couldn't walk across that. Got across this river and did all sorts of things. And -

So where did you sleep?

In the end we gave ourselves up. We said we lost our transport, could they send us back to the transport. I said again, you know, my mother - we didn't - we didn't do that in the house of these people, because we didn't want to say who we are, but we went to the village and found somebody. We said we lost our transport because, you know, my mother has a bad foot and we got left behind a little bit and they just disappeared. So I remember they took us in a sort of vehicle, you know, this sort of coach and - and - I think horse with a bell. Sort of like a sledge and - and a horse. And they took us somewhere. And they actually took us to some town and there was a - a police station there and there was a cell like a prison there. And they put us in this cell in this prison. And gradually - we all got there together. They all started escaping, they all were put back and we all met in this prison.

So all the people who ran away were taken ..?

Yes, went to this prison for some reason. Either they were caught or they gave themselves up. But we had such laughs.

End of F204, Side A

F204, Side B

Well, we were very lucky really that they didn't all take us and shoot us.

Did they know then that you were Jewish?

Oh yes, oh yeh, we told them, we said we lost our way. You see there was nowhere to go. The only way to survive, we thought, was stay with the transport. Eventually the Russians or the British would come, meet up in the middle, you know, and we would be free. We knew that. So we had to - play our cards right. Which actually we did, you see we had this instinct that we could do these things. You see the Germans who looked after us wanted to have a good reputation so that we'd tell the Germans or the Russians that they treated us well. They did their duty, but they didn't - sort of shoot us on the spot or anything like that. If we had met some other - I mean people were shot - from these transports. We weren't the only one, there must have been dozens, hundreds of them. But we were lucky that we had this - this person. And - somehow we got away with it. I think it was also very, very lucky.

So how long did you stay in that cell. Did they give you something to eat?

No. We stayed - oh I know, you see we were - that's right, we were all this Czech transport at first. And then we - ten of us from the transport, or eleven of us, met in that cell. And we were then joined with another transport that came. They were all Polish.

So it wasn't your original transport?

It wasn't our original. There was just the ten of us. I think we were eleven. There were nine Czechs and two Dutch girls.

So all those others had also escaped?

They were in another transport you see, they went away. Now the eleven of us were put onto a transport of some Polish - people. All Polish people. And we had to join on to them, so of course we were even much closer then, we were friends together. And - so we marched on and we got - to Czechoslovakia - and we actually marched through the Sudetenland, across the border. And I also escaped, and I think I was on my own - and - I came to a - a little cottage, with a nice gate. And you know how they used to have names on these cottages. It said 'Kocourek'. A Czech name, 'Kocourek'. So I thought maybe he could hide me or give me some food or something. So I knocked on his door and this Czech man came along. And he said, "Go away, go away, I don't want you here, go away". The Czechs were worse than the Germans were. So I went away, and it didn't take long, once some German came and caught me. He gave me away. He called the Germans.

A Czech?

He called the Germans. A German came along. And took me to another prison. And - I remember, for some reason somewhere, I must have got a poppyseed cake. I had a whole poppyseed cake.

So this Czech had given you away?

Yes. But for some reason before that I must have got a poppyseed cake from somebody. And I had it under this blanket you see. And this German came and arrested me and took me to a prison. And I was in a cell all on my own. And that cell had a - like a sort of - like a - bunkbed in it, or something like that. And it actually had a toilet, a proper toilet. And I remember, I was locked up in this cell. And sitting on this toilet - because I hadn't sat on a toilet for God knows how long, you know, a proper one. Sitting on this toilet eating this poppyseed cake. And I was happy. And - somehow they put me back together -

With your transport?

Somebody else came in then I think. Eventually - yes, they put me back with the transport. And - we went through Czechoslovakia - quite a lot. We went through - Marienbad.

Did you ever escape again in Czechoslovakia?

I don't think so. I was put off because these Czechs were so terrible. You know. Collaborators. If they could get something they would do it. I daren't - specially in the Sudetenland you know. So we just marched and we marched through Marienbad, and eventually arrived in Bavaria. Which was very, very beautiful, very pretty Bavaria is. And through these lovely villages. And - then again - one day - we ran away with my friend. And I don't remember the exact details, but eventually gave ourselves up.

Meaning what?

Went to the Germans and said we lost our transport, you see. And they - took us again in one of these sledges, with a horse, you know, with a bell. We went through the most beautiful countryside, sort of forests, you know, it was - wonderful. And - we arrived at a concentration camp called Flossenburg. I don't know if you've heard of it. It's in Bavaria. And we arrived there and - our transport was there. But before that I remember another incident. We ran away and we went - to a little house. They were also spotlessly clean these German houses. The lino on the floor was shining and everything was shining. And it was a woman with two daughters. And we stayed the night there. And the - rest of the transport was somewhere in a barn in the village. And this woman knew who we were and she was a communist. She talked, she said, "I know who you are, but don't be afraid. I won't give you away". And we talked. And in the morning she sent these children out and said, "Make sure that there's no.. - " It was early in the morning before there were people about. "Make sure there's nobody about, no Germans about. That it's all free to go". And they went out and they came in and said, "Nobody is there". And we quickly ran and went back to our transport. So the communists were the only ones who were sort of anti-Nazi and who helped. I always - you know, I always thought after the war if only I could have

found her, you know, and sent her some parcels or something. But I couldn't even remember which village it was, we went through so many villages. And her name or anything, you know, how to find her.

If you stayed with other people overnight, you couldn't have had so much help in being sure to get back safely. How did you manage then. Did you leave very early in the morning?

We tried to leave early in the morning. And - get back to them. Or - somehow we managed it, you know. Sometimes we gave ourselves up. I mean we didn't escape that often, it seems, you know, many times. But it may have been altogether - half a dozen times.

At least you got a little bit of extra food and warmth?

We got extra food and warmth and it was quite an adventure. I remember when we were walking we saw on the hillsides these isolated cottages. They were always white. Usually painted white with gardens and gates and - And we thought if only I could be alone, all on my own in a little cottage like that, for five years, that's all I want out of life, to survive and - Because you know we were a thousand people sometimes. In a barn. Shut away always with lots and lots and lots of people. Never having any privacy. You just had this longing of - being on your own. I've got my cottage now. And the funny thing is, obviously, you know, all I ever wanted after the war was to have a family of my own again. But I still need my solitude. I couldn't be with people all the time, I need to have a - bit of time on my own every day. Or most days. I need to - have this - it's not privacy, but the peace and quiet. And the sort of freedom to do exactly as I like. And I - I - every day - well at the moment I go to my studio and I - I paint and I'm on my own. But I never minded being on my own, knowing that my family are coming home in the evening. When my husband worked and the children went to school, I enjoyed my day at home. Knowing they were coming back. But I enjoyed the peace and quiet. The freedom to do as I liked. Being able to go to the fridge and get my food. And eat when I wanted to. And - see my friends or whatever, you know.

When you were in Czechoslovakia were you ever tempted to run away to Prague?

No, because the Czechs were so terrible, I wouldn't have dared, it wasn't worth risking. You know, knowing - I mean if I had known what was going to happen, I might have done. But, you know, I just thought, well we all thought, somewhere the Russians and the Americans will meet and that will be that. But we still had Belsen in front of us.

So what happened then?

So we went to this Flossenburg. And that was - I'm told - most of the time a terrible camp. But by the time we were there it was a - a - it was mainly for men. And - it was just somewhere for people to go and stay. It was a concentration camp. It was up on a hill. It was a fortress I think - once. And I believe it was a very bad camp in its time. But when we came there, which was - by that time it was - beginning of March.

'45?

'45. We stayed there for ten days. Sort of surviving, you know. We had - a bit of soup every day. We slept on a concrete floor.

You didn't have to work there?

We didn't have to work. And - I remember I was so thin. I - I tried to find somewhere to sleep because it was so crowded. And I found somehow - a - a - there was a table or a shelf or a piece of furniture somehow was - was there, some sort of thing. And I remember going under it. I managed to crawl under it and it was only a few inches high, but I was so thin - I crawled under there and slept there. And in spite of our adventures and a bit of food, we didn't get fat on it, you know. But we just managed to keep up our strength to - together with the willpower, to go on walking. And -

Did people get ill on that walk, and what happened to them?

Well, somehow - the transport we went on, people - carried on. Somehow. I've read about these death marches. If somebody got a bit tired and stayed down they shot them. Lots and lots of people were shot on these death marches.

But you didn't experience that?

I didn't experience it, we were very lucky. I tell you what I did experience once. It was still on the death march, before we went to this - Flossenburg. I had a very frightening experience. I again ran away with my friend. We always went together. This mother, daughter thing seemed to work. And we got very, very friendly the two of us. And - we ran away and we - either gave ourselves up or we were caught, I don't remember the details. We probably gave ourselves up. And they said they would take us to our transport. And we were in some - form of transport. You know, I can't even remember if it was a - a lorry or a van or a - sledge or something. We were in some form of transport. I can't remember now what it was. And suddenly we got into - we were in a forest and we got - we got to some place - and there was a - some sort of building and a wall there. In the middle of nowhere somehow. And I remember these Germans told us to get out, just for the two of us, there was about three of them. Just to get out. And they said, "Now you stand in front of that - you go to that wall". And he took a gun out. And I thought that was the end, you know. I thought well, we've had it now. And - terrible, you know, sadistic and - "To the wall". So - I - I panicked. You know. I was very young, I was only 16. I said, "What a shame", you know, "survived all that". All the thoughts that go through your head at that time, you know. So I actually pleaded with them. I said, "Look", you know, - "I'm only 16, maybe you have a daughter - would you like your daughter for somebody to come and shoot her?". You know, I tried all this sort of emotional blackmail in a way, it just came to me all of a sudden. And they put their guns away. And they just roared with laughter. I don't think they intended to kill us, they sort of had their joke on us. And they were just laughing like mad, they thought it was a great joke. Whether it helped, what I told them. I said, you know, "You have children at home maybe?" Because he wasn't that young anymore. "You wouldn't

want them to get shot, would you?" I don't know whether it - did something to him, or - I spoke good German, you know. I said something, you know - "My father fought in the first war", something like that. "He had medals". And all sorts of stories, you know, it all came to me suddenly. Which isn't true, but - tried all sorts of things. So somehow - They just laughed and took us to our transport.

That was just the three of you?

There was the two of us. Two. But there were about three soldiers. Well not soldiers, they were - a bit more than just soldiers. They were in the army, but they were these - you know, people in uniform and - So that was a big fright.

So then they took you back to your transport?

Yes.

It must have been quite a shaking experience?

It was very frightening I can tell you. Very frightening. Anyway, going back to Flossenburg, we stayed there - for about ten days, or two weeks. Not very long. And then we were marched down from this hill, from this fortress - to a train. And that was a coal train. It was these wagons. And it was all - black inside. They must have - transported coal there before. It was all black dust. And we were put - just filled up these wagons, fifty, sixty to one - wagon. And shut the door. We had a little bit of food, a little bit of drink on the journey, I think a slice of bread and a cup of something to drink. And - they shut these wagons and we were on our way. And it actually got very hot. It was a very sunny and warm March. And during the day it got frightfully, frightfully hot in these wagons.

It was dark?

It was dark. There were - I think these little windows with the - bars there. I don't think it was intended for a coal wagon, but they did use it as such sometime. And - it was very, very hot. And we were on the way for a week.

A week?

A week. And in that week we had nothing to drink and nothing to eat. For a whole week. We were very hungry and very thirsty. And the thirst was worse than the hunger in a way. It was absolutely dreadful. And - after a week - You see it isn't that the journey would last a week, but as I said, you know, they had to go in a round about way, because the - railway lines were bombed. And sometimes we stood for hours and hours and went nowhere, you know. And -

How did one survive that?

I don't know.

You must have got weaker and weaker?

We did. We were so weak - and so hungry and so thirsty, you know, it was - dreadful.

Did all the people in that carriage survive it?

In that particular carriage they - as far as I remember, yes. You see the people who were left were the strongest.

Did you talk to each other or ..?

Well, I think we tried to sleep most of the time. We were lying as best we could. And - just slept. Because we were so weak and tired. Which was a good thing, because it was one way of preserving energy, was to sleep. We were very, very weak. Then after a week - we arrived at Belsen. I mean we didn't know what Belsen was.

But we arrived at Belsen. But we had to walk 7 kilometers. Because the train stopped there somewhere in the countryside.

Did they give you anything to drink?

No, they didn't give us anything to drink. But there was a sort of - like a - stream or pond, with stagnant water, it was all green and slimy. And we went and drank that, because we - you know, it was - But we were so thirsty we just drank that.

Did that make you ill?

Well - not at first. But, you know, we did so many things we shouldn't have done. We all got typhus in the end. So whatever it was - And - I mean it didn't help a lot, but it helped a bit, and we didn't have a lot of time to drink, because all these Germans were there to welcome us with their dogs and whips and everything. And then they said we've got to walk for 7 kilometers, you know. So in that state we were, all black, we were all black, like black people. Our clothes was black, our faces were black - from this coal dust. And it also made you even more thirsty that dust. So we walked. And got to this camp. And - there were no gas chambers there. But - there were barracks. With all different camps. There were all different sort of - sectioned off with wires. And - we were taken to the end of the camp. Which was called the so-called gypsy camp, because there were gypsies there as well. And it was on the - on the edge of the camp. And beyond us - there was sort of like a wasteground. I don't know, you might have seen it on pictures, it was like a wasteground. And then the wires. And then there was forests. Could see the forests. But it wasn't very nice, it was all very, very flat and then the forests were in the distance. And - when we arrived it was in the evening, we were taken to a sort of barrack and we slept on a concrete floor. We still weren't given any food, they said the next day. And there wasn't any. So - we - asked all sorts of people what the place was like. Tried to find out where we were and what it was like, you know. And they had these water troughs, but they were dried up. You see it was very, very difficult. Because normally I think people could go and get water, but they were dry. So - we just went to sleep.

End of F204, Side B

F205, Side A

I think the last time we talked about the time you actually arrived in Belsen. And you told me a little bit about the actual arrival and where they put you in the camp. But we didn't talk very much more about what actually happened there?

Well, I was there about a month before the liberation. And - I think I did mention last time that we stood around a lot on roll call, didn't I? That we had to get up very early in the morning. 4 o'clock or -

That was also in Auschwitz, wasn't it?

Well, everywhere it happened. But - we - we slept on concrete floors, because - there were these huts, with just bare concrete floors. And we slept on those. Very, very close together, very squashed together. And I remember on my first evening, there were already some people there before we came. And on my first evening there there was an old woman - sleeping right sort of - more or less on me, because you were so close together, her sort of head was in my lap. And we were talking. Well, she seemed old, she probably wasn't, but she looked old. People in their forties they looked old, really old, because they were so - tired and - ill. And we talked a little bit. And when I woke up in the morning she was still in the same position. And I realised that she was dead, she had died.

That must have been a terrible shock?

Well - you know, it was an everyday occurrence really, that people died. But she sort of died on me. And - then we -

What did you do about it?

Well, as you perhaps know, if somebody died you just threw them out on a heap. Because outside each hut there was a heap for the dead people.

You did that yourself. Or did somebody come and take them away?

Well, we did it ourselves really, or somebody came and - you know, some people were on duty and had to do it. But - as people died they were just thrown on these - heaps there. They were like - sort of like haystacks, getting bigger and bigger on top of each other.

Did one take the clothes away before they were taken?

Well - I didn't see anybody taking clothes away, but they must have done because there were so many naked people there. I think if somebody had decent clothes they just took it off. Didn't take it off that woman. So - next thing was roll call. It was still dark and it was - March. So it was very early. It was about this time of year actually. And it was quite early. And we stood for ages. First in the dark and then it was getting - light. It was very, very cold, because we didn't have good clothes. And it was freezing cold. And then gradually it started getting light, it started getting a bit warmer. And - we - just waited for - the Germans to come and count us. And - when that happened we were - then going to have breakfast, which was a - bit of dirty water really, it was supposed to be coffee and it was a sort of brown water, and that's all we had for our breakfast.

Was it hot?

I think it was warm, yes, I think it was warm. And you had - a few people who were on duty who went to the kitchens and collect these great big cans. With the so-called coffee. And at least it was hot. And wet. Which was very important. And after that we were -

Nothing to eat at all?

Nothing to eat for breakfast at all. The only thing we had to eat was in the evening, which was a soup, with a few cubes of - turnip in it. Or some vegetable. I remember

also on my first morning, I don't think I mentioned that, about going to get the water. And I said it was all dry. But did I tell you about the woman who - who hit me?

No?

I didn't tell you that. I was going to tell you. Well, we were so thirsty as you know, we had been on the train for a week without any water or food and we were very thirsty, which was worse even than being hungry somehow. And there were these troughs. We were at the - outer edge of the camp and there was like a wasteland with a lot of dead bodies on it. But there was also a trough with taps. And we were told they were dry, there wasn't any water there. And I was so thirsty I thought well I'll give it a try, maybe I'll get a drop out somewhere, you know, test all these different taps see if a drop comes out. But nothing came out. So - I came - I was coming back over this bit of wasteland. And this girl came along, very good looking girl. And she didn't look so - ill and tired like the rest of us.

Was she a prisoner?

She was a prisoner. And I think she had some hair, because she looked very good as far as I remember, she had some hair. And she suddenly - hit me so hard over the face that I fell over. And - she - I can't really remember now how I knew that she was Czech, but I knew she was Czech. Whether it was the looks or whether she talked to me, I can't remember. But I knew she was Czech. A Jewish prisoner like me, but she was one of these kapo you see. And I was so furious that a Czech girl should hit me like that, that I hit her back. I hit her back and I said, "You should be ashamed of yourself, a Czech girl a prisoner like me". I said, "You are as bad as the Germans". And she got hold of me and she took me to the Germans and reported me that I was rude to her. And - the - there was this German - overseer there, the man in uniform. And he told me to pick up some stones and made me put them in a heap. And some bricks. And he made me kneel on these stones. And these bricks over my head. I don't know if you saw the picture which is called 'Punishment'. I didn't put me, I put a boy there, with these - kneeling with these bricks over my head. And he said I'll be there all day like that. And all because of this woman. And - because - we

all looked so much alike I knew he would never recognise me, you know. So when he wasn't looking I ran away. I thought well if he's going to punish the whole camp, then I'll own up. But if not - I'm going to get away with it.

So when no one was looking?

When no one was looking, when the Germans weren't looking, they sort of went off, I just ran away and hoped for the best.

And you had to kneel on the stones and have bricks on your head?

No, no, over - hold them with my hands over my head like that. So I just ran off and I got away with it. Luckily. I mean he could have come and shot me or something. He could have just said, you know, "Own up or everybody is going to get shot", or something like that. But because it was towards the end of the war - some of them - I think - tried to be a bit careful, you know. Although some of them were - still were happy shooting and - killing people, kicking them to death. One of my friends got kicked to death.

Why did she hit you in the first place?

Well, she said, "You shouldn't be going to these troughs. You were told there isn't any water". Because they were so sadistic. I mean which - what sort of a person would collaborate with the Germans, knowing that they have to keep the Jews in order. They were hitting us, they had - some of them had whips. Some of them - you know, were big and strong. And I mean what sort of a person would do it. A lot of them were sadistic. And - enjoyed it. Enjoyed the power.

Why would they kick your friend to death?

Well that was a German, because - I was telling you, I was always running away with - with a friend who was a bit older and we said, you know, she was my mother - and daughter. And - again, you know, we were very, very hungry. And - when the soup

came in the evening - it came in a very big sort of container, like a big drum. And again these kapo they were giving them out. And they were giving us all the water and keeping these turnips to themselves that were floating in the bottom. And - some people got more and some people got less and she was so hungry and she just got water without any of these turnips. And this kappo was keeping them, you know, for herself, this mountain of turnips. So she went and complained to the - to a German. About her. Said, you know, that it's not being fairly distributed, that she's keeping it all to herself. And he just knocked her down on the floor and kicked her and kicked her and kicked her, until she was almost unconscious. And then he sent her to a bunker. And we never saw her again. The bunker was just a sort of - hole, dark hole, without windows or anything, where they just let people die. Dreadful, yes. And - I still see the face of this German on - you know, in my mind. And - then at the end of the war when - well not at the end of the war, but when we were liberated, the Germans had to pick up all these bodies and put them on the cart. He was one of them. And that - really made me happy. To see that. But that comes a bit later.

That was all on your first day, the punishment?

Well, the punishment was on the first day. My friend was a few days later, when she was kicked.

That was the friend you escaped with?

Yeh, the one I used to go around with a lot. She was my best friend there. And he just, you know, a young man, he was very, very young. In his twenties I would say. Very sadistic face. He enjoyed it so much, you know, kicking this woman.

You could see it all?

Oh yes.

And there was nothing you could do of course?

Nothing I could do. You know, kicking and having a sort of sadistic grin on his face, really enjoying it. And - well during the day we could more or less do what we liked within our - partition. Our camp. Because it was divided -

What did you do?

Sleep most of the time. Or just sit around. It was very warm. It was a very warm - spring really. It was March. It was warm during the day. And it was all sort of like sandy outside. You know, like mud had turned to sand. And we just sat. Either we sat outside leaning our backs against the huts and talking, you know, with each other. Walking around to see if you knew somebody. Because there were other people there who came at other times. So there was a good chance that you met somebody you knew, so you went exploring.

Did you find anybody?

I found a few, yes. And - lying down in the sand and - sleep. Or go inside and sleep. You know, we were very weak and very tired.

What did you talk about?

Well, we talked about our lives. We talked about what we were going to do when we come out. We talked about food - a lot. Oh, you know, how women talk amongst each other.

Did you talk about the Germans at all. The hatred coming out?

I suppose so, I suppose so, yes. What we - we knew - that - it's not going to last very long. We could see that because - we knew that - you know, the British and Americans are coming from one side and the Russians from the other. That it wouldn't last very long. So we hoped we would survive that long. And so we were talking about what we are going to do. What our first meal was going to be.

Can you remember what the meal was going to be?

Yes. Yes, something very similar to what I gave you when you came last time. It was dumplings and sauerkraut. I had this craving for dumplings and sauerkraut. I wonder if it's psychological that I gave it to you. It's only occurred to me now, it didn't occur to me before. But - that was - that was - not even meat or anything, just the dumplings and the sauerkraut.

Did you have any idea, when you were talking, what you will do, what was in your mind?

Not really. I had this dream of just being left alone for a while, just being on my own. Well not on my own, I wanted to find my family. But away from the crowds, just have peace and quiet. Away from the crowds and - clean and - nice surroundings and - I think we just all hoped that we would go back home and - meet somebody. Some of the family. Because although I knew my parents were dead, I didn't know what happened to anybody else. And I certainly hoped my friends would come back. Because I had so many - Jewish friends, because I went to a Jewish school. So my friends would come back and - we sort of start a life. I hoped I would study to catch up with everything I had missed, all those years of study. Go to school, go to - university maybe and study and - get married and have a family of my own. And -

So that was the kind of conversation one used to have?

Oh yes, yes. Mainly about things you wanted badly. Because it - it sort of - you pretended almost you had them, you know. And it kept you going, the hope that it might happen one day. So it went day after day, you know, people around were getting very ill and dying all the time, because this epidemic of typhus was there.

They were not taken to hospital if they were ill?

Well - there was a hospital, yes, but nobody ever came out. Nobody ever came back. I didn't know anybody who went to hospital and did come back. You just avoided hospital, you see, that was the thing. You didn't want to go to it because - I don't even know that there was a hospital. They said they were going to hospital. But they might not have gone there, or - I honestly don't know where they went. They always said they are going to hospital. But nobody ever came back. We were getting weaker and weaker and feeling unwell. You couldn't wash, there was nowhere to wash. There was no water.

Not at all?

Not at all. And we were all black from those coal wagons, you know.

You still were?

Well, we sort of probably tried to wipe it off or something, we were filthy dirty, full of lice. Feeling ill. And feeling very, very weak.

Did you have tummy upsets?

Tummy upsets, diarrhoea.

What were the conditions for lavatories and so on?

Oh dreadful. They were these - latrines. But they were overfull. There was just heaps and heaps of mess, you know. And you just went and made a bigger mess, that's all.

Paper or anything?

No, nothing. Paper, you must be joking. No. It was unbelievable. Quite unbelievable. You know, I never even thought about this lately, what you said, paper and all that. I - I - funny, you think about some things and don't think about

others. Never thought about it. When you went to these latrines you had to walk over these dead bodies, because as I said, we were on the - edge of the camp, by this wasteland, where all the bodies were put.

So you actually had to walk over them?

Walk over them.

Over the dead people?

Yes. Sort of you had bits of gaps in between which you had to step over them. Well they were just like stones. In the end you didn't take notice. They were just stones. You know, they are just things. Over them to get to the latrines and - and back again. And - so time went on and it became more and more difficult to stand roll call. You know, one day was like another really. You didn't really do anything except stand roll call and sleep and -

You didn't work?

Oh no, no, no. You just waited for something. You know, the camp was there - to wait. It was - it was filth and lice and smell and death around you. And you just waited for the end of the war really, that was what we were doing. And - then after some time, after about three weeks, we were hearing shooting in the distance. And we knew that there was fighting going on. Because - behind that wasteland - there were forests and there was sort of like forests and hills. And we heard shooting in there. And of course we adored that, we thought oh, something is happening. One night actually some planes came over and there were flares, and the whole camp lit up, there were - you know, the British or the Americans came and lit up this camp. And of course we were very happy because I said, "Well they've seen us, they know we're here". Whether they really did, you know - I suppose they must have looked what was there.

Was there any bombing. Could you hear any bombing?

Well, it was - it wasn't bombing of - towns and so on, it was just this shooting, you know, like - from the tanks would it be. Machine guns and - sort of quite big bangs, you know. Cannonfire. And - because they were in tanks, weren't they. And I think they were shooting from there, weren't they, from tanks. I think so. And -

So when you heard the shooting ...?

We heard the shooting. But the thing was that I personally I was getting more and more ill. I already had typhus in me. Because I thought I had a temperature and I was so weak and so tired. And I had to stand roll call. I knew I was ill and I was determined - not to go to hospital. I didn't want to go to hospital because I knew I wouldn't get out. So - you know, you had to - be so strong willed to be able to stand. Remember we hadn't eaten for ages, for weeks we hadn't eaten. This little bit of soup and five cubes of turnip in it, that's what we had for the whole day. And - on top of it, the illness, you know, people were just dying all the time. And I thought I've got to - got to, you know, keep - I've got to stand, got to stand for this roll call. Because once you fell you've had it.

If you fell down they took you away?

They took you away. So I wasn't going to fall. And we were still together with our Czech friends, so we sort of gave each other moral support, or physical support if need be.

Were they all ill?

Most of them were ill in some way or another, you know, to some degree. I was also told afterwards that they were giving us ground glass - in our food. To kill us off. Because they couldn't kill us off - any other way. There was no ammunition, there were no gas chambers. So they tried to kill us in that way. And so we had this diarrhoea and - I've had a weak stomach ever since. Whether it's got anything to do with it I don't know. It couldn't have done me much good, could it? So -

End of F205A (Part one of side one)

F205B (Part two of side one)

So you managed to stand ..?

Stand. And - then - one day we were standing, standing, standing and no Germans came. And then we found out that all the Germans had gone. But the Hungarians were there. You see the Hungarians were really on the German side. Fought with the Germans. And the Hungarian soldiers there, because - not far from the camp there were the military barracks of the Germans and the Hungarians. And so the Hungarians were there - the Germans had left, and the Hungarians made sure that we don't leave the camp. We weren't allowed to leave the camp. I think it was partly for sort of quarantine as well, because we had typhus. But I don't know, we just weren't allowed to leave the camp.

But were they cruel to you, the Hungarians?

Well, not to me personally, but they were cruel to some people. And I knew of somebody - who - I didn't know about it in the camp, but when I came back to Prague. Somebody I knew, a boy, was actually shot by a Hungarian and he was paralysed. So they did shoot - I suppose if somebody did something that they were not supposed to do. So everybody was supposed to stay where they were. But they tried to look for food, they tried to raid maybe the German - quarters for food or something, you know. And these Hungarians didn't know what to do. I think they didn't know quite what to do, so they shot or hit. You see I went - I went to look for - things. I got some new clothes. I went to some - stores. It was camp clothes, but it was - whole and warm, you know. But I made sure that nobody saw me.

That was possible?

It was possible, yes. You didn't do it in front of them. They weren't everywhere, you know. And you just made your way - You could actually walk out of your bit of

camp and go to the - you know, there were a lot of small camps, just partitions, with wire. And you could walk to see if you knew anybody, if you met anybody. And that went on for a few days. And -

Could you get a little bit more food?

We couldn't get any food. Some people did, some people did get hold of some potatoes. And they were making - specially the gypsies somehow. But they were making fires, little bonfires on - on this wasteland.

That was allowed?

That was allowed, as long as you stayed in the camp. They made little bonfires. Where they got the wood from, I suppose it was lying about, because there were these forests or something, they - they - made little bonfires and they were cooking potatoes.

But they didn't give you any?

No, I didn't have any. They were the gypsies'. And maybe some other people - you know some people - I don't know how, some were working in the kitchens, you know, - some maybe were lucky to raid a place where there were potatoes, I didn't find it, I found the clothes. But I remember there was like a swimming pool there. It was a swimming pool. And there were dead people at the bottom, but I was so thirsty I drank the water. And that's where I got the typhus, because I wasn't well before, but I don't think it was typhus. And that's where I got the typhus. I think. And - then - a couple of days or so later the - British came. The British came on the tanks. The tanks started rolling down the - sort of like a main road, but I was so weak I couldn't - even go to greet them. Most of us couldn't go to greet them, because we were so weak and tired. I was so pleased I could just lie down and sleep. You know.

But you must have felt ..?

Oh, I felt - oh, thank God for that. Oh, thank God for that. But we always we were always imagining that when we are liberated we are going to be - dancing and kissing them. And I don't think they wanted to be kissed by us to be honest. We didn't think of it that way, we didn't think we were so dreadful, you know. But to them we looked absolutely awful of course. And we are going to embrace them and - be happy and dance and God knows what. But - all we wanted to do is to lie down and be allowed to be ill.

Is that what happened?

And that is what happened. And we are just lying in our huts and they came. And they were very, very good. Especially the slightly older ones. There were some very, very young soldiers. They must have been - 18 plus. And they were really quite frightened of us. And because they were frightened they were quite - tough. You know, they were very -

Correct probably?

No, no, not correct, they were - almost a bit cruel, you know, because they were so frightened of us. If we were supposed to queue up somewhere they made sure we are in the line, they were pushing us, you know, and so on. Whereas the oldest ones didn't. Because I think they were just frightened of us. I mean we must have looked really awful, and we did. We didn't think it was that frightening, obviously, you know. But to them we were. But I must say the - they were absolutely marvellous. They came with great big - tankers of water. That's what we needed more than anything, was good water. Food. Luckily - I think it was more luck than - than sense. They gave us the right sort of food.

They must have known that it would be dangerous to give you rich food?

My very first food was tinned creamed macaroni. You know the one in the tins. And that was heaven. And - every day on Liberation Day I feed my family this tinned

maccaroni. And the poor things have got to eat it, yes. And my son likes it, the rest of them aren't very keen.

What was your first contact with a British person. Could you speak English at all?

No, I couldn't. I couldn't. But you didn't really have to. I was just lying there, most of us were lying there, or sitting up. Outside or in the hut. And they just came and brought it to us.

Were you inside or out?

You could be in and you could be out, it didn't really matter where you were.

When the British came where were you?

Well, when the British came I was in. And I just crawled out. You know, I crawled out, I had to see them myself. And I crawled out near enough to be able to see them, that they were actually there. Then I just lay down, I said, "Thank God, now I can sleep and be left in peace. No more roll call, no more standing around in the cold".  
And -

You got some water and some food?

Got some water and some food very quickly.

That was water to drink or to wash?

Well, to drink mainly. I don't know when we had our first wash. It's funny, I don't think about these things anymore. I don't think we washed - at the time. But - we had water to drink and we had this food, we had these sort of tinned - maccaroni and tinned rice. And very light sort of things, which was very lucky.

Did it make you feel a little better when you had some food?

A bit happier. Oh yes. It was wonderful. But, you know, a friend of ours who used to be with us when we were marching. We used to share everything. I don't know if I told you this. I told you the story. We shared everything. And then she got this food, this packet of sugar, she just sat there and ate this whole packet of sugar. And other things that this soldier gave her. She died. Did I tell you that?

No?

Oh, I thought I told you. Well, this girl, she was with us - all the time. And we always shared everything. She shared what she could get, she shared with us. And then - she could speak English - a bit. And she got herself a friend, a soldier, she befriended a soldier. English. And he was giving her food. And she got this packet of sugar, like a two pound packet of sugar, she just sat there and ate it and didn't give us any. She was getting corned beef. And things like that. She got very, very ill and she died. Because she ate the wrong things.

So you managed to stand ..?

Stand. And - then - one day we were standing, standing, standing and no Germans came. And then we found out that all the Germans had gone. But the Hungarians were there. You see the Hungarians were really on the German side. Fought with the Germans. And the Hungarian soldiers there, because - not far from the camp there were the military barracks of the Germans and the Hungarians. And so the Hungarians were there - the Germans had left, and the Hungarians made sure that we don't leave the camp. We weren't allowed to leave the camp. I think it was partly for sort of quarantine as well, because we had typhus. But I don't know, we just weren't allowed to leave the camp.

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No, I couldn't. I couldn't. But you didn't really have to. I was just lying there, most of us were lying there, or sitting up. Outside or in the hut. And they just came and brought it to us.

Were you inside or out?

You could be in and you could be out, it didn't really matter where you were.

When the British came where were you?

Well, when the British came I was in. And I just crawled out. You know, I crawled out, I had to see them myself. And I crawled out near enough to be able to see them, that they were actually there. Then I just lay down, I said, "Thank God, now I can

sleep and be left in peace. No more roll call, no more standing around in the cold".

And -

You got some water and some food?

Got some water and some food very quickly.

That was water to drink or to wash?

Well, to drink mainly. I don't know when we had our first wash. It's funny, I don't think about these things anymore. I don't think we washed - at the time. But - we had water to drink and we had this food, we had these sort of tinned - macaroni and tinned rice. And very light sort of things, which was very lucky.

Did it make you feel a little better when you had some food?

A bit happier. Oh yes. It was wonderful. But, you know, a friend of ours who used to be with us when we were marching. We used to share everything. I don't know if I told you this. I told you the story. We shared everything. And then she got this food, this packet of sugar, she just sat there and ate this whole packet of sugar. And other things that this soldier gave her. She died. Did I tell you that?

No?

Oh, I thought I told you. Well, this girl, she was with us - all the time. And we always shared everything. She shared what she could get, she shared with us. And then - she could speak English - a bit. And she got herself a friend, a soldier, she befriended a soldier. English. And he was giving her food. And she got this packet of sugar, like a two pound packet of sugar, she just sat there and ate it and didn't give us any. She was getting corned beef. And things like that. She got very, very ill and she died. Because she ate the wrong things.

End of F205, Side A

F205, Side B

Was this a special friend of yours, the girl who died?

Well, we were a group of ten or eleven. And we were all very friendly together, all the time, for months and months.

Was she the only one who died actually?

Of that group, yes. She was Czech, she was from Prague. She - was in the Lodz ghetto and we were together ever since we left Lodz. So for many months. And we were very, very close friends. For some reason she wouldn't share with us.

Did you ask her to share with you?

No, no.

She just didn't. You were surprised I suppose?

Oh yes, we didn't - you know - talk very nicely about her when she did that. And - so lucky.

That was fortunate for you?

That was fortunate for me, because she was getting this corned beef and all sorts of things that were much too rich. And she became very, very ill. And she actually did get to Prague and she died there, because she had this very bad upset stomach, you know, she damaged her -

She died in Prague?

She died in Prague. But she never recovered actually you see. And she had this - I don't know what happened to her stomach, but - she could never recover.

What happened to you next?

Well - I - met a few people I knew. Because we could then go anywhere in the camp. And we stayed together. I met a very good friend from Prague who lived in the same block of flats as me, on the same floor. There were two families on each floor. And she was the other one. And we were always into each others flats. I met her.

And that was the first time since Prague?

Yes.

She was your age?

She was one year younger. So when I was in Prague we played together, but she was the young one, you know, she was a year younger. And I met another one who was a very good friend of my sister. Who used to come to our house a lot. I met her. She was an artist already then, and somehow she managed to get pencil and paper and charcoal. And I remember her sitting there and drawing all these heaps of corpses and drawing the camp, you know, with charcoal and paper. Making a good record. And I actually met her not so long ago. And -

She did the drawings?

She did the drawings, she did the drawings. She was a real artist and she did the drawings. And - last summer there was this exhibition of - out of the - from the camps. Things that people did actually in the camps. And some of her work was in there, that she actually did in the camps.

What was her name?

Well, her name was Marianne Herman, but she is - Marianne Grant now, she lives in Glasgow. You see we lost touch in Belsen. Because she went somewhere else. And

I went to this exhibition and I saw this. Because ever since she was little, for some reason - people called her Mousey. Even as a child. And I saw this - these drawings there, and it said Mousey on it. And I thought well, that must be her. And I asked at the desk where they had the exhibition. And as it was, her best friend was at the exhibition. So we started talking and then she got us in touch, and my sister in touch, and we all met together. Only a few months ago. Well, after that - after about three or four days, something like that, after some days, they - were going to burn the camp down. And we were going to be put into the military barracks where the Germans and Hungarians were. The proper - buildings. And before we went there they - sort of deloused us. They - put powder all over us and sprayed us with things and gave us, I think, clean clothes or something. I know that they tried to get rid of all the - all the lice. And then we went to these military barracks and they burnt down the camp.

You saw that?

Well, I - no, we were evacuated. And I didn't see them actually burning it down because we all had gone by then, before they burnt it.

That was some distance away?

The barracks were - some distance away, I don't know, a mile or two or - You know, they took us in lorries. They burnt down the camp and we could smell it burning, but I didn't actually see it.

Did you see any revenge on any Germans?

Well, you see I - I - I started telling you that of course - when - when the British came - and we had a little bit of food, I got a little bit curious and I spent a lot of time just sitting down - and watching what was going on. And - the - the British got these carts, the carts drawn by horses - well they used to be drawn by horses, but they were drawn by Germans, these big carts, with Germans inside them who had to pick up the bodies. And then sit on top of the bodies, go a bit further, get off, pick up some more bodies, get on top of these bodies. And it was a wonderful, wonderful sight to see

these Germans that I knew as so horrible and so sadistic, sitting on top of these bodies, having to pick them up. Wonderful. Wonderful. That was because, you know, I - I wasn't feeling vindictive, I could have taken stones and thrown. Some people did. I never threw a stone at them or anything, I didn't - didn't want to lower myself to that. But I must say there was great pleasure seeing them having to be on top of all these bodies. It must have been dreadful for them.

Were the British soldiers ordering them ..?

oh yes, they were there with their guns, you know, pointed at them, with - what they call these bayonets. And ordering them around and they had to do as they were told. Pushing these - some were pushing them and pulling them and some were on top. And they were taking all these dead bodies and putting them on one heap on that wasteland.

Were there some officers amongst them or were they ordinary soldiers?

I don't know. I think mainly soldiers. I don't know what their ranks were to be honest. They were not the very young ones. Some experienced ones obviously. But I remember - some newsreel coming and filming us. I remember that. And I was sitting on the steps of a hut, just when I was watching these Germans coming picking up the bodies. And somebody came - what I know now from the BBC, which I didn't know at the time. Or - or British newsreel. Maybe it wasn't BBC, it was British Newsreel. Photographing Belsen and photographing where we were, and actually photographing me as well, but I've never seen myself on anything, I've seen some things. It's somewhere. I wish I could find it. I'd love to find it.

Maybe they have an archive somewhere?

I'm sure they do. But I don't know where. They took the films and edited them. I mean I don't know how much they showed, but I know they showed them here afterwards, because I was told they showed them here afterwards. But I definitely

know that he had the camera on me for a moment. And I'd love to - I don't know if I would recognise myself. But maybe yes, because I know where I was sitting.

It might be possible to find out at the archives.

But where?

In London. I'll find out. I'll ask.

Could you please? I would be very interested. It was whilst we were still at the camps, it was within the first few days. After the liberation. Because we are only a few days in the camp before we were taken to the barracks. And there were people there with cameras. I'd love to find myself there.

I will find out whether it is possible to get at these archives.

That would be wonderful. Because, you know, they had The World at War series. And they showed you - but not me.

You couldn't talk to them I suppose because you couldn't speak English?

That's right. Only, you know, with your hands, you could make yourself understood. There was nothing much to say. I mean there were thousands of us and we got water and we got food and that's all - we wanted. I mean - what else could we ask for?

Did you get some treatment for your typhus?

Afterwards, later. You see I - They took us to those barracks. And there were bunkbeds there, and we were on bunkbeds. And I was together - with these friends. This friend of my sister, you know, the artist, she was very lucky because she came out with her mother. And her mother actually only died a few years ago. And -

How did her mother survive?

I don't know.

Was she in Belsen the whole time?

Not all the time, but she was in Belsen at the liberation. I don't know. Because she must have been - either well in her forties or fifty, you know, because - the girl was - about 25. So her mother must have been at least 45 to 50. I don't know how she did it. Luck. Just pure luck.

You didn't ask or talk about it?

No, well I did, but I can't remember anymore. I know they went to Theresienstadt to begin with. But, you know, Theresienstadt was all right to survive. But - only if you stayed there. If you went somewhere else and if you went to Auschwitz, you didn't have much chance at that age. So we all were in that - in those barracks. And we had this room with the bunkbeds. Just a few of us. There were - three floors like. So there were six of us in one room. Because you had the wonderful luxury of having a bunk to yourself, you know, you weren't two or three on it, like you used to, and it was luxury.

Did you have clean sheets?

Not sheets, oh no, you must be joking. Clean sheets. No, there were some straw mattresses and a blanket I think.

And did a doctor then come and look at you?

Well, not at that time. You see it's all a matter of days this what I'm talking about. But they did - establish hospitals. A lot of hospitals, in some - huts. I don't know what these huts were to begin with. They were huts. And they made hospitals, lots and lots and lots of them, dozens of them, all these huts. It was like a village of hospitals. And anybody who needed treatment - which must have been at least half of

us, or more, went to hospital. If you had a temperature and - a doctor did come, yes. I think a doctor did come. And if he thought you needed treatment he sent you to hospital. And I went to hospital because I had typhus. I had a very high temperature. And I was very, very ill. And people around me were dying. I could see the look on their faces, I knew when they were going to die. And I refused to look at myself in the mirror. I said, "I'm not going to look in the mirror because if I see that I am -", you know, "that ill. I'll die just of the fear of it". I wasn't going to. And I remember there were - German doctors and nurses still looking after us.

Really?

Yes.

But they behaved themselves?

I don't know if they were supervised by some - other ones, that they couldn't sort of kill us off, or what, I don't know. But I remember a German doctor coming. I don't know if the nurses were German or if they were Jewish, but I know the doctor was German. A proper German. And he looked at me and he talked to these Germans - it was in the evening - "She won't last till the morning". About me. And I said to myself well, that's what you think. You know. That really gave me strength, just this - what he said. I said well, I'm not going to die. I was very frightened, I can tell you. But I refused to go to sleep because I thought if I go to sleep I'm not going to wake up. So I used to stay up every night and slept during the day, because I thought if I go to sleep at night I'm going to die.

How did you keep yourself awake?

Well, just sat up and I wouldn't go to sleep. And I even tried walking around. And during the day I was so weak, but I said as long as I can walk I won't die.

Did they not tell you to go back to bed?

Well, they weren't there all the time. They didn't have enough doctors or nurses to be there all the time. We were left in a room about - ten of us in a room, or six or ten of us in a room. Not much bigger than this. With one bed next to the other. And there were - yes - about six beds in one room, or eight beds. And - I was determined not to die. I - I - I wasn't going to go to sleep. I dozed off a bit at a time during the day, but somehow I didn't feel it was so dangerous. Because these people were all dying at night, and their crisis was always at night for some reason. The crisis is always at night, isn't it. I knew for some reason - I knew when my crisis was going to be. I think you count from the day it starts. The temperature starts, or something. I knew when it was going to be. And I sat up all night, I said no, I'm not going to sleep tonight, you know, and I sat up all night. And I - got through and I started feeling better actually. And then I - then the temperature came down and I started sleeping.

Did they give you any medicine?

They were giving us medicine, yes.

You don't know what it was I suppose?

I don't know, some - quinine or - strychnine or something like that. And I suppose aspirins or whatever.

Did they give you a drink and some light food?

Oh yes. Well at first I couldn't eat much. I was eating a bit. I think it was sort of soup with barley in it or something like that. It was - obviously supervised, because we weren't given the - it was soup mainly, like thick soup with bits in it. And - I was making myself - I didn't want to eat, but I said I've got to eat - to - to survive. I don't know why there was a German doctor there. Because I mean they could have just killed us off, couldn't they, you know, given us the wrong things. Whether they were - maybe the nurses were Jewish and they made sure that -

Was he in German uniform?

Not in uniform, he was in civilian clothes.

He might have been a refugee coming with the British, you see, speaking German?

He could have been. No. He would have spoken English, he wouldn't have spoken German.

Well, as you didn't understand English, he might have spoken German?

He wasn't talking to - I don't know, he - no, he was a proper German.

He wasn't kind particularly?

No, he was a proper German. He didn't sit at the bed and say, "How are you?" and all this. He just came and said, "She won't last till the morning", you know, and that sort of thing. But they did try - to cure us, you know, somehow. I - maybe - Maybe he was -

They must have been under supervision?

Must have been under supervision. Maybe the nurses were Jewish or maybe - maybe he was a decent doctor, I don't know. Because I know somebody in the same room who was having water on the lungs and they were pumping it out, you know, so they were doing things. They were trying to save the people, definitely. Giving them medicines. And - oh yes, of course you got clean. The hospital was clean, you had a good wash or bath, I don't know anymore what it was, but I know I - I think it was a bath, and you were cleaned up and there were clean sheets actually. Clean sheets. They were gingham sheets. I remember that, they were gingham sheets. And, you know, as the hospital was getting emptier we used to steal these sheets and make dresses out of them. Because we only had these camp clothes you see. So we made this gingham - I can't wear gingham now.

What colour was it?

I think it was blue. I think it was blue gingham. Little squares. And - we were pinching these - I don't think they minded, I mean they - I said they can't do more than throw us into prison for stealing sheets. Making clothes. I suppose they were quite pleased we actually made ourselves some clothes.

Did you have cotton and needles?

I didn't do it, but there were people who sewed it up for you and you paid them a bit of your ration or something, you know. Give them something in return. There were all sorts of swops going on. Some people managed to get something from the - British, something extra. Or they managed to steal something from the Germans. You see in that hospital - they still had German nurses. That's right, you see it's coming back to me now. They had German nurses and German quarters. And - I'll tell you about that later. But next to me - the bed next to me was a girl about the same age as me. She was very, very ill, she was in a way more ill than I was, because although I was very ill I didn't have any pains. Or anything like that. Not much. She was having terrible headaches all the time and she was grumpy and bad tempered and - you know, you couldn't talk to her or anything. But then she was getting a little bit better and I remember we got our first egg. Soft boiled egg and - bread and butter or something like that. And - we both sort of - sat up, happy to have an egg, and we started talking, it was such a wonderful thing to have an egg. So we started talking and - became great friends. Became very, very great friends forever. And she is still my best friend.

She was Czech?

She was Czech. And when we got better - we started - we must have still been a bit hungry or something, you know, we still didn't have enough to eat - perhaps as much as we wanted. Because we used to go to these German nurses rooms and doctors to steal. We had no - no conscience about that. And we would go - and steal bread. One of us would be on guard and the other one would - we used to - that's right, that's

before we made the dresses. We used to have - we used to wear blankets instead of dressing gowns, we'd take the blanket off the - off the bed. And put it round us when we'd go to toilet. So one of us would keep guard and the other one would dive into a room and dive out again, you know, with this bread under the blanket, a loaf of bread. Or - once we stole, it was just cotton. You stole anything you could. Just because it was fun, because it was the Germans. They had no business to have lovely rooms and lovely food and everything. What seemed luxury to us. So we just took it. And - then - then we got better, we went back to the barracks.

Did the doctor come to say that you were now fit to leave?

Oh yes. Oh yes.

But you were actually feeling better?

Well, very, very weak. You know, the temperature went. And - the sort of grogginess went, but very, very weak, terribly weak. I mean we were in bed for so long.

How long were you in that hospital?

About three weeks or so. Something like that. I don't know for sure, something like that. It seems an eternity but probably it wasn't that long. It was about two weeks for the illness and another week to - get a little bit of strength. I was very, very weak. You know after any illness you are weak, but we started off weak.

Do you remember any other special food after the egg, that you got a little bit more than just the soups?

No, I don't really.

Did you ever get some chocolate or anything like that?

No, nothing like that. You know, I can't remember the exact - I know we got soup and we got this egg. I don't know what else. It was mainly soup, but thick soup, you know, with meat in it. Lots of meat in it and - and vegetables and - barley and things like that. It was probably very good for us. And I remember they had - they had - the people who brought the food to us were - German men. See, it's coming back. I didn't think about this for the last 45 years or so. They were German men. And they brought us the food on trays into each room. And my friend and I tried to guess what their job used to be. By the way they carried that food. And by the way they looked and by the way they moved. We were usually right.

Did you ask them?

Yeh. Yeh. You knew a lorry driver, you knew a waiter, because he came with the food like that, you know. I don't know what they were doing there. I suppose they were - I don't know if they were sort of nurses. But they wouldn't be, because they had other jobs.

Were they all German?

They were -

Because the Germans had a lot of foreign people doing these things?

Maybe, maybe, maybe. You know, I remember so much and certain things I'm not remembering. But I just know that these men, who were not Jewish - and not prisoners of the camp, came in to bring us this food, and we could guess what their jobs were. By looking at them. Maybe they were proper Germans, because we wouldn't have talked to them. I don't think we would have talked to Germans. They were probably - maybe prisoners of war who - the Christian ones who weren't so weak. But they couldn't go out either because - because of the quarantine.

They were friendly anyway?

They were friendly, yes. But I'm not absolutely sure who they were. And so then we went back to the barracks. But we weren't in bunks, we were in a - my friend and I stayed together and we were in a big room with straw mattresses - on the floor. And blankets. And - the other friend was there as well, the one who used to live in the same house. This other friend actually got friendly with a person I met in the hospital, because they were together during the war.

So you all joined up again?

All joined up again. And that friend, her name is Helen. And we've been friends ever since, she's been my best friend ever since.

Is she in England?

She's not in England, no, we shared a flat in England for 9 years. And she married an Englishman who was selling books. And he was travelling, he was selling encyclopaedias. And they went for their honeymoon abroad and sell at the same time, because the Encyclopaedia Britannica was very much in demand in certain places in the world. And he was sort of selling them there and they went to the West Indies and then they went to America. And they've never come back. And I haven't seen her for 30 years. But we write to each other long, long letters. She knows more about me than anybody else. And I about her. But sadly her husband just died two weeks ago.

Do you think you might go over to see her?

Well, I keep on asking her to come here all the time you see. He - I have been getting letters from her. He was very ill. Actually in a way he was quite lucky because when they went over about five years later, which would be about 25 years ago, he got cancer in a - kidney. And they removed the kidney and he was alright for 25 years. Almost. And then it came back and it came on his lung and - in his air passages and - all sorts of places. And - he died just recently. And I've been having letters two or three times a week to tell me what happened and - I've been writing to her, you know, every - about twice a week. I don't know what she is going to do. I told her to come

because she has got a lot of friends here, you know. We are all friends together and - I said she could come and stay with me and with my other friend. So we - we really became great friends. I think if you make a friendship there - Well, you see we went through the - typhus together, but we went together through the stealing as well. And that was great fun, a great adventure for us at the time. We - we once stole something, some food - and we had a box, for some reason we had a metal box. I don't know where we got it from. And we put it in there and buried it under some things. And when we came back it was gone. Somebody must have seen us and got it. And we quite laughed about it. So then we went back to these barracks and we were in quarantine, so altogether we had to be in quarantine for 3 months. So - that was May - June, July, until the middle of July, and we had to stay. So we - walked around. We were not supposed to leave the camp at all. You know, it wasn't a proper camp, it was these military barracks. But we were not supposed to go out at all. But we did go. But not amongst people, we went into the forests. We both loved the forests. There was a lot of forests around. And we just went into the forests.

Nobody stopped you?

Nobody stopped - well, we made sure nobody sees us. We used to find ways that nobody would see us. Just quickly - I remember there was a gate. Which had - it was a wrought iron gate and the gaps between the wrought iron was that - And the gates were locked. And we got through. We were so thin.

Even then you were thin?

Oh, we were so thin. After the typhus even thinner, because after the illness you lose weight anyway. We were so thin and we managed - there were just - ordinary iron gates, you know, because people are not supposed to get through iron gates. We managed to squeeze through. Go into the forests. And we used to pick berries. There were these blackberries, billberries. And I remember we used to pick them and bring them back and I gave a lot to somebody who made a dress for me out of this gingham, you know.

In exchange?

In exchange, yes. And - people made all sorts of exchanges. Once we brought berries back and somebody gave us a tin of sardines. So you made sort of - swaps.

Did anybody ever tell you what was going to happen to you?

Well, we were going back home, you know -

To Czechoslovakia?

To Czechoslovakia. You could either go back home or you could go to Sweden - as a sort of - to recuperate. You know, if you had typhus or any illness, if you had typhus or lung illness, TB or - something wrong with you, with your lungs, or anything serious, you could go to Sweden - to convalesce.

A campsite or ..?

Well, they didn't tell us at the time. They said, you know, you can go for six months to Sweden to - to recuperate. Like convalesce. And I didn't want to go because I wanted to go back to Prague to see if anybody came back. But this Mousey, she went back to - she went to Sweden with her mother. And she was going for six months and she stayed for 7 years.

Did she marry somebody there or ..?

Well, she married - I don't know where she met him. She was - never orthodox, she was never - religious or anything. She married an orthodox rabbi. She became frightfully orthodox. And we met her not so long ago. She was quite orthodox. So - we just walked around. And there were entertainers came. They were entertaining us. We had these - it was like - outdoors, like a platform, like a stage. And I remember these - Scottish soldiers dancing in their kilts, you know, and giving

Scottish dancing. Whilst I was in hospital Yehudi Menuhin came and played, but I missed it because I was in hospital. Which is a shame.

He didn't come to the hospital?

No, he came - they was all outdoors these performances.

They were really trying to cheer you up?

Yes. I - I wish I -

Did people come and talk to you at all. Let you talk about what happened?

No. Oh no, they didn't have time. There was still war, you know. Actually it was - when the war ended, I think it was on the day the war ended - that I went to hospital. Which was beginning of May. Because I remember the war ended, and I was still in the barracks, before I went to hospital.

End of F205, Side B

F206, Side A

We were talking about you staying in the camp before going back to Prague. And you told me about your life during those weeks?

Well - I had a very good friend who - was in hospital with me, which I think I told you before. And - we really became very, very friendly, hit it off very well. And - we - were in the same room together when we went back to the barracks, and we just tried to amuse ourselves a little bit, because we got a bit bored. And - we used to go out for walks and we were not supposed to go out. Went into the forests to - pick berries. And I remember going through that gate, there was this very tall gate, with bars very close to each other. And I remember we were able to squeeze through them, because we were so thin. So we used to squeeze through those bars, through the gate, and get into this estate. And - pick berries. And, you know, blackberries and raspberries, blueberries. And we used to bring them back and then we could change them for something else. You know, because we didn't want to eat berries all the time, so - some people had - sardines or soap or got hold of something from somewhere, so we could have exchanges. Also we - changed some berries and had a dress made. Because we used to - pinch those sheets we had. We had sort of gingham sheets. And we made dresses from them. Because we had these - some very peculiar clothes. Some of us still had these striped - like pyjamas, you know. And we wanted dresses. So we had these gingham dresses made by people who knew how to make them from the sheets.

In exchange for berries?

In exchange for berries, yes. And - One day, I think it must have been in this estate with the gate, because - we came across this - big country house, very beautiful country house. And - we saw - this line of washing hanging up. A bit of a distance away from the house. So we went and - stole some socks, because we didn't have any socks. So we thought well, these people who live there must be - quite rich to live in a place like this. We knew there were soldiers living there, but it was also prosperous, so we took some socks, and somebody caught us, one of the soldiers.

And we thought we'd be in a lot of trouble, but - he was very nice, and he started questioning us and he gave us the socks. And - took us in and gave us some food. And invited us back for some dinner some - some other day, or evening or something. I remember going there, sitting there with all the soldiers at a long table, having a meal. With my friend.

Was he an officer?

I really don't remember. He - I don't know. He was - yes, I don't think the ordinary soldiers lived in that house. It was the officers who lived there. I think the ordinary soldiers probably lived in some ordinary barrack.

Do you remember any other special incidences?

One other thing I remember is that we were of course always hungry. We did get food. There were these great big kitchens which probably - were for the - soldiers there before, the German soldiers. And - we used to have mainly soup. And the soup was made from huge bones. And some vegetables I suppose. I suspect they were horse bones. I don't know. Horse or cows. But - they were huge bones. And - my friend and I used to take a blanket and when it was the end of dishing out the soup, we used to go and ask them if we could have the bones. And we used to bring these bones back in these big blankets, carrying it, you know, one - two corners each. And then we used to find a place of our own, somewhere quiet, you know, and we used to pick all the bits of meat off the bones. Which was quite nice. And we sort of chewed the bones and licked the bones, it was absolutely marvellous. And - that helped. It was a bit of fun and it was - good. Quite good for me. I remember some of these bones were quite soft and we sort of chewed them and spat them out, you know. Get the most out of them. We also met with some friends whom we knew before the war. You know, you sort of walked around and saw if you knew anybody. And I met with two or three friends that I knew. And we sort of - met and talked.

Did you decide to go back to Prague together, or how did it happen in the end?

Yes. Well, my friend, her name is Helen - we were going back together. But she wasn't from Prague, she was from Brno. But as far as Prague we went - together. And all the Czechs went on the same train.

How did this happen actually to start. Did one day people come and say, "Today you have a chance to get home"?

No, no, no, no, not quite like that. There was an office and I think people - registered according to nationality. I really don't remember the detail, but I should imagine each nationality had a separate office and somebody in charge. And so all the Czech people registered and then we were told that on a certain day we would be going. And we did. And it was again a cattle train. But this time we weren't as crowded as when we went to Belsen. And also the doors were open all the time.

No seats?

No seats. We sat on the floor. In our gingham dresses. Most of us had these gingham dresses, you know. I could never wear a gingham dress after that. And - we sat on the floor. And we used to sing a lot and - sort of look forward to - getting back home, without thinking what will happen when we get there actually. And - we used to - be allowed to go off, from time to time, to stretch our legs.

In stations?

Well no, in fields. We sort of - well, the train just stopped anywhere, in the middle of nowhere, and we were allowed to sort of run down the bank and go in a meadow or field or something like that. Or near a town. And I remember picking flowers, going into people's gardens and raiding their gardens, literally. And there is nothing they could do about it. We just swooped on these gardens, picked the flowers, made long chains and put them on the train. As a sort of celebration. And - I don't remember anymore exactly how long it took, something like two days. Certainly not as long as when we went there.

Did they give you food in between?

They gave us food, yes. Of course they gave us food. And - I can't really - remember exactly what we had to eat. I'm sure we had something to eat.

Can you remember crossing the border into Czechoslovakia?

I don't remember crossing the border, but I remember - that - we stopped - to change trains in Pilsen. And that was American. It wasn't far from the border. I don't know if there was - any - sign of crossing the border at that time. But we had to get out at Pilsen. And wait a few hours to get the train to Prague. And I think we - I have a feeling we stayed the night somewhere. It's a bit hazy now. But I do remember that my friend and I were walking around Pilsen and there were all these American soldiers there. And I remember one of them giving us a plum pudding. Sort of Christmas plum pudding in a tin. And he opened this tin for us and we ate this plum pudding. And that I remember. And I remember sitting on a sort of low wall with these soldiers, you know, and - and having some food. And - then we got into, I think, another train, an ordinary train.

Still in cattle trucks?

I don't think so, I think that was an ordinary train. But I can't be a hundred percent sure. That part of it is a bit vague. I just remember, you know, these flowers, picking the flowers and having them on the train and singing in the train and talking, and - and these soldiers in Pilsen. And then arriving - actually arriving in Prague. I'm pretty sure it was an ordinary train, the people who went to Prague. And - I remember arriving. And I don't know what we expected. We certainly weren't expecting what we got. Because we got absolutely nothing. There was nobody there to - welcome us, to meet us, to tell us where to go. Anything. It was just like, you know, an ordinary person arriving at an ordinary station.

That must have been a real shock?

Yes. I think the only thing as far as I remember, is that - I don't know if there was a board or if there was one person or something, said, if you've got nowhere to go there's this hostel. And there was somebody there, one person. Or announcement somewhere. Because we had an address where we could go if we had nowhere to sleep. So that was it. And -

Did you go there, to this hostel?

I had to go, because I had nowhere to sleep, nowhere to go. But I think my friend must have gone straight on to Brno. Because she wanted to get home and see if anybody came back. All I remember is just being on my own. Walking out of that station - and walking through Prague on my own. I remember that, I'm just realising that - it was all somehow different, very different. There were a lot of Russian soldiers. And a lot of strangers all of a sudden. And - of course the first thing I did was to go back to where I used to live. I don't know what I was expecting, but - obviously there was no one there because I knew they were all dead.

Was it empty or was somebody else living there?

I think somebody else was living there. And then I went back to where we lived - last, before we - Well not last, we had to move to a little flat which I told you before. And I went there because we were - friends with the sort of concierge there. And - she said we can hide all our belongings in the cellar. And we had carpets and china and - you know, valuable things. And furniture. And when I came back and I asked about those things, she said the Germans came and took it all. But I saw some of the things in her flat. But I was too - inexperienced in those things to do anything about it. So I just left, I never went back there. But - I had a very low opinion of that. Of course if it was now I'd say something, I'd say, "This is mine and this is mine". But - I was too young, I think, to know how to cope with it. And she said - yes, she's the one who told me that - a friend of my mother's came back. She knew her because, you know, they saw each other every day and was best friends with my mother. And - she was friends - they were all friends with another lady, who lived across - the street. This was a block of flats and across the road was another block of flats. And they

owned it. And apparently she was back there with her son. So I went to see her. And she actually told me that my mothers friend was back, because they had met. And - I don't know if I told you about the son of hers, who was also in Belsen. And when the Germans - left Belsen, the Hungarians were still there, the Hungarian soldiers were guarding us. And - when - when the Germans left we weren't quite so - tied down to our various camps, we could walk freely - through - through the other various camps. Because it was all divided into - little camps in Belsen. I mean we could go anywhere we liked. But somehow this boy who was about my age, one of the Hungarians shot him for some reason. I don't know anymore why, but they shot him. Maybe he went somewhere he wasn't supposed to go, I don't know.

You actually saw it?

I didn't see it. But I heard about it. And - he was paralysed. He came back. It was already after the Germans left. He got injured. He came back. His mother luckily was there. And - and he was paralysed on his back. I don't know what happened to him later.

You saw him when you came back?

When I came back, just for a brief moment. But - she - she told me about my mothers friend, where she lived. So I went to see her. But - all this wasn't that quick, you know, that was a matter of a few days. Because meanwhile I had to go to that hostel and I know I spent a few nights at the hostel. Roaming around Prague, you know, just feeling - desperately lonely. Because I suddenly realised there is nobody there. I went - there was an office - in Prague, where you had lists and lists of people who came back. I don't know if it was in alphabetical order maybe, or dates when they came back. But you could check if you knew anybody who came back. And I went to - see these lists every day hoping somebody would come back I knew. But none of the family came back - at all. And I went for days and days, actually for weeks afterwards. To see if anybody would come back. But they didn't. And - so I just remember walking around Prague being absolutely - devastated. Feeling that, you

know, I was alone in the world. That - I didn't know anybody. Just didn't know anybody.

Was anybody in the hostel talking to you while you were staying?

I suppose one talked, but - you know, all sorts of people in the hostel and everybody was so - keen to find some friends or relatives, you know.

But there was no staff who were willing to be helpful and to ..?

No. They - they all thought they had a bad time as well, you know, it didn't mean much to them what happened to us because they all - I mean they didn't have it easy in Czechoslovakia, but - they were all just pleased it was over and - No, there wasn't any sort of social services or anything like that. No. It was really, I think, the worst time of the war. Although we were free and - and liberated. It was the very worst time, because we realised, or I realised, that - nobody was going to come back, and that life is never going to be - the same. And - what I hoped for would happen after the war is never going to happen.

They had taken away all hope really?

Everything, you know, the hope was gone, because until then one had hope that there will be a small group of people one knew, some relatives, some friends, and one would start - life again in the community. Get married, have children and - you know, carry on. But there was absolutely nobody there - whom I knew. There were no relatives, there were one or two people I knew vaguely.

And how old were you then?

I was 17. And then - as I just said, I found this friend of my mothers. And I went to see her. She lived in a flat. And - she was pleased to see me. Very sorry about my mother. But she took me in. And I could live with her, because she had a spare bedroom. She had a very nice flat. One - sitting room and - one bedroom and one

tiny sort of like a little boxroom, but I had a bed there, and that was my room, and I could use the whole flat as I liked. And that was - a great help really, because she was like a mother to me in a way. But - in some ways there wasn't this generation gap, we were like equals, we were like friends almost, you know, I must have grown up a lot. Because I felt towards her like towards a friend. It was nice because there was somebody who knew me as a child.

Could you gradually acquire some clothes or get some money in some way?

Well, that came much later. I think I was in this gingham dress for quite a long time. I think we did. I think eventually we got some clothes from somewhere. I seem to remember more the sort of - emotional experiences than the actual physical experiences. It's - it's a long time now. We must have got some clothes. Because I was there in the winter and - you know, winter came and I -

You remember the misery of the loneliness probably more?

I remember the misery of the loneliness. And - the sort of - shattered hopes. And the sort of feeling of being completely lost and - helpless in a way.

This friend also lost everybody?

She lost - well she had a son in England. He came with one of the children's transports to England. But otherwise she lost everybody. And I think she had a friend whom she was in camp with and they became very friendly.

Was she hoping to go to England?

No. No, no, not to stay. She was hoping to see her son, but not to stay. Actually, later, when I was in England, she came a few times to visit her son. But she never wanted to stay. We asked her to stay, I said she could stay with us, you know. Because financially she couldn't have done it herself. But she didn't want to. She - built up some sort of a life in Prague. With a few friends. She met a few friends. Or

made friends. And she had a pension there. She didn't want to be dependant financially on anybody. She had a pension, she had a sort of life and - they were sent, I think every year, to the mountains, you know, from the government I think. They could go to some - place in the mountains.

Recreation?

Recreation, yes.

So how did you get yourself out of this terrible beginning?

Well - I - I went to - to - like an art school - for the afternoons. Design, not painting, but design I remember. Clothes design and things like that. And I intended to stay there and become - I was interested in the arts somehow. And - I - I managed to get a pension after my father - sort of orphan pension, after my father. So financially I just managed. I mean I didn't eat a lot because you couldn't buy anything. Couldn't buy much food, couldn't buy clothes. So - there wasn't much to spend money on. And - I also met - some friends who had been to the camp with me. I told you about the group of Czechs. Who were with me. Well, we had a date on a certain day - in a certain place. So we sort of met up. And - from time to time we met. But we didn't somehow stay friends at the time. I think we were all so busy - building up our lives somehow. And they weren't all from Prague. But I remember we had this reunion. But I also remember that - at Christmas - we were invited to go to the mountains. To one of these huts in the mountains.

Who invited you?

I think it was the government. But in that particular hut - up on a mountain, they were all people who had been to the camps. But they seemed quite civilised by then, you know, you wouldn't have thought they were in the camps. And - I made friends there actually. I made quite a lot of friends there, because we were all in the same boat in a way. And all being sort of - quite happy to be in the mountains. Unfortunately there was no snow and we couldn't ski. And then there was a bit of snow, but not enough

for skiing. And I remember we just walked and walked and walked. I made a sort of boyfriend there. And - we walked a long time and talked and talked and talked. We hit it off.

He had been in a camp as well?

Yes, everybody was in the camp there. A funny thing was everybody was Jewish who had been in the camp and we went to midnight mass at Christmas. There was a little church there, you know, and it was so pretty, snow fell. It was very pretty. And we just went to sing these carols. And these - these Christmas songs. And we had a Christmas party, somebody made this Christmas party for us in the mountains.

Did you stay in an hotel?

In an hotel, yes, one of these hotels in the mountains. Very good. Good food, good accommodation and everything, it was very nice. I made myself a ski suit from a blanket. You know, we had a blanket. Where I stayed I had a grey blanket, and I made it myself, because when I was in the ghetto I learned how to sew and how to make my own patterns. So I made a ski suit. And -

So that was a happy time?

That was - that was a reasonably happy time. I made quite a lot of friends there. And we actually stayed friends afterwards. And I - met them, you know. Specially some of the boys.

In Prague?

In Prague, yes. And some of them wrote to me for a long time afterwards. When I was in England we used to correspond. And then it sort of stopped.

Had you been in touch with your sister at all?

Yes, yes, of course we wrote to each other. I wanted her to come to Prague and she wanted to come to Prague. But - I couldn't get anywhere for her to live, you couldn't get a flat. It was impossible to get a flat. And so she said, "Why don't you come here for a bit? And then when things get easier in Prague we'll go back". So I said, "Well that's quite a good idea, I'll see a piece of the world". And I had an offer to go to school there. So I said, "All right, I'll come". And it was only to be, for the most, five years. And - so I - packed a few things. And this friend of my mother's took me to the airport. And - I flew over to England.

How long did you stay in Prague altogether?

Well, I came sometime - it was either July, August. And I went at the very end of January. Sort of six months.

And the only thing you actually did in Prague was go to this school for design?

I went to that school to learn design. It was a good art school. And - well that's all, I went I think every afternoon.

Did you enjoy it?

Oh yes. Yes.

Can you remember anything else about the time in Prague, or before you went to England?

Well, I remember eating these mountains of potatoes with my friend, with my mother's friend. We couldn't get much food, but you could get potatoes. And we loved potatoes. So we each used to have a real mountain of potatoes with our meal - for our meal everyday, with fried onions on top. And thoroughly enjoyed it and I got very fat. On these potatoes. And -

What happened to your health, because I remember you said you didn't really develop in camp. Did that all come back when you then started to eat?

Well, eventually it came back, yes.

In Prague already?

I suppose so, yes.

Did you have any medical examination at all when you came back. Did people watch you or ..?

Yes. No, no, not in Prague, no. Not in Prague. I don't think so in Prague, it was in England. I - I - I - yes, I did have. I've got a little document still. I remember now. I had a lung and heart. I had an X-ray for my lungs. And some sort of an - X-ray for lungs and heart and some sort of heart test. And that was all right. And I've still got this little - I think before I left the country I needed some document about my lung health I think. In case I had TB or whatever, you know. So I had to have this certificate. And I had to go and have this test done.

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F207, Side A

So you went by train to England?

No, no, I flew. We had a holiday in the mountains actually, all the people who were in the camps could go - at Christmas time, for a couple of weeks to the mountains, to one of these huts, skiing huts. And I made myself a ski suit out of a blanket. It was quite good actually. It was grey, it was a grey blanket. A very nice ski suit, I've still got a photograph somewhere of it. And - so - there were a lot of Czech Jewish people mainly, not all Jewish, but mainly Jewish people there. And I made quite a lot of friends there actually. Who even when I came to England they wrote to me for quite a long time. We had a great time. But unfortunately there wasn't enough snow to ski. We could never ski, which was a great pity, because if I had skiied then I would have got back into the habit again. Because it wasn't that much later. But then I didn't have an opportunity anymore, so I don't think I - could ski now. I could ski sort of, but not - down hills, you know.

So you had Christmas there. That was the first Christmas after you came home?

Yeh, that's right, it was 1945. And - I - went to England at the very end of January 1946. And I flew. I flew in an old Dakota, a military Dakota, with benches on the sides, you know, just a bench either side. You know that. Came flying in that. And it was a very wobbly flight. And arrived in Croydon. And somebody I knew picked me up. Because when I lived with my mothers friend - she had friends, Czech friends, who went to England during the war. And who would go backward and forward. He kept on coming - one of the men he kept on coming to Prague. And then he went back again. You see I think they were going to stay in England, but he came to visit Prague a few times in that time. So I had his phone number and somebody - I showed somebody - I stood by a box in Victoria Station, because I went by coach to Victoria, had this phone number, and I asked somebody to phone. And - they did phone this number and - he came and collected me. He lived in Wembley.

You made your own way from Croydon to Victoria?

No, there was a coach that took us to Victoria.

Was there a whole group of people?

Yeh, but I didn't know any of them. There were a few, I mean you didn't get an awful lot of people into a plane like that. You had about twenty people, you know, ten either side on these - sitting on these benches. I didn't know any of them. And - you know, they didn't mean anything to me really. And - I managed to get in touch and he came to - pick me up and took me to Wembley. Met his wife. And - I remember a very peculiar thing happened next morning. I was given smoked haddock for breakfast. And I couldn't understand. It was such a strange thing to happen, you know, when you have a sort of continental breakfast, rolls and coffee, suddenly given smoked haddock. I liked it, I mean I liked any food. But I found it very peculiar. I remember that. And -

Was he an Englishman?

No, he was Czech, he was in the Forces, in the Czech Forces - during the war.

His wife was English?

No, she was Czech as well. And - he showed me London for a couple of days. And then he put me on a train to Ireland. I had to go to - Liverpool. From Euston. He put me on a train at Euston, to Liverpool. No, not to Liverpool. I went to Scotland, to Stranraer, on that first journey to - to Ireland. You can go through Liverpool, but at that time I went to Stranraer. Right up to Scotland. And - from there I went on a boat to - Larne. And from there I took a train to - Belfast, and my sister picked me up.

What were your first impressions of England when you arrived?

Well, London was very interesting. It was difficult to make up your mind because I was with these Czech people all the time. I know we went to eat in a kosher restaurant, not because they were kosher, because you could get good food there. I mean in those days - the English restaurants were pretty - It was all rationing, and the food wasn't exactly very much to our sort of liking, you know, continental taste, it was very - uninteresting food. But we went to this kosher restaurant somewhere in town. And there was some very good food there. I didn't really make up my mind - about the English people. I didn't really meet any, you know. But London was - I remember when we flew over England and everything was green, you know, that was in - in - end of January. That's what struck me, to see all these green fields. I mean you didn't get that on the continent. The countryside was very nice that we travelled through, you know, up to Scotland. That was very nice. Because I travelled overnight and I slept overnight, and in the morning we were in Scotland. And I was very, very seasick coming across. It wasn't a long journey. It was the Irish Sea. But I mean it was winter, you know, it was so rough, I was so sick. It was the first time I've ever been on a sea. And I thought oh, that's alright, that's nice, you know, and I sort of didn't do anything for it, I just stood there outside on the deck, that's lovely, you know, up and down. Before I knew it I was very sick. My sister picked me up.

What was the meeting with your sister like after all this long time?

You know, we never got on as children very much. She was seven years older than me. And we never got on that well. And something, a little bit of that - feeling, I think, still - we didn't know what to - what to expect you see. But she was all right. She - I think was pleased to see me. And we went back by train to - Londonderry. And I met the old lady. And -

Did you feel it was nice to have some family?

Well, I thought so, yes. I thought so. But - it didn't turn out that good actually, because - either she was frightened or she didn't understand anything about me. Because we never talked about the camps, we never talked about anything.

She never asked you?

Never asked anything. When I wrote to her from Belsen I told her what happened and that was it.

She never asked you?

Not to this day.

Not even about your parents?

Nothing. She didn't want to know anything. Either - she - was too scared or - I don't know. She - I couldn't share it with her you see, she was family and I couldn't share it with anybody. Because nobody wanted to know. All these Jewish people there. Quite a few, about a dozen - Jewish continental people in Londonderry. And they used to meet, they were a group, you know, I met some of them. No, but they probably all thought I wanted to forget. You know. Not my sister, I think she just didn't - couldn't bear to hear these things. But these other people, they probably thought I wanted to forget. And so I could never talk to anybody. So all this past was inside me. And I came to this very strange place. I don't know, have you ever been to Northern Ireland.

No, I haven't?

It was Victorian. It was like something a hundred years previously, you know. It was so old fashioned. So Victorian, so churchy, you know, you couldn't do anything on a Sunday, you weren't even allowed to read a book or something, you know. No cinemas or anything on a Sunday. It was very, very depressing. The weather was dreadful. It was raining all the time, the skies were grey. People were grey. It was really - very, very depressing. Very depressing. I felt very, very lonely. Very lonely amongst these very strange people. I thought they were, they probably thought I was very strange. Which I was I suppose to them. But they were so - like from another planet to me. I couldn't communicate with them, you know, except the very

superficial things. I could communicate with some of these Jewish continental people, but only about everyday things again, you know.

What did you do then?

Well, what I did I went to school. Because I was supposed to go to school - when I was going to come there before the war. So I went to the Londonderry High School. To catch up with everything I have missed, you know.

Which form did they put you in?

They put me in the 4th form to begin with, and I was about - 17 or 18 by then.

All the others were younger?

I was - I was - I was born in '27. '46. And I would be 18. I was 18 by then. All the others were younger. And I was put at the back of the class. You know, you sort of listen and learn the language. Which I did very, very quickly. You know, you had no television, you had no radio to listen to, I think you probably could learn English by television quite well. But there was nothing like that. I had a dictionary. I had a - English German dictionary and a German Czech dictionary. So I had to - translate things. Because I was trying to do the same things that they did. You know, if they did geography or history or whatever, I had the books and I came home - because we only had school in the morning until 2 o'clock. And then I went home and I went through these books and I translated into German, from German into Czech. And I wrote the Czech on top of the English, you know, and that's how I learnt the language. I learnt very, very quickly, because -

How did they behave towards you, the other children?

Well - some were extremely stupid and silly. And were sort of laughing and giggling. But some were very nice and sensible. And I made one good friend there. The teachers were extremely nice. They never talked about the camps. They were very

nice. Some of them weren't much older than I was. They were in their twenties, you know, some. And the teachers were good, the headmistress was good. And they were very keen that I should catch up with the so-called 'important subjects'. So I couldn't do the things I liked. Art I couldn't do. PE I couldn't do. Things I really loved, you know.

They didn't allow you to do these?

Well, they - arranged my timetable, so I couldn't argue with them, could I.

So that you would catch up?

I would catch up with the other subjects. I did do games in the afternoon. But there weren't any other classes anyway in the afternoon, they had games. I used to be terribly keen on sport when I was in Czechoslovakia. Very, very keen. And I very quickly got myself into the 1st eleven of the hockey team. And I was the goalkeeper. And - I - I enjoyed playing hockey. And we used to travel all over Northern Ireland on Saturdays, playing matches. And I was a very good goalkeeper, because we won the whole league after I joined, because I never let a goal in, you know. And - in the summer I was in the netball team.

So that part of it you enjoyed?

Sort of. I was very lonely and very depressed. But I did do that.

Did you soon catch up?

Well, you know that - although I was very - I had a lot of illness after that. I was feeling ill and I had palpitations already then. And - all sorts of things. And I had a doctor. And he - discovered that I was extremely anaemic. And I had to stay at home and he came every day and gave me an injection, a liver injection, I think it was iron and vitamin injections. My teeth were bad. You know, I had abscesses. It all came out, all the bad things - it came out. I had - a temperature, I think it was these teeth, I

had some abscesses and got a temperature. All sorts of things. So I was at home quite a lot. Until Easter. But by the end of the summer term I was doing exams exactly the same as the others. In English. I caught up not only the subject, but in a foreign language. And I even did Shakespeare. The questions asked. Yes, I even did Shakespeare. I learned my English through Shakespeare, and Julius Caesar. I was so hungry for knowledge that it just went in like a sponge - like on a sponge. You know. I absorbed it. And then I had one more year in the High School. And I went into the 5th form. Some lessons I did with the 6th and some with the 5th. And - what happened was that - in Northern Ireland, near Belfast, - in the middle of the country there was a farm. And - on that farm were a group of so-called children, children my age, you know, sort of 16 to 20 perhaps. They were so-called children. Children who were in the camps. And they took them from these displaced - persons camps. And took -

They were also refugees?

Refugees who had been in the concentration camps during the war. Jewish children. And they had 25 of them and they were put on that farm. It was like a little kibbutz and they were learning - that sort of work to go to Israel. Like on a kibbutz. They actually didn't all go to Israel, but it was - it was run by Jewish people. And there was farming going on and they had to do a little bit of work every day on the farm, a couple of hours or so, because they weren't very strong and they were recuperating there. And somebody told me about it and got me in touch and I could have holidays there with them. I used to have all my holidays, sometimes weekends with them.

Because they were nice people?

Oh yes. They were all - like me, you know. I mean they weren't - they were Czech, but they were the so-called Hungarian Czech. They came from - from the Hungarian part of Slovakia. You know.

Did you ever talk about the camps?

Oh yes, well they came from the camps. I mean it was only - It was only a year after, you know. And they were - oh yes, we were like a big family together. I was like their sister who used to come at weekends. Oh - they were very nice, we got on very well together. There were boys and girls. And - that was great. That - that saved me, going there, being with these people.

Did this lady pay for you and keep you?

Well, she didn't pay for me. She kept me, but, you know, I had my main meal at school, at school dinners. Which were quite nice, because they were cooked by the girls in the cookery class. So they weren't bad. And having come from the camps, although the others moaned, I thought they were marvellous, you know. Some of these English kids were very fussy. But I thought they were great. They were nice meals. So I had my main meal there and what I had - I mean if I had it nowadays maybe I wouldn't find it so little. But I was a - I was beginning to grow, I was beginning to develop, I had come from the camps hungry, I was anaemic, I needed to eat. And I would be given two slices of brown bread - with - a slice of cheese, for evening meal. Or a bit of corned beef. Or - for breakfast I might have a - a couple of slices of bread with - jam or marmalade or something like that. It wasn't enough. And you see there was rationing, I couldn't buy anything. The only thing we could do, with my sister, was in the evening we went to the harbour, because it's a harbour, Londonderry. And - they were selling fish and chips down - by the waterside, and we'd get a pennyworth of chips if we could afford it, you know. Get a bag of chips.

Did you have any money at all?

Well, that's another story. There were these Jewish people there, you know, and they tried to be very charitable, so they were - collecting money amongst themselves to give me as pocket money. And I was getting 5 shillings pocket money. And out of that I had to buy everything for myself. If I needed something for school, you know, like exercise books and pen and ink and all that, I had to buy myself. And - I remember on Saturday night - Friday night - I used to go and have a meal with some very orthodox people, who were not - Czech - well they'd come at the turn of the

century. They were elderly people, they'd come at the turn of the century from - Russia. And they were very orthodox. And I had to go there every Friday - mind you you had a wonderful meal. Really big, lovely, rich meal. And - I remember there was this chicken with - prunes - and carrots. Very greasy, but very nice. And potatoes. And - but, you know, I had to pray with them and all that. And - these Jewish people were collecting money for me and they expected various things from me, you know.

What sort of things?

To be very Jewish. And I remember when the - what's it called, when you fast? The Yom Kippur came. They wanted me to fast. And somebody saw me go into a shop and buy something. I think I was getting - I had my - ration book for sweets and I went to get my sweets. And they saw me eat. And I had such a telling off, you know. I fasted enough for the rest of my life in the camps, I didn't want to fast anymore, I had enough fasting in my lifetime. Anyway - I didn't - even believe in a God anymore after all that. And - somebody saw me that I was eating. And I had a big telling off and he said, "You ungrateful girls", you know, "here I go every - every -", Friday, whatever it was, "to collect money from people, it's not very pleasant for me to have to ask - money for you and all that. And this is what you do, you -". I said, "Stuff it", you know, "keep your money". And I didn't want any money from them anymore. And - I went - in Belfast there was some sort of a Jewish authority. And they offered me a holiday in London, a summer holiday in London with some Jewish people. And I went. And at the same time - these people who were on the farm, all these - Jewish boys and girls, were transferred to a hostel in London. And from there they were then going to be sent to various places abroad. So they went to London and - I was meeting them there. And - you see I had - I had a chance to go to university. I was supposed to stay another year at school. I had a year and a half at the school. I was supposed to stay another year at this school, do my matriculation. But I had a place assured at the university.

Which university?

Trinity College, Dublin. But you could do the first two years in Londonderry. There was a college there. So you went up to intermediate, which they had in those days. In Londonderry. That meant another two years there. And then go for another two years to Dublin. Well, I went to London. And also, you know, after this person was doing me great big favours collecting money for me - I never liked charity anyway. - I decided that I didn't want to come back to Londonderry. I couldn't bear the thought of another two years there, I really couldn't. Especially with these people gone from that farm, you know. That saved me, because if I wanted I could have a weekend there. Used to have my half terms and my holidays there and I was amongst my own. And - so I went to the Jewish authority in London, in Woburn House. Board of Deputies I think. And - asked them if they could arrange it for me to live in London and go to college. I said I wanted to go to teachers training college. Because I wanted to study something, you know, I wanted to have some sort of a profession. And teachers training college was the shortest thing you could do. It was just two years.

And earn your own living?

Earn my own living. I - I would have liked to have gone to university, but - I didn't want to spend - it was another four or five years, on - on charity. I couldn't get a grant because I wasn't British. So these people arranged for me to go to teachers training college. And to live with a Jewish family. And they were going to finance it all. And - I - I had an interview at the college. I could speak English. But I didn't have matriculation. You couldn't go to college without matriculation. But I promised that I would do my matriculation whilst I was at college and after one year halfway through. Which I did. I worked on my own for it, nobody helped me, and I did, and I passed. They trusted me and I did it. And so then I did another year. And - passed my teachers training college.

And you lived with a family?

Well, it was a - a lady. A middle-aged Jewish lady from Germany. Orthodox. With her brother - she lived there. Who was about 70. Charming people. And they - they

lived in a block of flats in Brixton, which was not far from my college. And - in the same block of flats - lived three - young men, who came here before the war as - children more or less. Well she was giving them food. They just slept in other places in the block of flats, with other people, but had all their meals with her, even breakfast, you know. So it was like a sort of family, there were sort of like three brothers and me.

And they were nice?

They were nice. But they were very orthodox. But they were so nice I respected that. And she was very generous and gave us lovely meals and she was like a mother to us. I suppose she never had children so she was quite pleased to have her children, you know.

Did she have to cook kosher?

Well, she didn't have to, they weren't kosher, but she was. She was kosher. The boys weren't. I wasn't. But - because they were so nice one respected it, you know. I didn't sort of bring bacon in or anything like that. And - oh, we had to go to synagogue every Saturday morning and spend hours there. But - she - she was alright, she was very nice.

So that was a fairly happy time?

Well, it - It wasn't happy - well, it - it was as good as it could be. I mean she was nice and all that, but - all the time I had this sort of - loneliness in me. Because nothing could substitute what I lost. I was in a strange country with strange people in a way, you know, I had no family. And - no strangers can be like your own family. I felt - I was grateful I was there, but at the same time I felt very lonely. All I wanted was to have a family of my own. That's what I lived for, to meet somebody and - be really close to somebody, share somebody's life. College I didn't enjoy very much. It was a girls college only.

You didn't make friends there?

I made one friend there. It was girls only and they were so prim and proper, you know. They were so - in those days, in the forties, you know, the English girls were so old fashioned. Coming from such nice families, you know, they were so nice. Nothing naughty or jolly about them, you know, they were all frightfully nice and it was a Church of England college, you know, so it was sort of religious and - Which there is nothing wrong with that, but they were frightfully boring. To me.

Did they ever ask you about your experiences?

No, no never. I never talked to anybody -

Didn't want to know?

I don't even know that they knew.

One thing I meant to ask you which I forgot. You talked about the doctor who treated you for all your various illnesses. He must have known what you had gone through?

Oh yes. Oh yes.

You told him?

Oh yes. I just told him. There wasn't any detail or anything like that. They never questioned me, I just - had to tell him. And then actually when I was in London I was having terrible dizzy spells. You know, I couldn't walk without holding on. I was sort of falling over. And I was taken to a doctor again, and again it was very - severe anaemia. And I had to go to this doctor twice a week to get these - liver injections. And some vitamins to take and all sorts of things.

You were talking about the girls in the school and they were not very much company for you?

No, well they were younger for a start. They were just straight out of school. And they were - how old were they when they went out of school - 18. I was about - 21 by then you see. Which normally wouldn't matter so much, but they were such - they were schoolgirls, you know, and I had a lifetime behind me, you know. So I didn't have a lot in common. But I did make friends with one girl who - came from Cornwall. And I used to spend all my holidays there. Had beautiful holidays there. Very nice family they were. That was nice. In Falmouth. Had a beautiful bungalow on top of a hill. And I used to have weeks with her. You know, all summer holiday, which was about ten weeks at college. Used to have Christmas with them. It was nice and warm. I remember - anemones growing outside the house at Christmastime, and daffodils. It was her parents, but they had a lot of relatives around. And I remember one Christmas they had a Christmas party and it was really so jolly and so nice. Very happy, very jolly and - they knew how to have fun. And they had a boat. A little motorboat, with a hood, you know. And the two of us, and her cousin was more or less the same age, we went just - touring, all by ourselves, sleeping in a tent on the beach. We could do it in those days. Imagine, nowadays you couldn't do it. Three girls sleeping on their own on a beach.

It's surprising that the parents allowed it?

It wasn't dangerous in those days, there was nothing to it. Nothing ever happened to anybody there. Maybe in big cities like London. But there it was so safe. And we cruised around all over Cornwall. The creeks and all that. And - either slept on the boat or slept in a tent on a beach. The three of us together, what could happen to us. I mean those days if you went alone you were safe. You didn't have murderers and - and muggers and all that, you know. If anybody tried anything on you - maybe if you were alone, but not if there's three of us. You didn't have such violent people then. I mean people tried things on, but they weren't violent.

Did you ever help on the farm?

They didn't have a farm. The farm was in Ireland. They didn't have a farm, they just had - they were retired, they were - quite elderly - really. No, we had a really nice time there.

End of F207, Side A

F207, Side B

What did you do when you finished teacher's training?

When I finished - teachers training I got a job as a teacher in Hendon.

What sort of school was it?

It was a secondary modern. And it was in Brent actually. And I moved. Because I lived in Brixton with that - with these people. And - I moved to - Golders Green. I had some friends in Golders Green. And I stayed with them for a while. But then they went to Israel. So I found some digs and I lived in a little room by myself.

Did you enjoy that, actually being on your own?

No.

You were lonely?

I was very lonely, yes.

What were the subjects you taught?

Well, I taught what used to be called in those days backward children. Remedial work.

Were you trained to do that?

Well, I specialised in that. I - I was supposed to be able to teach everything in a secondary modern school. You had to just sort of swot it up the night before, prepare yourself. Because you can't possibly know everything in every subject. But I did teach the - backward children. And - you see I was - I was partly trained for it, because when I was at college, which was in Camberwell, it wasn't a very good area.

There was Brixton nearby and Kennington and Rotherhithe. And it was just after the war. And some of the schools were quite appalling. The buildings were quite appalling. And - the children were deprived children a lot of them, from poor families. Some of the fathers were in the war and they came back and it didn't work out. There was trouble at home. So - I was - trained in these schools, you know, when I did my practice. And I somehow sympathised with these deprived children. Because in some way I was a bit deprived myself, know what it's like, you know. So - I sort of specialised in that when I started teaching. And I wasn't very happy in my first job. And then -

Why was that?

I don't know, I wasn't that keen on the staff. And - I wasn't terribly good at it, being my first job I wasn't that - that good at the discipline. A bit too soft with them I think. And so I got transferred at Easter to another school at Edgware. Had a new start and I was alright then. I learnt through my mistakes.

Did you continue to stay in your room in Golders Green?

Oh yes, yes.

Did you cook for yourself?

Oh yes. We usually had a sort of gas ring in a bedsitter. And we shared everything else. We shared the bathroom and all that. And I was very lonely there. But - in 1950 - I - I went to - I went to another room. I don't know anymore why, but I went to another room. And - in 1950 - my - girlfriend, you know, the one from Belsen, she went back to Prague with me, but she didn't come from Prague, she came from Brno. She went back to Brno, there was nobody there either. But she had some relatives in Switzerland, so she went to Switzerland and she was there for about - three or four years and she came back.

Back to where?

Well, not back, she came to England. She took a job as a domestic, because you couldn't get any other jobs.

Is she the friend who was in the next hospital bed to you?

That's right. Yes. We were in correspondence all the time. She came to England, into domestic, to some friends of her parents. Her father was in wool, he was - some sort of a merchant in wool in Brno. And this was in Yorkshire, and they were somehow merchants in wool. The mills and all that. It was in Bradford. And so there were these connections there so she went into domestic to them, and they were very kind to her. She did have to do - some cleaning and cooking. But only until lunchtime and she had the afternoons off. And in the evening all she had to do was sort of get the children to bed and babysit. They were very good to her. But then some relative died, somewhere in Belgium. And they found her and she inherited a little bit of money, not a lot, but she inherited some money, so she gave up this job, came to London and went to Pitmans to learn to be a secretary. She by then knew already - French and German, as well as Czech. And she learnt English. So she knew three languages, apart from Czech. And she - then - when she finished the college, she went into digs and finished the college -

You didn't live together?

We didn't live together then. But she had a friend from Brno who was also in England. And she came to join her aunt. And they lived in Kensington. So my friend Helen somehow went to join them. And we saw a lot of each other. But - when that aunt died in very tragic circumstances, she was in the office and she - they had a fire and she burnt to death. They didn't want to go on living in that same place. So - there were a couple of rooms going in the same house where I lived. So they moved in. So all three of us lived together. The other friend had also been to the camps. So from 1950 until 1959 I lived together with Helen, that was the friend from Belsen. And the other one I lived together with for about five years, and she got married. And we are still friends. She is my best friend in London now. And -

That's a long time, nine years. You stayed in the same job for nine years?

When I was in Edgware I stayed for eleven years. Most of my - no, for about - for about ten years. Ten or eleven years I stayed at Edgware School. Made a lot of friends there, that was a lovely crowd. A really lovely crowd of people, fairly young, we were together, a group together. That's how I met my husband.

He was teaching in Edgware?

He was teaching in Edgware. And I met a lot of other friends there whom I am still friends with now. And -

So that was a happy time, those nine years?

Well - to a certain extent, but all I wanted was to have a family of my own. Somebody to share with really, you know, share your life with. Although I had my girlfriends to stay with, you know, which helped enormously, it was better than being on my own. It wasn't really - what I wanted for the rest of my life. I still had this - loneliness inside me, you know, for my own family and for my parents and for the life that was. But I made the most of things.

You once mentioned you had a nervous breakdown?

Well, that was during that period actually. Well no, I - I - that was after I married, the proper breakdown. But I had things going wrong with me all the time. I was under the doctor and tablets for a very long time. I had these panic attacks and palpitations and dizziness and all sorts of things.

Panic attacks?

Yes.

Was that anything to do with your experiences?

Well, I don't know, I suppose it must have been.

What sort of panic attacks?

Well, I thought I was going to collapse. I thought I was going to die, you know, and - had these palpitations and funny sort of - dizziness and feeling ill, you know. They just happened.

Did you have a good doctor?

I had a lovely doctor to begin with. I had a - well at first I didn't have a very good doctor, but then I - through my landlord I got to know a very lovely doctor - He was Jewish Polish. But he was here during the war. He was in the army during the war. But he came out before the war. And his wife was also a doctor. She was a lovely woman. She wasn't Jewish. A lovely couple. A lovely doctor. He was very, very kind, as a - ideal doctor should be, you know, he didn't mind - how long I sat in his surgery. I used to come in a panic to him. He didn't live very far from where I lived. And he would sit there holding my hand and reassuring me. Examining me, every time he would examine me properly just to reassure me that I'm all right. I thought I was having heart trouble and all sorts of things wrong with me. And he was very, very good, and people who went to him never minded how long you stayed, because they knew if they weren't well he would treat them the same way. Most of his patients were continental Jewish people and they appreciated a good doctor who took his time. He was wonderful.

When did you meet your husband?

Well, I met him at the school, and although we were friends we weren't sort of going out together. We used to go to the opera and to the theatre. We were just sort of - good friends, but - there was no romantic attachment. But I had other boyfriends and it didn't work out. And then in 1960 we got friendly. I think it was because I had a

television set. And the Olympic Games were on and he was very interested and so he came every day to watch the Olympic Games during the day, and then we sort of went for walks on Hampstead Heath. I lived in Swiss Cottage by then.

You didn't live with your other two friends anymore?

Not in 1960, because in 1959 - my friend Helen got married. And they went away to America.

Did she work as a secretary?

She actually started work for Robert Maxwell. She worked for Robert Maxwell when he was in a tiny little - house in Covent Garden before it was rebuilt, it was all very slummy. And he had his offices there. And he gave her job. Because you had to - you weren't allowed to work other than domestic, unless you specially applied for. And he took in a lot of these refugees, applied for them. And I think it worked well for both sides, because they got a job, but they worked very well and they knew languages.

You said you moved out when your friend got married?

Well no, she moved out, I stayed because we had each a room of our own you see. We lived on the top floor of the house, a sort of Edwardian house, or a Victorian house. We had the top floor. There was me and my friend, we had a room each. And somebody else whom we knew. And we all shared a kitchen. And when she moved out - this other person also had to move out, not because of her but - got involved elsewhere. So other people moved into there. And I was very lonely then. I didn't know them, they weren't interested in me and - it was a very miserable time.

So you looked for something else?

Well I didn't, I stayed there, I had my room, with a basin there. Shared the kitchen and bathroom, and - stayed on. And then my husband started coming round and - we

used to go - as I said, a lot for walks and we used to go to the opera and theatre and we got very friendly. And then in 1961 - we - found an unfurnished flat and moved in together. Because we were fed-up living in digs, you know, I mean to share with other people and you weren't allowed to do this and you weren't allowed to do that. But - I must say that the - post-war years, you know, the 50's, were very, very miserable. Although I lived with my friend - and I had friends, I wanted something more, I wanted - to be involved and have a family and - have a good husband and have children and - you know, to re-create what I'd lost. And it was very, very difficult - in this country to meet a nice man. The only way you could meet them was through work, because socially there was nowhere to meet them.

Particularly in London?

In London, you know - there were no - nowhere you could go. You could go to a dancehall. And you didn't really meet anybody nice, so we did go to a dancehall sometimes. You didn't really meet anybody nice there. It was all - very impersonal, you know.

How did your friend meet her husband?

Well, she met him in a way through work, because she was working for Maxwell. And this man was dealing with books. With the Encyclopaedia Britannica, as I said last time. And - for some reason there were connections there. And he came to the offices and he went through the offices where these girls worked, to the main office. And he saw her. And got very interested. Liked the look of her. So they got introduced. And he took her to dinner. And it started there. But - it was very, very difficult to meet somebody - socially. Because I think people met each other, they went to school together and had parties and coming out parties. All that business.

Particularly somebody of your own background, probably it was very difficult?

Yes, very difficult, very difficult. Nowadays you can go to a pub and disco and - and Dateline and all these sort of things, but you couldn't do that then, you know.

When did you become a British subject?

At first I couldn't afford it, it cost quite a lot of money to become British, and I couldn't afford that. Sometime in the 50's. I don't know exactly which year. I can look it up. But -

Did you ever go on holidays?

Oh yes, I went abroad. I went to Austria, I went to Switzerland. I also used to go with the school on school parties. Abroad.

Did you ever go back to Prague?

No. Not then. I went - on school parties and I helped out a bit, so it was very cheap. We went to Switzerland, to Holland, to Belgium. No, I - you see - I don't know if I said this before, but - I tried to renew my Czech nationality. Citizenship. My passport, I'd like to renew my passport, and they wouldn't renew it for me, the Czech Embassy. Because they said I should go back because they need every pair of hands to go back and work, you know. Because I didn't want to go back they wouldn't give me nationality, so I was stateless for many years.

You had a stateless paper?

I had a sort of travel document of some sort. But the fifties I think were the most - unhappy years after the war. It was very, very depressing because I said I'll never meet anybody. I'm going to be on my own for the rest of my life. Never have a family. And - and - and London - was very depressing in those - in the 50's I think. Post-war, you know, there was rationing and nothing much was happening. And - people were very reserved and very - you know, they weren't outgoing and warm and - fun. They were - I suppose if you're English born and you knew that sort of person you could have your fun, but I found the men rather boring, the ones that I

could meet, say, through the dance halls, you know. Even if they were so-called 'respectable people'. They were rather boring and -

I suppose you lost your planning and hope which somehow carried you through the camps?

That's right. You see it was all very, very different from what I - was hoping for. I mean everybody - seems lonely in London if they are sort of on their own. And I was uprooted in a different country - and nowhere to go to meet people socially. So it was very, very lonely. Well then I moved in with my husband in 1961. And - we had quite a good time there in the flat. It was nice, we did it up. And got married in 1962. It was very useful to have the year together, because you really get to know each other. Everybody advised me against, you know - said, "Don't move in with him", you know, "he's never going to marry you". And I said, "Well, you may as well find out now rather than later", you know. And it was lovely. We bought some furniture and did it up, for the first time I had a home of my own. My own furniture and my own independence. I didn't have to - share with anybody, you know, we all shared one bathroom, the whole houseful, you know, and nobody could tell me what I was allowed to cook and what I wasn't allowed to cook, because it smelt. In some digs, you know, I wasn't allowed to cook cauliflower or kippers and things like that, because it smelled. I used to go to the Czech club quite a lot in the fifties.

I know the Czech club. They have nice food?

They have lovely food in Westend Lane. I used to go there in the early fifties. Saturday nights we used to go to the Czech club with my girlfriend, you know. But there weren't the real sort of people. It was quite nice.

You never met nice people?

Well no, not really, they were all - peasants really, basically. Quite a different - they were - quite nice some of them, but they weren't educated, they weren't cultured, they

- just - you know, one had a little bit of fun there, but they - they weren't really that nice the people there. The food is lovely there.

The food is lovely and the place is gloomy, isn't it?

The place is gloomy, yes.

I've occasionally been there.

Yeh, I occasionally - when I go to London I occasionally go there.

So you got married in '62?

Married in '62. And - then I got a nervous breakdown. It all came out - after I got married, because at last I had what I wanted. And all the miseries and everything came out and I couldn't go to work, I couldn't work. I would - go on the underground to my work and I couldn't go out, I felt paralysed. I - I just couldn't cope. I was sleeping very badly anyway. For years and years I was sleeping very badly. Which didn't help.

Already before that time?

Before I got married, yes, I was sleeping very, very badly.

And it didn't get better?

It didn't get better and I was - tired all the time. So I had to cope with the tiredness and to teach when you're tired, when you don't sleep, is very, very difficult. And in the end with everything put together - I - had this nervous breakdown. You didn't read this book "The Journey Back from ....?", did you. That deals with the - post-war period.

I must get it.

Perhaps you could get it out of the library.

Did you have a good doctor then?

Well, I still had the same doctor, who was very good and he gave me tablets.

He knew your history?

Yeh, who knew my history.

How did your husband cope with this?

He was absolutely marvellous, yes, he really - coped well. He's very - very - composed and - not frightfully emotional, you know, he was just right for me. He was very good and very helpful. But he didn't go under with me, he pulled me up, you know, he didn't - make out that I was actually that ill and - it worked out.

How long did it last?

Well, I never went back to work. I did do a bit of supply teaching. But I never went back properly. When you do supply teaching you don't have to go in, you can just say "No, I won't be coming in tomorrow". Not that I wanted to do that, but you knew you could if you weren't well. And - I gradually got better. Actually you know - I - really only got properly better when I started painting, which was in 19..71, I think, I started painting. But the sixties weren't so easy either, although I got married and I wasn't on my own anymore, I couldn't have any children.

How did you find that out?

Well, it's not very difficult to find out. You try and nothing happens.

Did you have tests?

Well, there was nothing wrong apparently. Eventually we had all the tests. And - they couldn't find anything wrong with me and they couldn't find anything wrong with my husband. But -

Was that partly the cause of the nervous breakdown do you think?

No, the nervous breakdown came first. But - then when it was sort of - I was getting better, I was hoping we would have children. But they didn't come, so that was another problem you see. I very much wanted children, a family of my own. And - we did think of adoption, but there was the problem that he wasn't Jewish and I was. Because most adoption agencies in those days were through the church. And they wouldn't let you have any. And the Jewish people wouldn't let you have any children. Because I had a non-Jewish husband.

How did you solve this problem?

So in the end we solved it by going to the council. And they don't mind about the religion - that much.

I didn't know the council had an adoption agency?

Oh yes, oh yes they do. We went to the Islington Council, because that was the nearest. We lived - we lived - by then we lived in Muswell Hill. We moved from Swiss Cottage where we had a flat. We had it for two years. And we then bought a place of our own, a maisonnette in Muswell Hill. My sister lived in Muswell Hill with her husband. And - from her window she could see these new maisonnettes being built. So we - bought one. It was a very nice - nice little place. So our nearest place for adoption, the council was Islington.

And was that comparatively easy in those days, because now I believe it is very difficult?

It is. It was comparatively easy. But - we spoke - we were interviewed by a Greek woman. Greek people started coming in then. And we were interviewed by this Greek woman and her interest was to place Greek children. And we got to know about this little boy who was 3 then, and he was a little Cypriot boy and he was in a home. But he was very, very damaged. And - we - he was in a home in Bedford. And he was a very - pretty little boy, with lots and lots of charm. Very, very disturbed, very damaged, because his - his mother - his mother was a prostitute, the father was dealing in drugs, he was in prison. The mother was on the game. And she - only had one room and he was in the way. And she took him to some Greek restaurant, said she's got to look for some premises, and left and never came back for him. And he went from one home to another and then he was ill and he was in hospital. So, you know, for eighteen months he has a mother, and suddenly the mother leaves him. He was very, very disturbed. And we thought we could cope, you know. Because in many ways he was a lovely child, but very, very difficult. Very spiteful, very evil, very - very hostile. You know. And in the end we did take him in, he was being fostered by us, because -

To see how it worked out?

Well not only that, but she wouldn't allow - the mother wouldn't allow him to be adopted you see. She wouldn't give him up. But the mother was asked to come to court - she wanted him back. She was asked to come to court many times and she wouldn't turn up at court. You see. But at the same time she wouldn't give him up for adoption. So in the end she - she wanted to see him - once he was already staying with us - she wanted to see him and she had the right to see him. So - we took him to the council offices you see, on neutral ground. It was the first time she didn't turn up, and he was so disturbed again, because we said he was going to go and see his mother and he was about 4 by then.

Could he remember his mother at all?

Well, I don't know. I really don't know. You don't know what goes on in their little minds. We said he was going to meet his mother and she didn't turn up. So that didn't

help because he was very, very disturbed. And then once she did turn up at the offices. And she said, "They're not your parents, I am your mother", you know, "You're not to call them mummy and daddy because I am your mother". So then he got even more disturbed because he came and said, "You are my mummy, you're not my mummy, you are my mummy, you are not my mummy". Just chanting that for days on end, he couldn't work that out. And was - very bad with us, you know, because he was rejecting us. And then we asked the mother to come and visit him at our home. And the social worker said, you know, "He's got such a lovely home, you ought to let him be adopted because you can never give him a home like that. Go and see that home, see him there". So she came and saw him in our home. And she then did say, you know, "I could never give him a home like that", and she consented to him being adopted. So we adopted him. But we had a lot of problems with him, because he was very difficult, very hostile. Very anti everything. Everything we suggested he didn't want to do. And screamed if he had a bath and - very, very difficult.

Not exactly the easiest child to start off with?

No, it wasn't. You see he was already - 4 years old, so - it wasn't easy.

Did he settle down in the end?

Well, not for many, many years. We had lots and lots of trouble until he was grownup. He became a delinquent. He was in - a detention centre because he was stealing. He was doing terrible things. But I tell you about that later another time.

So then you adopted another one?

So then we got to know -

End of F207, Side B

F208, Side A

We were talking last time about your adopting your first son and the various difficulties you had with him. Maybe you could talk today about your second son and how you came to adopt him?

Well, when - our oldest son was about five years old, we managed to adopt our second son. I knew somebody, I knew a friend who had also adopted. And she did it through a midwife who she knew. And so we got in touch with her and got to know her. And she was just - she, in her home, used to keep girls who were pregnant and unmarried, because in those days in the 60's it was still not quite done to have an illegitimate child and nobody knew that she was having a child. And she said that they would throw her out, she wouldn't be allowed to live - she wanted to keep the child, but they wouldn't allow her to live at home. And she had a job. But she couldn't keep the job and have the child, because she said that it wouldn't be fair on the child, she worked all day and - So in the end she decided to have him adopted. She was staying with this midwife. And she was a very kind woman. She looked after these girls. And we didn't know her, we didn't know the girl. But from what we heard she was a very nice woman, in the Civil Service, a good job. And that was somewhere in Manchester. And we said we'll accept whatever comes. She was a few months pregnant. So we said whatever comes we'll have. And then in January 1966 we had this phone call, that a boy was born, healthy and well. So we were very happy. And when he was about - just a few weeks old we went to collect him. Our oldest son - we said to our oldest son at the time that he was going to get a little baby brother for Christmas. But he was a bit late. The baby was a bit late.

Did he look forward to that?

Well, he did in a way, yes. He did in a way. As I have a non-Jewish husband, you know, Christmas presents for the children. And I remember writing a letter from Father Christmas saying that he was so busy delivering toys to other children that he had to wait for the baby a few more days. So we went to collect him and he stayed at home with some friends, he didn't come with us. We went to Manchester to collect

the baby. He was with very nice foster parents, he wasn't with the mother anymore. And - so we brought him home.

Could you name him?

He had a name, but we could change the name. He had a name, yes. And I remember putting a big box of Smarties in his little carrycot, you know, for the other child. And you know that little box of Smarties meant so much to him, to the older one, who was 4. That he liked this little baby ever since. And they're still close, something happened that moment, you know, and - this little hand with this big box of Smarties - in the carrycot. And he thought it was marvellous. He loved it. Although he was quite cruel to him at times he loved him, and they're still good friends and they're quite close now. And - he was a very bright child, very strong.

You must have enjoyed having him as a tiny baby?

Well, we did enjoy him as a tiny baby, but there was this problem of the older son who was very difficult, he was very, very jealous. And we had to be so careful not to cuddle him too much because he was getting jealous, you know, such problems. So we had to wait until he is at school and then you could sort of - you know - make a fuss of the baby. But when he was at home we had to be very careful not to make him jealous, because he was disturbed already. And we had a maisonnette at the time in Muswell Hill. Two bedrooms. And we couldn't have the two children together in the same room, because we were a bit afraid that the older one would hurt him, he was very jealous. So he had to sleep in the sitting room. So we were looking for a bigger place. Eventually we got a house that we liked very much.

In Muswell Hill?

In Muswell Hill. Yes, a very, very nice house. And the social worker who got us the older boy knew that I very much wanted a little girl. And when we were in that house a few months. It was in the summer then, it was about - August. The social worker came along and said there is this little baby girl. And it just happened that she had

nowhere to go, nobody sort of wanted her, because people were on holiday and it wasn't the right time of year.

The mother wanted to give her up for adoption?

Well, yes, the mother had given her away. She was quite ill, she had enteritis the baby, and she was in an isolation hospital. And then went to a children's home. And so she was sort of in care of the council.

How old was she?

She was only about 3 weeks old then. And my husband said "oh, no more children, no more children". I said "well let's go and have a look at her". So we went to the children's home and he fell in love with her straight away. She was so beautiful. And showed interest and looked at him, you know, and he gave in. But she stayed in that home for another three weeks or so because she had been very ill and they had to make sure that she is alright. So we had her when she was about 6 weeks.

So you had two babies really?

There is 18 months difference between them. The other one was 18 months when she came along. And actually there were some problems there because - he got very jealous because, you know, he was sort of - very important.

The 18 month old?

Yes. So I mean this little baby came along and he just ignored her, for a long time he ignored her. Until she was old enough to sort of come up to him and wanted to play with him, when she was about a year, she could walk, she would sort of come up and see what he was doing. By that time he was sort of two and a half and he used to push her away and so on. As I found out from other mothers, all the children were the same.

How did the older boy react?

He ignored her, she didn't exist for him. She was very good and very easy, you know. And they just ignored her. But she adored them. She kept on sort of running after them and wanting to play with them. It was - no worse than most brothers and sisters I suppose.

So gradually it sorted itself out?

They went to school like all other children. And they always knew they were adopted.

How did you tell them?

Right from the beginning, that - you know, we went to choose them. We used to say there were a lot of children there and we went to pick a very special one - and chose them. I know they were very pleased, especially my daughter, she was boasting to everybody at school, you know, "your parents had to take what came, but I was chosen".

They knew that other people had their babies in a different way?

Oh yes. Oh yes. But, you know, it wasn't a secret, I mean we didn't talk about it all the time. The same as you don't talk to children about being born, you don't talk to them about adoption. But we wanted to make sure that they knew and that they don't have a shock later on.

So they all accepted it?

They accepted it, yes. Our son didn't accept it very well, he never told anybody.

Which one?

The middle son. He never told anybody. And even when we came here. They didn't know. But I don't know why. He was always feeling - a little bit inferior probably, I don't know. He never talked about it to us. He never discussed it until - a few years ago when he went to university. We were driving in the car taking him there. And it somehow came up and he talked about it, for the first time. I don't know why, because my daughter always accepted it quite happily. And she was very sensible. She tried to talk to him about it, but he wouldn't talk to her about it. Because we discussed him with her, you know, trying to work out why he is like that. And she tried to talk to him, but -

But sister and brother had a good relationship?

Reasonably. It's getting better all the time. It wasn't so good when they went to school. But they squabble and they fight. But when there is a crisis they come to each other. And when somebody was bullying my daughter he would come and stick up for her in the playground at school and things like that. They're alright now, they're alright now.

So you had a lot of pleasure from them apart from all the problems with your eldest son

Oh yes, yes. He spoilt things a lot because he was so jealous, you had to be so careful. If you were frightfully nice to the little ones he might come and start playing up. He he would say things to them. I heard him once say to them mummy doesn't love them. And then the little one would come and say "is it true". And things like that. So there were a lot of problems. But we managed. We managed. And now they're grown up.

So you have a normal and happy family life?

Oh yes. Yes. Oh they've brought us a lot of pleasure. They are really very nice children. And bright. Healthy and -

Where did your husband teach when you were in Muswell Hill?

He taught in Southgate.

A comprehensive?

A comprehensive school. He was - head of the upper school.

What are his subjects?

His subject is French. When my daughter was about 3 - apart from the children I was very lonely in Muswell Hill because I didn't know anybody there, except my sister, my sister lived in Muswell Hill. But I didn't have any - other friends there at all. Although I had children I didn't meet grown up company, I didn't sort of have friends. And when my daughter was 3, they started school when they were 3, because there was a nursery attached to the school. So she started going for half a day for a year, to this nursery. And I joined the art class. I wanted to do something, to get out of the house and to get to know people. So I joined this art class. It was called 'modern art'. And the reason I joined was because I didn't know anything about modern art, didn't understand it and wanted to learn. So I joined that group and it was very, very interesting. And I also met a lot of people there with whom I made friends. Actually they were continental some of them. Different religions as well, not Jewish. But one girl was Polish and one Swiss. And we became very friendly. We are still very good friends now. And one English girl. I met some, you know, people with the same interests. I had a lot in common with some of the continentals, so - We became very good friends.

Is that when you started to paint yourself?

Yes. Started that class. It was in Muswell Hill. It was in an adult education centre. And I did this modern class and also a sort of conventional beginners class. Where I learnt all the sort of basics of drawing and the techniques of painting. And then I went to the modern class where we - where they were adventurous. We had

explained to us some of the modern movements and we tried to paint - you know, for a few weeks Renoir movement and then like another movement. And he gave us whatever, just things to do, which I enjoyed very much. And it appealed to me because I love colour. And it really freed me from more inhibitions in painting. Whereas the other class taught me some of the techniques. Then with the two other friends who I made there, the Swiss girl and the Polish girl, we started going to the Camden Arts Centre. Which is an art school for grownups during the day and evenings. And that was very, very good. We did life class there. And portrait. And went once or twice a week. I was going to classes about three times a week then.

Did you suddenly feel that you wanted to paint?

I wanted to do something, you know. And I always liked art at school. But since I went to school I didn't do any. But I just wanted to go. Once I went, you know, I couldn't stop. I got so interested. I wanted to do more and more. I was really happy going. When I was painting I could forget - well not forget, but cope, with all the other problems. And I found that - I had a lot of health problems. I don't know if I told you that last time. I was on pills. And I had all kinds of attacks of panic and - you know - not fainting, but almost collapsing. When I started painting I was getting actually better. It helped me an awful lot. It's a wonderful therapy and my mind was on it, rather than on the other things. And the colours sort of released something in me and made me very happy.

When did you first start to paint the concentration camps?

That comes later.

So what did you paint at first?

Well, just whatever we were given in class. It was still life and portrait and I went to a life class. And we went out in the summer to do landscapes in the parks. And I was so busy with it and my household, I was fully occupied, and I actually started getting better, and also I had good friends. Which helped. If I wasn't painting I was out with

my friends. After all these years - my son was about 12 by now, the older one, so since he was 3 - for 9 years I was tied to the house. And I couldn't go anywhere and I had nobody to go with, because I didn't know anybody. You see these two other women they had little children. If we had known each other we could have taken them out for walks together and visited each other.

Did you not meet other parents through school?

Well, once I went to school I was alright. But it was before they went to school you see. The oldest went to school, but no I didn't make any friends.

Did you have trouble with him at school?

Oh, he was very, very difficult. But it was a very nice school. And the children were very happy. And my daughter tells me it was the happiest time in her life when she was at school. But they didn't learn anything. They were happy and they played and they had nice teachers and they were creative. A lot of art and craft. But they didn't learn much. She played the violin and she was in the choir. But - the oldest son - they knew, you know, that he had problems, and he needed a bit of discipline, but instead he was allowed to do what he liked. He once punched a teacher because she told him to clear up outside the classroom together with the others, he pushed in the front and she told him to go to the back. And he just punched her in the stomach. And she said "oh don't worry, it doesn't matter, it's alright". You know. They were too kind and he got away with anything. And didn't really want to basically. He wanted to be controlled and have the security of it, but he could do what he liked. He was drifting from classroom to classroom, he didn't have to do any work. He learned to read because he was interested in football and he was reading a football page for boys. He was very much interested in football. He supported Tottenham. And as soon as he could go he used to go to Tottenham. He still supports Tottenham. And he - got so difficult and so disruptive at home that my younger children were - in a very bad way. And they were sort of - in the primary school. In the infants. He was playing up so much that he was threatening me with a knife and all sorts of things. He was very, very difficult when he got a bit older, that in the end - we couldn't really

cope very well and we went to the social workers, and in the end they sent him to a special boarding school. I don't think they did it for us, I think they did it for him, to get away from us. But the policy was in those days, I don't know what it is now, that if a child is difficult it's always the parents fault. So we were to blame. But I didn't mind, as long as he was taken away. He was at Colchester. And he used to come home for weekends. It helped us. Because we had our weekdays in peace. He came home for holidays. It was a very, very difficult time. It was so difficult I can't tell you. The older he got the worse it got, because he had sort of violent tempers. He didn't actually do anything when he was threatening to us. But he started stealing outside and - having fights and - being nasty at school to the teachers. And in the end - he went to two or three schools, but they couldn't cope with him. Even schools for difficult children couldn't cope with him. At first they said "oh, he's a charming boy, he's lovely, it's all the parents fault". In the end they couldn't cope with him. They sent him away. But when he was 14, which was sometime in the 70's, they tried to persuade us that the last two years of school he should go to a normal school and learn to cope with everyday life in an ordinary community, rather than a special school. Persuaded us to have him back, so we had him back. And they were a hellish two years I can tell you. And he went to school round the corner and he was playing up and he was playing truant and he was threatening the teachers and it was a very, very difficult time. I think in the end when he played truant they didn't care less. They said he wasn't there. And he had a friend, a black boy with whom he was very friendly with, who had a white mother, who was on her own, there was no husband, they were divorced or something.

Another boy with difficulties?

Another boy - well, I don't know, he wasn't that difficult. When he came to us he was quite charming. We liked the boy. And the mother liked our son very much. So he said could he go and live there with them. So I said "yes, you can, we'll pay for your keep". And we did, we came to an arrangement, we paid so much per week. And he stayed with Gladys, that was the mother of that boy.

She agreed to it?

Yes, she agreed to it. We had one - one Christmas, before Christmas, a few days before Christmas, it was a Sunday. We had a party for friends. And there was about 10 or 12 of us and we were having a lovely time. All of a sudden I had this phone call. Because our son was still living with us, but he went to visit this friend and spent a lot of time there. And she said "how dare you send your son all day without any food. I'm going to report you. He hasn't eaten all day". Anyway, it wasn't true. I did a lovely Sunday dinner, you know. He went there and he was telling this story that we didn't give him anything to eat. And it spoilt my day, because you know it's dangerous, these social workers believe the children, they don't believe you. So - I can't remember exactly what I said, but I put her in her place. I said "does he look starved to you". I said "you are a sucker for believing him, he just wants - you know, more food". Very often with children they want to eat all the time. I mean he could eat what he liked at home, but when he went there he wanted some more. So he was telling this story. So I said something to her "look, if you are going to start spreading rumours like this I am going to sue you. You've got to think before you do anything, because the child is well looked after. You can ask at school and so on". She was a very ordinary common woman. And we thought she was, you know, maybe common and all that, but she was kind and nice. Anyway, in the end he said he wants to go and live there because she was much nicer than I was. I said alright. We came to this agreement. We gave her the money, took the money round. And he went to live there. And then - before that whilst he was still at a special school in Colchester, he had a conviction of theft. He went with other children and they went to steal, like transistor sets from shops like Woolworths. And they went to a dairy at night and broke all the bottles there. Milk and yoghurt and everything. And we got called. He went to court four times. And each time they said "if you do something like this again you will go to a detention centre. You will be punished". And each time he got away with it. So when he went with this woman Gladys, he - we didn't know it at the time, but what he was doing he was going with this other boy, they went to car parks and stole out of cars. Briefcases. Amazing what people leave in their cars. Briefcases, money.

Unlocked cars?

Unlocked cars. Some locked cars. He had a big bunch of keys. Some were locked and some weren't locked. Radios, transistors. Oh - a whole list of things. We didn't know about that. And one day the police came. He was at the police station. Would we come. He stole a motorbike with this boy. He was - about 16 then. He was still at school. I can't remember how old he was. He wasn't old enough to ride a motorbike. And he stole a - no, no, he didn't steal a motorbike - I think - bought a motorbike, but it was stolen, a dealer stole it and let them have it cheap. And he had some money from what he was stealing. And he was riding this motorbike. And a policeman stopped him and said "where is your driving licence", because he looked very young or was possibly driving very badly or something. And he said "where's your licence". And he didn't have one of course you see. I don't know whether they found the bunch of keys or something, they said "we want to go and search your home". And they went to this woman. And there was a room full of stuff.

She must have known about it?

She must have known. And she never said anything to us and let him stay there. It was full of stolen stuff. Of course they had records of things that were stolen. And it was all there, from these car parks. And we explained the situation to the police, that we didn't know anything about it. And the other boy sort of - didn't go to court, he got cautioned, I think it was because it was his first offence or something. But Paul had to go to court. He had social workers. The social workers were quite useless. Also in his childhood and so on they were quite useless, because everything he was doing was alright and it was all our fault. It was always "poor boy", you know. There was nothing we could do. They were so weak these social workers. I don't know what they're like now, but they were then. And he went to Highgate Court. I think juvenile court. And we saw the report that the social worker gave to the court. And I've still got it, I actually saw it the other day because I was sorting out my documents. It said all the things that he had stolen and what he did. But it was sort of more or less our fault. It was a report about us. And so we went to court. And we were allowed to speak. We never shouted, we never got cross. Just told them what we thought.

Did your husband and you speak separately?

Separately. And we told them our side of the story. Because their side of the story was all there. We told them our side. Just telling them the experiences we've had, what we've tried to do, how hard we tried, that we could never be right, whatever we did, you know, was always our fault and - when we asked for help we never got it. We did say to the social workers, you know, "help us, what can we do". Some of them said "it will be alright, don't worry, it will be alright". And the others, you know, just everything was wrong. So anyway, what happened was that we were lucky and he was lucky in a way, that the magistrates really let him have it and said "your parents are bending over backwards all these years to help you and that's how you repay them". Because they could see exactly what was happening, because I think they had a report before. Reading through the lines they could see that every time he did something wrong we had him back, we had him back, we had him back, all the time, you know. He went to a detention centre.

End of F208, Side A

F208, Side B

He went to a detention centre. It was such a relief I can't tell you. That for once there was somebody who could see what was going on. I mean that social worker was there, they could see what he was like. So weak. Such, as they say, a whimper, nowadays. I think they meant well. But their training was all wrong. They didn't help him, they didn't help me. Even when we went to court waiting, he was running off and he was chasing after him, begging him to come back. Anyway, it was wonderful to see a bit of justice. And they actually asked us - what we thought should happen to him. We said "well, he's got away with it every time and he's getting worse all the time. So we'll leave it to what you think is right, because we can't go on the way we were, it didn't do him any good". Anyway, they sent him to this detention centre. They said his parents had been bending over backwards. Gave him 3 months in the detention centre. And that place was actually shown on television a few years ago as a short, sharp shock. He went there. And we went to see him, he was in a cell down in the police station, the court. And he was laughing. He thought it was all a big joke, because he'd got away with it so much, he didn't know what was waiting for him. And he went to a detention centre. And they cut his hair. It was at a time when boys had long hair. They cut his hair very short. He had to wear a uniform. He hated wearing a uniform. He never wanted to wear a uniform at school. And he was shut in. He always had to be free. He couldn't bear being told what to do. He always had to do what he wanted to do. And he had all that to put up with. We went to see him. We could see him every two weeks, and we went to see him. And the first time we went it was November time. It was very foggy. And we were late because we couldn't find the way. It was the very first time we went there. It was sort of in the country somewhere. And what we saw was this very high wall. And my other son said "this is like something out of Colditz". It looked terrible. I think that visit stopped him from ever trying. Because my middle son, like a lot of other children, - just had a go - I don't know whether it was because my son was sent to a detention centre, he had a go and he stole a five-pound note from my husband. Now he was - about 11 or so. I think he was a bit disturbed when he stole this money from my husband. And we didn't say anything at the time. And we just watched him if he would do it again. And we went - and my friend told me that he took - they were

playing with these little soldiers and he took a few soldiers and put them in his pocket, I think he was disturbed at the time. But when he saw that place he never ever stole anything again. He knew that you can't get away with it. Because that impressed him. Where he would go. If my son had been disciplined right from the beginning by the authorities it would never have got that far.

How did you find him when you got there?

Well - there was a keeper there with a bunch of keys. We went in. It was sort of like in a prison - in a visiting room, and they just called him. He was in his room and -

How did he behave to you?

Well, he was very miserable. He had a sty in his eye. He had short hair. He looked utterly miserable. And - so we went to see him every fortnight. And he was so keen to get out that he behaved himself. And he sort of got remission. He was out after 6 weeks. But he's never done anything again. Nothing serious. He's had the occasional fight or something. The only thing what we used to get sometimes was a call to a police station. He was at a football match and got a bit - He said he didn't do anything, he said they were all getting into trouble, they all called the police station because they were a bit rowdy or something. Whether he was telling the truth or not I don't know. But it all stopped. He never got into trouble again. It did him good. But you see when he was - we learnt of this very much later, years later, he - was in trouble so many times and we were always called to rescue him from the police station. And he said to him last time "if you get into trouble with the police again it's the end, we don't want to know you any more". He was 16 by then.

Because you had had enough?

Yes, a big boy now and it's got to stop. And he went to this detention centre. And we were late, as I told you, it was foggy and we couldn't find it. We were about 20 minutes late. And when we got there he wouldn't turn up, he wouldn't come. And when we said "where were you, why didn't you come", he had some reason, he said

he was playing football and he had to have a wash, or something like that. But all these years later, quite a few years later, he told me. He said "do you know, I thought you weren't coming. And I was crying my eyes out. And I didn't want you to see it. So I had to wash my face and wait until it goes away". And it meant so much to him that we came after all, that it somehow - you know - helped the relationship.

Was he better with you after that?

Yes. He had time to think. He appreciated that in spite of everything we said we still cared. He said "you are the only people who stood by me. Whatever I did you still stood by me". And he appreciates that. Yes, things got better with us, he then was 16 and sort of free to live away from home. He lived in digs. Had his own place. Got into trouble there. But not with the police, just with the people, he was so untidy - they threw him out.

What did he do. Did he earn his living?

He - was - yeh, he worked at a greengrocers in Muswell Hill. We saw him there sometimes. He worked at a greengrocers. He always liked to be with people. He had a lot of charm. You know, the sort of Greek charm. He liked to chat-up people, he liked to be free, he didn't like to be sitting down or something. He - he always wanted to be a milkman, ever since he was a little child. When he was little we bought him one of those milk vans and he pulled it along. An Express milk van with bottles. And we lived in a small block of maisonnettes, four maisonnettes in one house, and he used to leave the bottles with people and then collect them. And they were all very nice to him, they played milkman with him. And he always wanted to be a milkman. And he used to actually work Saturdays and holidays for a milkman. And they were praising him, they said he was a marvellous worker. He was out and about in the world, doing something. He always wanted to work because he was bored otherwise, he was always a good worker. And - then when he was old enough to be a milkman they wouldn't let him because of his police record. You see. He couldn't handle money and all that. Years later when he could have been a milkman they actually offered him a job and he didn't want it anymore. But - he - worked for

a greengrocer. Did very well. And - what did he do then. He worked for a greengrocers for quite a long time. Worked for a greengrocer in Finchley. He then moved into a flat. He had a room in a flat. Where there was a - a man living there, a very nice man. I don't know how he got to him, he was a bachelor. And he was very kind to him. He was very good to him in a way that - didn't upset him. He didn't tell him what to do and so on, but he was so good to him and he listened to him. He was a man in his 30's or something. And he was a great friend of his. They are still friends. Still friends. This bloke was a chauffeur to a very rich man. He was driving a Rolls for this rich man who lived in the same block of flats. And when Paul was getting married this man could borrow the Rolls and drove him to the wedding in a Rolls. It was actually so near, it was only a few hundred yards. But then they drove them to the reception, so it was very nice.

When did he get married. How did he meet his girlfriend?

I don't know where he met her. He met her - in a pub or somewhere.

So he was able to have relationships with girls?

Well, this girl was also adopted. She was only 16 when he met her and he was - a bit older, not a lot, about 2 years older or so. Yeh, about 2 years older than she was. He brought her home for a meal and - very nice parents. She left school when she was 16, she didn't want to study. And she was very good for him. She got herself a job at the Friern Barnet mental hospital. Do you know that hospital.

I have heard of it.

She worked there taking the meals round and the tea round and all that. And she was very bright in herself and very good. But she used to tell us how she coped with the patients. And her job was to take the tea round and have a chat with them. She'd chat with them, they talked to her, tell her everything. She was very, very good with them. And she was very good with Paul. She somehow had the knack of dealing with people who were perhaps a bit disturbed or - And she was very good to him, because

she could understand that he needed certain freedom and certain - and made allowances for him. At the same time she said to him "if you end up in prison I'm not standing by you, I'm not having a life of somebody who keeps on being in prison". And she's been very tough, in retrospect. Otherwise she's very good and she lets him - you know, she gives him quite a lot of freedom, but he doesn't abuse it, he does go out sometimes with the boys and so on, but - she's quite strict when it comes to not getting into trouble. They - got married after - well no, they - went out together about - 2 years. And then they lived together for 2 years. They moved in together. And they got a council flat. He is very clever, you know, he got a council flat and she moved in with him. He got thrown out of his digs. Because he was very untidy or something. And he lived in a van. I said "well you can come and stay with us". He said "no, I won't get anywhere to live". So he told these people that he wasn't allowed to come home, he's got nowhere to live. And the social workers found him a council flat in Wood Green. It was brand new. Actually the Queen went to see these flats, because there was something new they had on the roof. They had a playground for children, all fenced in. But you could see through. And the children could play football and all sorts of things, they could play.

What a good idea.

A good idea. And they had gardens, people had gardens, they were like corridors, like corridors on top, where people lived. Some people lived right on top. And they had gardens up on top there. And these playgrounds. The Queen went to visit it. And they had one of these flats, they lived there for 2 years. And then they got married. But whilst they lived in these flats there were riots in Wood Green. And he wanted a bit of excitement and she said "you are not going". She wouldn't let him go. She's very strict with things like that, but otherwise she's been very good to him, very - doesn't nag him or anything like that. She knows not to haggle him.

Do they have any children?

Yes, they have two children. And - he's turned out all right. He hasn't been in trouble since.

What does he do now?

He's working - at the moment he's working for a firm - collecting rents from some landlords, collecting rents. He got the job and he couldn't get anything that he wanted and the job was going and a car with it. So he's sort of drifting about. Well, not drifting, he's - he's been unemployed for a long time. Because he was unemployed and on the dole for some time because he said he can't afford to work, because the jobs that he could get were less than what he was getting on the dole, which is absolutely ridiculous, isn't it.

They are trying to stop that, aren't they?

Well, I hope so, because if they let them work and say "look, we will make up the difference so that you can go and work. And we'll make up the difference". He would have gone to work because he didn't like sitting around at home. He was, you know, bored stiff sitting around at home. Its nice for the kids, he was watching them grow up and he was very good with them. But he wanted to work. He's somebody who likes to work, he's got a lot of energy. He doesn't want to sit around.

His wife gave up working did she?

Well - his wife had to give up in the end because when they had only one child he could work and she could work and put the child to a baby minder. She was still working at the hospital. But the second one came along, she would have had to pay so much for the child minder, that it wouldn't have paid her to work. So she stayed at home. Anyway, he's got a job now, he's had it for some time. And - got a car.

Where do they live?

They live in Arnos Grove. It's called New Southgate. But it's near Arnos Grove Station. They've got a little house.

And do you see them sometimes?

Oh yeh.

Do they come here?

Yes. They had a holiday last summer at the cottage. Oh yes. And they phone us.

So it really worked out well in the end?

Worked out. But only just. If he hadn't been to a detention centre, if he hadn't met the girl, he could have spent his life in prison. In and out. But everything together it somehow worked out. And now he's got kids I think he knows he doesn't want to end up in prison.

How old are the children?

The little girl is - 3. And the older one is - 5.

Two girls?

Mmm.

And they are nice?

Oh, they're lovely kids.

And they are good parents?

Oh yes. Oh, he's a marvellous father.

It's wonderful that he turned out so well.

Oh yes. The children have a nice home, yes.

I must say that you can be proud of that.

Well not proud, just lucky. I consider myself very lucky. Well - I think the fact - that we didn't desert him - helped. Whatever happened, you know - we were there, he could always come for advice, he could always come for help. In the end he did appreciate it. He's always been very loyal to us, because our friends said, you know, "never says a bad thing about you. He always praises how marvellous you are". We said "well we wish he would praise us to our face sometimes". Yes, I am very grateful because it would have been very miserable for us if he had been in prison. In and out of prison.

How did it affect the other two, to have this difficult problem?

Well - they had great respect for that detention centre I can tell you. Well they all get on well. They all get on well. The two boys get on extremely well together. My daughter, since the children came along, she likes children. So - it's alright. They came with us for a week last - for about 10 days, last summer to the cottage. And we saw them every day. And when we go to London we go and see them.

So the other two children you didn't have such difficulties with?

Oh no. Not serious. My son - well - we can go back now to when I started painting.

I would like to hear about your painting. It is very interesting.

I - went to - classes for about - 2 years or so, when I started a history of art class in the evenings. An evening class. I went with my friend. And I was very much interested in the history of art and I was going to do an A level. I wanted to work towards an exam, I thought that would do me good. So during the day I went painting to this other teacher. And the history of art I went to another teacher. And it was so fascinating, I was so interested in the history of art, it was such a wonderful course,

by a very inspiring teacher. John Charrington is his name. And he's the one who painted all these pictures. He was - so interesting. He loved his subject so much it communicated. And we were doing modern history from 1850 onwards up to modern times. And when I saw these modern paintings I suddenly started thinking, you know. Because I think I told you I wrote a book about my experiences. And people didn't want to know anymore because too much was written. They said "come back in 30 years time or something like that and maybe interest will be revived". Which actually is true. Or not 30 years time, but maybe 40 or 50 years time. I suddenly thought why not, you know, put those experiences into pictures. It sort of came to me that I - you know, when I saw the modern - I couldn't have done it old masterish, I couldn't do that. Because it was such a strong subject. It was such an impossible thing. The only way to do it was sort of in a modern idiom, expressionist idiom. Where you can do what you like, express it in your own way. So - it came to me and I started thinking about it. And I then - went to my teacher's home once. I said "I'd love to see your painting". And I went to his house, he lived in Highgate. And the house was like a gallery of paintings. And there were such wonderful paintings. And I was quite overcome. And - I said "will you teach me to paint". And he said "why do you want to learn to paint". And I told him. Told him why. And he was absolutely wonderful, he got very interested. I said I'd love to do these pictures.

But you already had had lessons in painting before that?

Yes, with another teacher. The other teacher was alright, but he wasn't an artist like this one was himself. I was very inspired by his paintings, because not only did he teach about the history but he painted those pictures. And I had long discussions after that with this teacher John Charrington, because he knew what I wanted to do. And he got very interested in the camps, the whole experience. And he said that after the war he saw those newsreels about the liberation of Belsen and it has haunted him ever since. And he was the - only person at the time, he was the only person who - understood - that I couldn't be normal, who made me feel that all these abnormalities in me were actually normal under the circumstances. He made me feel that the way I felt - and thought - was actually quite normal. He - he - he - he showed me to myself. He could read my - subconscious in a way. And brought it out. And helped

me in that way because he understood things I couldn't understand myself. I couldn't understand why after all these years I felt this and I felt that. About a lot of things. Why I was troubled about some things, why I wasn't feeling well. Why I was having nightmares and all that. And he explained it all to me and it made sense. And he made me actually realise that I shouldn't try to be normal in the accepted sense, because it's not possible. It would be abnormal to be normal sort of. And it helped me a great deal. And I started getting so much better after that. It was marvellous.

So you still painted just ordinary things?

Just ordinary things. And - so I went, went to his art class, he was teaching art as well, painting.

Where was that, in Camden?

No, that was in Muswell Hill. And he did A level art. And I went to the A level class. I did my A level and got my certificate and I went and did - a painting. And because it was an exam course he had to be very strict, and that appealed to me. You see the other teacher was alright, but everything you did was wonderful and beautiful and lovely. Just praised people. Whereas this one had to be very strict. I said "I don't want you to praise me if its no good. I want you to be very tough with me, because I want to learn to paint, I want to do these pictures and I want to learn all there is". So he was very good and he taught me to draw and he taught me to paint and techniques and - anything I wanted to learn. That was great. I still wasn't doing these pictures, I wasn't ready for it. I had to think about how I was going to do them. But with him I started painting - all kinds of things. I really sort of - started getting adventurous. And - that went on for some time and then - he moved out to Hereford. He had a holiday in Hereford. And they saw this cottage which was next to the cottage that they borrowed. Somebody let them have the cottage for some holidays. And that cottage was nearby and it was for sale. And they bought it. And they moved out. And they said "you must come to us, it's wonderful". So we started going for holidays. To the village, out in St Margarets. And eventually this cottage went up for sale at auction. And we thought well we spend so much money renting. Because we

used to come for holidays a lot because my husband was in teaching. And we used to rent a cottage nearby, we couldn't stay with them because it wasn't big enough. And - so we - then went for this auction and said we may as well buy one, rather than - renting something. Because we spent three or four months a year, you know, out in the country. So we managed to get this cottage at auction. And a lot needed doing to it, but we lived in London and we used to come every holiday you see, to the cottage. Well eventually my husband had enough of teaching, it was such hard work in a comprehensive at that time, in the 70's, in the late 70's. And he had had enough and he wanted to take early retirement. But the only way he could take early retirement was by giving up London. Because we couldn't have managed financially on his pension. I had a bit of a pension from the Germans. But we couldn't have managed. Rates were high. Well you know what London is like. So we decided to sell up London and come to Hereford, because we liked it so much by then, we thought we'd like to live here. We had friends in London where we could go and stay. So we came out to live. That was in 1980. By that time I had been painting for about 8 years.

Just ordinary painting?

Yes. And we came - well we were going to extend the cottage because we couldn't live there the four of us. It was only two up, two down. It was much too tiny. So we wanted to extend, but we weren't allowed to because there wasn't enough room for a soakaway for the septic tank. So we had to think again, either sell up and buy something bigger. Then we thought well, the children will be going to school. And they were young teenagers. They'll want a bit of a social life. So we thought whilst they are at school we'll get a second house and get one in Hereford. So for the money we sold the house in London, we could buy the cottage and this place and pay off all the mortgage so that we don't have any mortgage to pay. And we managed. So that's how we got this house. And we had a cottage in the country. Which was very nice, because our friends came to stay in the cottage a lot and we had holidays with them. And we spent a lot of time there in the summer as well.

And your husband retired?

Retired. He was still doing supply teaching. When he came, for some time. But he's given up now. And - before we could move into the house here, because it wasn't finished, it was supposed to be finished but wasn't, we lived at the cottage for six months. It wasn't quite finished. The plaster was off the walls, you know, and - a lot needed doing to it. We lived there and - it was there that I started thinking seriously about my paintings. And I used to walk a great deal in the lanes by myself thinking about it. And - trying to work out what's called 'a pictorial language' that would do justice to what I wanted to do. Because it was such a big subject. It was so horrific the subject. I had to find a way of doing it that would express it. And whilst I was walking in those lanes it started coming to me. And I started drawing actually at first. Started drawing the people, the way I thought - would express what they looked like. And because I couldn't paint at the cottage, it was too small and dirty, so I started drawing, in pencil, you know, sketching how I would do it. And that's how it started.

End of F208, Side B

F209, Side A

You were telling me how you started painting last time?

Yes. I told you how I - walked through the lanes trying to think about it, work it all out, how it could be done. And - somehow gradually it came. I - I - did all these drawings and - I had books - about the ghettos and the camps, with some photographs in it. And although I wanted to - paint memories of the Holocaust it was good to have a little bit of reference, even if just for the background. But also what people were wearing and - what they looked like. And I realised that these people in the pictures were - showing the bone structure a lot, because their flesh was all gone. And some of them the hair was shaved off. Or in the ghettos they had these hats and the kaftans, the men did. And the women just had scarves. And so I - worked out certain - significant things to do with the camps. Like the bones showing through the skin. People were like skeletons more or less. And in the end that's how I painted the people. That's the only way I could paint them to show how very hungry they were and how very disturbed they were. Because they really did look like skeletons with just skin on. And - when I realised that it became a little bit easier, because I knew that if I - paint the people like that it will show how - badly off they were and what a state they were in. And so I started drawing from these pictures. I made - I made drawings in pencil, or charcoal. And got the sort of - structure of the faces and bodies, perhaps exaggerated it a bit because in the ghetto for instance, as in the other camps, because people were so hungry and they lost all their flesh their heads seemed much bigger in proportion to the body normally. Because the body is very small without the flesh. I don't know if you realise that, but the head doesn't shrink much except the cheeks. But the body shrinks. So I exaggerated that a little bit, had the big faces, big heads and small bodies. And - to give the impression, to show - what people looked like with these big heads. And - then the shabby clothes. And most of all I'm very fond of colour. Colour is the important thing with me in paintings.

There are some wonderful skies sometimes in those pictures. Very impressive skies.

Yes. And - I thought well, I'm not - a great person at drawing, I'm not really very good at drawing. But I'm quite good with colour and paint. So I'll have to make the most of what I can do. So I - thought if I'm trying to be accurate with a drawing I'll never do anything. If I wait until I can do it I'll never do anything. Do it as best I can like children do. If a child is told to - draw something, anything, he'll go and do it, and that's that. So I thought well, I'll have to do it - somehow, I'll do it as best I can. And even if it's not accurate, if I can express - what I want to say and people can understand what I'm trying to say, the message comes across, that's the important thing. Not every detail of every finger or - or leg or something like that. If I can tell people - what I need to say - then that's alright if they can understand. So - when we moved to Hereford eventually, after we got the place straight - I started thinking about painting. And - I - I just didn't have the courage to start. So one day I said well, I'll get a - a board, a biggish board. And just start it. Nobody has to see it, but just paint. And it actually turned out quite well. It was - I thought I'll start with a portrait and not with a whole figure. And I started with a portrait of the - the man, which I call Liberation Day. And - you've got a picture of that. And - he is a man who was in a book that I have, a photograph of him. I didn't do him exactly as he is in the picture. But I - used colour to emphasise the various structures of his face. And somehow it worked. And that was a big breakthrough. I thought oh yes, it can be done. And from there there was really no stopping me. Then I did a ghetto woman. I also had a black and white photograph, not very distinct, but again with colour I emphasised the - important things. The expression, the hunger, the despair, - the - the posture of the people, you know, the posture of her. With colour I could - I could - I could express it as I wanted to. And from there I then started doing scenes. I didn't have pictures of those. But once I knew how to - paint the people - I could then more or less make it up. I thought maybe if it's not accurate it doesn't matter, but I've got something to say and I'll say it anyway. So I then started. And - did what I call Memories of the Holocaust. I just remember some things so vividly - that I thought I'll do it. And I worked things out on paper first. Did a lot of little sketches until I got - got it right.

Each painting you did a sketch of?

Each painting I would do a few sketches on paper. Only small ones, to get the composition. Because once I've got the drawing right and the composition right, the rest comes - fairly easily. If it isn't right you can do what you like with paint and it's not right and it - you know, it's no good. So - I would - think about it for quite a long time first, you know, what scene I want to do and everything about it, and very often I would write down on paper anything I could remember about that scene that is important. Psychologically - emotionally - physically, what these people went through, what they were thinking, what they were doing, what they were feeling - whether they were cold or - or something was hurting them, you know, all that I put down. And that had to go in the picture somehow. And then I had it so much in my mind that - when I drew it and got it right I put it on a board. And started painting. And - and somehow it just - came, the paint comes, the colours come. You will probably notice that I have a lot of red in my skies. And that is symbolic of the - of the fire, of the burning of the people. Because when we came to Auschwitz the skies were red - from - from these - from the fire. And they were burning the people. And the red sky is symbolic of that - practically in every picture. Even if it's not in Auschwitz there is some red in the sky usually just to remind myself - that so many people died through being burned. And also the skies are fairly - violent because - it was a violent situation. And I think the sky sets the scene, whether it's a landscape or a - you know, a scene like that or a portrait or whatever. The background somehow sets the scene for me anyway. And depending on the mood of the picture, or what I might feel at the time about it. I mean if I painted the same picture another day it might be completely different. But the way I feel about it on that day I do the sky. I set the mood with the sky and the colours in the sky and the patterns in the sky.

Did you start with the sky?

Always start with the sky. Whether it's the Holocaust picture or whether it's a landscape. If I do a landscape, if it's a nice calm day I do a nice - calm sky, you know. And if it's a - an evening, I do a - darkish sky and the rest comes accordingly. And the same with this, you know, I mean it was a very stormy situation all through the - war. And I didn't want to make the people - energetic, because they weren't, the people were very - quiet and - and still, because they didn't have any energy.

They were sad - and sick and ill and hungry and cold. And they were very - calm in many ways, they were sort of - not quite all there somehow, you know, some of them were mentally not there because of the hunger. And - I wanted to bring out this sort of - acceptance and sadness and - all the suffering in their faces. I didn't want to make them violent. So I did the skies - the background. And then against that. And somehow it works I think, so people tell me. That's - I worked out somehow for myself, it came, I don't know how.

Did you show them at all to your teacher, the one who encouraged you to do that?

Well - he - first of all - he said - I suggested at first that we do them together. He said "no, that's your subject, you've got to do it yourself. What do I have to do with it", you know. So I accepted that. And then - when I did about half a dozen - I said could I bring them along for him to see. He said "alright". And - I took them along. And somehow he got terribly upset. I don't know why.

Well they are upsetting paintings.

He got really upset. And he sort of apologised that he wouldn't be able to - to help me. You know. So I said "well - alright, I'll do them on my own". And I did.

Perhaps he could not face it?

He couldn't face it somehow, it upset him. And - so - he pointed out one or two things at the time. Which were actually useful to me for the rest of the pictures.

Technical things?

Technical things. Some things which I - to his mind I was doing wrong. And I took notice of that. And - thought about it every time I did a picture, so it did help actually. And - although he couldn't help me with the pictures - he helped me by - being supportive, you know, altogether. And I was still going to his classes anyway and - still learning.

Did he enquire how you were getting on with them or would he not take any more interest?

Sometimes we talked about, not very often at that time. He - I don't know if I told you about this, but he couldn't face that subject anyway because he said - after the war - and he's a little bit younger than I am, so he was quite young, about - 12 or 13. His father took him to the cinema and they saw this - this news of Belsen. And it haunted him so much he had a thing about it, you know, he just couldn't face it, it upset him so much - to think that people went through that sort of thing, and he was very upset - in a way for me when he found out that I had been to the camps and -

That's probably why he couldn't help you with the paintings?

He couldn't help me. But he helped me otherwise. I had the sort of moral support and - given help with other type of painting.

Did he come to see your exhibition?

Well, this is - I was going to tell you about it. Because when I said I was going to have an exhibition he said to me "I'm not coming". So I said "Alright, what a pity, but I understand". And then when the exhibition was coming nearer he said he could face it now, you know. So he came. He came to the exhibition. And I was very pleased that he came and -

Did he give you any comments afterwards?

Well, he said they were very powerful and - very expressive. He didn't give me technical - help on them. It was too late anyway, they were done.

He probably couldn't with that because it was your experience?

It was my experience. But he did praise them and I actually gave him one. And - you know, he chose the one he wanted.

Which one did he choose?

It's the one - Be a Good Boy. Where the mother says goodbye to the little boy. He chose that. And he had it hanging in his place for a long time.

How many did you paint altogether of this particular theme?

Well at the moment about forty two altogether.

Are you still painting them?

Yes. But I have about - at home about thirty, because some were - some in the War Museum and other people bought some.

Who bought the pictures?

Well, the Wiener Library bought two. And - the - Coventry Cathedral bought one. The - the - International Centre bought one. And - another gallery - in London - bought one. And that's about it. One I gave to my friend.

And the Imperial War Museum?

Yeh, and the Imperial War Museum have four. But they didn't buy them, they were donated to them. And - some - I wouldn't show. I've got some that are no good. And - so altogether I did about forty three, but some are no good, so - I did them again better next time. They couldn't be rescued somehow. I have about twenty eight or so in the exhibition. The Coventry Exhibition had - eleven I think.

When was the Coventry Exhibition?

I think I'd better work up to it. I painted - about a dozen pictures to begin with. And - nobody had seen them except my family, so I didn't really know what they were like, except some friends came. And they wanted to see them. And they were quite moved by them and they were very encouraging and full of praise, you know. And so I - it gave me a bit of courage and so I had them photographed by a professional photographer. Had slides made. And just to get some sort of a judgement on them I sent them to the Imperial War Museum. And asked them what they thought of them. And asked them if they would like any for their archives. And I had a very nice letter back. And they actually chose four. And although they - you know, I didn't have any money for them, it is - quite an honour in a way to have it accepted by the Imperial War Museum. And it's a sign that they're worth something, you know, that otherwise they wouldn't take them. Even for nothing they wouldn't cut out the place, you know, they are very full up. So - they did take them. They were unframed. And they actually did frame them, I know they did, because I've seen them. And they sent professional - removers to collect them. Which is quite expensive. So - that was a good start. And - then - I had this - I don't know if I told you, I had this - letter from a - from a German man. Did I tell you that story. No. Well - I was - at home minding my own business, soon after this Coventry thing - Yes, after that Coventry - not Coventry - after the - Yes, after the Imperial War Museum - I - I realised that - I need to paint bigger pictures. Nothing to do with the War Museum, but I - I didn't think that a private person would be interested in buying a picture like that. Only an institution possibly sometime in the future would be interested. So I have to do big pictures. And I didn't have anywhere to do them. I had no room, because the room upstairs that I painted in was so small I had all pictures - a lot of pictures - stacked up there, you know, stored. All my books and everything, my paints, my easel, I had no room to move, and if you do big pictures you need to move. So I applied for a grant - to the West Midlands Art Council. To buy me a - shed outside where I could paint. And they actually did. They were very good and they gave me money for that - shed which I've got outside now, which is - six foot by twelve foot. So I've got sort of twelve foot to - to step back and look at them. And I think it's more than six foot - it's something like - I don't know, it's quite wide, it's - it's twelve foot long. And it was mentioned in the local paper that I had this - grant. I think anybody who has a grant is mentioned automatically. And then I had a phone call from a reporter in Hereford,

from the local paper, the Hereford Times, if she could come and interview me. So she came and she stayed for quite a few hours. And interviewed me. And there was a long article about me in the local paper. And also a few of the pictures. Me with a few of the - the paintings - in that shed. And - then somebody else came to interview me from West Midlands Art Council. For a paper, West Midland paper called Arts Report I think it's called. Arts Review. Arts Report. And this Arts Report was picked up by somebody who was, I think, on a train. And it was left there. And this person reads everything from beginning to end, you know. So I suddenly had this letter out of the blue. That he is a German man. A young German man. Who - works in Coventry. He's on the - there is an organisation, a German organisation, who - organised, after the war, to rebuild Coventry Cathedral and to help - people, you know, sort of do social work in Coventry with the people of Coventry. And so - I don't know if they physically helped to build it, but they came and tried to make good what the young people - what they - destroyed. And they've got an international centre at the Cathedral. At the new Cathedral now. It's not actually in the Cathedral, it's a part of the old Cathedral, this international centre, in one of the towers. And - there is a group of young people - have six weeks in a concentration camp, to go on a sort of course, and go to Auschwitz and other camps, on a course. And then they come to Coventry and they do social work. And they, I think, stay six months. And - this - young man who was somewhere in his - lateish twenties - was in charge. He was here for two years and he was in charge. And I had all sorts of documents from this organisation and all that. And he said he would be interested - to see my paintings and possibly give me an exhibition, organise an exhibition for me at Coventry Cathedral. Well, at first I was - very apprehensive about meeting a German, you know, I hadn't met any Germans since the war. And then I thought well - give it a chance, because it's a chance of a lifetime to exhibit at Coventry Cathedral. I loved that Cathedral. It's such a lovely - the new one, it's a lovely new Cathedral. I was always fond of it and I thought what an opportunity to exhibit there. And if he wants to do it, give him - you know, a chance to meet, even if he is German. So I asked him to come here and I wanted my husband to be with me, I didn't want to be alone with him. And he came and - would you believe it, he has a Jewish wife. And - lovely girl. She is -

She came as well?

She came as well. And they actually met at a kibbutz in Israel. And they talk Hebrew together. That's their language that they have in common. I mean they talk all sorts of languages. That's actually the one I met in Prague. And - she is - she was born in Nigeria, but they lived in France. Very, very lovely girl, lovely looking girl too. And they came. And we talked. And in the end, not by the end of that day, but after some time, we became such good friends all of us, you know. And he is really very nice, actually he can make jokes about Jews and we can make jokes about Germans, and that's a sign of friendship. And we became very good friends. And they came to see us quite often and they actually had holidays at the cottage a few times. And when I saw this girl - in Prague the other day, she said the best thing that happened to them at the time in England was to meet us. Because although they did good work they hated Coventry, you know.

Did this young man stay in England?

Two years, two years. He - He is a diplomat, he works for the Foreign Office. But he gave that up - for two years to do this work on very little pocket money.

So he is now back in Germany?

Well, he's in Yugoslavia now. He's working for the Foreign Office. And -

The German Foreign Office?

Yes. And he's stationed in Yugoslavia at the moment. Where we are going for a holiday next year. And - so we said yes. Yes, I'd love to have an exhibition at Coventry. And he went to see my pictures in my shed and everything, you know. And was very enthusiastic about it and - he's very good at sort of, you know, - organising it for me. But she was terribly good at the actual organising - the - small things, you know. And she - in the end when I delivered the pictures to Coventry, she was the one who hung them. She's very artistic in a way. And she would come from

time to time and look at the pictures and criticise them very honestly. She'd say, you know, "I like it, but -" this and this and this, you know. And I'd take notice and she was right, you know, I said "There's something wrong with these pictures and I can't make out what it is". And she told me very honestly, you know.

And could you change it then?

I could, yes, with acrylics you can change things very easily. It might be one little thing that makes all the difference. You know. She might say "Well, this face is too small or too bright or something", you know. She was very good, very honest. We became very friendly. It was - only two years later, I think, that I had the exhibition. I had it in 1984. And - No, we met in 1983. And the exhibition was in 1984. One year from then. But we worked together all year because a lot of things needed organising. And - then we decided on - posters and invitations and all that sort of thing. I had a bit of a grant from West Midlands towards it. And - Cadburys who were in Birmingham - contributed something. And - we got it together. And - I think it was the 1st of September 1984 that I had this exhibition.

Who opened it?

Kitty Heart opened it. She's very famous - for writing some books about the camp and she also did this film on television, Return to Auschwitz. She went with her son - to Auschwitz. And it was on ITV. And - took him along and explained - and - and - she - brought the place alive. You know, you had so many films about Auschwitz, there was lots of people there and it wasn't right. She was there alone in this empty camp and you suddenly see it full of people. She brought it all alive and explained where these things were and what happened there, it was absolutely wonderful. And she became a sort of authority on the camps, you know, when they made films like Sophies Choice and other films about camps, she would advise. And she came and opened it for me. And it was a very beautiful sunny day. And lots of my friends came, there was about forty of my friends. The setting was absolutely wonderful. It was in the Chapel of Unity. The round Chapel. And - you couldn't hang it on the walls because you mustn't make holes in the walls. But they put a trestle table under -

you know, against each wall, with a cloth on it. And propped the picture against it. So I had a picture and then there was one of these long stained glass windows in between and then a picture. And it was - you know, I couldn't have had a better setting, I never will have a better setting than that. It was absolutely wonderful. The Provost of the Cathedral gave a speech. Kitty Heart gave a speech, she gave a speech. And - then we had a big party. I spent several days cooking and preparing things for a cold buffet. And we had it in this - in this International Centre, which - comes out onto the - you know where the old Cathedral was, it's like a - space, open space. And it was such a lovely day people just took it out and we all stood there. It was our own private party in this space. It was absolutely lovely. And - people were very complimentary about the paintings and - I met a lot of friends who I hadn't seen for ages. And they came from London and other places. Absolutely wonderful. And - the Cathedral - well the International Centre bought other pictures. They wanted to get it for the Cathedral first and then the architect of the Cathedral thought it didn't quite fit in. I - I suspect, but I'm not sure, that with so many Germans coming in they didn't want to - aggravate the Germans. But I'm not sure. Maybe it wasn't good enough, I don't know.

So where is it?

It's in the International Centre. And - then in 1985 - which was a sort of - fortieth anniversary of the end of the war, there were all sorts of things going on then. And I had a - no, before that, sorry, before that - I had a phone call from somebody - the art organiser at North Stafford Polytechnic. You see a selection of slides of my paintings was at West Midlands Arts. So anybody who is interested in any paintings can go there and view these slides. And so I had this phone call and - could they borrow the paintings to have an exhibition at North Stafford Polytechnic in Stoke-on-Trent. So I said yes. And they actually came to collect them. They had a van from the university, from the college. Collected them, insured it, brought it back and gave me £100. That's how it should be.

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Yes, so I had this exhibition. A very nice write-up again in the local paper there. Write-up in our local paper. And - then in 1985 - I - was asked by a synagogue in Birmingham to exhibit there. They had some sort of - not celebrations, but memorial - activities. And - so I had to take them and somebody brought them back. And then sometime later, about two and a half years ago, there was the Ann Frank exhibition, it's a touring exhibition about Ann Frank. A very good exhibition. With pictures - of - of her and various things she did, and also a lot of things in writing and documents and exhibits. And that was in Manchester. And again out of the blue I was asked if I - if they would mind if two of my pictures from the War Museum would be exhibited there. I said "no, I don't mind". So - that was another great experience, because with this exhibition there was a - an exhibition of - paintings to do with the Holocaust. And there were a lot of famous artists exhibiting, you know, who actually went and - they were war artists, official war artists. Who - exhibited there. You know. And it was wonderful. There was this catalogue, you know, and I was amongst these famous artists, my name was. So that was great. And the pictures from - the War Museum, they actually - got, collected, and back I suppose. And it was actually framed. Behind glass. Protected. And they framed it very well.

Who were the other artists. Were they people who had come with the army to the camps?

Well, they were official war artists in this country whose job it was to - to draw things from the war. Not just the camps, but - you know - planes in combat and scenes from the war. They travelled with the army.

So they were people who came with the liberation army?

I suppose with the liberation army. So - that was - that was - absolutely wonderful.

So that was 1986?

I think the beginning of - what have we got now - we've got '89. I think it was beginning of - '87 or '88. You know time goes so quickly. I've got a poster somewhere. I think it's about two and a half years ago. It would be sort of beginning of '87. Could have been '88. I think it was '87. And they were so nice. They were very nice. Because - we had to leave early for the - for the opening. The opening was at 10 in the morning. And we had to leave by a very early train. I think something like 7 o'clock. But we didn't know where the place was because we didn't know Manchester. My husband and my daughter came. So we said to them "Could you give us an idea how to get there, so that we don't waste time looking for it". They said "Don't worry, we'll come and collect you". So somebody came and collected us with a big board, you know, 'Birkin'. And - took a taxi. Took us to the place. And there was this opening. And then we went to the exhibition.

Where in Manchester was it?

It was the Art Gallery. Athenium I think it's called.

The City Art Gallery?

The City Art Gallery, yes. Right next to the City Art Gallery, it's another sort of - two there. But the opening was in the Town Hall. This extraordinary - Victorian Town Hall. And - then - they took us for lunch. And there was a Chinese restaurant, and I remember - you see they had the people from Holland there who organised the exhibition, this Ann Frank exhibition, who toured with the exhibition. Some people from Holland. And there was me and my husband and my daughter and one or two other dignitaries. And they took us to one of these huge round tables in a Chinese restaurant, and we could order what we liked. That was really nice. They are - I think very - art conscious in Manchester and active and, you know - I wish we had something like this here.

Well Manchester of course is a big city.

It's a big city, but - as my husband says "Labour dominated". And they seem to be more - spending more money on culture than -

Who organised this exhibition?

Well, the people from the gallery. It's - it's the - the council. Council - financed. It's a public gallery. A museum, you know. And - they're very, very nice. And - and we had a taxi back, which they paid for, to the station. Some people treat you well and some people don't. I - I had an extraordinary experience in Birmingham. They were going to give me an exhibition in the foyer of the library. And I thought well, that's - quite nice, because so many people go to libraries through the foyer, it should be - you know, quite - Even if it's just six pictures, they will see them. Now - we got - we couldn't find our way to get right in front of the library, because of the one way system. We were going round and round and round and we couldn't find our way to actually get there, to the right door. But we managed to park - this is like a square, the library is in a square - the other side of the square. So we parked and my husband stayed with the pictures and I went in. I said "I am so and so, I'm supposed to have an exhibition here. Could somebody come with us and direct us to - to - to the door". He said "Oh, we haven't got any time". I said "Well, have you got a trolley or something that I could borrow. Have you got somebody - is there somebody here who could help us". I said "I've got a bad back, I can't cart these - pictures. We can't carry them. They are big, heavy pictures. We can't just carry them across the square all the time, one after another. Could somebody help us?". "Oh, we can't spare anybody, it's holiday time and we haven't got enough staff as it is". So I then said "Well - could I speak to the person whom I was - writing to, organising this exhibition?". So she rings through on the telephone, she said "I'm sorry, she's busy now". So - I said "Have you got a trolley you can lend me?". "Yes, all right, we'll find you a trolley". She found me a tiny little trolley, that one picture wouldn't go on you see. I said "Look - where exactly am I exhibiting?". It wasn't in the foyer, round the corner from the foyer was a sort of tiny little annexe, really tiny, it was sort of six foot by six foot. And in it was in the middle sort of like a star shaped boards, and my pictures were supposed to hang on those. I'm sure nobody would ever see them, you know. So I said "Well look, I don't think you are very keen, let's forget about it".

You know. "It isn't working". I was getting fed-up, you know. Nobody there to say hello, nice to meet you, welcome, can we help you, you know, which other people do when you have an exhibition. It wasn't very long after that Manchester incident, when everybody was so helpful and they made me feel that I did them a favour, you know, which I don't particularly want to, but they were decent. And these people were doing me such a big favour. So I said to them "Look..." - I told them a little bit about how I was treated at Manchester. He said - I said "Well people are fighting for places at this library", you know, "they are only too pleased to be able to exhibit". You know. "Even whether we help them or not". So I said "Well, thank you very much, I think we'll go home now, we've had enough".

What did they say?

So, we went back to the car. Locked up the car. And were looking somewhere to have a cup of tea, because we were so fed-up we thought we needed a tea or a coffee or something. We came back, and somebody was waiting at the car. And it was apparently that woman who was corresponding with me. Begging me to reconsider. All of a sudden somebody - people could come and help me and all of a sudden people could - do whatever, you know, I asked them. I said "Look, there's really no point". I said "It isn't in the foyer. That's not a foyer, nobody is going to see it". I said "I'm going to hospital". I was going into hospital the next day. "My daughter will have to come and collect these pictures. She can't cart them across the square all by herself. People are so unhelpful, she might come and nobody will help her. How is she supposed to do it?" And bye bye and we went.

Good for you I think?

Well, you know, I'm not putting up with it. I mean if it was something that would do a great deal for me, it was in a very marvellous place and the Press was coming, all sorts of things, you know - but it wasn't doing anything for me, so what's the point. And I was going into hospital actually. And I was very worried and frightened, I was in no mood to - to - to - mess about.

So you went home?

So we went home.

That was the last time, was it, until now. Or was there anything in between?

That was - three years ago. Yes, I had an exhibition - Well, I didn't have an exhibition, but the class I go to - were exhibiting at the Main City Art Gallery. That's a very, very large place in Hereford. It's in the building of the library, and the City Museum and Art Gallery upstairs. It's a very, very big room. And - I had a whole wall to myself to have these pictures. I had about ten - of these pictures there.

When was that?

That was about - two and a half years ago. I think. Or maybe - You know, I can't remember time - maybe it was eighteen months ago. No, I think it was two and a half years ago.

It was from your class?

It was from my class. I had my ordinary pictures in, you know, that I do. Like these Prague pictures and so on. And the camp pictures, the concentration camp pictures, I had a whole long wall to myself. And I had about ten of those or twelve of those on there.

Did you get a write-up for this?

No, it was just before Christmas, you know, and - people were too busy. They were having parties and -

It was not a good time?

It was not a good time, I think that's why we got the gallery, you know. So - I think there was a mention of it, but it wasn't anything special.

So this one in London is going to be quite exciting. The one that's coming up?

Yes. Yes. I'm just thinking if there was anything else - I - can't remember now. I don't think so. Yes, that's the next thing. In London.

Do you find you change in style as you go along in your paintings?

Not those pictures, no. No, I don't change in style, because it wouldn't work. I wouldn't know what other style to use. You know, I change sometimes my colour scheme or - That's about the only thing. It depends on what I'm painting.

Did you do any paintings from your long march, the death march?

I did. I did. What's called 'the death march'. I did one at first which I didn't like. And although I've got it I'm not showing it to anybody. Then I did another one, but it isn't quite finished. It's almost finished and I've got gaps there for the Germans, you know, and I haven't put the Germans in yet.

That's difficult is it, to put the Germans in?

Well, it's not - it's not difficult, I'm just sort of - don't like the idea. I don't think it's going to be difficult because you've got - so many - you can find photographs in the library of Germans, you know. And my son had these little soldiers when he was a child. He always played with soldiers, you know, so I could find some German soldiers and - and - and do it from there. But I just hate - drawing them or painting them, you know. I'm going to do it.

It means thinking about them I suppose?

I don't know. I'm just - not in the mood. But I will do it. I have to do it. But - talking about that, you probably noticed that I haven't got any Germans in the pictures. Except for one picture. The Deportation of Children. Where I've got a few Germans there. I don't have any Germans in the picture. Because my paintings aren't really about the Germans, it's about the prisoners. It's about the - not just the physical, but the psychological - suffering of these people. It's about - about - partings - really - mainly about - people being torn apart, you know. That was the worst part of the war, was - people losing their relatives and their children and - being torn apart. And that's what I'm trying to paint, the sort of experience which they shared. Which all of them shared. The - attitude of them, the sort of resigned attitude, which - most of them had who I met. I know there were some who rebelled and they rebelled in Warsaw and - other places. But the ones I met they all sort of somehow - accepted it. Perhaps they were too ill and too weak - to do anything about it. And sometimes they perhaps hoped until the last minute that if they behave themselves things will be alright, you know. But - I'm not painting the Germans because I'm not interested in painting - brutality. And I don't particularly want to put Germans on - on - on canvas, you know, they don't deserve it somehow, you know, I feel why I should I waste my time on Germans. Not worth it. It's a sort of rejection of them in a way I think. But basically it's really - to paint the victims. You know, I don't want to paint - You see I don't want to paint things that most people know. They know that the Germans were kicking and shooting and - throwing them into gas chambers. But there are not many photographs of sort of day to day happenings. You know, what actually happened to these people's minds - in certain circumstances, in certain situations. You know, when for instance they took the children away. Well people maybe now, maybe they don't know that they actually came and took all children under 10 away. And the screaming of the people and the - the devastation of the parents when they tore the children away, you know, that's what I want to paint. Things like that.

And you were only about 12 yourself, or 13, when that happened?

About 13 at the time. 13, 14. I was lucky in that respect that I was - just over the age of 10. And yet not old enough to - be too old, you know, I just - was the right age. I must be one of the youngest to survive.

End of F209, Side B

END OF INTERVIEW