Holocaust Survivor Testimonies

Ernie Michel, née Wurzinger, was born on April 1, 1909 in Nuremberg, Germany. Two months after *Kristallnacht,* she left Germany -- at first to go to France -- and subsequently the United States.

Q. Why don't you tell me about the circumstances that led up to *Kristallnacht,* and then your
experience there?

A. Ah, the circumstances leading up to the *Kristallnacht,* the Nazis used the excuse that one of their smaller employees of the Embassy in Paris was killed, allegedly by Jewish people. That was their excuse to break into all the homes on November 9th, 1938. All the Nazis who executed the breaking-in were well-trained, had fantastic tools to destroy everything, to break into homes which were not easily opened like ours.

We didn't open the door. They had to break in. They had heavy tools to open and push open anything. This is one example of how well they were trained. We had a big black piano. They knew exactly what to do. With the heavy hammers, they cut all the ivory keys and then with other instruments, they cut the wires in the back, so they made the grand piano completely useless. But the frame was still standing there, as it wasn't touched at all. We had a huge radio with a loudspeaker built in. They knew exactly where to hit the apparatus. The frame wasn't touched. They cut all the tubes in the back and then took their knife or whatever and cut the loudspeaker.

Q. So you feel that they had been trained beforehand for this?

A. Oh, they were trained marvelously before. They knew exactly what to do. They came with their lists. They had all the addresses. They knew how to break into the buildings. They were well-prepared. No, that was not a spur of the moment thing.

Q. How do you remember the whole thing starting?

A. Hitler was talking in the newspaper and in his speeches of destroying the Jewish population. In Nuremberg, there was also one of the greatest antisemites, Julius Streicher, and he had a very antisemitic newspaper [Ed. note: *Der Stürmer,* or The Attacker]. He was talking all the time about our bad influence and what terrible people we are and also that we have to be destroyed because we are not worth being on this earth.

The question was raised so often, over here particularly, why did you stay that long? I have two answers to that question. The most important one is that it was not a question of leaving your native country, it was a question of the other countries -- any other country who would let you in permanently, not with a three- or four-week visa, because you could never go back to Germany. So that was the most important thing to us, to find a country willing to take us in. Secondly, we lived a comfortable, normal lifestyle, just like American Jews living here. None of us were anxious to leave the country to start over with nothing and with mediocre jobs. When I finally saw after Hitler took over Austria and Sudetenland -- that was the first part of Czechoslovakia -- I knew that it

looked bad, and I started to look around to leave the country.

Q. Was that before *Kristallnacht?*

R. A.Yes, I started to try to get to America in January 1938.

Q. That's when you wanted to start looking around?

A. I wanted to leave.

Q. Okay, let's get back a little to the *Kristallnacht.*

A. It was a terrible experience for anybody who was there, of course for a Jew, but I would have to say it also was a terrible experience for all the gentile people living in the same buildings where Jewish people lived. The Nazis came in our place around one, one thirty in the night. We had no inkling, none whatsoever.

Q. That this was going to happen that night?

A. Right. Our entrance door had a glass portion and all of a sudden, we saw a lot of shadows.

Q. Were you up . . . just happened to be up at that time?

A. No, they rang the bell and made a lot of commotion and noise out there in front of the door,
yelling, "Open up!" but we would not.

My father at that time was not home and that was a lucky break for him. He was visiting one of his friends from the first World War, from the army. He had been an officer. It was only my mother and I who were home.

The Nazis finally broke into our apartment, and there was a lot of noise right away. They stormed in, asked for my father, and we told them that he wasn't here. They spread out in every room. We were in a corner. We saw their big axe, and a very heavy instrument which you use on a construction site, I would say, and they started immediately with breaking things apart. Then they took their knives out, opened the wardrobe, cut the clothes, cut triangles in the fur coats and the Persian rugs, making everything absolutely worthless. It was for about an hour and a half. They totally destroyed our apartment. They dumped the crystal and the silver.

My mother was from a very fine family. Her father was a jeweler in Silesia for the court there. So when she got married, she had in her dowry beautiful silver and stuff. And they dumped the silver on the floor and stamped on it with their boots and just flattened it. Everything was a total destruction. The fine porcelain, they took the hammer and broke with all their might, through a stack of twenty-four plates or so.

The noise was unbelievable. The noise was damaging to our ears and, of course, for our nerves. I still cannot stand any noise. If I go to an assembly with a lot of people, I

have to be extremely careful. They were well-prepared. In the corner were my skis standing, because it was wintertime. You know November in Germany is wintertime. They just broke off the tips. At the very end, they took glass pots and threw them in the open cut bedding, in the down comforters and everything, so that we couldn't use our beds. Once they left, there was nothing, not a chair, nothing. Everything was demolished, even the big furniture.

Q. Did they say anything to you during all of this?

A. No, I do not remember. Their faces were red and full of hate. I would assume that they had plenty of alcohol in them or something which made them strong and full of hate -- unbelievable -- and ready to fight. They did some stealing, but obviously they were told not to touch the women. So nobody touched my mother or me. They threatened us, but they would not hit us or touch us.

Q. What did they threaten you?

A. With their looks, with their behavior, and with their tools.

Q. How old were you at this time?

A. I was already twenty-eight years old. When they left, the very last thing they cut were the crystal chandeliers, so we were in total darkness more or less. Maybe they overlooked one of the other ones.

Q. And no other apartment in your building was touched?

A. No, they were all gentiles and after they had left, the other people in the building saw them out there on the street and out of our neighborhood. They sneaked up quietly to our apartment and when they came, they put their finger in front of their mouths, not to speak to us, because they were afraid that maybe another party in the building was listening and would know that they came up and wanted to look at what had happened here. So slowly, most of them came up, tip-toeing to see what happened. All they could do is to shake their head with the most misbelieving eyes and touch our shoulders.

Q. Were the Germans clearly dressed as soldiers? They were in uniform?

A. They were not dressed as soldiers. They were dressed as Nazis. They came in their brown uniforms with the Nazi sign, with their hats, and their big, black boots. They were not soldiers. They were Nazis.

Q. What happened after they left? You just stood there in shock?

A. Yes. We couldn't believe our own eyes. They tore all the books. There was nothing left. Were standing there and the people in our back apartment were very nice and supportive. We had only one thought the next morning, how to find a workman who could fix the damage on our entrance door, so we could close the apartment again. And I was walking around completely dazed. I had to say, there were people around us and the people who knew us in our neighborhood. I went to the butcher who knew us also for

fifteen years. When he saw me, he just silently shook his head and with his eyes let me know he felt sorry for me. Nobody would dare to say anything, but in the stores you saw the eyes and the unbelievable thinking of the people who knew you.

Q. So there was a lot of fear in everyone?

A. Oh, hundred percent fear in everybody.

Q. Was there more antisemitism after that?

A. That is a question which I cannot really answer. Maybe amongst the people who had no contact with Jewish people before, after they saw the synagogues all on fire, everything destroyed in the Jewish homes. The men had been picked up and put on trucks and brought into special halls. After they saw that and they announced over the loudspeakers and the radio, maybe some uneducated people then became future followers. They may have developed more antisemitism. They probably thought Hitler was right that we are a bad people and that we deserve it. But I do not think that people who knew other Jewish people would have been influenced. I think they felt more sorry for us, and, of course, it showed very clearly that there was no more time for Jewish people left in Germany.

Louis Scott was born on January 9, 1926 in Berlin, Germany. Baron Edward de Rothschild of Paris, France attempted to rescue Jewish youths, including Louis. He was brought to Paris and was sent to a children's home in Southern France until 1942. Because he turned 16 years of age, he was turned over to the Nazis and deported to several concentration camps in Germany.

Q. Louis, tell me a little bit about your early years.

A. Well, I had a very good life. I went to German public school the first four years, and later on I went to a Jewish middle school in Berlin. I had an enjoyable youth. I had everything that I wanted. I played a lot of soccer with the neighbors, and I belonged to a team. But then I had to stop playing with the team, and I couldn't understand why. I did not feel any persecution until November 9, 1938 on the infamous *Kristallnacht.* Then I first really found out what it is to be a Jew.

Q. Tell me about *Kristallnacht.* What was your actual experience?

A. I can vividly recall the police of the town where we lived telling my father to disappear. They took the men to the camp of Buchenwald at that time. My father disappeared for about ten days, and then he came back. I still did not understand what it was all about. The next day when I went to school, I saw a lot of destroyed windows. Being that we lived on the outskirts, we were the only Jewish family living in that small village.

Q. What was the name of the village?

A. Mardsdorf. At that time, I did not realize what the *Kristallnacht* was. But then the next d a y I went to Berlin to go to school which, naturally, was closed. The guard outside said, “Go home.” He was mad at me, I recall, that I even came there. I didn’t realize what had happened.

Q. Did you see any evidence of *Kristallnacht* on your way into school?

A. Oh, definitely. I saw a lot of goods laying in the street.

Q. Let’s go back a little bit, Lou, and talk about how you first knew of your Jewish identity and the fact that you were different than your neighbors; the first incident of antisemitism that you can recall.

A. We knew in 1933 when Hitler came to power. We had a notion store where we lived, and big signs were outside, big placards that said, “Germans fight. Don't buy in Jewish stores.”

Q. What about your young friends? What experiences did you have with them?

A. With my young friends until after *Kristallnacht,* I did not feel Jewish in any way. We played together. There were no remarks made. However, then after *Kristallnacht,* two boys that were a couple of years older than I am said, “You dirty Jew.” I picked up my fist and fought them both. And I recall vividly that their mothers came to my mother in the evening saying that I shouldn't beat up their kids.

Q. Did you ever see Adolf Hitler?

A. Yes.

Q. When was that?

A. At the Olympic Games in 1936, I saw Adolf Hitler walk out of the Olympia Stadium in Berlin when Jesse Owens won the fourth gold medal. I didn’t know at the time what it meant, but I saw him walk out.

Q. In the early years of Hitler’s regime, from 1933 on, did your father and mother ever discuss leaving Germany?

A. My father, definitely. I know my father brought home at that time a visa for Uganda.

Q. What happened to these discussions about Uganda?

A. I do not believe my mother wanted to leave.

Q. When did you know for the first time that things were really bad in Germany, and that

you
might have to leave?

A. When I couldn't go to school anymore.

Q. When was that?

A. In early 1939. I went to school until March 1939. But I know it was already tough in the Jewish middle school. The studies that we got were different. I would say, without purpose.

Q. When did you first become aware that you would be leaving Germany?

A. Well, in the beginning of 1939, they had something where a lot of young Jewish children were leaving to go to Israel -- Palestine at that time -- but there was no room open for me.

Q. And who was making the effort to do this? Was this done through an organization in Berlin?

A. Yes. What you would call the Greater Jewish Community, something like that, was organizing these efforts to get the children out, if possible.

Q. What age children are we talking about?

A. Early teens.

Q. So then what happened next as far as your leaving the country?

A. I was prepared to go to France with the children's transport which was a whole group of children put into a train for transportation and sent to a children's home.

Q. Who was organizing these efforts?

A. I do believe it had to do with the HIAS [Ed. note: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society]. And other Jewish organizations, such as *Ha Sharah.* They also tried to take these children to France. I believe it was all sponsored by the Rothschild family, Baron Edward de Rothschild at the time, under the orders of HIAS. Not only that, but if I recall, he paid for all the train tickets and whatever it took.

Q. Obviously your parents were making these arrangements. When was the first time that you
found out that you were going to be leaving Germany?

A. About a week before.

Q. And what were your feelings at that time?

A. I was sad to leave my parents. It was explained that we could not go to school here any-

more, that we won't have an education, and that we must go there for a while. They said, "We'll see each other in a short while."

Q. And that's the way it was explained to you?

A. I met some of the children a few days before we left. I met some nice kids, which made it
a little bit easier then to go.

Q. This was March 1939?

A. On March 28, 1939.

Q. And you left your parents. Before we talk about the camp, let me get a little background about your parents. What happened to your parents from this time on?

A. A short while after, my parents had to move to a ghetto in Berlin where they assembled the
Jewish community. Most of them went to Riga, in Latvia.

Q. And your parents went there together?

A. Yes, my parents went there together.

Q. And then what happened to your parents subsequent to that?

A. My father was gassed in Stutthof about a year after that. My mother survived and was liberated by the Swedish Red Cross under the auspices of Count Bernadotte.

Q. And taken to Sweden?

A. Taken to Sweden.

Q. Okay. We're now in March of 1939, and you are leaving Berlin. Tell me about it, the actual
leaving itself and where you were going.

A. After the paperwork on the frontier, we went to the Rothschild Hospital and got a complete examination.

Q. Where was that located?

A. In Paris. We got a complete examination, and I think everybody was well.

Q. You left with what size group?

A. Close to a hundred people.

Q. What were the ages?

A. I think from nine to fourteen. Or nine to fifteen.

Q. All German Jewish boys and girls?

A. Yes.

Q. And then what happened?

A. They separated the religious children. They went to a religious children's home run by rabbis and dedicated Jewish people. The others went to the hunting castle of Baron Rothschild.

Q. Where was that located?

A. About an hour's ride from Paris. It was called Chateau de la Guette, in Sandonné.

Q. And how many children arrived there?

A. We were mixed with some children from Austria, and we were about 130 all together.

Q. And how long did you stay there?

A. Until the Germans were close to coming to Paris.

Q. Do you remember finding out about the war beginning?

A. Oh, yes, we found out. We had brilliant educators, most of whom had to leave Germany. They showed us what comradeship is. They had to leave earlier than we left, because they could not be caught, and they went underground.

Q. What was the change that was brought about because the war had begun?

A. The Germans came closer to the Maginot Line, which was supposed to be so great, and it didn't do anything. They just walked around it.

Q. You were still in this facility going to school?

A. Right.

Q. And when did you find out you were going to leave there?

A. I would say at least three weeks before the German troops reached the outskirts of Paris,
in May 1940.

Q. And where did you go from there?

A. It was a beautiful place called La Bulbul. We stayed in a hotel, all the children together.

Q. Where was this located?

A. It was close to a big town called Clermont-Ferrand, in the southern part of France, which afterwards became the unoccupied zone in France.

Q. How long did you stay in this temporary setup?

A. Oh, about five or six months. The children were placed in different schools. I was placed in an industrial preparation school by the OSE [*Organisation de Secours aux Enfants,* or Children's Aid Organization], which functioned with ORT [Organization for Rehabilitation and Training] in France.

Q. Who financed this organization? Do you recall?

A. If I am not mistaken, the money also came from the Rothschild family, plus money from HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] in the United States. All for the welfare of children. The organizations still exist today.

Q. Were you following the progress of the war?

A. Oh, yes, definitely. It was my deep opinion that the whole French government and most of
the people were very antisemitic. I felt that more in France than I felt it in Germany.

Q. Now somewhere along the way France had capitulated, had surrendered to the Germans. And they divided France into an occupied and unoccupied zone. You were in the unoccupied zone?

A. Correct.

Q. What did that mean? Did it mean that there were no German soldiers there, that it was like
France before the war?

A. Not at all. The French police were just as bad as the German troops, I would say. They didn't help you. They knew you were Jewish and not a French Jew. They had it against you right then and there.

Q. Did you have any special identity cards, or did you have to wear any special identification?

A. No.

Q. You were in this industrial school, and then what happened?

A. On August 26, 1942, they collected all the young children who were sixteen or older. Just the Jewish children. Not French, Jewish children. They knew so well where we were, we had no time to even hide or run away or anything. In this particular school, there were twelve boys of German or Austrian origin. And they took six of us who were over sixteen years old. For the six of us, there were over twenty French policemen who just came and collected us. I remember I wanted to go to the bathroom. I went to the bathroom, and inside were three policemen. They didn't wait outside. I had no warning whatsoever. None.

Q. And what happened?

A. We were put into a collection center. It was a camp called Maxonne. It was my first experience with cattle trains. The cattle trains took us from there to Drancy [transit camp in a northeastern suburb of Paris, from which detainees were sent to labor or death camps].

Anne Meyer, née Heineman, was born in Mainz, Germany on May 31, 1925. She witnessed *Kristallnacht* in 1938, before leaving Germany on a *Kindertransport* [Children's Transport] to England, where she arrived on February 22, 1939. In May 1940, she moved to the United States.

A. When the Nuremberg laws were passed, all of a sudden we could no longer go to public school, which I had never gone to anyway. Classes were being held, but they were clandestine classes, in effect. At the synagogue, they used the Sunday school rooms to have a regular school. Jewish teachers were not allowed to teach in the public school system, so they came and taught us. So we were very fortunate. We got an excellent education.

The part that bothered me was that we could no longer go to the movies. That about killed me, because I loved to go to the movies. We could not go to restaurants, and we couldn't ride public transportation. This was really a problem to me, because every day I had to plot a different route to walk to school. I learned early on that it could be very dangerous if you didn't change your route each day. This got worse as we got closer to November '38. If you took the same route every day, they'd lie in wait for you.

Q. And do what?

A. Beat you up, if they could catch you. Now you have to understand something. One of the great ironies of this whole stupidity was that I was such a typical Aryan, blonde hair, blue-eyed. I mean you talk about your basic German kid, here I was. There was no way anybody was going to look at me and say, "Aha, that's a Jew." So I was safer than a lot of

people. It was very unfair, but that's the way that was. So it wasn't, I guess, as bad for me, as it was for some of the children, but that's how we learned first.

Then I think what brought it home to me more than everything else was that children, whom I had been playing with all my life, all of a sudden weren't playing with me anymore. I thought I had done something wrong, and my mother had to try and explain to me that they couldn't anymore, because it wasn't safe for their families. It is very hard to explain to a tenyear-old, "You know, you haven't done anything, darling, but . . . and from now on, just cross the street and don't say hello, because it would be dangerous for them." That's hard to understand because you think you have done something wrong. It's difficult to assimilate.

Early in 1938, my parents had started making contacts in England to get my sister and me out. At that point, the Joint Distribution Committee and the Friends' Service Committee were arranging what were called Children's Transports. What that meant was that from all over Germany, the trains would pick up children and would take the children to Holland or Belgium or England. Arrangements were being made for me to get on the next possible Children's Transport. I was then told I that I was leaving the 2nd of February [1939].

I was busy running back and forth and saying goodbye to my friends, some of whom were also leaving, but not on the same train that I was. I was only 12 years old. By this time, it was very dangerous to go outside the house. School had been disbanded completely, because the synagogue was blown up. So, there went the classrooms and what we did then was to go to other people's houses.

The teacher and the children in groups of five or six would meet at somebody's apartment and go into the bedroom and close the door. That would be a class. We would be there all day, and by this time, since it was obvious if we stayed in Germany, nobody was going to survive, we were being taught what they felt we needed to learn. The class was according to where you were going to emigrate. So, I had intensive English lessons and also, in the meantime, my grandfather always had me listening to shortwave radio. He said, "I want you to get in the habit of doing that and learn the language." It was illegal to do that. Nevertheless, I listened to Radio Luxemburg all the time. Luxemburg was not that far from Mainz, so the reception was very clear.

The day I got on the train, I had kissed my grandfather goodbye the night before. He said "Don't worry. We'll see each other." They really didn't want me to say goodbye to my grandmother. They were afraid she would understand that she was never going to see me again, and that it was going to be too hard on her, and so the farewell with her was much too short. I regret that bitterly.

I said goodbye to my mother at home. She was not going to go to the station with me, because if there were two parents, then it immediately called attention, and my sister was supposed to come up the next month. So my father and I drove to Frankfurt.

While we were driving, he said to me, "You are going to be on the train with a bunch of other children. You'll have a wonderful trip. When you get to the German border, be very quiet. Do exactly what you are told. When you get to England, they will put you on the

train and when you get to Manchester, you will be met by the Benzingers, " whom, of course, I had never seen. He said, "Now this is family. They are not close family, but they are distant family. Just be a very good child and do what they tell you. You'll be their family, so just make us proud of you." And I said, "When will you come?" He said, "As soon as we can."

And I said, "How do I let you know I'm in England?" and he said, "I think the best thing to do is to arrange a code. When you get across the German border, just send us a post-card with your name on it and that's all. Don't say anything else. We'll know." I said, "How will you let me know that you're coming?" and he said, "Well, we won't put our names on it," and then he said, "No, don't put your name on the card, just say hello and that's all." And I said "OK, what is your code going to be?" And he said, "We'll try and send you a telegram and it'll say *"En dlich"* [ending, in German] and that'll mean we are leaving. So that was the code. I was to say "hello" and they were to say *"Endlich."*

The platform at the train station in Frankfurt was very familiar to me. So just about then, the train pulled in, and there really wasn't time for a big, emotional goodbye. He just kissed me and put me on the train. Somebody met me on the train and took me to my compartment. There were already seven other children in it who were from different cities. The doors clanged shut and the train rolled out. I really didn't know where the train was going. Where the train was going was to the hook of Holland, then we were going to get on a channel steamer, land in Harridge, England, go to London and then to the Albert Hall. We were going to be taken care of from that point on.

Q. Was this all by Joint Distribution?

A. This was the American Joint Distribution Committee, which is now Federation, and the Friends' Service Committee. The Quakers were doing these things all along and they were really the auspices under which we got out of Germany. The Joint Distribution Committee came in for the funding of both the train and then for the children once they got to where they were going.

When we got on the train, somebody came into our compartment after a few minutes. "How old are you? Where are you going?" It was like going to camp. You were having to meet new people and deal with them, but you weren't going to be with them very long, because once the train got to England, everybody was going to go where they were supposed to go.

A little, red-haired girl came into the compartment after about a half hour or so, and she said, "My name is Rushie. I am the counselor from this train, and I will tell you now what you are to do. You'll do exactly as I tell you, and then everybody will get out. If you don't do what I tell you, everybody will be ordered back on the train, and you'll have to go back where you came from and you'll never get out." So she said, "Don't argue and just do what I tell you." She was firm and gentle at the same time, but there was no nonsense about it. We were just going to do what Rushie told us.

She asked, "Has anybody given you anything to smuggle out, like a ring or gold coin that's sewn in your coat bottom or whatever? I want you to get rid of it now. Throw it out the window, because when we get to the border, the Germans are going to arbitrarily pick ten boys and ten

girls to be stripped and searched, and if, God forbid, they have anything on them, everybody is going to be back on that train, and it will go back into Germany and not across the border. So, if you have anything with you, get rid of it now.

When we get to the border, you'll be ordered off the train. You'll be told to leave your luggage behind. Leave it. Don't worry about it. If we get back on the train, the luggage will still be here. You'll come back to the same compartment that you are in now. If there is anything in your luggage, throw it out now, because it is not going to be safe to have it in there. Anything you are told to do, once we get to the border, do it and say, 'yes, sir' and do it immediately. Don't open your mouth, except when you are spoken to and then be very polite and do exactly as you are told." And she said, "Once the train rolls across the border, then you'll be safe, but not 'til we actually see the Dutch flag are we safe." So she said, "I want nothing untoward happening. I don't want anybody making any gestures or getting smart. Be absolutely still and do what you're told, and God willing, we will get everybody out."

Well, that changed the atmosphere considerably, as you can imagine, particularly since there was one boy in our compartment who had been showing everybody the family signet ring that he had on. We about beat that kid up, trying to convince him to throw it out the window, and he wouldn't do it. He finally said, "I'll take care of it." I think he secreted it in one of his orifices and thank God, he was not one of the kids who was sent up to be stripped and searched, but that was really stupid of him.

Anyway, there was no food on the train. It was a long ride and when we got to the German border, everybody was subdued, quiet and scared, as you can imagine. It had really sunk in by that time.

A. I think they ranged from about ages eight to sixteen. If you were over sixteen, you were no longer a child in German eyes, and you weren't eligible to go on a Children's Transport, which is why my sister had to go out the way she did. The youngest was about eight. I think the sponsors of the train felt that those any younger would not be able to say goodbye to their parents or would be terribly homesick and would just create problems for everybody. There was a whole lot of crying going on, on the train anyway.

Children were beginning to get very frightened, and in my compartment the atmosphere was fairly good, because we were all so angry at Bernie. We were ready to throw him out the window. But anyway, by the time we got to the German border, everybody was very quiet, because the closer we got, the more we saw uniforms, guns and trucks. The uniforms were enough with swastikas all over the place.

The train pulled into this enormous shed, and the troops came aboard, guns drawn. Now this is a train full of children. What are the kids going to do? They ordered everybody off. "Leave your suitcase and get off the train." What we were allowed to have was the little suitcases, and we were also supposed to have an identification tag around our necks. I had a tag around my neck with my name, hometown, age, and a star. On another tag was my name, my destination, which was Manchester and the name of the family Benzinger, and the town I was ultimately supposed to go to, which was Altringham. I also had around my neck a little miniature German-English, English-German Langenscheid dictionary. So that's what I had and this little bitty suitcase. So, the suitcase

stayed on the train and with all this junk around my neck, I joined the rest of the children.

We were herded out of each compartment and down the aisle, off that particular car and into a line, into the shed, with more drawn guns all around us. There were about 300 to 400 children standing there at attention. Then the same guy with the swagger stick marched down and counted off again. Then they said, “Okay, all the number eights, boys this side and girls this side.” They were taken off to be stripped and searched. Well, thank God, Bernie wasn’t an eight.

The rest of the time, while they were being put through that, the rest of us stood there with the guns aimed at us. When the children who had been led off came back, they were put back in line where they came from and then the same officer, walking up and down the line and hitting himself on his leather chaps with the swagger stick said, “Do any of you live . . .” -- and then he used a very nasty word -- “. . . have anything to declare?” Well, I knew from being on trips with my parents when I was very little that you were supposed to declare binoculars and cameras and things like that. My grandmother had given me a miniature children’s camera that cost maybe ten dollars and was called a Sida. I was so afraid they would send us all back if I didn’t tell him I had this dumb camera. I raised my hand, and I said, “Sir, I have a Sida,” and he laughed, and said, “Well, if that’s all you *Judenkinder* [Jewish children] have, we might as well get rid of you. Everybody on the train.” Thank God, it struck him as funny. I never knew why that triggered anything. You know, why he finally decided it was time to let us go.

We got on the train, and the train started up, and we pulled across the border. We knew it was the border because there were swastikas, and we saw the Dutch flag. The minute the train pulled across the border, everybody was leaning out the window, spitting and making other very rude, stupid gestures that expressed something of what we felt.

The train pulled into another shed on the Dutch side, and the women of the Dutch Red Cross and the Quaker Friend's Service Committee came aboard. They brought us oranges, bananas and ham sandwiches and other kind of sandwiches and postcards. The postcard, of course, was the key. I wrote my parents' name and their address and "Hello," and the women promised to mail that, so our parents would know immediately that we had made it out. We hadn't seen an orange or a banana in a long time, because those were luxury items the Germans weren't importing. We were all just starving and very excited. So, that stop I remember clearly.

Herb Karliner was born on September 3, 1926 in Peiskretscham, Oberschlesien [Upper Silesia], in Germany. He and his family, along with other Jews attempting to flee from the Nazis, left Hamburg, Germany on the ship *St. Louis* in May 1939. They were destined for Cuba, only to be refused entrance first to Cuba and then to the United States, despite entreaties made to President Roosevelt. The ship was forced to return to Germany. Great Britain, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands took in the refugees. Very few of the passengers ultimately survived the Final Solution, because Great Britain was the only nation of the four not to be occupied by Nazi Germany.

A. It took us about ten days to get to Cuba. It must have been the end of May, the 26th or the 28th [1939]. I don't remember the exact date now.

Q. So everybody saw Cuba?

A. Everybody saw Cuba. I even have a picture here which we took on arriving in Havana. Some relatives and some friends came to welcome us in Havana.

Q. What was the first intimation that you got that there was trouble, and that you were not going to be able to land?

A. Well, as soon we arrived in Havana, they told us that it will take a little time for debarkation. After a few hours, the ship went to the docks, and then there started to be some problem. I was too young to understand those things. They said we had to pull off the docks because some other ships were supposed to come in there. So I figured, if not today, a little bit later. Actually, that was my first word I learned in Spanish, *mañana* [tomorrow], because that day they said, "*Mañana."* People came close to us and they said, *"Mañana. Mañana* you will come off the ship." Nobody was allowed to come on that ship at that time, and we figured there was some problem, that we would get off tomorrow. One day, two days, three days, and we started to get a little bit worried about it.

Q. Did they move the ship away from the dock?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Where?

A. In the middle of the harbor.

Q. And they just dropped anchor?

A. Yes. Relatives came with small boats and talked to us, but we never actually could reach them. After about five days, we knew something was wrong. We noticed that people from the Jewish organizations sent telegrams from the ship, and they formed a committee. There was something going on, and we found out that they had some complications. We understood afterward that the captain told us that he cannot stay in the harbor any longer, and he has to move the ship out. He promised us he would stay just outside. Well, naturally, our morale went way down, and people started to worry. One day we were playing, myself and some other friends on the main deck, and I heard some screaming

going on. I saw somebody jumping overboard. The small boats afterward came over and dragged him out. And he was actually one of the only grown persons who was let off in Havana.

Well, after a while, we started to move a little further away from Havana. Meantime we got telegrams every day. Some new rumors came out that we were going to land on Island of Pines, which is an island off Cuba, and that they would let us off there. Then I heard another rumor that came in that there was a very rich Texan Jew who wanted to give us an island. He would take care of us somewhere off the United States. Then we heard rumors that we were going to go to the Dominican Republic.

I mean, every day was a different rumor, but nothing came through. We were cruising close to the Florida coast, and I saw Miami Beach from not too far away. I was so impressed because I saw the palm trees, I saw the skyscrapers and, truthfully speaking, at that time when I was in my twelfth year, I hoped that someday I would come back to Miami. Well, thank goodness, I made it, but some people didn't.

Q. What do you know of any attempts that were made to land the passengers in the United States through Miami?

A. Well, I heard a rumor at that time. In the afternoon, all of a sudden, we saw an American Coast Guard cutter coming by, and they told us to move away. We were too close to the coast of Florida. The captain had to obey the order, and we had to move out from there.

Q. You had mentioned something about efforts being made with the United States government
to let the people on the ship, who numbered, I think, 936.

A. Something around there, yes.

Q. What did you know of these efforts?

A. Well, we sent telegrams to all the countries in the world . . . to Mr. Roosevelt . . . to Mrs. Roosevelt. Actually, to Mrs. Roosevelt we had made a special request to let only the

children off the *St. Louis.* To let them into the United States because, naturally, the parents would worry about the children. As far as I know, we never had an answer. We never got a response. We sent telegrams and also the Joint Distribution Committee, which was working with the American government asked to let us in here, but to no avail.

Q. When did you first find out that you weren't going to be allowed to land anywhere?

A. The captain told us that we had to go back to Europe slowly, because he didn't have enough fuel or food. Naturally, we felt very depressed. Already, people were wondering what's going to happen to them because they had the experience in Buchenwald [concentration camp] earlier.

Q. When you finally found out that your destination was then Europe again, was there any explanation as to where you would go in Europe at that time?

A. The announced destination was Germany. We had to go back to Hamburg where there was
this home port. We heard that they were working with other countries.

Q. When is the first time that you actually knew where you were going, or what was going to
happen to you and your family?

A. Well, the situation got worse and worse. People wanted to do something about it. They didn't want to go back to Germany. They didn't know what would happen to them.

Q. How was the mood aboard the ship?

A. It was terrible. It was no longer a festive ship. Finally, I would say about two days before we arrived back at Hamburg, we heard some rumors that some countries might take us in. One day, the rumors were flying like the day before, we got a telegram telling us that three or four countries would take us in. That means Holland, Belgium, France and England would divide us and bring us in. This was just before we landed in Hamburg. So, naturally the hope went up again, and we made port in Antwerp, Belgium. We were on that ship for almost five weeks. In Antwerp, we were transferred to another ship which took us to Boulogne, France.

Q. Was your whole family still together at this time?

A. The whole family. When we were on the ship, the *St. Louis,* about two, two hundred fifty
people went to each country.

Q. How did they make the allocations? Do you recall?

A. Some of my relatives were supposed to go to Belgium. But, then, afterwards, an uncle of mine, who was a dentist and was single, came with us to France. Then our friends who

were from our hometown went to England, which was very lucky, because they were safe.

Aron Fainman was born on February 10, 1923 in Zabludow, Poland. The Germans occupied the town in September 1939. His family hid in a cellar for three days, while the town was ransacked. By the end of September, the town was under Russian rule.

A. We stayed as a family together. It was on a Thursday that the Germans walked in. Whoever was on the street, they just grabbed them and took them to a place. They made them dig holes then shot them. And they had the few people whom they left, close the hole up . . . and that was the first of a series. And then Saturday, they took all the Jews that they could catch or find in homes or those who dared to go out on the street, and they put them in the synagogue, and they put the synagogue on fire. You'll have to excuse me, if I get a little bit tense, because it's hard when you remember things like that. They burned them alive. I'm sorry to say it. [Ed. note: crying]

Frieda Jaffe is one of the very few children to have survived Hitler's inferno. Born in Piotrków, Poland on June 16, 1937 as Fredzia Gelcman, Frieda was forced to witness her father's hanging, because he refused to divulge a chemical formula to German authorities.

A. I remember too well the day that they came, that they broke into the house. My father was in bed. He was not feeling well. I remember my mother saying, "But you have to get up and go to work! Go to the plant!" And he kept saying, "But I can't!" and about that time, just as she was combing and brushing my hair, and he was in bed, the house was literally broken into. Soldiers, policemen, broke in, and they told my father that he had to go to the office, to the factory, and he kept saying, "But I can't!" And then I remember vaguely, but I remember, someone in a different kind of uniform who came and said, "Well then, give us the formula." And all I remember was my father saying, "Never!" At that point, they literally just dragged him out of bed, and then we didn't see him again until the public execution.

We were all made to stand in this town square, and I very clearly remember the gallows, which to me as a very small child, seemed as though they were going to the top of the sky. First we watched the three men brought out. Their hands were tied behind their backs. The most vivid recollection before the actual hanging is that somehow the Germans had rigged up some sort of a walkway that was stone, and there were very sharp edges. The men were made to crawl on their knees over this. Well, between the beatings and the punctured knees and the bleeding that was going on, by the time they actually hanged them, we were glad. I remember some of the adults saying, "Oh my God, how much longer?" We really could not imagine how they could continue this. So, it was actually a thankfulness that the agony would soon be over. And I remember one Nazi very clearly say-

ing to the population standing there, “This is what happens when you don’t do what we want you to do.”

And I remember my mother trying to shield my eyes so that I wouldn’t watch. There was a German standing right next to her, and he jerked her hand away, and he said, “Let her see.” So, it’s hardly something I’m ever going to forget.

Jadwiga Kroupnoff, née Gor~czko was born on August 8, 1926 in Bielsko Biala, Poland to a Catholic family. As a young girl, Jadwiga was taken away by the Nazis and was forced to labor on a farm in Bavaria, Germany.

A. After the Germans came into the city, they started to mobilize against the Jews and take them to the center of the markets where we always bought all kinds of food and vegetables at the flea market. First they beat them up. Then they hanged them.

Q. Did you see any of this?

A. Yes, I was witness to this once in my life. They put, maybe two hundred Jews together, men, elderly and others who probably were sick or crippled. They took us from the houses and said, “You have to look at it. We want you to remember. If you help them somehow to survive or hide them, then you are going to be in the same place where they are.” That’s what I remember. We were very sad about it, because to see them hang people was a horrible thing. As a thirteen-year-old child, and even younger, we couldn’t understand why. Why did this person have to be hanged? What did he do that was wrong? I couldn’t watch the scene. I tried to escape. They grabbed me back, but then somehow I snuck between people and I got away, because I couldn’t look at the scene anymore.

Q. Do you remember if they did anything to Polish people in addition?

A. I remember they took in first Polish priests, Polish professors, Polish directors of the schools, directors of the factories or like . . . if my father would have been alive, they would have probably taken him also from his job. I believe they first destroyed the people who were intelligent, who were educated. Then it would be easier for them with the others later. I believe that was the reason.

Q. Do you know if any of these Polish officers or any of these people tried to resist, if they did
anything like sabotage?

A. Yes, that is what happened in 1940 before we were taken to Germany. It happened with us when we tried to go to the city. From our place to the center of the city, we had to take a train. We were sitting there, and the train already was starting to go. Somebody ran to us. He said, “Please get off train, all of you, because they are shooting everybody in the center of the city.” The German got mad, and my mother asked him, “Why did they get mad, and why are they shooting everybody?”

In revenge for the execution of twelve Polish people by the Nazis, a group of partisans got dressed like Germans. They spoke German very well. They came to the city hall in a jeep, and they killed the main Nazi officer there.

Before the Nazis realized what happened, the partisans returned to their jeep and disappeared. Later, the Nazis, high officers or Gestapo, had some kind of meeting in the city hall to organize a search for the partisans. The Nazis couldn't find them anywhere. They ran from house to house and asked, "Did anybody see them?" Nobody even knew where they were. So whoever was on the street, the Nazis dragged out and especially when they knew the Jews were there. They took them out, and there was a shooting massacre.

Then some person told us that blood was running in the street from the dead people. So we had no choice, we just disappeared.

Elvira Showstark, née Sonnino, was born on June 18, 1925 in Rome, Italy. She hid in Rome throughout the war.

A. It was about 5 o'clock in the morning, and we heard a lady screaming. I lived near the Roman Forum, and all Jewish people lived in my building. We looked out the window and wondered why the lady was screaming. She said, "Run, run. I just came back from the Jewish section, and they're taking all the Jews in the trucks. They're taking them away. Hurry up, hurry up. Leave."

Q. This was a Jewish woman?

A. No. A gentile woman. She warned us. Everybody from our building gathered our things. We ran and the first stop we made was near the Roman Forum. We stopped at a building, and we sat inside in a hallway. A very nice lady came out and saw my little nephew crying. He was only an infant, and she offered some water. But we couldn't tell her who we were. She perhaps thought that we were just refugees from other cities that were afraid of the bombs.

My father said, "You stay here, and I'll come back and see if we can find a place." He came back and said, "I couldn't find any place to hide, so the best thing is to go across the street to the Roman Forum." And so we went there.

There were caves, dark and muddy. When we arrived there, we found the other Jewish people who lived in our building. We had all run. We hadn't been in contact with one another. We didn't know where they went, but we found them there. Someone had to go out to get some food, but it was very difficult.

Q. Where would you get food from?

A. I don't remember ever seeing any good food, any clothing, anything that I could warm myself with.

Q. When you ran, you didn't have time to take anything with you?

A. No.

Q. What was your food like before this happened?

A. My father was making a living, so he would come home at night, and whatever he earned,
we would use to buy us food.

Q. So it was really on a day-to-day basis.

A. Yes. That's the way it was. You never knew what the next day would bring or if you were going to eat or not. We stayed in this Roman Forum for about two, three nights and then we had to leave because from where we were hiding in the caves, we saw the Germans sightseeing. We felt that if they ever found out who we were, what we're doing there, then they would report us. So we all left, not knowing where the others were going. We just separated from each other.

Q. Your family separated?

A. No. The other people from my building. And then from there my father found out that a friend of his found an apartment near the Coliseum. We went there, and again we found another family that we knew from our building also living in there. My mother used to go every afternoon to make sure my father would be okay at work.

But then one day, my mother came home, and she was crying terribly. I asked, "What happened, where's Daddy?" And she said, "It's all over." I asked, "What do you mean, it's all over?" She said, "The Germans took him. He and his friend were working. They took him, and they beat him up terribly, unmercifully.There was a lot of blood on his shirt." He said to her, "I'm sorry I'm crying. Go home, run." He didn't want her to be taken.

Q. He didn't want her to be identified with him?

A. And he said, "Run as fast as you can." So she ran home, but she was quite upset. What happened was that we couldn't stay there anymore in this apartment. This man who worked in a hospital kind of felt sorry for me because I was so young. He talked to my mother and said, "Why don't you let me have her, where I work? She can stay there. It is a big ward." The ward was empty because during the war the patients, no matter how sick they were, were afraid of the bombs. They wouldn't go to the hospital.

Q. They were afraid they would be bombed in a hospital?

A. Bombed in a hospital, too. And so it was empty, and I was there all alone and afraid. My mother finally came to get me, and I went home with her. Another lady that knew my mother and us for many years offered to take me and one of my sisters to her home. She lived near the Vatican. We stayed there about a week. Then one early morning when it was still dark, she said, "Please go. Leave." She never gave us a reason. And we left, and I found the reason when I went back with my husband in 1960.

Q. You found her?

A. I saw her.

Q. You made a point of looking her up?

A. No. I didn't. I met her by accident because she was in a kiosk. She said, "For years I wanted to tell you why I sent you and your sister away." She told me that her brother-in-law

wanted to sell us to the Fascists, to the Nazis.

Q. To sell you?

A. Sell. Because for each man they used to get paid 5,000 lira.

Q. If they would turn in a Jewish man?

A. A Jewish man, or for a woman, it was 4,000 lira. For a child or a young person, it would be
3,000 lira. They used to get paid to round up the Jewish people and give them to the Nazis.

LIFE IN THE GHETTO

I was born in Lód~, Poland, an only child from a large and loving family, who was completely unprepared for the extraordinary, tragic and deadly five and a half years which started when I was twelve years old. I think that if we had suspected that the war would last that long, we would all have committed suicide.

The first inkling of war came to me during the summer of 1939 when I was in a summer camp. Unexpectedly, my mother appeared to take me home. I remember being very excited by the electricity in the air, by the parades, speeches, soldiers marching, the famous Polish cavalry riding their horses waving flags. But horses cannot win against tanks and airplanes, and the Germans overran Poland in less than a week. Within three to four days Lód~, the city I was born in, was occupied by the Germans. They came during the night and we woke to the sound of rumbling tanks, heavy artillery and marching soldiers. Immediately martial law was instituted. Our city was declared a part of the Third *Reich.* We were forced to wear the yellow Star of David patch on the front and back of our outer clothing. Radios had to be turned in and most of our possessions were taken away. We were constantly brutalized by Germans and my grandparents were killed when they tried to prevent the desecration of religious articles in their home. Despite all that we saw around us, we believed that the Allies would come into the war soon and it would be all over in a matter of months. So all the planing that my parents did was for the short range, and when in December of 1939 the ghetto was being formed in Lód±, my father decided to move the family to Warsaw, which was not included in the Third *Reich,* but had became a protectorate and had none of these sanctions -- yet.

We traveled to Warsaw, taking only what we could carry, on Christmas eve of 1939. In order to travel by train -- the only transportation available, but forbidden to Jews -- we had to risk a death sentence by removing the yellow patches from our clothes and trying to pass for gentiles. We counted on Germans celebrating Christmas and not checking too carefully and it worked.

I first saw the old and dilapidated part of Warsaw which was to become a ghetto the following year, when we, along with the multitude of other refugees pouring into Warsaw -- a city already reeling from defense, bombing, destruction, shortages and new occupation -- settled in that old and predominantly Jewish area, because the local Jews were the only ones who offered to share their homes.

The overcrowding was unbelievable and still strange to us. We were living thirteen persons to a room, then when things settled a bit, two families to a single room, sharing the kitchen and bathroom facilities with people who occupied the other rooms in the apartment.

The buildings were old, mostly three floors, built around two or three courtyards with the front and first yard having better apartments and poorer accommodations as you went to second and third yard with stables and garages in the back. Every apartment had an assigned space in the attic to hang laundry to dry, and a little cubicle in a dirt floor basement for coal and food storage, except that there was no coal and no food to store. Each building had a heavy entrance door which was locked in the evening. The roofs were very steep, the streets cobblestoned and the side streets quite narrow. The winter that year was extremely cold.

There was no heating material, the water was constantly freezing in the pipes, and food was very hard to get -- exchanged for gold and worth its weight in gold. Life was very harsh, especially after my father was arrested for exchanging some foreign coins from his collection, which is all we had left after the German rampage. My father's gold coin collection was what saved us from immediate hunger, but it was -- under the new laws -- illegal. Luckily, he was put in a Polish criminal prison and not German political one, so we were able to have him released after a few months. We were constantly hounded by the secret police and were finally lucky to move into a better, less crowded, but predominantly gentile area. Despite having to wear the white arm band with a blue Star of David on it, life was easier for a while and our spirits lifted, especially because my mother's twin sister and her family and one of her brothers and his family were able to smuggle themselves to Warsaw. But it only lasted through the summer and early fall and it proved to be a mistake, as the ghetto was formed in November 1940, and orders were issued that, under penalty of death, all Jews, including those Catholics who had a Jewish ancestor as far back as the fourth generation, must move into the ghetto area. So we were without a place to live once more, and this time the competition for space was frantic.

We were finally able to find a room in a two room apartment, where the owners moved into the kitchen and we occupied the only room -- the advantage being that only two families shared the kitchen and bath, although the frozen pipes often rendered these facilities useless.

Things were moving very fast. Helplessly we watched the walls surrounding the two ghettos -called large and small -- and connected by an overhead bridge, grow brick by brick. Then broken glass was placed on top and finally rows of barbed wire stretched over that, with a few gates placed at strategic thoroughfares. It seemed that the walls were throwing a shadow over the ghetto and blocked what little sun there was.

And then one day, in the middle of November, the gates were closed with three guards posted on each one: a Jewish militiaman, a Polish policeman and a German soldier. We were locked in.

Please let me explain at this point that “ghetto” as you know it is not the same as ghetto under the German rule. That ghetto was in fact a camp, a labor and transfer camp, where people were performing slave labor and were temporarily sent from smaller ghettos to be shipped to concentration and death camps. The only difference in the beginning was that families were permitted to live together. Later on, in 1942-1943, that too changed and the ghetto was separated by barbed wire and watchful guards into many small ghettos, so that each person lived where they were forced to work and families were separated as in other camps.

As the ghetto closed, it was not only organized by the Germans, but it began to organ-

ize itself. The *Judenrat* was chosen by the Germans from elders in the community and headed by an engineer, Adam Czerniakow (who later committed suicide rather then obey German orders). He was forced to carry out German orders -- and did so -- assigning living quarters, guards, collecting blackmail, jewelry, metals, furs, running soup kitchens, overseeing rations, and so forth. The Jewish militia, recruited from sports clubs and fairly harmless in the beginning, later became hardened and began acting more violently towards their fellowmen. Working establishments -- such as uniform and shoe factories, brush factories and other equipment for the German army, kitchens and transport of goods in and out of the ghetto, hospital -- which although desperately needed was avoided at all cost, because the Germans regularly emptied it by deporting the patients to certain death. Edicts and orders were posted, most of them announcing death penalties for disobeying orders, including an order forbidding teaching or
attending school. Can you imagine -- death penalty for teaching or attending school, for wanting to learn? Nevertheless, illegal and secret schoolrooms opened and were widely attended and taught on all levels including college. The classes were often moved to new locations and evading measures taken such as placing typhus signs on doors, because the Germans were known to be very much afraid of catching typhus, and would seldom enter a building with a quarantine sign on it.

An important lesson -- not taught in school -- was to learn to live by two sets of laws. One for the authorities -- our enemies, where anything was possible and it was morally proper and smart to lie, steal and cheat in order to survive, and the other in dealing with our own society, where we observed standards of decency and morality and helped one another sometimes to the point of sacrifice.

Theatre flourished in the beginning, but the Germans used it as a propaganda tool, catching people in the streets and filming the scene, so the theatre closed in order not to cooperate. Radios were forbidden and had to be turned into the Germans about a month after the war started. The few that were hidden were used first privately and then by the underground to listen to the Allied news and first by word of mouth and later on by illegal newspaper printed on an old fashioned hand press in a basement, and often moved as well and passed from hand to hand, spread to people to bolster their spirits. Electric power was given one hour a day -- usually late at night, so a carbide lamp was developed. It gave out fumes but it was the only way to get some light and therefore was used widely. Also a horse-pulled trolley was inaugurated. The sanitation department using wheelbarrows picked up garbage and dead bodies, which lined the streets each morning, covered with old newspapers and without identification so that the surviving members of the families could collect their food rations for a while longer.

All of this was expected to last only a short time and plans were made accordingly, when planning was even possible, as we all believed that the war would end soon. We lived on that hope from season to season and avidly sought news of the front and Allied involvement. We heard that emissaries were sent from the underground to London with reports on the conditions in ghettos and camps. We also heard that a Jewish member of "*Sejm"* (Polish parliament) appealed to the world to protest the treatment of Jews in occupied Europe and when the Allied governments refused to speak out, he committed suicide as a protest of his own. In the meantime, conditions and the quality of life grew worse with each passing week. The Germans, seeing that there were no complaints or threats of retribution from the outside, continued to take new and terrible steps towards genocide.

The Warsaw ghetto which originally had a population of 500,000 people -- locals and the first wave of refugees from lands included in the Third *Reich* -- was swelling by an influx of

people from the smaller ghettos, which were being liquidated. To our sorrow and terror, people were disappearing and evacuated in large numbers to make temporary room for new arrivals. It was a constant movement of masses of decimated families.

The underground began forming itself -- secretly and cautiously at first -- with many factions and organizations from left to right politically, disagreeing on policy and course of action. The younger of us, and there were many youngsters such as myself, were for arming ourselves and fighting then and there against the deportations and killings, while the older groups wanted to adapt the wait and see, don't "rock the boat" attitude to avoid repercussions. Because you see, our biggest problem was the mass responsibility policy practiced by the Germans. Individual, open acts of defiance were discouraged, because for an act of one person, hundreds were punished and swiftly killed. We never knew what group would be affected. For instance, a baker once committed a minor act which displeased the Germans. The following night, all the bakers in the Warsaw ghetto were taken from their homes, gathered into the street and shot. This accomplished two purposes. It caused fear and compliance to avoid repetition and the whole population of ghetto, starved as it was, was denied bread for days. Another time, it would happen to all the occupants of an apartment house or all the people walking on a certain street or people waiting on line for food or working in a shop and so on.

We never knew where the next attack was coming from -- what to expect next. We only knew that it would be brutal and deadly. Few of us, even the young, could live with the knowledge that we

caused the death of our people. And so, we waited and hoped and started to prepare by collecting money for buying guns and ammunition and paying a king's ransom for them. We were under a constant strain for, in addition to the danger of underground work, when we left home in the morning for work or other chores, we didn't know if we would see our families or friends again. Our main objective was to save as many lives as possible because that was becoming the hardest defiance of all. There were many orphans miraculously left alive when their parents died or were deported. They needed caring and feeding, and many of the young groups made that their responsibility, for the children were the saddest sight of all. They never laughed, they did not even cry. They were silent and only their eyes asked why? We collected food going from door to door and in groups to avoid temptation and suspicion, because we were hungry too -- a hard task to say the least -- food being precious both as nourishment and barter currency -- and we cooked it, serving it to the children daily. The children were also provided with any warm clothing we could collect or spare. Naturally, it was never enough. There were so many hungry children and so little food to go around, and so you could see those little street urchins, running in the street, looking in garbage cans or ripping food packages or pots with cooked oats from the community kitchen, out of passersby's hands. Many of them took up food smuggling. Most were caught, beaten and killed for it.

As for the majority, we lived on the slave wages and sale of whatever possessions we still had including the clothes on our back. As time went by, conditions continued to get worse. The cultural life, except for schooling, ground to a stop. Gatherings of any kind were dangerous. Total effort was needed just to survive another day and we were getting sick, weak and desperate. We all received food cards, which in the beginning entitled us to rations of 300 calories a day and were reduced gradually to only 150. It was mostly bread, black, full of sand and chestnuts and other fillers and very little flour. Jam was made with saccharin and God knows what else, probably beets and squash, because there was no fruit in it. We also received some squash and potatoes only when and if it had frozen and was rotting. As carefully as they were peeled, those hungrier yet than we, picked the peelings out of the garbage and ate them. I don't remember ever having any fruit, milk or meat products in the ghetto. We did have some private and illegal vegetable and grocery stores, but there was hardly any foodstuff in them. What was there was very expensive, because it was smuggled in or thrown over the wall -- both quite difficult and dangerous. There were soup kitchens throughout the ghetto, but all they prepared and sold were cooked oats sent by the American Joint Distribution Committee. I don't know what the Joint sent, but all we received were oats with the chaff still on it. Since there was no way to process it, this is how it was cooked and eaten, causing us bleeding of the gums and scratching the throat. But hunger was such that even this was desirable. Many times our whole meal consisted of a few glasses of hot water with a half spoon of jam. In order to be able to fall asleep, we'd save a bit of bread to stop the hunger pains. Reading cookbooks gave us an almost sensual pleasure. Food became a matter of survival and there were many who were worse off than we.

To bring the ghetto life a bit closer to you, let me tell you about my life there, as I remember it. We rose at dawn -- in darkness and cold -- the Polish winters being very long and cold and when I think of the ghetto I remember always being cold. By the light of carbide lamp, we had our breakfast consisting of hot water and small slice of black bread. I then went to the brush factory where I worked from 7 a.m. till late evening. The walk to and from work was quite traumatic, because each day I had to pass by scenes of arrests, beatings, beard pulling, dead bodies covered with newspapers being picked up by wheelbarrows, live skeletons sitting supported by building walls waiting for death, desperate mothers holding children, begging food to save them from starvation, groups being led to the *Umschlagplatz* for deportation, hostages shot on the street as an example and, quite often, a suicide, with jumping out of windows the most common and accessible way. I never knew whether I would not be caught in a round-up.

Once I was hit with the butt of a rifle by a German soldier when I failed to see him coming up behind me and did not step down into the gutter in time. In addition, we had to be careful not to brush against people, fearful of picking up lice, which aside from revulsion also carried spotted typhus. Avoiding contact was not an easy thing considering the mass of humanity on the narrow streets.

Piece work at the factory was hard and dirty -- spools of wire fastened to wood tables, with handfuls of bristle in my covered lap -- the bristle alive with parasites. By the end of the day my hands usually bled. Lunch was eaten at work, a carrot if I was lucky to get one, as I developed a tremendous yen for them. When I got home in the evening, relieved to see my parents still there and to be able to close the doors in the comparative safety of our room, we had the main meal of the day consisting either of the cooked oats full of chaff or, if we were lucky to get some ingredients, soup. After that I met with my group to help with the orphans and then went to classes, studying well into the night. There was hardly any time to sleep, yet I was always full of restless energy despite all the hardships. Time, as needed, was also devoted to underground meetings, printing and distributing illegal newspapers, trips to the outside of ghetto walls as a courier, bringing news, guns and ammunition.

That life was interrupted when I had to leave my parents and the ghetto for the first time. My new working papers, without which I was a prime subject for deportation, were lost by my boss, a friend of the family, who was bringing them to me as a favor. He was arrested and deported on the way, because, as we found out later, he left his own papers at home by mistake.

In all, I left the ghetto three times and returned twice, not counting the many short forays for the underground, once through cellars and tunnel, once through a courthouse which had an entrance on both sides of the wall but was heavily guarded, and once through sewers. If it sounds easy, don't you believe it for a moment. It was extremely frightening, dangerous and difficult. Aside from Germans, there were many agents and people who made a living denouncing Jews and the underground to the *Gestapo* and they were everywhere. On the other hand, there were very few who could be trusted and were willing to help. It took tremendous planning, appearance, luck, self control and an available safe house to go to in order to succeed.

One of my uncles and his wife and son, did not move into the ghetto, risking capture and death, remaining on the "Aryan" side, after buying false identity papers. And this was probably the single, most important factor of my own survival, as through my family's courage and willingness, their home gave me a trusted outside base when I needed it -- it became a sort of halfway house, permitting me time to get used to and being at ease in the deception I had to live, when the time came. My uncle also got false papers for me.

I was there a short time when I found out that both my parents were very sick; my father with typhus and my mother with pneumonia. There were no medicines and it was out of the question to send them to hospital, because we knew that would mean instant death, so I came back to care for them. After they got well I was sent out again and my uncle started to make arrangements to place me in a convent. He was being blackmailed and we were all in immediate danger. As a matter of fact, a few days after I left his home he was arrested and put in Majdanek concentration camp where he was soon killed. His wife and son escaped and were on the run.

In the meantime I was sent to a cabin in the woods near a village. It was the end of summer of 1942. I was 15 years old and all alone there, without food, except some rotten potatoes. It was getting cold but I couldn't make a fire, because the smoke would be a dead giveaway. There were wild animals in the woods and they came close at night howling. For a city girl like me, it was a frightening and lonely existence. At times Germans or locals ventured into the

woods and I had to hide. Finally the woman who was placing me in the convent came to escort me there. We went by train and during the ride she told me that there was a big action in the ghetto and my mother and her twin sister were taken away. I couldn't even cry out in my grief. In the convent, the nuns who didn't know I was Jewish tested my knowledge of catechism and assigned me to a dorm with other girls. I became ill with yellow jaundice due to sorrow of my mother's deportation and was talking in my sleep, so I was taking pills to knock myself out. But soon I was so sick that I was placed in the infirmary. I finally got better and under the pretext of going to confession to my priest in Warsaw, I was able to travel there and meet my father at a prearranged place, when he came with a wagon for supplies as a part of his job.

We were able to meet a couple of times but then one day he did not come. His co-worker told me that he fell of the wagon and broke his arm. There were no Jewish doctors since and the hospital was still out of question so, in pain, since he could not report for work, he went into hiding. I ran away from the convent and arranged to get back to the ghetto in the double bottom of a wagon, not a very desirable way since the Germans used to poke bayonets in searches for all manner of contraband. But luck was with me and I was back in the ghetto in January of 1943.

A few days after my return, the Germans started another action. There was an armed resistance lasting four days. Then we were forced to go into hiding to avoid mop up operations. My father and some of his friends had a hiding place ready. It was a line of little alcoves, well masked from the outside, with an entrance from the attic. The alcoves were the size of a walk-in closet, with a hole in floor and ceiling, with a rope ladder connecting the floors. There were no bathroom facilities nor food or water. We spent a few days in that dark and airless tomb -- many people passing out, packed like sardines and in total silence, for any sound could betray us.

After the action was over, only about 40,000 people were left out of approximately 750,000 and those left were on their last leg. We were separated from the bulk of the underground, because by that time the ghetto was re-organized into small enclosed areas, with families separated by barbed wire and guards and individuals living where they worked. Communication was difficult and life was in a chaos. My father's arm was re-broken and set by a nurse we found. As we started once again making preparations to leave the ghetto, the uprising started when the Germans surrounded the ghetto at Easter time and started a final round-up.

How can I -- how can anyone -- describe to you the feeling of that moment? The moment we waited for almost four years -- that so many of us did not live to see.

The elation of striking the enemy, of hitting back, the bittersweet taste of it. But also the terrible sadness of knowing that we shall all perish in the end. We looked at our comrades and friends and they were walking dead -- but they were smiling and willing to die, if they took some Germans with them. My father had long talks with me -- from a man's point of view, trying to prepare me for a future alone, should I survive -- which neither one of us believed.

Although we were prepared -- as prepared as we could ever be under the circumstances -- for final resistance, the beginning of the uprising came unexpectedly on the eve of Passover. This time a total attack was launched. Their fire was returned, hand to hand combat took place, with our fighters finding super human strength and unbelievable heroism. Although the Germans came in wave after wave of well armed, clothed and fed troops -- our weak, desperate, hungry and bedraggled resistance fighters along with anybody who could stand up, fought them sending truck after truck and bus after bus of wounded and dead Germans away. Those who couldn't fight were making "Molotov" cocktails, filling bottles with gasoline and stuffing rags into them -- our most effective and available weapon. There was a shortage of everything -- weapons, ammo, food, water, medicines, bandages. The Germans were encircling us

every day a bit more, using heavy artillery, tanks, setting fire to the buildings, creating a circle of fire around us. The scenes we were a part of and witnessed were that of hell. People were leaping out of burning buildings, screaming, children being tossed out of windows by Germans or grabbed by the feet, swung, their heads smashed against walls, mothers going mad with grief attacking their murderers with bare hands, bunkers discovered and dynamited, with all inside killed, corpses and body parts laying all over. Still, the Germans were coming and coming — street after street, building after building. We pushed them back in fierce fighting and, of course, they came back again with fresh troops. Our losses were tremendous. We had no effective way of treating our wounded, the choking smoke and smell of burning flesh always with us, along with cries of pain. After about two weeks, when conditions got worse yet -- if that's possible -- an order went out from the leadership that whoever had a way to get out of the ghetto and a place to go, should do so in order to leave whatever supplies were left for those who had no place to go and to continue the fight from outside.

A group of us left the ghetto for the final time in the beginning of May 1943 by sewers -- led by a guide. The sewers of Warsaw were old and filled with slime -- sometimes quite deep and slippery. They were also the home of many, many rats who were big and hungry. I'll never forget this trip -- it lasted about three hours, but it seemed a lifetime. The rats were bold, staring at us with those beady eyes, ready to jump, and I remember thinking -- I expected to die, made my peace with death, but not here, not this way. It took a tremendous effort not to cry out, not to make a sound, which would be reverberated by the metal plates over manholes, and would give us away. Also the Germans, aware that some sewers were used for escape, gassed them often at random so that we never knew which breath was our last. Finally, we surfaced, made contact with a man we knew and were told to spend the night in a coal cellar. In the morning after cleaning up as best we could, we went to a safe apartment separately.

I was back on the "Aryan" side and this time there was no going back. Gone were my people and all they were and represented and all the future generations to come, that would never be.

I kept going back to the walls of the ghetto as it was burning and burning and kept vigil. I just couldn't stay away. The Polish people too, were standing there, but they were laughing and saying to one another -- well, at least the Germans got rid of the Jews for us. And soon it was all over. It was deadly quiet and all that remained were burned out ruins and ashes.

I was arrested by the *Gestapo* soon after, when I went to the house of a Polish woman -- the same one who placed me in the convent -- to pick up my father's false papers. I spent three days in the *Gestapo* headquarters, the infamous Aleje Szucha, undergoing constant interrogation, but somehow convinced them that I was pure "Aryan" and finally walked out of there free. I believe that I am one of very few if any, who lived to tell the tale.

For the next two years I lived among the Polish people as a Christian, on false identity papers, working as a governess and mother's helper. My father wanted and was able to, through contacts in the underground, join a partisan unit in the Wyszków forest. I became involved again in the resistance movement in Warsaw. I was doing much the same work as in the ghetto, working as a runner delivering orders and responses, ammunition and guns to and from command posts and various units in the city, villages, and partisans. I received a cyanide pill in case of my capture, which gave me great peace of mind. I had to live in silence. Isolate myself from people as soon as they got closer and started to ask questions. It would be too easy to get caught on contradiction or give myself or others away. Logically, I was fortunate not to be in a concentration camp, but I was so lonely that I truly envied the people in camps, because they were together.

When it seemed that the war would never end, we heard the heavy artillery of the approaching Russian army, and the Polish underground National Army wanting credit for liberating Warsaw, started an uprising. Some of the remaining Jews hidden in Warsaw surfaced then and when the city was again laid to ruin and the uprising failed, most of them were denounced or caught and killed, as the Germans evacuated the population. We were marched to freight trains, taken to a transfer camp and from there, after a few days and selection, I was able to get on a cattle transport of old and sick, pretending to be pregnant, and we landed temporarily in Bochnia -- a town not far from Auschwitz. The town was near the front and many German troops were stationed there. Since I spoke German, I was asked by the underground to get a job as a translator and report to them what I overheard as to German movement and positions. That I was able to do until liberation.

A few days later the Germans ordered all Warsaw refugees to report, but distrusting them as always, I did not obey and remained in town until the Russian army liberated us in January of 1945. Yet even the liberation so long wished and prayed for was a bitter and heartbreaking time as we realized the extent of our losses.

It took me two months to board a freight train and return to Warsaw and then Lód~ to search for my family. My mother died in Treblinka, my father was lost without a trace in partisans and out of close family of about 150 people I found five alive, two of them in Russia. All the rest perished.

And so, when there was a pogrom after the end of war, and when I was standing on the street talking to a male Jewish friend and a Pole passing by, spit on the ground and said to me, "Shame on you -- a decent Polish girl associating with a Jew," I decided then and there to leave the country soon and for good, even though I was still searching for the remnants of my family. Within a month, I entered a kibbutz and left Poland with them, crossing into the U. S. Zone on my 19th birthday, to start a new life.

Matilda de Mayo was born on September 28, 1921 in Podhajce, Poland. She remained in the Podhajce ghetto from 1941 to 1943 and was then hidden by non-Jews.

A. The first *Aktion* was on Yom Kippur. All the *Aktions* were on Jewish holidays. Unexpectedly, people were gathered in the middle of the city, still wearing their prayer shawls, and they were taken away. Then they declared that the rest of us must leave our homes and move into a ghetto. But before they did that, they made us work in the fields. Then they brought us into the ghetto.

Q. Could you please describe the day that you and your parents had to leave, to move to the
ghetto? Did you have any warning?

A. They gave us very short notice. I remember one time, a short time before, when a German soldier was in our house. He told us horrible things were going to happen, but he didn't speak of ghettos. He spoke of total elimination. So we knew that each day, each step, was a step towards death.

People walked and just took whatever they could carry in their hands, like bundles or a suitcase. We were gathered, as many as six people in a room measuring maybe eight by ten feet, in the poorest part of town. They surrounded the area with barbed wire and with German and Ukrainian militia. They told us that we could only go out for an hour to do our shopping and later, they didn't even give us that privilege.

There were three families living in that house, a house of three or four rooms. The sanitary conditions were indescribable, because there was only one cistern for water, hand pumped water. The toilet facilities, there was only one outhouse for all those people. The living conditions were unbelievable! Typhoid broke out right away. We had lice. Maybe not my family, but there were lice in the ghetto, because there were no bathrooms to take baths in.

Q. Was there any electricity?

A. No, there was no electricity.

Q. Was there any heat?

A. Only the heat from a little coal stove.

Q. And how did you get food?

A. My cousin was a very strong man, so they gave him a working permit. He was allowed to go out of the ghetto to do menial work, cleaning streets and sewers, so he was able to smuggle some food and also the newspaper into the house. Otherwise, we had no news. We were totally cut off from the world. If a Jew had been caught by a German carrying food or a newspaper, he would have been shot to death.

Q. Since if Jews were caught carrying food, they were shot, how did you get the food?

A. Well, we bribed the Ukrainian watching the ghetto and gave him something, so they wouldn't search us. I found a place to bring in food. I was roaming through the ghetto and at one side, facing the main street, instead of having barbed wire, they had like a wooden gate. So I would sit there with a knife, and slowly I pried a couple of boards loose, and everyday I made it a little bit bigger. Finally, I declared to my parents that I would go out of the ghetto to look for food. Of course, the populace, even the Polish and Ukrainian people, did not have much food, but they were not starving. We were starving. Every morning, you could see people on the street dead from hunger.

Q. So you sneaked in and out of the ghetto.

A. I sneaked. I put a kerchief on my head and wore a long skirt, dressing like a farmer's wife, and I went outside the ghetto, where every step I made meant death, not only from the Germans, but also from the Ukrainians or the Polish population.

Q. Where did you get the food?

A. I went to the farmers, who knew me, who knew my parents, and I bartered.

Q. With what?

A. With whatever I had left. A nightgown today, a coat tomorrow and things like that.

Q. What other rules did the ghetto have, made by the Nazis?

A. Every week, they wanted a certain amount of young people to be taken to work, and, of course, there was no work. They took them to Bergen-Belsen [concentration camp].

Q. What do you mean they wanted a group of people?

A. They had a quota.

Q. Were there any Jewish or non-Jewish organizations outside the ghetto at this time that were offering any kind of help?

A. None that I know of.

Q. Was there some type of religious activity in the ghetto?

A. Nothing. In the ghetto, there was one great, depressing, devastated bunch of humiliated humanity that no human words can ever describe. People were dying from hunger and typhoid. Every day there were dead bodies on the street and in the doorways of the ghetto, and the children were hungry, tattered and begging orphans.

Nobody who has ever seen the ghetto children can forget their eyes. You have seen hungry children on television in the Sudan or from Biafra. Nothing compares to the expression of the ghetto children, their eyes, their eyes.

There is something about the horror of the war, the horror of the Jewish misery. The whole tragedy of the Jewish life at that time was expressed in the eyes of the children. Nobody who has seen those eyes can ever forget them.

Miriam Fridman, née Dudkiewicz, was born on December 5, 1925 in Lód±, Poland. She was in the Lód± ghetto from 1940 to 1944. From there, she was sent to Auschwitz and Freudenthal concentration camps and was liberated in May 1945.

A. At that time when I came into the Lód± ghetto, I was fourteen. The Jews were condensed in a small area, and they were living there. They enclosed the whole ghetto areas with barbed wire.

Q. As people came into the ghetto, where or how did they find housing?

A. The Polish people had to leave the ghetto, because it was only for the Jews. As soon as they left, there were some shacks and some rooms that were in very poor condition. And they divided those places among the Jewish population that was sent into the ghetto. That's how we got little places to stay, and they were in terrible condition.

Q. Was there furniture?

A. There was whatever we were able to salvage, whatever we were able to take with us. And even if we did have something, it didn't last very long. We had the coldest winter ever recorded at that time. Nature even went against us, not only the world. Whatever piece of wood we had, we broke into pieces and tried to keep warm.

I had beautiful long hair to my waist. I washed my hair and went to sleep, and my hair froze to the headboard of the bed. Unfortunately, my mother had to cut it. With terrible sorrow in her heart, she cried, "My dear Miriam, I have to cut your hair." The rest of the hair remained on the headboard until spring came and melted the ice away. It was a terrible experience for me and would have been for any little girl.

Q. You went into the ghetto with nothing but your personal belongings?

A. Personal belongings, some little things, some dishes, and if it was a smaller piece of furniture, we were able to take it. There were not many things. We had a yellow star, the star of David, it was the *Judenschande lateh* [patch of Jewish shame] on us. We walked like dead people in that cold snow, from one place to the other to bring the little things that we were able to bring.

Q. Once the ghetto was closed, how did you live as far as food was concerned? Where did food
come from? How did you get it?

A. I was a chubby little girl, and in a very short time, I lost thirty-five pounds. They gave us a small ration which most people had for one day but was supposed to last us for a week. The last six days we were starving. No food, and if we had a little soup and a little water, that was it most of the time. That was the war of nutrition, in which we died like flies. There were times they were collecting the dead by the wagons just from malnutrition and starvation. And the Lód± ghetto was one of the worst as far as malnutrition and starvation was concerned.

My father took very sick from malnutrition. At the deportation, they took him. I don't know where, what, when. I never heard from him. I am sure they took him to a death camp.

Q. And your mother?

A. My mother died at the age of thirty-nine from malnutrition. She swelled up, and she died in my arms, and her last words I will never forget until I die. She said, "My dear child, will you ever have enough bread in your life?" Those were her last words.

Q. The Lód± ghetto was known as a labor ghetto. Did most people work?

A. Yes. Most people worked for the German army, making things like gas masks, uniforms, etc. After going to school for a while, I worked in a place, a factory called a *resort* [sarcastic nickname for a factory]. There, I worked as a finisher for uniforms for the German army. And at that time, I got one soup a day. That was a little bit, a drop in the ocean for survival, with little water, and in the soup was one piece of potato.

Q. And your sister, what did she do then?

A. My little sister worked a little bit in a place where they had jobs for children at that age. We did not have many children anymore, because we had a selection. People had to come out into the streets and if there were children a certain age, they took them away, because they said that those children disturbed the people who worked. They took away the children and killed them.

Q. You referred to having gone to school. Who organized the schools, and what were the Jewish organizations within the ghetto? You had a *Judenrat* [Jewish council selected by and under the total control of the Nazis]?

A. Yes.

Q. Who was head of the *Judenrat?*

A. The head of the *Judenrat* was Rumkowski, and he had people with him. He organized the
Judenrat.

Q. And what was the *Judenrat's* responsibility, and how did they carry it out as far as the ghetto was concerned?

A. They were running it like their own country. They were the leaders.

Q. What do you mean by that?

A. Like any other leader, he was the leader of the ghetto. I mean, all the leaders had it good. We had our own police and fireman in the ghetto. We had our own printed money, not as much we could get for the money, but we had papers, and we obeyed the laws.

Q. Whose laws were they?

A. The laws were the leaders', like Rumkowski. They would give out laws, rules, and regulations such as when to walk in the streets, when not. Maybe those were the laws from higher echelons, from the Germans. Those were the rules given to him, and he had to obey it. I didn't see many German police in the ghetto. I saw them on the borderline. They were on the border outside, near the wiring, where they protected so that nobody would be able to get out.

Q. But the Jewish police were within the ghetto.

A. Yes.

Q. Was there any organization of underground in your ghetto?

A. I presume there must have been, because we always heard some news, and they had underground radios which were forbidden. If anybody was found with a radio, they were taken out of the ghetto and were killed. There were always people who risked their lives.

We were locked in with no means of survival, with no ammunition, without anything. We had no help or anything from the world. We couldn't protect ourselves with what we didn't have. Not that we were stupid or ignorant or sheep. No. We didn't have with what to do anything. I know about myself. I knew quite a bit for my age, but I couldn't help myself because I was sick taking care of my family, what little family I had. I was trying to find a piece of wood so that I should have a little water to boil and keep my house a little warm. Then people came and asked, "How come you didn't uprise or didn't do this, didn't do that?" It's very easy to say for the person who didn't go through it and was not hungry.

Q. Where there any efforts, do you think, to escape?

A. I presume, that would have been on individual basis. Because when they closed the ghetto,
we had 160,000 people from Lód±. Maybe some individuals tried to escape on their own. But I don't know of any mass escape, because we were in barbed wire and there were people guarding with ammunition. There were people that had armies. We had nothing. And beside that, we were sick, hungry, and starved.

Q. And yet, you tried to survive?

A. We tried to survive.

Q. Who made the selections for the deportations? Do you know?

A. As much as I understand and knew at that time, the *Judenrat* got notes from the Germans,
"We want a certain amount of people from the ghetto." Then they got notice to every factory to pick X amount of people. And from each factory, X amount of people were picked, and that was it.

Q. There was no category basis?

Q. In 1943, when the end of the ghetto was slowly approaching, were there any changes in the
ghetto, the life in the ghetto itself?

A. It was getting worse and worse.

Q. It what sense?

A. We were getting less food. The only thing on our mind was survival, and the survival was the food. No food and we died. Now if somebody was dying, he got a ticket from the doctor, we called it a *talon* [voucher]. So, he went to the kitchen where they made the soups for the people that worked in the factory. You had to be dying already in order to get a pound of potato peels. And then presumably, they were giving something like coffee. The coffee was literally burnt straw. It made holes in our stomach. And after we brewed the coffee, we didn't throw away that burnt straw. We tried to chop it up and put a little salt and make like patties, and we tried to eat that. They sometimes gave us the leaves from fresh beets. If we got a few leaves, it was a holiday.

Q. When did you first become aware that there was going to be a deportation, that your ghetto
was going to be closed?

A. One of the ghetto leaders said, "I want to get you out in the best way possible. The Russians are coming." I remember vividly, one of his speeches. "The Russians are getting close, and we want to get you out of here. Take everything along that you can carry. Take all your belongings." Anybody who has a sewing machine take it along, because we're going to open another factory. Take your pots, take your pans, take everything you can." We were all sewing little sacks and little things to fill up. People who had machines put them on their shoulders, because we thought we were going to continue and

have it much nicer and much better. This is how he blindfolded us. We did not know that we were going to Auschwitz. Maybe if we would have known, maybe something would have been done about it.

Q. Okay, tell us about the day you were getting ready to leave the ghetto.

A. A tragic day.

Q. How large a group was there in the transport that you were in?

A. Let me give you a few last days of my terrible experience before the transport, if I may. As you know, I was left with a little girl when she was fragile, because she was young and had suffered torture and malnutrition. I tried to hide in a closet. I was hidden for a few days with this little girl, but we didn't have anything to eat, and we were starving. So I made a decision just to go out around August 20th or the 21st. We decided to leave as we both said it would be much better there. Not that I believed everything exactly, but those were the words and we figured maybe. And we were holding onto any last straw, and I left. At that time, when we came to our designated place where we all left from, there were hundreds and hundreds of people. The sight was unforgettable. They put us in cattle trains. We were crushed like sardines in a box.

A. A countless amount. It's unbelievable, because we couldn't even turn around. That's how crowded we were. No food, of course, no toilet facilities. Nothing. And that took many hours. I think it was the whole night until we arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Ruth Desperak, née Infeld, was born on December 14, 1922 in Breslau, Germany. She was forced to live in the Lód± ghetto in May 1940, and remained there until August 1944, when she was sent to Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Salzwedel concentration camps.

Q. Did you have to wear yellow stars when the ghetto started?

A. We already wore them before.

Q. When did you have to start wearing them?

A. I think it came right away. You had to show that you are Jewish, but people took chances, you know. Some people still wanted to conduct business or felt that they could make it maybe easier for themselves, whatever.

Q. So they took it off?

A. So they took it off.

Q. Did you ever?

A. No. Somehow I never did. I didn't even look Jewish. Even though I was in the ghetto, some of our neighbors later on said, "You could have passed as a German." But I never had that feeling, because I wanted to be with my parents. I was maybe too young. You know, if I would've been maybe seventeen, eighteen, maybe it would have been different.

Leo Shniderman was born in Lód±, Poland on August 18, 1922. He was forced to live in the Lód± ghetto from May 1940 to August 1944. He was then sent to Auschwitz, Lerchien labor camp, Kaltwasser, Wolfsburg, and Ebenzee, where he was liberated in May 1945.

Q. Can you describe the day that you first saw the Nazis come into town?

A. Yes. They marched through the town in columns, and we all stood, wondering. They seemed to be normal people marching through our town. Here and there, we heard different rumors that they grabbed Jews from the street. Jews with beards, the pious Jews, rabbis, were pulled aside, pulled by the beards and just for fun, the Nazis cut their beards and their earlocks [which were worn for religious reasons]. They desecrated religious articles, like prayer shawls and religious books and were having a good time doing these things.

Q. Did you witness any of these incidents?

A. Yes, I did. A Jewish man was going to synagogue in the morning and was carrying his prayer shawl in a bag. They opened it up and told him to put it on and dance with it. He took it out, and the German took out a large pair of tailor scissors and held the rabbi by the beard and cut his beard and his earlocks. A crowd of Poles was standing around and laughing their heads off. Just having fun. As the war broke out, Jews were forbidden to ride streetcars, to use any public transportation. We weren't even allowed after sundown to walk on the streets.

Q. How were you able or your family able to make a living?

A. Well, if we can call it a living. Everybody spent the last penny they had. Some resorted to some black marketeer, buying a bread by trading a ring, buying some potatoes. There was no outlook for the future. We didn't know how we were going to live in a week from today or in two weeks. We just took it day by day. We managed somehow.

It was illegal under the threat of death to take out some of the merchandise which, by decree, did not belong to us already. It belonged to the German authorities. My father had some relatives in a very small town, so he managed to go and bring some merchandise that we had left, because we thought that the war was not going to last too long. Maybe a month, two months, because, after all, the whole world was against Hitler. We never saw or heard from him again after he left, because Jews were not allowed to use the mail or write letters. We were cut off completely. Actually, we never knew what happened to him.

Q. How did you first learn that you had to live in a ghetto?

A. In September, the Nazis came into our hometown, and there was one decree after another stripping the Jews of all their rights. And then, we heard that a Jewish ghetto was to be established in a section called Baluty. It was a slum section of Lód±. And those Jews who lived there were at home. The gentiles were ordered to move out, to find different places. And the Jews, we knew, would have to be moved in there. The gentiles took over the Jewish homes in the town, and the Jews had to move and take over the places in that slum area where the gentiles had lived.

Q. Did you live in that area before the ghetto?

A. Two weeks before the ghetto closed, the janitor and one German soldier came into our apartment. The janitor said in Polish that by order of the authority, we have to move out. So my mother said, “Where should we go?” And they said, “You know where you’re supposed to go. The ghetto.” And then my mother asked, “When should we leave?” And he said, “Right now.” So, she said, “We have to start to pack. It will take us a little while.” He said, “You don’t pack anything. You go right now.” He start screaming and hollering. He had a club in his hand, and he banged it on the table, so we were really scared. And again, he start screaming, *“Raus!”* That means out. “Out from here!” So we grabbed a few belongings, a few shirts. My mother even had a half a loaf of bread she packed. We went out into the street and walked towards the ghetto.

We came to the ghetto and, in a way, we were lucky because a distant cousin of my mother lived there all her life. So, we just went to her place. There was no way she could refuse. We were there, and we had no other place to go.

Q. Could you describe the living conditions there, the food, did you have electricity, water?

A. Water was not running water. There was a pump in every yard. We had to pump the water.
And yes, there was electricity.

Q. About how many people were living in that area with you?

A. The first count that we heard was 175,000 Jews in one square mile.

Q. And in your apartment, how many people were living in there, and how many rooms did you
have?

A. There was one room, but when we moved in, we took a curtain and divided that room. For our family, for example, I was sleeping with my brother in one bed, and my kid brother was sleeping on the floor on a mattress on that half of the room. And my mother and my sister also slept in one bed.

Q. Were you or your family able to go in and out of the ghetto at any time?

A. Up until May the first. That day, the ghetto was closed, surrounded by guards. Signs were
posted all around the barbed wire, stating that anyone just coming near that wire will be shot.

Q. What rules or laws were established by the Nazis for the operation of the ghetto?

A. There was a Jewish council. The Nazis asked who was the oldest. So, a man by the name of Chaim Rumkowski said, “I am the oldest.” The Nazis said, “From now on, you, the oldest of the Jews, will follow all the orders that we are going to issue for the Jewish people. Make sure they are followed to the letter. Otherwise, you are responsible.” Chaim Rumkowski established like a mini-state. He had a Jewish police, a Jewish council, all kinds of departments. They started functioning like a state. They set up housing. They even printed money that was in circulation in the ghetto.

Q. Is that what you call the *Judenrat?*

A. The *Judenrat,* the Jewish council.

Q. Do you feel that the *Judenrat* helped the people?

A. Some have blamed the people in the *Judenrat.* But they don’t actually understand. There was not much they could do to help, but some of them did abuse their power for their own advantage. I don’t know if anybody in that position could have been different. If they had an order, for example, to send 2,000 men to labor outside the ghetto, they made sure that their families stayed behind. So they sent others. Who can blame them for that?

Q. Rumkowski was in charge of the Jewish police, also.

A. He was in charge of everything. Life in the ghetto.

Q. What did the Jewish police do?

A. The Jewish police were supposed to keep order. This was a situation where we lived next to starving. Portions of bread were stolen, sometimes even from one’s own family. Then, it was a system of labor, to work. Factories were established in the ghetto, tailoring factories, shoemaking factories, carpentry, even components for metal -- God knows, probably for guns -- were manufactured in the ghetto.

Q. Did you or any members of your family work in these factories?

A. Of course. I worked in the tailor factory making uniforms for the German army. My sister worked in a factory where they made straw shoes. They were used by the German guards, standing guard in Eastern Europe. My mother worked at a place where they brought in coal and wood they distributed for fuel. My brother also had to work.

Q. How old was he at that time?

A. At that time, he was ten and a half years old. But if he wouldn’t work, he could not get a card,
so he worked as a courier in an office, just running errands.

Q. Were there any Jewish or non-Jewish organizations outside the ghetto that offered help?

A. In the case of the Lód± ghetto, there was no contact with the outside world. Other ghettos, I heard later on, did have contact. For example, if we knew that somebody was very sick and dying, we tried to do something for him. We got a collection together and from our meager portion of sugar, for example, everybody gave one spoon just to help that person.

There was an underground school for the few youngsters in the ghetto. We provided education. It was not allowed. There was a Zionist organization, also, underground. At one time, there was even a theater in the ghetto. Later on, it was closed.

Q. If anyone was caught participating in any of these activities, what happened to them?

A. The punishment at the time was to be sent away to a labor camp. We did not know at that early time about extermination camps. But the people who were sent away for any little thing -- and everything was considered a crime -- were never heard from again, ever.

Q. Did you know of any resistance or underground organizations in the ghetto?

A. I'm ashamed to say that in our town there were no resistance organizations. Not like in Warsaw or Vilna or Kraków or any other ghettos, or Lublin. The Lód± ghetto was clearly non-resisting.

Q. There were no individual acts of resistance?

A. Individual acts. That depends what one calls resistance. If one clung to his faith, I call it resistance. If one tried to help a sick person and helped him to survive, this is also resisting the Nazi pogrom. Armed resistance, I cannot recall.

Q. How long was your family able to remain together in the ghetto?

A. For four years. In 1944, in August, the larger ghetto was liquidated.

Q. Were there any suicide attempts in the ghetto that you know of?

A. Yes, there were a few. People who did that could not take it anymore, because hunger pains are the most horrible pains a human mind can imagine. It's very bad when you're hungry for a few hours and then, maybe, you're hungry for a day or two days, but when it gets longer, you feel like all the insides are coming to your head and are walking on your brain. We could not think about anything else day and night, no matter what the conversation was. You can talk about politics and all of a sudden you start talking about bread and potatoes. All your feelings, all your thinking is occupied with hunger, with your stomach.

Q. What is your most powerful memory that you have of the ghetto experience?

A. During the ghetto -- before the liquidation -- there was in 1942 what the Germans called an

Aktion. Chaim Rumkowski held a speech. Everybody who could went to a huge place to hear what he had to say. He said, the most difficult, the most horrible thing he ever had to do in his whole life was to tell us to give up the children under a certain age and the older people above a certain age, to be sent away.

Q. What age was that?

A. Children under the age of twelve and the older over the age of 50 to be sent away to be resettled in a different place. Rumkowski said, "As you know, the fate of the rest of us depends on following that order from the German authorities." I'm telling you -- I wasn't a father at the time -- I was thinking about committing suicide at that time. I heard people say, "Where is God? How can he let such atrocities be committed? Such crimes? We remember, in Egypt, they took away our children but now? This is the twentieth century. We have to give up our children?" It didn't take long. The Jewish police started collecting people, and they started resisting. It looked like an open revolt against the Jewish police. People fought with them. They didn't want to give up their children. The German authorities saw it was going too slowly, so they took over the *Aktion* and started going from block to block, from house to house. They ordered us to come down to the yard, and they inspected us. People able to work, who were young and fairly good-looking were left. The other ones were taken away and thrown into coal wagons drawn by horses, and just taken away.

Q. Did you lose any of your family or friends during that *Aktion?*

A. Friends? Many of them. Neighbors. I hid my mother. A mother had a choice. She could give up her child and stay behind, or she could go with the child if she wanted to. The same thing with children. One of my cousins gave up a child, and they took it away. The next day, the family didn't watch her, she went back to that center where her child was waiting for transport, and she joined the baby. She went away with them. This was the most horrible time. We called that *Aktion, a Sperre.* It means confinement, like a curfew. We couldn't go out of the house. We had to stay under house arrest. There was no food. We had to eat whatever we had prepared in the house. And this took seven days. After seven days, it was over.

Q. Did you have any actual knowledge of what happened to those people who were taken? The
children, the older people?

A. Well, you didn't have to be a wizard to figure out what will happen to those children, who were thrown into a wagon and taken away. Sick people. If they treated working people the way they treated us, how could we expect that they will treat children, or the sick, old, crippled, disabled any better? The mortality rate was tremendously high. Whole families used to die, especially in the winter months when there was very little fuel. People used to chop up all the furniture because, after all, we needed something to make a fire. Parts of buildings disappeared. And anybody caught taking a board of a house was a candidate to be sent away, because when the Germans sent in an order, five, six hundred, those people sitting in jail for any little thing were the first ones to be sent away. And this how the system worked in the ghetto.

Q. Let's talk now about your deportation from the ghetto.

A. We saw that this was the end because nobody was exempt. Even the police, fire department, all the big shots, they were also ordered to report. It came even the time when the oldest of the *Judenrat* was ordered also to leave and to report to the train depots for resettlement.

Q. Tell me about the day that you left the ghetto.

A. Well, it was, at that time, when my mother said, "I can not run anymore." Actually, there was no more strength for anybody to run, and there were no more places to hide. They knew every hiding place. So, we said we have no other choice. After all, if the Germans wanted to kill us, they would kill us right there. Why would they bring trains? Maybe there is hope, maybe there is a place where Jews live in a different part, farther away. So we went, under guard, of course, to the train depots.

Gertrude Waichman was born on November 14, 1916 in Czestochowa, Poland and was forced to live in the Czestochowa ghetto from 1940 to 1941. She was then sent to Blizin concentration camp, to Auschwitz, and to Bergen-Belsen, where she was liberated in April, 1945.

Q. How did you learn that you had to live in a ghetto?

A. First of all, we had two ghettos, the large ghetto and the small ghetto. A lot of people lived in the large ghetto from 1939 until about 1942. In 1942, they started to send people out to different camps.

Q. What was the name of this ghetto?

A. Czestochowa, my hometown. In Poland.

Q. What were your feelings when you entered that first ghetto?

A. We were scared all the time. They used to come in the houses every few days, and they checked this and that. They took out the men from the apartments to work.

Q. How long did you stay in the first ghetto?

A. Until September '42, on Yom Kippur evening. The police were around our big ghetto, and then they took us out. Everybody had to go to the marketplace. The SS, the police, and everybody were there. There was one commander who looked over everything. They checked the houses, and if people were too sick to leave, or if children couldn't go out, or if somebody didn't want to go out, they killed them right away. And then they segregated people.

They sent them left, right, left, right. When I passed by, I had a little baby, six months old. Before we went out from the house, I said to my husband, "Remember, you go and fight, fight for your life, do whatever you can. I will go with my baby." My mother-in-law

was with us. My husband said, “I am going where you are going, where the baby’s going. We are a family, we’re supposed to go together.” So, as we went down and we were close to the police. My mother-in-law said to me, “Gutka, give me the baby.” [crying]

She said, “Let me hold her and kiss her one last time.” So, she took the baby [sobbing], and she didn’t want to give the baby back to me. She wanted to save the life of her son, because he had said that he was going with the baby and me. They sent me right away, “You go right,” and my husband also went to the right. And my mother-in-law with the baby [sobbing] went to the left, and I never saw them again.

Q. But that’s how you were saved.

A. Yes. After that, they sent us to the small ghetto, wherever there was room.

Q. What were the conditions there? Food, water, electricity, and sanitation?

A. Oh, they were terrible, worse than the large ghetto. We had ten, twelve people in one room, strangers. There were no more children, because they had been sent out with the older people. Just young people were left. We went to work for the Germans, and we had rations. They gave us only so much bread. That’s all. It was very bad.

Q. And was there a lot of illness?

A. Yes, the conditions were very bad.

Q. Were you able to get in and out of the ghetto?

A. No. We were not allowed to cross over to the outside. People weren’t allowed to have any business. They just went to work. The small ghetto was very bad. We still could move around from one street to another. But there were very few streets all together, and people were crowded together.

Q. How did the Jewish community organize to help itself in the ghetto?

A. The Nazis ordered the Jews to form a Jewish committee, the *Judenrat.*

Q. Well, what did the *Judenrat* actually do for you in the ghetto?

A. They served the Germans, who told the Jews that they need to deliver so many people to go to work at certain places. They were in charge. When we were in the small ghetto and went to work, we walked with police. The Poles came and sold us bread. One time, we bought the bread. The SS commander saw us buying the bread. Right away, they took the whole bunch of us, and they sent us out to a camp, to Blizin.

Q. Before you went to Blizin, did you hear about the liquidation of the ghetto?

A. Only after I left. A few months later, they liquidated the ghetto. The main thing was that they

wanted all the educated people, doctors and the engineers and lawyers. First of all, they concentrated them, and then they killed them.

Esther Gastwirth, née Dykman, was born on December 27, 1923 in Vilna, Poland. Starting in 1941, she spent one and a half years in the Vilna ghetto and was sent to a concentration camp near Riga, Latvia, in 1943.

Q. In 1941, when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, you were still living in Vilna, and you were still living in your own home. Is that correct?

A. Right.

Q. What happened? Can you tell me the experience of the Nazis coming into Vilna?

A. Right away when they came in, naturally, we were very frightened. And the streets were flooded with tanks and soldiers. The Polish people right away picked up their heads, everybody was against the Jews. And right away, came all kinds of restrictions. We couldn't walk anymore on the sidewalk. We had to put on the yellow *lattes,* [patches, yellow stars] in back and in front. We had to walk together with the horses, not with the people. We were restricted when we could walk and where we could walk. We couldn't walk in certain places or on certain streets. Just about a week or two after they came in, they came into our house. Three young, blue-eyed Germans.

Q. SS [elite guard of the Nazi party] or soldiers?

A. SS, I think. And they were looking around, and they were knocking on walls, I remember. They started taking our silverware and a very large radio. It looked to me like they were going out already. Then they turned around and asked my father to pick up the radio. "You're not allowed to have the big radio. Come to the police station. Didn't you hear that you had to bring the radio to the police station?" So my father took the radio. And I remember I ran out on the step, and I started yelling, "When are you coming back?" And the soldiers said, "Well, maybe he'll go to work for a couple of days." We never saw him again.

We went to the police station, and the Polish people said, "You'd better go home, because they don't bring the Jewish people here. We don't know what they are doing with them. If you stay here, you'll have to be arrested, too, so you'd better go home." Then I found out that they took 90 prominent Jewish people from Vilna. I had no idea. All I thought was that they were taking people to work. They were working mostly on the station near trains, unloading things, or they were taking them somewhere else to work.

One morning, it must have been around five o'clock, a young Christian boy came to our door. He had fish in his hands. He said, "I brought you some fish. And I want to tell you that I saw Mr. Dykman, and my mother sent me. We saw Mr. Dykman walking towards Ponar." This was where they were shooting all the Jewish people. He told me, "We followed, and we hid ourselves, and we were watching. They shot your father." When I heard this,

I banged the door in front of him. I couldn't believe it. I didn't want to believe it. And I thought that maybe the Polish people were coming to torture us, and we really didn't believe it. It seemed impossible to us that a thing like this should happen, that they should just take people and shoot for nothing? They didn't do anything. So, this is the way they started taking people out.

They were building walls around us. They made this certain little street the ghetto. As a matter of fact, they had two ghettos. They made a little ghetto and a big ghetto. So, after, they pushed us into the streets with our bundles. My house was full of people, but we managed to go into that little room. It was mine and my sister's room which had a hiding place. We managed to occupy this room.

And as a youngster, I remember I was fifteen years old when I started going out in the street. You know, at that time we felt quite safe, because there were only Jews in the streets. I walked the streets to see where the walls were. I wanted to acquaint myself with the ghetto. We found out very fast that we were not safe at all.

At that time, they formed the *Judenrat,* and by us the head of the *Judenrat* was a Lithuanian major who was Jewish himself but married to a Christian woman. The *Judenrat* already had formed some kind of a government. And we had our police, and my friends from school were policemen. They were seventeen years, eighteen.

In the beginning, every week, the Nazis used to come to the ghetto in the middle of the night. They came in with dogs, and we used to hear shouting, lamenting. They used to call it an *Aktion.* And they used to pull out people. People in the ghetto were, like in the beginning, like 50 families, maybe, in one apartment.

There were groups of people taken out to work who were given rations. And we had our own bakeries. The people who didn't go to work were standing on lines to get their rations of bread.

Q. Did you work?

A. I worked. We were always surrounded with soldiers with guns. And we marched for miles and miles until we were brought to where we worked. So I used to wash clothes, the Germans' underwear, their clothes. We used to go in a barn and do this kind of work, or clean the barracks or carry stones, or carry things out from the wagons. And later on, they had organized electricians. They needed electricians, so they made their own house for the electricians outside the ghetto. And they wanted furriers. The Germans wanted fur coats for their wives. They took these workers outside the ghetto, but they were guarded. And after this, they were killed mercilessly.

Q. Did you understand the value of the work permit? And working with the Germans?

A. That meant life.

Q. You understood that at the time?

A. Certainly.

Q. That you wouldn't be taken away?

A. There was no guarantee. Because after a while, we had a night of yelling and screaming,
and they took everybody out from the little ghetto. So, there was no more little ghetto.

In the evening after work, I used to gather on steps somewhere high up. There was a spot where teenagers always liked to go, in one place, and we would sit and look up at the moon and talk about it. Sometimes, someone from the underground, or someone from a different ghetto, or someone with information about what was going on would come. And the young boys were making guns, and they used to bring in pieces of things, metal, and they used to dream only about how to go to the underground.

And I want to tell you also that when we used to work, we were able to bring in some food into the ghetto. We used to hide the food, sometimes under our arms. Our overcoats were always bigger.

There were thieves in the ghetto. People from the underground told us about a doctor whose family made a deal for themselves with the *shtarker* [the strong ones] to be smuggled out of the ghetto for gold or jewelry or something by digging a tunnel. They were murdered. Now these people, these murderers, were from the police. They were judged, and they were hanged.

Q. By the Jewish police?

A. By the Jewish police. That was our own court, our own punishment, our own way.

Q. But these thieves were Jewish?

A. Jewish, yes. And they were hanged, I remember. Naturally, there were all kinds of people.

At one point, we had to go into the *Judenrat,* which had a little gate like a little garden. In this little place we were packed in, and I was standing there with my little sister and my stepmother. The Germans were riding in and pulling people out of the garden. I saw it, and I was covering my little sister's eyes. I tried to protect her, so she shouldn't see what was going on.

People were shot in the streets. The Germans enjoyed themselves in the most brutal ways. They took the Jewish police once, and my friends told me that they went to Ponar where they had killed people. They had to clean up the place and undress the dead people, because they wanted their clothes and their gold.

In the ghetto, the garbage was taken out along with the dead people. Among the dead people and under the garbage, the young people tried to leave the ghetto to run to the underground. We had gotten information that there were big jungles, the Polish forests. And over there, we had to have guns. So, the people were building guns. The Jewish young people, all my friends.

Q. Were there any Jewish or non-Jewish organizations outside the ghetto that ever offered help?

A. I didn't know anything about it. The only time I remember any contact is when we heard

about what happened in the Warsaw ghetto. Somebody came from the outside. We were called into a small room -- all the young people -- and we said that we were going to fight. And he was telling us what happened actually in the Warsaw ghetto, and he said, "You know, this is your last hour. You should consider that. Before this, we are going to revenge." That was toward the end already. So we were preparing ourselves. But nothing came from

our efforts. We wanted to fight, but the eldest of the *Judenrat* or maybe the rabbis didn't want to have all the Jews in Vilna slaughtered. Maybe this way we'd have a better chance. So, they spoke to the soldiers who were outside, and they told them, "Look. We are going to fight. We have weapons. And you are going to be the first ones to die. And you have one chance to survive. We have a group of people with guns. You have to let them out." A group of young people went into the underground, just before they liquidated the ghetto.

Q. Were you in contact with some underground organizations within the ghetto?

A. Very loosely. I knew the people. The only time I was at a meeting was maybe a week before they liquidated the ghetto. There were rumors already that they were going to liquidate the ghetto.

Q. Were you aware of any individual acts of resistance or defiance? I know survival itself is defiance and resistance, but did you experience or participate in or see any of those kinds of instances?

A. If I would have participated, I would not be sitting here and talking to you. Whenever I saw people running away or doing things, they were shot after that. If they tried to run away, they were caught. I personally did not see anybody get away with anything.

Julius Eisenstein was born on August 15, 1921 in Miechów, Poland. He was sent to the Kraków ghetto in 1941 and to the Plaszów concentration camp in 1942, where he remained until May 1944. He was then sent to Flossen burg, Schachwitz munition factory, and Theresienstadt.

Q. Let's talk about when the Nazis, when Hitler, invaded Poland.

A. September 1, 1939. They came into Kraków. Kraków was declared an open city, because
it was a very historical city.

Q. Who declared it an open city?

A. I suppose the Polish government.

Q. What did that mean that it was an open city?

A. That they shouldn't bomb it. They gave in. They surrendered. The Germans just came in one

day, the first of September 1939, and from that time on, for us Jews it was a terrible thing. If we walked out of the house, we were grabbed, and they used to take us to all kinds of work.

Q. When did they establish a ghetto in Kraków?

A. They started the first ghetto in 1941.

Q. When they invaded Kraków, what happened? How did that change your life?

A. About a month or two later, we had to wear those armbands, the Jewish star.

Q. What color was the armband?

A. It was white with the black thing or a yellow star.

Q. Were there any specific laws or rules that were set up for the Jews at that time, before you were moved into the ghetto, about what you could do and couldn't do?

A. There were places where we couldn't go. There were places that we had to report to go to work, and if we didn't go and if they found us, we were beaten and thrown in jail or whatever.

Q. Did your father still run his delicatessen after the Germans came in?

A. Right after they came in, he couldn't go to work anymore. There were some Polish people who took over the business.

Q. Were they people who had worked for him before?

A. They didn't work for him, but they knew us. They saw that my father didn't open up the store, so they opened it up, and they just took it away. They didn't pay anything for it. He was afraid to go out, because he had a beard. They were grabbing any Jew they saw with a beard. They used to take a match, put it to the beard, and light the beard. So he stayed home. He stayed like this for a few months, and then he decided to move back to Miechów, where I was born.

Q. Now the whole family moved back to Miechów?

A. The whole family, except my oldest sister. She was married, and she had a little baby, about a year old.

Q. So she remained in Kraków?

A. She remained in Kraków in the ghetto.

Q. Were you were living in a ghetto when your father decided to move?

A. It was just before the ghetto started, so we hadn't yet moved in. We just left, and we moved
to Miechów.

Q. So you never lived in the Kraków ghetto?

A. But I used to come to see my sister. So I used to know a lot about it.

Q. Were you able to come back, visit her, go into the ghetto, and leave?

A. Yes, at the beginning we used to go in. We used to be able to go in and say hello, and just spend a day or two, and then we used to go back. I used to take off the armband and pretend I was a gentile. That's how I used to do it.

Q. And you were able to enter the ghetto that way?

A. That's right, otherwise as a Jew, you couldn't go in. They wouldn't let you out. They wouldn't
let you in.

Q. Now when did you move back to Miechów? Do you remember approximately when that was?
A. That must have been by the end of 1940 or so.

Q. Was there a ghetto in Miechów?

A. They made a ghetto in Miechów. It was after we came there. They closed it up, and they made it like a ghetto.

Q. Can you tell me what the living conditions were like in the ghetto? Did things begin to change right away?

A. Of course, we were restricted. We couldn't go anyplace. There was no work for us. The Germans used to come in, and they used to make an appeal. We used to go out, and they would take twenty or thirty young Jews out on a truck. They took us to a field somewhere

to dig ditches, and for a while this was like our job. In the evening, they used to bring us back to the ghetto. The next day in the morning, we were afraid they knew where we lived. So, we had to report everyday to go to work with them.

Q. Tell me about living conditions in the ghetto. Was there food? Was there a good supply of
food?A. It wasn't that bad yet, compared to what we had later. So it wasn't too much, but we had

enough food.

Q. Were your father and your uncle able to keep their business open?

A. They were doing business with the ghetto people, not outside.

Q. And the Jews, did the Jewish people have money to buy food from them?

A. They had different businesses, and between themselves, they used to make business [barter]. That's how they were, all the Jews together like this, and some of them were going out also. They used to take us out to dig ditches.

Q. When did things in the ghetto begin to change?

A. They began to change towards the end when they started to take the people out and made selections and sent them out to concentrations camps. That's the time in 1942, when they started to set up concentration camps. Up to that point, where we used to live in our section, Kraków, Miechów, and all these other small cities, there were no concentration camps yet, except labor camps. They used to take us out to go to work. So instead of going to work in Miechów, they took us to Kraków, which was only 40 kilometers away. They used to take us to a brick factory.

Q. Near Kraków?

A. It was a suburb of Kraków. They took about 50 boys my age, about 18, 19, 20 years old. They took us to that place, and we stayed there for a whole week. We used to work over there, but then something happened. I don't know what. They decided that maybe they didn't have enough supervision for us or something. They took us back to Miechów, but they used to take people out to work, and that's how we could bring in some money from the outside.

Q. What about the women? Were they taken out to work, too?

A. Some women were taken out to work, too, but mostly they were confined to the houses.

Q. Were there any Poles, non-Jewish people, who tried to help any of you that you can recall?

A. None.

Q. Let's talk about the activities that went on inside the ghetto. Were there any religious activities?

A. There was no problem in the ghetto, but every once in a while, Saturday morning, some German soldiers came into the synagogue, and they took everybody out to do work.

Q. Were there any educational activities in the ghetto? Were there any schools? Did the

Jewish people try to establish any schools?

A. In the beginning, there were some Jewish girls who used to teach the younger kids.

Q. Were these just held in someone's apartment or was there an actual school?

A. Well, sometimes they met in the synagogue, or there was a special place that they used to
congregate.

Q. Do you know of any resistance or underground activities in the ghetto?

A. We heard that some were trying to resist. Like I remember when I used to visit my sister, some of my friends went to a nightclub, and the nightclub blew up over there in Kraków. The next day, it was in the papers that the Jews planted a bomb over there.

Q. Was that true or was that propaganda?

A. I don't know if it was true. After that, we followed it up. If they arrested somebody or something, they used to come into the ghetto to find out about it, but eventually it quieted down.

Q. Were you aware of any individual acts of resistance or defiance within your ghetto?

A. Well it was like a silent defiance.

Q. How long was your family able to remain together?

A. My sisters, my brother, my father, and my mother were all together until about the middle
of 1942.

Q. And then what happened?

A. Then they came in and they said, "We are liquidating the ghetto." All the people who were living in the ghetto had to go out to a big field. There were a few thousand people there together from different small cities.

They separated us, the young people, especially the men on one side, and the women and the older people on the other side. And then we stayed there in this field maybe for two days, maybe more. We had no health facilities. We didn't have anywhere to go to the bathroom, nothing, just standing there. We were standing still together and then the last day, they started to separate us. One or two days later, we saw a lot of trains coming in. When the trains came in, they asked us to get on the train. One side was for the older people, and the other side was for the young ones. There were two types of trains, one open and one closed. The open one was for the young men. There were maybe 100 in a wagon. There were, I would say, maybe 20 wagons or so for the young people. And the older people and the women, they chased into these closed boxes. That's the last time I saw my father, my mother, and three of my sisters. One sister was still in Kraków.

Q. Did you have any idea what was happening?

A. No, not yet.

Q. When did you find out where your parents had gone, where your family had gone?

A. I didn't, I never found out. They were killed. Nobody survived.

Q. Did they take you to the ghetto in Kraków?

A. No, they took us right away to a concentration camp. It was called Kraków-Plaszów. It was a suburb of Kraków and when we came in, at least 10,000 people were there already with barbed wire all around, electric wire. Each 100 or 150 feet, there was a guard tower with a machine gun on top.

Q. Like a tower of some sort?

A. A tower, a machine gun on top, with a soldier shooting over there and watching the concentration camp.

Q. You said there were already 10,000 people in the camp.

A. Right.

Q. Were they all Jews or were there other people, too?

A. There were no gentile people, only Jews in that concentration camp.

Q. What did you see when you first got off the train?

A. They took us down from these wagons, and we marched up. We saw a lot of people who were very skinny. We had just come in from the ghetto, so we still weren't suffering from hunger as much as they were, and that was the first thing that we saw there. It was very bad. People were looking at us and crying and telling us how bad it was.

Q. Were you numbered?

A. Not yet. They didn't make numbers in that concentration camp. They tattooed a "KL," *Konzentrationslager* [concentration camp] on our arms. With the tattoos, there was a story. Naturally, I met a lot of people who had come together with me from Miechów. So, we saw already that the situation wasn't good. We didn't have our parents anymore. We were all by ourselves, me and my brother, and a few of my friends. So we said, "Let's try and run away." There was a forest. "Maybe we can meet partisans over there. Let's go." We saw that we couldn't last long there in the camp. When they made the tattoos, they let us out. So, we walked over, and we sucked out the ink from the tattoo, so it shouldn't be there in case we ran away.

Q. How did you get the ink out?

A. We put our mouth to it. We sucked out the ink.

Q. And you were able to suck it out?

A. We were able to do it, yes, right away. My brother and a few other people did the same thing. We decided that we were going to try to run away. One fellow, my friend, went out and, he did run away. He hid. The guards had been watching the prisoners, but while he was going in and out of the building, he remained over there, and then he slipped away.

Q. Did they find him?

A. No. He was able to escape. Fifty people came in, and they counted them up. There were supposed to be 50, but there were only 49. They took all these 49 people up on the hill, and they shot them with a machine gun.

Q. All of them?

A. Every one of them. And we found out what happened. So we decided not to run away, because if we did run away, other people would be killed. And when they liquidated the Kraków ghetto, they shot all the old people, whoever remained there. The young men were brought to this concentration camp.

Q. No young women?

A. No. They liquidated the ghetto and they just shot most of the people.

Q. They didn't deport them to other camps?

A. No. They just shot them in the ghetto, and they told us to dig graves. So we dug a grave about 20 feet wide and about maybe 80 or 100 long and about maybe 10 feet deep. We didn't know what it was. We thought that they were going to kill us all from the concentration camp. Then about a few hours later, after we already had dug this, trucks started to come up there. The trucks had dead bodies in them, and the blood was coming out from the trucks. Even with horses and buggies, they were coming in with the bodies. We used to take them down and throw them in the grave. One of the bodies I picked up was my grandmother. I felt like she was still alive. They always shot these people in the head. She just was thrown into the grave and then one layer was laying down already. So we put a little earth on top and then put the other people, because there were a lot of dead people, dead bodies. And that was the finish of the Kraków ghetto.

Arno Erban was born on March 20, 1922 in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Forced into the fortress of Terezín, or Theresienstadt ghetto in January 1942, he was a teacher of boys under the age of 15 there. In 1944, he was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and on to Gleiwitz I and Jaworzno, where he was liberated by the Russians.

During World War II, the Nazis expelled about 140,000 Jews, mostly from the Czech part of Czechoslovakia, but also from central and western Europe, to the ghetto of Terezín. The idea of bulding a ghetto within the walls of Terezín was made effective in November 1941. At that time, Czechoslovakia was already in the hands of Germany, and there were no longer Czech soldiers in Terezín. So, the first transports of Jews started soon after the German decision to convert Terezín into a ghetto. In the first few months, the Jews were installed in barracks. Men and boys together, and women, girls, and little children in different barracks. There was no possibility of any kind of communication between the barracks. Later, the Germans evacuated the civil population to make a place for new transports of Jews. After that, they sealed the ghetto completely, without any possibility for the prisoners to escape.

Following the first transport of Jews from Prague on November 24, 1941, the Council of Elders was formed. This council ran the internal affairs of the ghetto and was responsible to the SS Commando, which gave them the orders and established the rules. The Jewish Council had the terrible task of compiling the lists of those to be deported to “the east.” Nobody really knew what the meaning of the “the east” was. The only thing we did know was that it was something really bad. The Jewish government was also responsible for all the activities in the ghetto, like maintaining order, distribution of food, employment of the people, sanitation, and the child care. Shortly before the end of the war, all members of the Council were sent to Auschwitz and murdered.

Of all the big lies conceived by the Nazi propaganda, the qualification of the Terezín ghetto as a paradise ranks as one of the greatest. It said in effect, “While the German soldiers are dying in the battlefields, the Jews in Terezín are sitting in cafes and eating cakes.” The truth could not have been more different. From November 1941 until May 1945, it was “the anteroom of hell.” From approximately 150,000 people who were deported to Terezín, 35,000 died there from starvation and almost 90,000 were shipped out to the death camps. Through Terezín passed 74,000 Czech Jews, 43,000 from Germany, 15,000 from Austria, 5,000 from Holland, and some 500 from Denmark. In the last period of the war, the camp received 1,500 Slovaks and 1,000 Hungarian Jews. Of the 15,000 children under the age of 15 who passed through Terezín, only 100 survived.

In a place with a garrison of about 3,500 soldiers and about the same number of civil inhabitants, the Germans established a ghetto with 50,000 people. Prisoners lived in large barracks and houses in town including cellars and backyards. Men and women continued to live separately in large buildings. Children under the age of 15 had their so-called “homes.” There were about 10 to 20 people squeezed in one room, most of the time sleeping on the floor. Prisoners at Terezín had to observe a number of various prohibiitions which affected them very much. There was a ban on the possession of cigarettes, medicines, money, matches, or lighters, prohibition to any kind of communication with the outside world, and also a curfew was imposed. Punishment for violation of these regulations was severe. For instance, early in 1942, the Nazis hanged 16 men who had secretly sent letters from the camp. The objective of these executions was to intimidate the other prisoners. After that, the offenders were sent to Little Fortress, where they were killed.

Yet, among the hunger, cruelty, and death, the inhabitants of the ghetto preserved their essential humanity, and artists continued to paint, singers to sing, and poets to write, while a cruel fate struck all who died or were deported. The deportation to Auschwitz was an everyday possibility, and we never knew when it would be our turn.

The children in Terezín were quite creative. They wrote poems, and they produced a lot of good drawings and paintings. Some of these artifacts survived the war and are shown around the world. The Terezín motto to survive and to demonstrate that the Germans could beat us but they could not subdue us was “I live as long as I create and I am able to absorb culture.” That was our cultural resistance. As a member of the Czech resistance movement, I was practicing with the boys some paramilitary exercises for an armed revolution in the ghetto. Unfortunately, the transports to

Q. The Germans paid this money?

A. Yes, this is how I found out what happened.

Q. So where did you go when this woman had thrown you out?

A. I went back to my mother, not knowing if I would find her because nobody knew. Then my mother had to sell every single thing in the house. When she went to a certain street to collect the money from the sale of our things, she was rounded up by the Fascists. The Italian Fascists had picked up my mother, my sister with the baby, my other sister, and my brother, who was with my mother. And they would round them up and put them in a restaurant until they would gather more Jews. They could make more money and take them on the trucks to ship to concentration camps.

My brother wanted to run away before he was taken in, and the Fascists wanted to shoot him. So my mother went like this with her hand and hit the Fascist’s hand, and my brother was able to escape. My sister ran home to me with the baby. She was crying and said, “They took Mama and Sylvana and, I don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Q. Were you aware of concentration camps?

A. No. We were not aware of the atrocity that took place or of what was going to happen. We wanted to know what happened to my mother, so a lady downstairs in my building who was not Jewish, said, “Come on. Let’s go find out together.” We went near the Tiber, and we could see where the restaurant was. The lady said, “Now you stay here. Let me go check.” Before she went there, we waited about an hour. When she came back, she said, “I think they are letting the women and children go.

Father John Januszewski was born on December 20, 1911 in Kolsadki, Poland. He was a Catholic priest who refused to cooperate with the Nazis, and consequently was sent to the concentration camps of Sachsenhausen and Dachau.

A. One evening, in February 1940, the chief of police and the manager of the district came to talk with me. “Now the church authority is closed. And the only thing for you to do is to work with us.” I said, “Gentlemen, you took an oath, and you are faithful to your oath. I am in the same position. I took an oath, and I will remain faithful to it.” “Oh,” he said, “then we have concentration camps, and you will be sorry.” I said, “The decision is in your hands.”

Q. Was this the first time you had heard about concentration camps or had you heard about them from other sources?

A. I heard. There was one priest who wrote to his family, but naturally it was very little. And the way he presented it, it didn't look too bad.

Q. So you knew that the letters were sent under duress?

A. Yes. I wrote to my family, too, from Dachau and Sachsenhausen.

Q. Can you describe the day when you were sent to the concentration camp?

A. On the 26th of August, 1940, in the morning, I went to church with two altar boys. I had just started the liturgy when I heard some heavy motorcycles starting. I told one of the boys to go quietly and see what was going on. He said, "There are some policemen speaking with your assistant." So, I took the key and opened up the door. The chief of police told me I was being transferred to Germany. He said a German priest would be sent here. First, they brought me to a jail, and then some SS men came and brought me to a transfer camp for three days, where they assembled about 180 priests and seminarians. They took us to a train, and we went to Berlin. Some of us had been very optimistic that maybe we were being sent to a monastery. From the train, they put us on trucks and closed the trucks up, and after a while, we arrived at Sachsenhausen.

Q. Nobody told you where you were go-

ing? A. Nobody.

Q. And you didn't know what Sachsenhausen was?

A. No. I understood German, but some of the priests did not. There was an older priest with a walking stick who didn't understand the orders. A guard took his stick and hit him over the head with it. He started to bleed. We saw right away what kind of place this was.

They put us in a big shower, took our clothing off, examined us, and cut off all our hair. They gave us different clothing, shirts, and wooden slippers. And then camp life began. We had to learn how to make our straw beds. All the covers had to be in line. We had to stand outside to be counted. Then they started to use us to work, for example, to carry bricks from one place to another.

Q. Were the priests kept together?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you share the same barracks?

A. Yes. These were buildings made for 45 people, but by the end, we had 300 people in them. There was a time when they had ten men sleeping, pushed together on five small beds. One with a head here, one with feet there, like sardines.

Q. Was there any religious activity conducted in the camp?

A. Yes. For some time, we could attend mass with one priest early in the morning. The priest

even got up early. That was for a short time. We had a chapel in Sachsenhausen.

Q. Do you know if there were any religious activities for the non-priest inmates of Sachsenhausen?

A. No, there were not, and we had to be very careful even to speak with someone. If some of the lay people knew we had the sacrament and the confession, I had to know who that person was. Otherwise, the spies wanted to catch us.

Q. Were you able to give the sacrament at confession as an individual priest?

A. Yes, we priests heard our confessions between ourselves. But if a lay person wanted to come, we would speak with them, and we would pray with them, but we had to be very careful.

Q. How long were you in Sachsenhausen?

A. From August 29, 1940 to December 13, 1940. Then we were put on a train. Again, the optimists thought maybe we were going to a monastery with better conditions. The next morning when we looked, we were in Dachau.

Q. Did you know what Dachau was?

A. Yes, we heard about it in Sachsenhausen.

Q. Were you in a special compound for priests in Dachau?

A. Yes. Special blocks. Blocks 28 and 30.

Q. Just priests? How many priests were there?

A. I don't know. But I have a book with the statistics. From 1940 to 1945, about 1,700 Polish priests were in Dachau. Of those, 857 died there, and 830 were liberated.

Q. What was different about the routine in Dachau than in Sachsenhausen?

A. In Dachau, sometimes a lot of snow fell overnight, and we had to clean the snow off the streets. We priests had to carry the coffee in the morning, the soup at mealtime, and the tea at night. That was our duty. And then we started to work in the fields.

Q. In the camp?

A. No. Outside the camp, they had a plantation where they planted different plants, herbs, and so on. We worked there.

Q. When you worked outside in these fields, were you working with other prisoners or were these just the fields where the priests were supposed to work?

A. Other prisoners.

Q. And were you able to talk with them and discuss what was going on?

A. It was very dangerous to talk. I was once almost punished for that, but it didn't happen.

Q. Were you aware of any extermination activities going on at Dachau that involved any of the prisoners?

A. No. There was a crematorium.

Q. You knew about the cremato-

rium? A. Oh, yes.

Q. And you knew what it was for?

A. Yes. I even worked as a bricklayer building the new crematorium. Oh yes, I knew. I saw how they put the bodies in the oven, and they got the bones out. When I worked around the crematorium, I saw a few executions. They shot people.

Q. Basically, what you saw in the crematorium were people who had died from overwork and hunger?

A. Malnutrition and beating and whatever.

Q. Did you ever think about giving up?

A. No. I knew that I was not guilty of anything. I didn't do anything wrong. My only guilt was that I was Polish, and I was a priest. That was the reason. Many times I even felt sorry for the SS. If they would just know what they were doing.

Q. Father, let's discuss for a moment your views on the reasons for the arrests of the priests throughout occupied Europe. What do you attribute that to?

A. I think generally, as Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf,* he wanted to exterminate all organized religions. And so, there should be the only one religion, his own religion.

Q. Do you think he viewed the priests as a threat to his domination of Europe?

A. Not exactly, but I think he knew that the priests in Poland had great influence on the people. The people were very close to the priests. And so long as we would have been with the people, there still would be some resistance, some spiritual resistance, some strength which he wanted to break.

Abraham Bomba was born in Cz~stochowa, Poland on June 9, 1913. He was forced to live in the Cz~stochowa ghetto for one and a half years, during 1941 and 1942. He worked as a barber in the gas chamber at the Treblinka death camp, from which he escaped.

A. For me, the time which was the worst in my life was the evening before the holiday of Succoth, in September. That was when, in 1942, the second transport from the city of Cz~stochowa was sent to Treblinka. I was selected along with my wife, my baby, my mother, my brother, and other members of my family.

At seven o'clock in the morning, we were transferred to the trains, pushed into the wagons with rifles. They packed between 150 and 180 people into each car — one right on top of the other. You couldn't take a step or even turn around.

I was near the window. Early the next morning, I saw a sign, "Treblinka." I had never heard of it. It wasn't on the map. We came into Treblinka. They opened the doors, and we went out, those who could go out. We had over 300 dead people who choked to death inside the train. It was hot, very, very hot.

We went in, and right away they separated women and children to the left side, into the barracks, and men to a huge, open place. The women went in, and we never saw them again. I would say we were about 2,000 men. An order was given to take off our clothing. We undressed ourselves and were waiting. Then another order came to go into the extermination gate. I spotted a cousin of mine there. He said,"Look, I have an order to take out a few people. I am taking you out. Is there anybody with you?" So, he said he had two cousins, myself and another one. He called them to stay on the side. We got dressed, and we stood on the other side. After the people went into the gas chamber, all these packages were outside. They took us, about 10 or 15 of us, and we had to clean the place spotless.

Q. How did you know it was the gas chambers?

A. The minute you came in — not only there, but several kilometers away — you could feel the smell of it.

Q. You mean the crematoria?

A. Yes, that is the gas chamber. You shouldn't have to know about it or see it, but just the smell. . . . And when we cleaned up that place, we had to bring all those clothes from this undressing place to another, a very big place. It was the first time I saw a place like that in my life. I would say it was at least eight to ten stories high with the items separated: clothing, shoes, money, everything. I couldn't imagine what a thing this was. Some of us, about twenty-five people, thought maybe this isn't the gas chamber, but most of us knew this was the last way, that there was no way out from that.

Q. Did you see the other people moved into the gas chamber?

A. Yes. We saw them going in through the gate to the extermination camp. What was going on inside, no, at that time, we didn't see it.

Q. Did the Nazi guards tell these people anything at all?

A. No. They didn't talk to the people. The only thing they did was take out the kids and the old people, and they took them to an open place. They called it the hospital, but there was no hospital. There as a big ditch, I would say, 50 meters by 50 meters. At the end of that ditch, there were Ukrainians with their guns.They killed the children and the old people who couldn't walk to the gas chamber, and threw them into the ditch. And we had to clean that place up. Everyone started doing all kinds of jobs. My job was to look for pants, jackets, shirts, and other materials, and everything had to be separated according to what kind of material it was, wool, and so on. That was my job for a couple of hours until we finished. Then we got some coffee and a slice of bread and went into the barracks. That was our first night in Treblinka.

The barracks was made of wood. There was no floor, only sand, and at night it was pretty cold. At five o'clock in the morning, everybody had to get up, and they counted us. Each one of us got a number. Mine was 88. From my group of 25 whom they had taken out the day before, about 20 or 21 of them were taken to the gas chamber, and they gassed them. I don't know why me and two or three others were allowed to live longer. I will never know. Just a matter of luck, I don't know what to call it.

Q. In time, your whole family had been taken?

A. In fifteen minutes, there wasn't anyone left from my family, and this I knew from the first night on. I talked to people that first night. I couldn't sleep at all. Most of us were crying because in one minute you lost a family, which — I don't know how to describe it — it was more than life alone. And that was going on day by day, like that. Hundreds and hundreds of people were killed before they could even go into the gas chamber. One time there came an order, "Who is a barber?" I was a barber, so I met some people over there, who came with the first transport, and they knew people from my town. There were two or three of them, and they knew I was a barber, and they took me and about twelve or thirteen other barbers.

What was the job? To cut women's hair. Where? In the gas chamber. It was the first time I went through the gate. The wires were camouflaged with trees, so you couldn't look through and see what was going on on the other side of the camp. The camp where I had been working was called the first camp. The other side, where it was barbed wire with trees and grass around the wire, so it shouldn't be visible, they called the death camp or the number two camp. That was the first time I went through that gate and went into the gas chamber. The commandant said, "You have to do the job in a nice way and make the women feel like they are not going to die. They should just feel they're getting their hair cut and then going to take a shower."

And they transported every day, I don't know how many sacks and sacks of women's hair, and that was the job I did in the gas chamber. The minute we got through, we went out, and they closed the door from one side and from the other side, and about ten minutes after, from the other side where we couldn't see it, they took out the bodies. The new transport of women came in, and the same thing was going on until the transport was finished. Then we went back to the first camp for our usual work.

John Gregussen was born on January 16, 1925 in Trondhjem, Norway to non-Jewish parents. Active in the Norwegian resistance movement, his underground activities included helping to smuggle people hunted by the Nazis into Sweden. He was arrested by the *Gestapo* in 1943,

and was sent to prison, and then to the Sachsenhausen and Neuengamme concentration camps. He was rescued by the Swedish Red Cross in April 1945.

A. I was arrested in the fall of 1943. Luckily enough, I wasn't carrying a gun at the time, so I was clean. But I was chained and brought to the fifth floor of the *Gestapo* office. I found that four of my friends were already there.

In the beginning, they took us to the toilet when need be, but later on, they couldn't care less. Our human needs, so to speak, were not taken care of. From those cells, we were taken from time to time to interrogation and in the beginning, they were nice to me. They gave me a cigarette and took my chains off and made me feel, "My God, this is not too bad after all." But when they started asking questions I felt I couldn't answer, that's when they started putting the squeeze on. They broke a couple of fingernails and put salt underneath them. They gave me a good hiding; they woke me with a bucket of water. Then they put me back in the chair and started all over again.

And everything we said or didn't say or didn't want to say was taken down in testimony. They didn't leave us for a moment in peace, to emphasize that if we did not confess to this and that, according to a list they had, we would be shot tomorrow, and that was it. They had a list of charges against me about half a mile long for things I'd never heard of before, things I only knew about, and some things I actually did do. So I kept quiet until they nearly knocked my brains out. I thought, "Okay, I'd better tell them I set fire to that building," so I did. That kept them off for a while.

In the meantime, we had been in these heating cells for eleven days and eleven nights. Believe me, that's quite an experience. Sitting in these cells with chains on my feet and with my hands chained underneath me, I had no way of committing suicide. They didn't give me anything to drink, and that bothered me more than anything else.

After eleven days, we were taken up to a German prison where we were put up on the top cells. I later learned that all the death cell prisoners were kept there. We were placed one in each cell, with steel chains and no mattress to sleep on, and no blanket. They gave us a pillow to put on the floor. I was kept there like that for about two months, chained up the whole time. From time to time, I was called down for interrogations.

One morning, three senior *Gestapo* officers came along. One of them read a paper that my case had been reviewed by a German military court. On the basis of what I'd confessed to, I was doomed to die by shooting. They also informed me that my friends had received the same sentence, and then they left. I thought, "My God, I'm going to die." At that time, I was sixteen or seventeen years old. I didn't fancy the idea of dying. But I couldn't see any way of escape either. On the 7th of January 1944, the same senior officer came back and informed me that my case had been reviewed together with the four others, and I had been sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor to be served in German prisons.

At the end of January, I was told to be ready to come downstairs the next morning to be transferred over to a concentration camp outside of Trondhjem, which was called Salstad. Salstad had a bad name, because people who went in never got out. The next morning, I was piled into a bus with a few others but kept separate. We were taken up to the cells up on the top and

kept in solitary confinement. I was there for about six weeks.

During that six-week period, they tried to use every method known under the sun to break our morale, our resistance. They took us down in the morning and gave us exercise between 9:00 and 11:30, because we were supposed to have meal at 12:00. Then they took us down again from 2:30 to 4:00 in the afternoon. During these exercise periods, it was a miracle that we survived at all, because if we couldn't do what they commanded us to do, they would either kick us or shoot us. Or they would give us a good hiding and send us back up, and we weren't allowed down again.

One day, we were again loaded into buses and driven down to the railroad stations and loaded into boxcars. The boxcars were then transferred over to a ferry. We finally ended up in Kiel, Germany. We were put in a penitentiary, run by the *Gestapo,* which was one of the most severe institutions you could find. If they found an excuse, they would behead us, chop our heads off. If a prisoner started shouting, they just took him aside and shot him. Simple as that. We came there for the final event, that was it. Outside the window, we could see a gallows with five ropes. They didn't bother with one at a time, it took too long. So now and then, they had a hanging, and everybody was called out to witness the hanging. Eventually we got used to it.

We did some work on the roads after the bombings. But later on, they found out that we had a red triangle beside our prison number, and we were no longer sent outside to do any work. We were kept inside the prison and thereby also denied any kind of possibility of organizing with one another, to steal bread or potatoes, or whatever we could steal to survive. The only way we could survive was by using our fellow prisoners. When one prisoner became ill and died, we kept him for as long as we could until his corpse started to smell. In the meantime, every day we collected his rations which we divided between us. That way, we survived the best we could.

In the camp, there was a man in charge of each barracks called the *Blockältester.* He was a block sergeant and was usually a criminal prisoner. He couldn't care less about our survival or anybody else's except his own. He was the man that divided the ration of soup. He had a great big soup ladle which was quite heavy. If it suited him, he would knock us over the head with that ladle, and we'd lose our ration of soup that day, just like that. So that meant, at times, when they had made a deal with somebody else to give away, for example, twenty rations of soup, somebody had to pay for it. So, quite a few people got a good hiding and no soup that day. At that time, we received no mail from home. I wasn't aware of whether my mother knew of my whereabouts, or if I was still alive.

From there, we were sent further east to Sachsenhausen. At one side of the camp, there were six barracks, totally isolated, which were inhabited by Jewish people. In the beginning, I didn't know what they were doing, what they were there for, or why they were being kept in isolation. There was a wall around these barracks with a guard outside.

We later found out that Hitler had a counterfeit operation in that camp, working in these barracks. The Nazis distributed counterfeit money, and these Jewish people produced it.

They were never intended to come out of there alive, and they didn't, to the best of my knowledge. But that's where he printed a great amount of his counterfeit money, millions of marks, dollars, francs, you name it. They were printed right there in the German concentration camp.

Q. How did they punish you in Sachsenhausen?

A. If, for example, someone was hungry and stole a loaf of bread and was caught, or even if it was only two slices of bread, they made the person bend over a table, and they would give that person 25 lashes on his back with a rubber hose with lead in it. That meant he couldn't walk for about fourteen days afterwards. We had a Russian fellow, he stole a leather bag from a motorcycle in order to make soles for his shoes. It was wintertime, snowy and wet and cold, and he was walking in his bare feet, practically. He would have died. He stole that, so he died anyway, because he got 50 lashes on his back. It happened at the place he was working, while we watched. And then we dragged him into the camp where they took him and hung him on top of that. We had to stand and watch every hanging until the man was declared dead. Only then would they release us to go back to the barracks. Sometimes, the gallows failed, and the rope broke. Either that or the man's neck didn't break, and it took quite some time before he was declared dead. Other times they didn't bother, and they shot him.

While passing through the main gate of Sachsenhausen to go to work, we were always subject to a kick in the back or a kick in the pants from the guards standing alongside us who counted us as we passed by. What we carefully did was to take our aluminum plate and hang it on the side we passed them on, so they would only kick the plate. We'd take a stone to knock out the dent, once we got in the woods, in order to make room for our soup.

In the fall of 1944, the camp capacity came to a bursting point. The crematorium was, at that time, working day and night. And people were standing, lined up between the outside and inside walls on the way to the crematorium. You could smell it, because there was no way of avoiding it. There were fellow prisoners working in there, so we knew what was burning.

One morning, 300 children, the youngest one was about eight months old, were brought into the prison. These children were given a whole barracks for themselves with two special guards to look after them. The youngest children were not assigned prison numbers, only the older ones. We were told they'd been picked up in Warsaw and the surrounding area and were transferred over to us. Nobody knew what was going to happen to them. Well, one morning, the barracks was empty. They were gone, and we all knew where they went.

In February 1945, early in the morning one day, about 800 of the Luxembourg police were called out to attention in the middle of the area and were moved on to the crematorium. Time went by and most of the members of the Hamburg police that had been in opposition for one reason or another were taken out early one morning. They went the same way, up the chimney.

In April 1945, in the middle of the night, the guards came and called out everybody up to the last name of X, which also included me, to scramble to attention outside, bringing every belonging we had. We saw the *Kommandant* of the camp coming in with his staff and a funny-looking fellow. He turned out to be Count Bernadotte of Sweden. We still didn't know what was going on. He came forward, and he spoke to us. He told us that he'd gotten permission from Himmler to transport us to Sweden and liberty. The buses were driven to the main gates. We thought it was a fake, but they started loading us onto Red Cross buses. I was taken to Sweden and nourished back to health there. Then I made my way back to Norway. I learned that my father had died, and my mother didn't think I was alive, because I'd been listed as missing.

Judy Freeman, née Beitscher, is a child survivor who was born on March 2, 1929 in Uzhorod, Czechoslovakia. This area became part of Hungary in 1940. Persecution by the Nazis did not begin until 1944, when Judy was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Guben, and Bergen-Belsen.

Q. Tell me about the day that you left the ghetto.

A. It was a terrifying day when the order came that everyone must leave. We gathered up our belongings, and we were ordered under guard to march to the railroad station. Cattle cars stood on the railroad siding. And, at that point, there were brutal orders given, or counting off a certain number of people and shouts of "Get in, get in. Hurry up." And when I looked around to see how many people they were jamming into the cattle cars, it was horrifying. It was an enormous number of people. Eighty people, a hundred people, it was hard to count. All I knew was that it was very, very crowded, and we didn't really have any space to sit down or lay down or be comfortable. As soon as the allotted number of people were jammed in, they locked it from the outside. It was like a sliding iron lock and if I live to be 100, I will hear that click from the lock. That was the most terrifying sound that one can imagine, because it made me feel like we're locked in, and we cannot get out.

Q. Did anyone attempt to hide or escape?

A. People were too frightened to try to hide or escape because when the orders came, they always ended with, "Anyone disobeying will be shot." And, so nobody wanted to take that chance. I don't think anyone imagined that they were transporting us from what was Hungary to Poland only to be exterminated upon arrival. Who would have imagined anything like that?

Q. Tell me about your trip to the camp. Did you have any food?

A. We took food with us, but we didn't know how long the journey would last, so the food was gone maybe after a day or so. But more than the hunger, the lack of sanitation was a nightmare. There was a bucket, one bucket, in the cattle car. That was the toilet. And the agony of having to go publicly, number one, was a horror and, second, after the bucket filled, there was no place to go. It spilled out, and the stench was unbearable. Periodically, when the train stopped, an SS man opened the door, the latch, and boarded each cattle car and ordered someone to take the bucket out and empty it. This happened either two or three times during the entire journey. But, in the meantime, for the rest of the time, it was horrible.

Q. Were there any escape attempts?

A. No. I don't know of any.

Q. What was the condition of the people during the transport?

A. Their condition was deteriorating with every hour. Everyone was frightened. They were moaning, and the children were crying, and people were saying, "Give me a little more space. I can't breathe." There were no windows. There was just barely a little bit of an opening in these cattle cars, covered with barbed wire. So it was terrible. We couldn't

breathe, we couldn't sit, we couldn't lie down. There was not enough food, no water, no bathrooms. So you can imagine.

We finally stopped at Auschwitz. At the moment of arrival, we were ordered off the

train. Q. When did you arrive at Auschwitz?

A. It was early May 1944. The order was given that men and women stand in separate groups. I was immediately separated from my father, and I never saw him again. I was standing with my mother and my sister and my female relatives. Then we had to file past Dr. Joseph Mengele who was always there to sort the new arrivals. With a wave of his hand, he decided who will live and who will die. He would send people to the right or to the left. Those to the right were allowed to try to live. Those to the left were marched to the gas chamber upon arrival. And if I tell this story a thousand times, it doesn't make any sense to me ever, ever, how they devised a system for transporting people long distances only to be killed upon arrival. But the whole thing was based on secrecy and deception. So, this was the gigantic deception.

My mother, my sister and I filed by Dr. Mengele and his assistants. He looked at me and waved me to the right. My sister was twelve. No child under the age of fifteen or sixteen had a chance to survive. All the children under the age of fifteen or so were sent to the left with their mothers, grandmothers, and younger siblings. When I saw that happening, I took some steps to follow my mother and my sister, because I wanted to be together with them. A man in a striped uniform who worked there, who was a prisoner there for a long time, saw me do this. He came, he like bounded up to me, quickly, grabbed my arm and very firmly and very sternly shoved me back to the right side where the young people were. And he said to me, "You were ordered to go in this side." Had he not intervened, Dr. Mengele would certainly not have stopped another Jewish kid from dying in the gas chambers.

Q. What was your first impression of what you saw when you got to the

camp? A. Oh, terror. Total terror.

Q. What did you see or smell or hear or think?

A. I saw armed SS men, rifles on their shoulders, guns in their holsters, dogs on leashes at their sides, milling about, barking orders, shouting, shoving people. I smelled a horrible odor. I had no idea what that was. Everybody was scared. We didn't know what was awaiting us. Conditions were horrifying.

There were thirty-two barracks in the sub-camp where I was sent. We were told to go outside and line up. Eventually the sun came out. We were standing there cold and shivering in the morning in rows of five. I remember holding onto the people in my row until the SS men or SS women or the guards came to our row and then, of course, we had to stand completely still and straight. But we would hold each other and try to get warm from each other's body heat.

After roll call, we were permitted to go to the washroom which was a large building with spigots of cold water trickling out of faucets, slow warm water. And you had to be quick about it if you wanted to get a few drops on your fingers and, perhaps, wash your eyes or

face. That's all the bathing there was. After that, we were permitted to go to the latrine, which was again a large building with wooden benches and holes in the benches. And everyone was given, I think, a minute. Then we went back into the barracks where breakfast was served. A bowl of lukewarm, sweetish tasting, ersatz coffee -- imitation coffee -- was served in one bowl for ten people. And it went around from person to person with a prearranged number of sips everyone was allotted to take.

Q. That was all you had for breakfast?

A. That was it. The rest of the day was spent doing absolutely nothing. We were not taken to work. In the afternoon, there was another roll call for a couple of hours. Again, we were allowed to go to the latrine at that point. Twice a day. If you had to go in-between, you were just out of luck, and it was a horror. And after latrine, we were again ordered back into the bunks. There was no space to stand. A thousand people cannot stand in this space. So we had to be shelved, with three on our shelves, stacked on the shelves, literally. And we received a bowl, in the same bowl that we had the morning ersatz coffee, a bowl of vile-tasting, horrible soup that had no identifiable ingredients in it. It looked green most of the time, and it smelled horrible and tasted worse. And, again, we passed it from person to person.

Our food ration or so-called dinner was the few sips of soup that tasted so awful that I remember holding my nose and saying to myself, "Swallow, swallow. It means life. If you don't swallow, you'll die." And I did not want to die. A little piece of black bread, sometimes with a small pat of margarine, was also given to us at the end of the day. Once in a great while they gave us a little slice of salami or *wurst,* but most of the time we got only bread. And I tried to be very thrifty and save a little piece of it for the morning, which I didn't always succeed, because I was so hungry after just a little bit of time in Auschwitz that it was very difficult to resist eating the little piece of bread that we received.

And as the days and weeks wore on, there were selections among us frequently. Those people who have lost weight or developed any kind of illness or problem or became mentally deranged were taken away. We found out about the gas chambers and knew where the people were taken to. If they selected people who were fairly able-bodied still, we were hoping that they were taken for some sort of work detail, to another section or to another camp. If they looked like they were sick, had blemishes on their bodies, had some scabs or scars or anything, then we were pretty sure that they were taken to the gas chambers. At each selection, we had to remove our dress and march by the selectors, the Nazi overseers, stark naked. Many times we were ordered to hold our arms up in the air so they could see whether the ribs showed, and what condition people were in. And you can well imagine, as time went by, people were getting to be in worse and worse condition. Not only did I lose weight, but I felt hungry constantly -- and it is not the kind of hunger that we feel when we skip a meal -- it is a total, all-pervading hunger that makes every muscle, every cell in your body hurt. It was more than hunger. It was starvation.

While in the camp, I was on my own and tried to help others whenever possi-

ble. Q. How did you do that?

A. I'll tell you how I did that, and that was sort of a unique skill that I came upon accidentally.

I was always hungry, as I told you, and the odor was unbelievable -- the unwashed bodies, pressed together like sardines in a can. You cannot describe what it was like. But more than anything, I wanted to remember what was going on there. The horrible pain when one had to go to the bathroom and couldn't go; the gnawing pain of the hunger; the dirt; the smell; the crowding; the dehumanization when there were selections; the beatings. I kept thinking to myself, "I must remember everything, everything. I have to remember, because the world out there doesn't know what's happening. And I have to live so that I can tell people about it."

So I sort of made mental notes of everything that was going on around me. It was very brutal conditions. Then I noticed that some of the people around me were staring ahead with a blank stare, and they no longer laughed, no longer talked. That was the end of the line for those who gave up and simply did not respond. And I said to myself, "You can't do that. If you're going to remember, you can't become a zombie." So my survival skills evolved from that, and I started to give book reviews to my ten people around me. And I started telling them about movies I had seen and books that I had read. That kept me occupied, kept them interested, and kept my mind going. I did not lose my mind. I was very proud of that.

Q. And you never felt like giving up?

A. No. What helped me to survive was the strong will to live, the strong desire to remember, and the survival skill that I just described, plus, I noticed that whenever there were selections or whenever we were herded outside for roll call, those on the edges of the crowd got hit by either the *Kapo* who supervised us or the SS women who could reach somebody on the edge of the line or the edge of the crowd. So I would mingle into the middle as much as I could. This was another survival skill.

Q. Were there any religious practices that were ever attempted in the camp?

A. Yes, those girls who were very religiously oriented tried to fast on Yom Kippur, for instance. But there were no services or anything like that. There was no way but I remember having an argument with them, where I remember saying that even God doesn't want you to miss that miserable few sips of soup.

Q. Could you tell the functions of the following personnel? The *Kapo?*

A. The *Kapo* usually was the overseer of the work detail. Since my camp mates, my bunk mates and I did not work, we did not deal with a *Kapo.* We had what was called a *Blockältester* [block supervisor or elder].

Q. And what were their functions?

A. They were supposed to keep order. But she was the one who told us at the very beginning, when we first arrived at Auschwitz, about the gas chambers. Since I was with young girls, as the days wore on, we were expecting to see our mothers. We were all expecting to see our family. So, there was crying and moaning and wondering whether we'll ever see our parents or how we get to where our parents are. She got tired of this scene. There was like a brick stove-like contraption in the middle of the building, but it didn't give us any heat or anything, it was just there. She got up on this height and said, "I want you all to shut up. I

don't want to hear any crying, any moans, and any calls for your mothers. You are never going to see your mothers. Your mothers went out the chimney." And we didn't know what she was talking about. She said, "Well, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but since none of you will survive anyway, it doesn't matter. So you might as well know that when you first arrived, your mothers and grandmothers were taken to a place where they were gassed and burned." I thought she was trying to frighten us.

Q. You didn't believe her?

A. No. Not at first. But, then, the evidence pointed to her telling the truth, such as ashes floating in the air, the horrible stench that smelled like burning feathers, and the skies lit up red if ever I looked back at night.

As time went by, there were constant selections. They would take people away even if they didn't look emaciated. And we were terrified of the selections because, at that point, we had the sense of them wanting to vacate the camp by eliminating those who were still alive. And we really were beginning to feel the sense that there was no chance and no hope. And as much as I tried to dodge selections at times when I could, I found myself in a selection.

This was now November of 1944. By then, I was quite skinny, too. I still was on my feet, I didn't have to be carried or anything. I still marched along myself with a large group of people who were selected. I was taken to where I could smell the odors, those horrible, burning flesh odors, prominently. At that point, I knew that as much as I wanted to live, I was not destined to. We were taken into the anteroom of the gas chamber and told to undress. By then, the undressing process was sort of routine, and I didn't feel quite as horrified as the first time. Then we were told to sit on wooden benches stark naked, shivering, terrified, fully realizing that our turn has come. At that point, in front of me were the large, iron gate-like doors, very large doors. A couple of SS men and women came up and down the rows and counted to about half of the room. All those people were told to go through the doors, and the doors closed. That was the actual anteroom to the gas chamber, and those who went through went into the gas chamber.

I kept thinking to myself, as much as I want to live, it's not meant to be. Some of the girls around me were saying prayers. I wasn't particularly religious, I wasn't praying, but I said to myself, "I hope I have been as good a human being as I know how to be. This is the end of the road even though you wanted to come out of this alive." And a miracle happened. An air raid siren sounded. There were a lot of bombings and air raid sirens in those days at that point in the area. The lights went out, and the whole proceeding was interrupted. Those who were remaining in the room and were still alive, me among them, were herded out and sent back into the barracks where we came from. That was the closest I came. That was truly miraculous to me, that the others who went to the doors were gone, and the rest of us came out of it alive.

I was in Auschwitz for seven months. After that, I was taken to a labor camp near Berlin, called Guben. It was a small, little-known camp. Very soon after the arrival of some new prisoners, an order was given that our camp has to be evacuated because the Russians were advancing on Berlin. We were told that we had to leave and, naturally, under guard, in rows of five, we were given a piece of bread. We had no luggage. We had no possessions. We were taken on the road. And this was one of the most harrowing, horrible episodes in the entire system of the Holocaust -- the death march -- where we were forced

to march through the roads of Germany for about eight to ten days in the winter of 1945, through forests and fields.

Q. Who was marching with you? The German soldiers?

A. Yes. But some of them came on horseback, and some were marching with us.

Q. You weren't clothed properly?

A. I had a coat at that point, but many of the people didn't.

Q. And how about shoes?

A. By then, my shoes wore out. I'm glad you asked me that. I had wooden clogs but no stockings. They rubbed blisters, bleeding sores on my feet. The road was snowy. It was very cold. It was wintertime. The snow accumulated on the bottom of these wooden clogs. It felt like I was walking on stilts. It was very difficult to walk, the little piece of bread was gone quickly, and there was no food the rest of the time.

Q. How long did you

march? A. About a week or

so.

Q. And no food. Water?

A. No water. It was snowing. I reached up to the person's shoulder in front of me, and I scooped up the snow in my hand.

Q. How about resting? Any resting, any sleeping?

A. Every so often, they would let us, by permission, sit on the side of the road. Or every so often, we were permitted to move over to the empty side where there was no humanity sitting and use it for a toilet. But no food, not on a regular basis, anyway. All these guards sat down, encircling us. Try to picture this, while we were starving, they unpacked their sandwiches and their thermoses of hot coffee, and they were eating right in front of us. It was torture to watch it. At that point, I encountered the one and only kindness from a German soldier that I've ever encountered personally. He was not an SS man. He was *a Wehrmacht* [regular German army] member, an older man. And he saw me staring in his face as he was eating this big, thick sandwich. So, when he came to the end of the sandwich, about towards the crust of the bread, he put it down on the ground, and he motioned with his head to come and get the crust. And I thought to myself that's what we used to do when we threw something for a dog, but I was so thrilled. I blessed him even for a little crust of bread.

Q. Of the number of people that marched, how many do you think survived the march?

Half? A. I don't know. Less.

Q. Less than that.

A. Much less. Then we were put into cattle cars and went on to our next destination which was Bergen-Belsen.

Dora Roth, née Goldstein, is a child survivor who was born on February 1, 1932 in Warsaw, Poland. She was forced into the Warsaw ghetto with her family in 1940. In 1941, they ran away from Warsaw to Vilna, but when the Germans re-occupied Vilna in 1941, they were forced to move to the ghetto there. In 1942, she was sent to the camps of Riga-Kaiserwald and Dünaberg, Latvia. Finally, she was sent to Stutthof concentration camp, where she was liberated by the Russians in April 1945.

Q. What concentration camp did you go to and how were you sent there?

A. They took us to Riga and then to Dünaberg, where we were working. I remember that when they undressed us, I already knew that there were gas chambers where they put people in a room, opened the faucets, and gas came in. I got hysterical. I said, "I'm not going in." My mother didn't know what to do. I said to her, "Look, you lived enough. You're old enough. I want to live, I don't want to go in." But we had to go in. Everybody was so sure that this was the last time that they would be alive. They said the words *Shema Yisroel* [Hear O Israel] which is the last prayer which the Jewish people have. But it was just a shower. When we came out, we got our clothes.

We had to work in Dünaberg. I had to carry stones and bags of cement. One day, I couldn't pick up the stones because my hands were too small, so the German put me over his knee and spanked me ten times. He said, "You have to work exactly as all the others."

Q. Do you remember how you got from one camp to the other?

A. Yes. We were transported by trains which were all closed, with no windows. I had only a two-inch place to stand, and I was pushed out of my place. I became a living bug, because nobody wanted me to stay or step on them. So, from one end of the wagon to the other, I was pushed around and all bruised. I sat down on someone and started to talk to that person, saying how grateful I was to have a place to sit, because I was so tired. When they opened the doors after three days, I turned around to say thank you, and the person didn't answer. She was dead.

Q. What happened when you got off the train?

A. We were pushed by Nazis with boots. We were dirty and smelling and stinking. We went to this camp, and they had to shower us. They cut our hair. Twice before this in other camps, they didn't cut my hair, because I was good-looking. So, they had pity on me, but this time they cut my hair. We got numbers. We did not have numbers on our arms. We got numbers with a chain instead. We were always called by our number, not by our name. We lost our names.

In the camp, they came twice a week with trucks to take away the people that were about to die, or had infections, or were children. My mother always managed to hide me. One day, she didn't hear the noise of the truck, and she didn't know what to do with me. Now, we didn't have bathrooms. We had pits, as big as this room. She threw me in there, not knowing

how deep it was, because they may or may not have emptied it. They covered it with earth, but she was so desperate. She hadn't heard them coming. They were already in the camp, and they went into the barracks. I was standing in whatever . . . you know, and she took me out, once they left. I stank for many weeks. There was no hot water, and nobody wanted to stand near me. Everybody said, "Take away the stinking little girl." But my mother saved my life. That I can never forget.

Q. Did you live in the same barracks with your mom and your sister at this point?

A. Yes, until my mother died. That is also something I will never forget. I will never forget when someone came to me and said, "Look, your mother died now. Come, little girl, and say goodbye to her." And I said, "This is not my mother." It was a skeleton with big eyes that they threw by the legs into a mountain of skeletons. I just didn't want to say goodbye. There was no goodbye to a skeleton. I think now that I wanted to remember her as a mother and not as a skeleton or as a dead person.

Q. What happened with your sister?

A. We were taken to the gas chambers. We were taken by numbers, this and this person has to get out. So they put us together from all the barracks. We were standing there in front of a gas chamber. You undressed and then you entered the second room. Then they opened the faucets, and you suffocated. So, we were standing in front of that room where you had to undress. I was taken out. My sister went in. If I would have gone in, I wouldn't be sitting here. Two Germans told me I had beautiful eyes, and they told me to get out. "Save yourself." My sister motioned with her hand that I shouldn't follow her. She understood that she was not going out from there anymore, and she waved me away. So I went out.

From then on, my life became a life of loneliness. I was afraid that they would come and pick me up. It was a life which was not life anymore. The lice were eating me up. I was hungry. My stomach turned. I had infections and typhoid. I was lying there, and it was cold. It was not a life one can describe. It was the end. That was the end of humanity.

Q. How did you survive by yourself back in the barracks? Did you talk to anybody?

A. Who talked to a seven or eight year old child? What was there to say? Once my mother died and my sister was sent to the gas chamber, nobody talked to me. So, I pretty much stopped talking. I was hungry. No one could give me food because everybody was hungry. I didn't see any other children there.

My world was the barracks. It was very grey. Every woman looked the same, because they all had cut hair. When people are hungry, with thin faces, you see only eyes. We were wearing the same clothes, so there was no identity. Everyone looked the same, except for me, because I was smaller. I stayed in this concentration camp until the day of the liberation.

Q. Was that in 1945?

A. Yes. They took the prisoners on a death march, but I had typhoid. I couldn't walk anymore. So, they let me stay in the barracks. In the morning, two Germans came with machine guns and sprayed the bullets all over the people that couldn't walk. Because even on the march, if you couldn't walk, they killed you. They were in a hurry, because the war was coming to

an end.

B. A few hours later, the first Russians came into the barracks. I was told that even the tough Russians fainted at the bloody picture that they found in there. Every Russian army unit came with a field hospital with nurses and doctors who were used to seeing blood. I don't know how much blood there was, because I lost consciousness. I woke up in a hospital. I really didn't have the pleasure of being liberated.

Q. Did you get hit by any bullets?

A. Two bullets in my back. I fainted, probably from the loss of blood. When the Germans had stormed the camp, they entered the barracks and fired the machine guns blindly. They were in such a hurry to kill everyone and escape, because the Russians were coming. Whoever had been sitting got it in the head. I was lying on my tummy. So, I got it in my back. Some people probably died, and some people didn't. A few hours later when the Russians came, they found me. I was still breathing. So, they took me into the field hospital, and there I was operated on for the first time. I woke up three or four days later, when I regained consciousness. They had to give me blood because I'd lost a lot. I eventually had four major operations, because they couldn't find the second bullet.

Later, in a refugee camp in Feldafing, Germany, I got a high fever. I was burning and nothing hurt me. So they took me to the hospital and they found out that I had double tuberculosis, which was very contagious. So I was sent to Italy, to a sanatorium, and there I stayed for three years with the nuns, recuperating from tuberculosis.

The story I tell is one of a Jewish child who still does not understand why she had to go through all this. The other day, my grandchild called me up and said, "Grandma, bring me a pair of sunglasses with birds on them." What a different life! She wants glasses with birds, and I just wanted a bigger piece of bread at her age. That's all I dreamed about, a bigger piece of bread. So, it is a very different story to hear it from a child. There were 1,500,000 stories like mine that you could have had, but they died. The real memorial for them is the story that we are leaving to the generations to come. I don't know if they will learn from me. I hope so. I do hope so.

Erwin Herling was born on April 22, 1920 in Bad Ischl, Austria (near Salzburg). He was interned in the ghetto of Clausenberg, Hungary from 1939 to 1941. In 1944, he was sent to Auschwitz along with his family. When Auschwitz was evacuated in January 1945, he was sent to Ebensee, a satellite camp of Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. He managed to keep his father alive and with him the entire time. They were liberated at the end of April 1945 by American forces. He became a director of the Bad Ischl displaced persons' camp in Bad Ischl, Austria.

Q. What were the first sights you saw when you got to Auschwitz?

A. When they opened the door and they yelled, "*Raus, raus!"* [Out, out] We had to go out. In the background were the crematoria. I saw the flames from the big chimney. I thought that they were burning all the belongings that people brought, because then when I got out, I saw the people in the striped uniforms. So I understood that there is no such thing as a pri-

vate place to be. The first thing they did was to separate the men on one side and the women on the other side. It was normal to think after the trip on the train, that we would go to a shower we clean ourselves. It was also normal to think that the women and the men will not go together.

Q. So you and your father remained together?

A. Yes.

Q. And your mother and sister remained together.

A. Right. There was a selection. They selected people to work by professions, and they yelled for carpenters and tailors and shoemakers and home builders. I noticed that the group of people remaining looked like intellectuals, and the physical workers were out by then. So I told my father that we have to adopt some kind of a trade to get out of this, because if we are left here without a profession, they are going to destroy us one way or another. But my father wasn't willing to lie and to say he was anything which he was not.

So they asked for those with the trade of painter. I told him, "We are going to be painters. What is the big deal, a better painter, a lesser painter? We don't have to paint like Leonardo da Vinci." My father didn't even want to do that. I went to an SS officer who was standing right there in a group with Mengele. I said, "There is a man here I know from my place. He is a very good painter but he doesn't want to work." It was a big risk denouncing my father because they could have shot him on the spot. The SS asked me, "Who is the man?" and I showed him. So, he grabbed my father and he gave him a beating. My heart broke right away in pieces. He was down on the ground. But the SS man pushed him into the working group. That was actually the last or maybe one before the last. The rest of the men were taken away straight into the so-called showers. They looked like showers, but they were gas. They gassed the people in the crematorium. They selected my sister to work because she was young. She was sent away to work, and my mother remained there. They killed her.

They put us to work in an armament factory outside of the camp. I worked in the office, and my father also worked in the office as an accountant. During the daytime, while we were working there, we were treated like humans. As soon as we got out from work, it was very-different right away. When we came in the evening, for instance, and an SS didn't like you or you had something on you, they beat you up. Every day, they killed a few Jewish prisoners with their hands. I told myself that I will have to survive this and tell the world as a witness.

In the morning, we got up at three o'clock, because if we wanted to wash and to be clean, it was essential. We had to go before four o'clock when everybody else went.

We were in a selection in December 1944. Selection meant that there came a new transport of two thousand people, and they didn't have space. If someone was in bad condition physically, they were selected for the gas chamber. Two thousand people were sent to their deaths. At that time, which was the end of '44, my father was still in very good condition, but he was about fifty-three years old. So, I searched for a man I had seen whose arm had been injured in an accident. That made him a candidate for the gas chamber right away. Everybody knew that. I tried to maneuver to put my father right behind him and me after. So when the SS grabbed the man's hand and read his number, my father and I slipped through. I told my father to put on his clothes. There were about twenty inches of snow out-

side. He ran for maybe a mile. I don't know where he got the strength from, but out of fear that they would call him back, he ran in the snow. I couldn't keep up with him. That's why I'm explaining this, because this fear and the will to live give you the strength to do things which normally you would not be able to do.

Q. Now how long did you remain in Auschwitz?

A. Till 1945, the 18th of January. At that time, the Russians were very close to occupying the camp. The Germans ran away. They made everybody go on what was called a death march, and we had to march from the camp. We could hear the artillery, shooting, cannons which meant that the Russians were getting close. I went on this march with my father. We walked for about two days. There were many guards with us, and if you couldn't walk, they shot you to death.

Q. About how many people were on this march with you?

A. I would say 20,000. It was in January, and it was very cold.

Q. What kind of clothing did you have on during this march?

A. Rags.

Q. And what did you wear on your feet?

A. We had some sandals of wood [clogs], nothing else.

Q. And were you fed at all during this march?

A. No, there was no food. There was only snow to eat. My father was on the march with me. They had periods where they said, "Sit down," but if you sat down in the snow, you were frozen in five minutes and that would be the end of you. So I did not sit down. I held my father, because he couldn't stay on his feet. We made it to the train for Mauthausen.

Q. How many people, would you estimate, died on that march?

A. We had about 1,200 left alive out of 20,000 people. When the people were dying on the march, they were just left there, and we went on.

Q. What happened to you at the train?

A. These were not cattle cars. We were on coal cars which were open. The trip lasted five days. We had one stop in a little town in Czechoslovakia that was called Drehrau in German. We looked like living dead people. The population took pity on us and threw little paper bags to the train with a little food: a piece of bread, a piece of cheese, a piece of salami. The SS was shooting at them from the train, but I managed to grab one of these packages. It was difficult because I had been holding my father at the corner of the car. There were 100 people on this car. I had to hold him with my back from the pressure of all the people. If someone couldn't hold on, they would be trampled to death. I told my father he had to eat some of this food. We ate snow and survived, and we got to Mauthausen. When I brought him to Mauthausen, he was a bundle of bones in a bag of skin.

Q. What did they do with you when you first arrived?

A. They said we were going to the showers. But only 24 men could take a shower at a time. We were maybe eight hundred to a thousand, so you can imagine, how long it would take to get there. I had with me a piece of gold which I'd stolen in Auschwitz, from Canada, which was the place where they collected and sorted the victims' belongings. I took it with me on the march and I held it in my hand the whole time. When we arrived at Mauthausen, I talked to an SS guard. I told him, "I have here a piece of gold. I'll give it to you, if you let us go to the showers now." I didn't say it was my father, but another man, an old man. It was torture to have to wait in the cold, until we'd get in. So, he said, "Give it to me." I said, "No, first you take me and then I'll give it to you. If I don't give it to you, you can shoot me. But I won't give it to you in advance, no way." He took me in with my father. We took the shower. We cleaned up. We felt much better, and then I went there to this little corner where I hid the piece of gold and I gave it to the guard. My father wouldn't have survived out there in the cold, if we hadn't been moved to the front of the line.

Then we were sent to a satellite camp called Ebensee. We were there for three months. There was very little to eat. We got potato peels that were rotten. We were eating grass, sawdust, everything that was possible.

Q. And during the time that you were in Ebensee, did they have you working?

A. Very hard. In Ebensee, there was a stone quarry. My father was so weak that if he would have gone to work one day, he would have never come back. I managed to keep him hidden in the back of the barracks for three whole months. I brought him food. He was sleeping there in the cold and in the misery. After about two weeks, I took him out to straighten himself out a little bit. That was the only time that he was out during the time I hid him there.

One day about a month before the end of the war, a prisoner came over to me. I'd never seen him before. His face was pale and his eyes like glass. He said to me, "I observed you, how you watch over your father." I got worried because if the Nazis knew that there were a father and a son or two brothers, that was immediately the end. They did not let people in families stay together. I said, "Who are you?" He answered, "Never mind who I am. I'm going to die tonight. I observed you, and I'm going to bring you tonight to replace me on the night shift at the stone breaker machine. Don't ask me anything. Just come with me." He took me to the SS and said, "This man is going to work for me." And the SS said, "Okay." This was a private company from Hamburg. He got me that work and that saved my life. And I never found this man again, never knew who he was, what his name was, or where he came from. Nothing.

The war was coming to an end at the end of April and beginning of May 1945. My birthday was the 22nd of April. They forced us to dig mass graves where they shot the prisoners in the last days, because the American troops were very close by then. People fell in and then came the next group. They put a little earth on top. They were shot. That went on two or three times, until they filled up the graves. I was walking and next to me was an SS. I told him in German, "Today is my birthday. Just on my birthday, I have to be shot." We knew where we were going and what was going to happen to us. He said to me, "Your birthday is today. My birthday was yesterday and the *Führer's* was the day before." Hitler's birthday was on April 20. So I told him, "You know, what is the difference? Let me go so that I will not be shot on my birthday. I promise that by the weekend I will volunteer and come myself."

This was a Thursday. He looked at me, and I felt some communication between us. He kicked me and called me a dirty Jew, but he took me out of the row of people about to be killed. By the end of the week, the war was over, and we were liberated.

Q. Where was your father during this time?

A. I still had him hidden in the barracks. Nobody found him. I hid him in the back of a toilet. He wouldn't have survived, even to go to be shot. When the war was over, I put him in a little push cart and walked eighteen kilometers from Ebensee to Bad Ischl, where I was born. I always say that I was born for the second time in 1945 on the same day as my birthday. You have to understand that we came out of hell. It was an incredible feeling.

When we got to Bad Ischl, we found an American field hospital. They treated my father, and they treated me too. He remained in the hospital for about three or four weeks.

Abraham Resnick was born in Rokishki, Lithuania on February 27, 1924. He was sent to the Kovno ghetto in 1941 and remained there until the time of its liquidation by the Nazis in 1944. He managed to escape and joined a group of partisans in a forest outside of Kovno. At the end of the war, he joined the Russian army and liberated Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

A. We used to work for the distribution of food. It was actually outside the master camp where there were a few houses which were abandoned. We had focused our eyes on one of the houses that was close to the fence, and little by little, we started stealing, some food products, like bread, some sugar, and some water in bottles. We tried to smuggle it out and bring it into this abandoned house. And then one evening, we decided not to go back to the camp but to stay there. We sneaked into the house.

We were fortunate because, at that time, the guards in the camp were already under the impression that they knew much more than what we knew. They were under the impression that they didn't have too much time left for themselves, since the camp was going to be liquidated. It was a good possibility they were going to be sent to the front. And SS [*Schutzstaffel,* elite guard organization of the Nazi party] people were brave people when it came to children, women, and people that were unarmed. But when it came to fighting, when it was for them — especially when they were not behaving properly — their own commanders threatened to send them to the eastern front, which was in Russia. They knew what was going on there and what happened to their comrades.

Q. You were able to get into this house during the day?

A. We were able to get into the house, and we happened to be in this house for about four days and four nights. In the plaza, we saw them starting to take people away, transporting them to the depot. They put them in the trucks.

After the fourth night, we had wire cutters, and we decided to try to escape. At nighttime, we watched very closely. We saw two guards that were walking back and forth. They had to cover quite a big portion of the fence, because this part was not guarded

so much, as it was outside the camp. It was quite fortunate for us. So, we cut through the wire and we sneaked out. We couldn't walk too much because we were afraid that we were going to be stopped. We walked about a mile, a mile and a half, and then we hid in some shops.

Q. Did you meet up with any partisans?

A. No. In the morning, the four of us decided to go. One of the fellow-escapees was very familiar with that region. He figured as long as we were going to go north, not on any highways, we were not going to be in jeopardy. Because of our clothes and faces, anybody could see that we were actually prisoners, escapees.

But fortunately, the front was coming closer and closer. The army was a completely different picture than three years before when the Germans marched into Lithuania. Now we saw them in complete disarray, we saw them running, we saw them with their dusty clothes, we saw them march. Their faces didn't look too good, also we looked bad, but they didn't look too good. And we were not concerned with the Germans, because we knew the Germans wouldn't be too aware, because they were too occupied with their own fate.

But we were very concerned about the Lithuanians at that time, because they were the ones who actually helped the Germans in the beginning. They were the ones who were discovering Jews. The secret police were as bad as the Germans. They were also heading all the massacres. The bloody hands were mostly from the Lithuanians. Because of that, we kept getting away from the city, as far as possible. We knew that about twenty miles from there was a city by the name of Yanova. This one city, Yanova, was between Kovno and a forest. We knew if we could reach the forest, we might be able to get in contact with the partisans, because they were already operating from there. The Germans were allergic to forests. They used to go up close to the forest, but inside the forest they knew was not a good place for them to be in and to operate. In the morning, we tried at one time to cross the highway.

My friend, the one who knew the region, made a slight mistake. He didn't realize that to cross the highway, it was better to do it at a time when you have much more movement, when it's very early in the morning. It happened to be that we started crossing the highway, and suddenly, a man with a rifle stopped us and asked us for our papers. Of course, we didn't have anything, so we just started running. He took off his rifle, and he started shooting at us. He hit one of our friends in the leg. One man that was riding a bicycle followed us, but the three of us dispersed in three different directions. I remember I was really running for my life. It was incredible how we ran that day through a potato field and near some sort of shops. We ran tremendously, and after a while, I was exhausted. I threw myself inside the shops, and I didn't know what happened to the others.

Q. Did you ever find them?

A. No, I never saw them again.

Q. Where did you go?

A. This is something that I can remember like it was yesterday. After a while, after I came to myself after this long run, I heard voices. Apparently, they were looking for us. After a

while, they gave up. I was just laying without movement. Then when the night came, it was still in March and in Lithuania, it was very cold at that time. I felt cold. I started walking towards the woods, and there was a little pond, so I headed towards it. I got some water to drink, and then I remember the next two days, I was just living on berries and leaves. What I did was I took some grass and piled it up during the day. It dried out, and during the night, I used to cover myself with that because it was freezing.

There I was, and I figured I'd give it a couple more days, because apparently they were looking for us again. This time they went around with horses. This place where I was happened to be next to a little camp of Russian prisoners and some civilians. At this little pond I saw a lady who came to wash clothes. When I saw her I knew she was Russian, because she was communicating in Russian. Since I spoke Russian, I called upon her.

Apparently, I looked terrible. She got scared. I told her I was an escapee and asked her to help me. She was very gracious, very nice, told me I should just wait there for a little while. I figured one of the two: she's going to turn me in, or she's going to help me. She brought me a bottle of milk and some meat. She told me she also has one of the prisoners.

She informed me that the partisans were not too far away. From there, it was about like three to four miles in the woods to where they were. They communicated with them. So, the next day, she told me that one of the Russian prisoners was also at large. And he was going to join us and lead me toward the woods. The next day, she brought him over, and she told me we should stay until nighttime and then move around. As best as I remember, we moved towards the woods that night. In the woods, we could move around easily because we knew that the Germans wouldn't look for us there.

Now, on the second day, my friend, the Russian, told me that he's going to go farther; I should wait a little while. About an hour later, he came with two armed men with civilian clothes who spoke Russian. They introduced themselves. They said that they were partisans. They also mentioned that the part of the front which was in Lithuania had been taken. There was a river Nemenis, which ran across Kovno. He told us that they had very severe battles on the other side of the Nemenis, and that they felt that very shortly, the Russians were going to come. But he told us we were going to get some arms, and he gave us certain instructions. He told us that the next day, there were going to be some people coming down. Their assignment was to harass the Germans as much as they could and also to watch for them. As soon as their army would come closer, they had to give certain signs to the army that the first troops were coming. We started getting better food, because they had supplies. We were there for about fourteen or fifteen days with them.

Q. Did you actually do any fighting?

A. We didn't do any fighting. What we did mostly was to check certain places. There were a few people wounded. We took care of them also. We heard a tremendous amount of fighting that was happening between tanks. After it quieted down, it was very quiet. We put our ears toward the ground, and we could hear some tanks approaching. We didn't know whose tanks, or who won the battle or anything. But in only a few hours, we heard speaking. First of all, we saw two tanks which were damaged coming by very fast. We knew they were German tanks. Then afterwards, we saw a few Russian tanks approaching, and we saw some people. It was sundown, and we heard people singing

and dancing, and we knew that it was the liberators.

David S. Cwei was born in Vilno, Poland on August 25, 1916. Joining the partisans in 1943, he fought with them in the Narocz Forest outside of Vilno. After being liberated by the Russians, he joined the Russian army and was wounded in fighting near Berlin.

A. I asked my father, “Listen, can I talk to you alone?” So everybody walked out, and I told him that I was in contact with the partisans. “I will stay a little while, and then I have to go away.” And I took out my gun and, my God, my mother got very scared. She said, “My *kind* [child], what are they doing? Take away the gun!” So I put the gun away in a cellar there. I stayed in Vilno for a couple months, and then I asked my sisters to go with me. They said, “How can we leave our parents?”

But we had a group already organized. They brought in the young people to Vilno. And there, between them, was my friend whom I had been with in Soly. We organized a group, and we left to join the partisans.

Q. How did you get out?

A. Parties were going out to work, and I was working in a party that was working on a field. We walked out like a party, with shovels, with everything. It was out of the city a little, and that’s when we left. We went to the partisans, and we stayed there with them.

Q. What was the partisan party comprised of? Was it mostly non-Jews?

A. Mostly non-Jews. And then the Jews started to come in. Most were from the little towns where they could escape, because they lived near the forest, so they had more chances to run away to find the partisans. When the Jews came to the partisans, they wanted them to bring weapons. Without a weapon, they wouldn’t take us.

Q. Did you still have your revolver?

A. Yeah. They took it away from me.

Q. But they let you in?

A. Yes, they let me in.

Q. How did you originally get the revolver?

A. In Soly. A Polish man had given it to me.

Q. Why did he give it to you?

A. We’d been very good friends.

Q. Were any of the partisans antisemitic?

A. What happened was, after the destruction of Stalingrad by the German army, a lot of the Russians who had been in the so-called Vlasov army [army formed by a Soviet army officer who collaborated with the Germans] started to run away, and they came into the partisans.

Q. So the partisans were getting larger and larger?

A. Yes, but they were already big antisemites, because they learned from the Germans. The
German propaganda was there.

Q. And where were you, geographically?

A. Geographically, we were operating between the Noroch Lake, which is in the northeast part
of Poland. We were operating from there to Minsk.

Q. How long were you with the partisans?

A. I started to get in touch with them in 1942. And then I joined them in 1943. I was in a partisan brigade. We were in a platoon, two Jewish people, me and my friend. I think I can tell his name. He was Femar Robanowich. In my opinion, he was a big hero, may he rest in peace. We decided to show them that we were good fighters, and we weren't afraid, because they always said that if we were ever afraid, then we were not fighters we don't know how to fight, we don't want to fight. So every time there was a dangerous mission, we were always the first to volunteer.

Once we had to blow up a bridge. It was very important. We had been told over and over to try to blow up the bridge. If we could blow up the bridge, the offensive would stop at least for three days. That gave the Russians a chance to consolidate on their side. We went to a small village and went up on a little hill. There was the bridge. But there were about thirty German soldiers guarding it.

And then we came to a house on a farm. We stopped there, and we said, "Here we will stop," because it was winter, and we have been in sleds with horses. We had just two English mines, and the rest was what we made ourselves from dynamite. As we approached a house, we said, "Two people will stay here, and we three will go to the bridge."

Usually, when we knocked on someone's door, they opened it right away. They knew we were partisans, because it was nighttime; we operated only at night. We knew that when we went in the village in the second house, there was a locksmith who could be trusted. He would give us information. And we walked in, accidentally, not in the second house; we walked to the first house, because it was dark. And we knocked on the door. All the people inside were dressed, with packages, and they wanted to leave the house. We said, "Where are you going?" They said, "We don't know. We have to go out." And then when we walked in the other house, the locksmith said, "The Germans know that you are here." We said, "How could they know?"

So, in a case like that, we had to run away. And we heard already that the lights were on where the Germans' sleeping quarters were. There was a river there which was frozen. I started to run away. Then my friend told me, "No. We are not running away. We are going to the other side of the river." We went to the other side, and we did it. We put in the mines and made everything ready to blow up. Then we ran back to the other side to go to the house where we left the others. And what happened, in the meantime, was that they started shooting at us. We'd been surrounded already in a half-circle, so we had a chance to get out. And when we started to run to my horse and sled, my horse was already dead. So I had to run. Someone was behind me, too. I was running, and it was snowing, and we were running very hard. And we had a machine gun and grenades, but we could not shoot back in a case like that, because we couldn't show them where we were. We ran to the forest.

I was running and running and couldn't breathe anymore. And then I saw behind me my friend and the third one. We saw that something was going on there. So we came in, and we walked into a house. We said, "We need a horse and a sled in one minute." And we got a horse with a sled, and we ran away.

Q. And you made it back?

A. We made it back. And we blew up the bridge. Without my friend, we never would have blown up the bridge. He was a specialist. He knew exactly what to do.

Q. How large was the Jewish population in the partisans?

A. As time went on, more and more came in.

Q. How did you get and prepare food?

A. We went to the richer areas at night and asked the people to give us something. They always said they didn't have anything. They had cows, and we had to take them. We took a cow, a pig, bread, whatever we could. One time, on the way -- I was with my friend -- we met some Jewish people who survived, but they didn't get in the partisans because they didn't have weapons, so we helped them out with food.

Another time, we had to blow up a train. And that was a very hard job, because we had to go over a river with no boat. The Germans had taken away all the small boats. But we found out that two young boys had stashed away a small boat someplace, and we got it. With two people who were not partisans, we had to be very careful. If the Germans caught them, they'd force them to tell. So we had to take the boys with us. Also, the boys knew their way around because they lived there. They knew how to go. When we got there, our commander told us, "We will stay here." That was approximately a half a mile from the railroad. I went with my friends, and we blew up the train. It was winter, and it was hard to do.

We came back to the river. So we had to whistle three times for them to come back for us. We whistled. And we said, "Oh, we are in big trouble now. We can't cross the river." We thought we heard boats coming. They took us another way, and we ran away.

It was winter. It was so cold, and we were living in the snow for the first time. We were sleeping in the snow. And then we made some bunkers. We'd been fighting for a while.

Sometimes, we cut telephone and electric poles, and sometimes we attacked small garrisons.

Q. And how long were you with the partisans?

Q. And what happened at that time?

A. The Russians came already. The army came in, and they selected people. They sent me and a few others to a military academy in Jarceva, in Russia. They trained me for about five months, and then they sent me out. I was all ready. In the partisans, I had learned a lot about military things. So, I went there for about five months, and they sent me to the front. For four months, I was on the front, and then I got wounded.

Saul I. Nitzberg, M.D. was born on January 16, 1923 in Pru~any, Poland. He was forced to live in the Pru~any ghetto from 1941 to 1943, when he was sent to Auschwitz. From there he was sent to Sachsenhausen, Dachau, and Oranienburg and was liberated in May 1945.

A. I remember that we were miserable. We were hungry. We had pains in our stomachs. We hesitated to relieve ourselves in front of a group of people, yet we had to do it. The stench was terrible, even thought it was very cold outside. It was very hot inside, because the steam of the bodies was building up along with the unwashed and unkempt bodies around us. Nobody could really envision what was ahead of us. We wanted just to arrive somewhere, get out of this terrible, cramped box. When they say cattle car, they mean cattle car, because it was never meant for humans.

There was no way of escaping from the train, because we were continuously locked up and were guarded by soldiers, who were sitting on top of the train with machine guns. You see, some of the movies such as the “Great Escape” etc., showed prisoners planning and finally escaping by getting underneath the trains. Those things sound great in the movies, but even if it did happen, those were soldiers that were trained in resistance. We were here with children and old women and old men. The sense of community responsibility – if they catch one, they shoot a hundred – always prevented us from doing such so-called heroic deeds.

Q. In other words, you were putting everybody else’s life in danger too, if you were tempted

A. That was obvious. Unless you were there on the spot, you could not really imagine the actual situation that presented itself. Theoretically, yes, you could run, except where to? Here you were, demoralized, hungry, cold, beaten down to the ground emotionally and physically; you were being pushed by armed soldiers with vicious dogs barking at you. Everybody was screaming. There were thousands of people coming out and thousands of people around, uniformed people who were prisoners. The area was walled off and if you made an attempt to run, you would be shot down immediately. There could be no heroes. If you would escape into the woods, you were faced with the hostile environment of the Polish population. Sure, we could have tried to run, but that would have

been the end of us.

The idea to resist in a form of survival, not of being a hero. I would have gone ten feet, and I would have been dead. What would that have done? Anybody could have committed suicide. I don't think anybody felt the odds were such that it was worth taking a chance.

Dr. Harry LaFontaine was a native of Denmark, a country that refused to surrender its Jewish citizens to the Nazis. He was a group commander in the Danish underground, and he worked actively to rescue Danish Jews by helping them flee to Sweden.

Q. Was there passive resistance?

A. Yes. Then you find out as far as the enemy is concerned, there is no passive resistance.

Q. Right.

A. Because if you're caught, you have absolutely no protection. There's a point I'd like to bring up. Lots of people don't understand that if you fight against any government, you are a criminal. You are not protected by the Geneva Convention. You are not under protection of even the people you like to work with for some of the Allied Headquarters can do nothing for you. You are absolutely and completely on your own. And one day you find out that just because you write a paper and are dissatisfied with the situation, you can get shot. So, then you decide, "Well, if I have to die anyway, let's do something in the meantime." So we slowly built up an underground organization in Denmark.

It was very tough in the beginning. England had nothing to spare; America was not in the war yet; and we were, more or less, on our own in regard to what could be done in the center. And there was a black cloud hanging over Denmark which was, "What would happen to our Danish neighbors who were of the Jewish faith?"

As we saw the problems in Europe were coming to Denmark, too, our thought was, "What can be done?" This was the difference between Denmark and the rest of Europe. We did have two and a half years to prepare something, whereas the other countries more or less got hit from the first day the Germans came in. And the reason the Germans didn't move against us was that as long as the Danish government was operating, Denmark produced war material, food, clothing, and many other things the Germans needed.

I think the people in Denmark realized that you have to stick together and have to forget what is different and look at what is the same. The most important thing is human rights, the right to live as you want to live and to have respect for other people. You are one type of people, you all belong to the same country, and you can't just let somebody step on some of you and look the other way.

At any one time, I don't think there were more than 4,000 to 4,500 people who were ac-

tive in the Danish underground. We lost, of course, approximately 30 percent of our people, who had to be replaced.

Q. Thirty percent were caught by the Nazis?

A. Yes. And then we had to send a lot of them to Sweden if there was a chance they could be found out. We had a system that if anybody got caught, we asked them to hold for fifteen minutes. We knew that everybody talked. This is movie stuff when you hear all this about people who don't talk. We had a central system which would know when a person was picked up. We could then contact the other people whom this person had contact with and try to keep as many people from being taken as possible. We learned the hard way how to keep the groups separated as well as how to limit exactly what was necessary to say and what these people must know to throw off the Nazi guards.

I got trained pretty early in the underground on how to protect myself; how never to trust anybody; how never to take a chance on anybody; how to be a good fox; to have at least eight or ten different places; and give them different stories to run with. I was caught on a fishing boat going over with some people, and they took the people to a concentration camp. They took me to the *Gestapo* because they figured I might have something to tell them.

They put my hand between two bars, and they broke all five bones and from then on, all they had to do was pinch, so then I would tell them anything. So I told them everything. I used the theory that if I kept on telling them things and the guard sat there and wrote everything down, then they had to go slowly. They'd say it was not true, so I'd tell them another story. So, this was one thing that made the underground a possibility.

And the next thing was to try to understand the psychology of what we were dealing with. You could do nearly anything to people. The only thing holding them back from acting was the fear that they might not get away with it.

Like everybody in Denmark, the king spoke German fluently, but from the first day the Germans arrived, he refused to understand German. He was pretty smart because when somebody from the German military or *Gestapo* came up and said something, he could hear it first in German and then they had to translate it into Danish. This gave him the time to think about the answer.

But he showed his disregard for the Germans. For example, fourteen days after Denmark was occupied, they took the king's flag, the Danish flag, down from the king's castle and put up the German flag. So he called the commandant over and said, "What is this thing up there?" He replied, "That's the flag of the German *Reich."* The king said, "Well, what is it doing here?" The commandant said, "We have occupied Denmark." The king said, "Well, this is my house. Will you please move it?" He said, "No, sir, this is going be here as long as we are here in Denmark." The king replied, "Well, in that case, I'll send one of my soldiers to take it down and put my flag up." The commandant said, "Your majesty, if you do that, we'll have to shoot that soldier." The king said, "Oh, is that so? Well then, I'd better go myself." So he went down, cut the thing, tore the flag down, put his flag up. Since the Germans needed the Danish war production, they took an insult like this without doing anything more about it.

Everything I've said has been documented or I would not even mention it. In 1943, the king of Denmark became seventy-five years old. He was now, more or less, limited to the castle. Hitler

sent him a personal birthday greeting which was brought to him by the German military commander of Denmark. And the king did what he always did when something came from the Germans. He had a pair of tweezers, and he took and dropped it in the wastepaper basket. The German general got furious, and he went back to Hitler and told him about it. Hitler become completely furious. He sent three Field Marshals to demand an apology.

What I say here really happened. These three gentlemen came into an audience with the king and demanded he apologize for treating a message from the *Führer* in that manner.

So again, the king listened to them in German, and then he listened to the Danish translation. He looked at the three gentlemen and said in Danish to his translator, "Tell these gentlemen that I'm an old man. I don't want to offend anybody. If you can find out who this Mr. Hitler is and where I can find him, I will send him an apology. I don't want to be unfriendly with anybody." And again, I guess the Germans took it because they needed the production that Denmark could provide.

> In 1942, the *Gestapo* demanded that all people who were listed as Jewish had to wear the Star of David with a big DA. The underground picked that up and put out in our papers, “Let everybody have a DA. Let everybody be Bernstein #1, 2, 3, 4, 5.” And the day this thing went into effect as a protest against the Germans, at least 50,000 people marched on Copenhagen with a big Star of David and a DA. The only ones who didn’t go out were the Jews because they were warned to stay behind and not rock the boat. The result was, of course, that the *Gestapo* gave up the idea because they were being ridiculed. Wearing the Star of David spread. They couldn’t arrest everybody that was on the street because of this thing. When they asked for someone’s name, people said, “Bernstein, 3,444.”
>
> What we did in the underground was to make a system whereby a central office knew where the Jewish people were. We had a plan that if the Nazis moved against the Jewish people, we would notify them right away. But we really didn’t know how we would handle 8,400 Jewish people in the middle of a small country. We eventually learned which hospitals we could depend on.
>
> In 1943, twelve days before the Jewish New Year, we got the idea that something was going to happen. We contacted London and got a radio message back that we could expect something in Denmark. Four tramp steamers came into Copenhagen harbor and just laid there. We had, at that time, taps on nearly all the *Gestapo* telephones. We had the postal department intercept all telegrams. The Germans figured the Jewish people would either be home or in synagogue, where they could find them.

Q. How did you manage all the taps?

A. Very simple. Everybody that worked at the phone company was Danish. And if they weren’t directly with us in the underground organization, they would at least help. If someone worked for the postal department and we asked them, “Could you give us a copy of this or do that?” he’d do it. The whole people of Denmark were against the German War effort.

> Twenty-four hours before, we got absolute security that the Germans would have an action on the Jewish New Year at six o’clock in the morning. So we had only twenty-four

hours to hide 8,400 people.

We gave some of the Jews false I.D. cards. We made some beautiful ones, false ones that were better than the ones the Germans made! In Copenhagen, most people lived in apartment buildings. We figured that if we could get the Jews off the streets and into the apartment buildings, the Germans wouldn't be able to raid every apartment. So we rang doorbells. We used all our contacts. People who were in the limelight, like the rabbi, we had to move at all costs. We had a system with the hospitals to take many of the Jewish people in under all kinds of excuses, like having the German measles.

Another thing that helped us was that the Germans occupying Denmark and guarding military installations tended to be older men, as the younger people were either in the Eastern front or somewhere else. These older ones could be bribed to look the other way, or we slowly found out what we could do to get them on the hook, so that we could say, "Either you play ball or the *Gestapo* is going to know about it."

We used ambulances, and at least the Germans had the decency to think that with the siren on, there must be something wrong. We would pack eight or ten people into an ambulance. We found that a very good disguise was black ladies' dresses. A funeral home helped us with those. We had the people put these things on with a big hat and veil and when we gave them a rosary, even the Germans would look the other way.

So, every little trick in the book was used, because it was not just a question of saving our Danish neighbors. It was also about how to show the Germans and the whole people of Denmark what we felt. Here was a chance to show the Germans up and to make complete fools out of them. And we did!

The result was out of a little under 9,000, they caught only around 200 Jewish people, either at home because they didn't believe anything would happen, or some Jewish people, I'm ashamed to say, were working with the Germans and thought they were safe. We left them alone. We didn't tell them it was time to leave, and the Germans didn't know better.

It was a little chaotic. Some of the places we got mixed up, and two or three groups would bring people to the same place, so instead of 100 people, we now had 600 in one place. We had problems getting food and accommodations and so forth.

We had a nice printing company. We made false ration cards, and that's how we supplied them with food. Again, people stepped in. I must say that during this time, right after the Jewish New Year, we never knocked on one door without getting help. The Danes simply had the feeling that here was a chance to do something against the Germans.

The best thing was, of course, to find a way to get them out of Denmark. There are only six or seven miles of water between Denmark and Sweden. Sweden was a neutral country, and anybody that came within three miles was under Swedish protection.

The next thing that happened was a real credit to the Danish people. We knew from other experiences in Europe that as soon as a Jewish family was taken away, the Nazis raided their home. In two hours, everything would be taken away. In Denmark, that was a big question. Some of these people's families had lived there for hundreds of years.

They had art work, they had paintings, they had all kinds of things and they all said, "Please help us to get these things to Sweden." We said, "No. That's something we can't do. It's tough enough what we do here, but we'll try to preserve your belongings." And the first thing we did was, we guaranteed the landlord that the rent would be paid every month.

Q. Really!

A. Yes. The underground organization figured we could raise the money. We then assigned a neighbor to look after the apartment. We gave them a special number to call so that if anybody tried to break in, our people would be there. And, I think they tried a couple of times, but they found out about us. They weren't dealing with the police or with the Germans, they had to deal with us. So it, more or less, became a hands-off situation.

And then the people took it up themselves. They formed a little committee to run the businesses of the Jews while they were gone. They closed up the apartments and kept them clean. The day the war was over and our Jewish neighbors came home, there were fresh flowers in all the windows and there was money in the bank. Everybody went right back into their homes.

This is the part that I remember with the most pleasure, because it shows how people could get together. Even if we didn't agree about everything, we could still say, "Enough is enough. Here's where we stop it." I think the whole thing can be summed up in one thing. The Jewish population in Denmark had earned the respect of their fellow citizens and they belonged to the society. They were part of it.

After the war, we found that the most harm to the German war machine was done by a little old man on a bicycle. He never had a gun; he never blew up any factory; he never did anything which you'd think would mean anything. But he was a retired railroad worker and in the nighttime, he would go down to the railyard and he would change the address on the railroad cars. He said, "They had such lousy glue. With a wet sponge, I could change any address." So, the cars that were going to Norway, he sent to Russia. The ones that were going to Hungary, he sent to France, and he just changed them any way he wanted to.

And after the war, we got a hold of the *Gestapo* archives. They had spent thousands and thousands of man-hours, and they had letters in there from a Commander in Russia, way in deep Russia, who got a railroad cars full of torpedoes that were supposed to go to Norway. And letters from a sub commander, marine commander, sitting in the coast of France, who had been waiting six weeks for torpedoes, and he got some land mines.

So that little man, we found out later, had done more harm to the whole war machinery than all the explosions and all the damage we did to the Danish industry. Maybe, some innocent people got killed this way. War is a very funny business.

And this little man just with his bicycle and a wet sponge, when he sent the war material to all different places just on his own, was never caught. They had an idea about it. They thought there was a special commander from England who was traveling in Germany doing this thing. They never found out where it happened or why it happened because during the night bombing in northern Germany, they rolled all these railroad cars into Denmark where the English did-

n't bomb. And then the next morning, they would send them back. So it never dawned on them that they had been in Denmark for maybe a few hours, and that's where it happened. And looking at the *Gestapo's* file, they were looking for a big solution to this problem, and they were wrong. They never thought about this little man on his bicycle and a wet sponge.

David Goldberg was born in 1907 in Dubno, Ukraine. He survived the Holocaust because he was rescued by **Janina Bradel** and her family. They hid Jewish people, including David, in their apartment, saving their lives.

Q=Interviewer, D=David, J=Janina

Q. Let's talk a little bit about the actual arrangements in the attic. What were the physical arrangements?

D. The big room was twice the size of an elevator. It was approximately six feet wide and fifteen feet long. We couldn't stand up for eighteen months, because the highest point of the compartment was only five feet tall. There was no heat, no daylight, nothing at all. It was a tin roof. In the wintertime, the temperature reached 20 or 30 degrees below zero, and the summertime was impossibly hot. We were filthy, dirty. We didn't take a bath for eighteen months. We never shaved the whole time.

Q. What about food?

D. Janina delivered to us whatever they had in their home. But the worst of all that she did for us was that we had a little bucket in that house which we used for a toilet. Every one of us used it. She was the one who took it away every day, washed it, and brought it back up. If we would have been discovered, not only would we have been killed, but everyone in her family would have been killed, and the house would even have been burned. This was the penalty for keeping and hiding Jews. They weren't even supposed to give Jewish people a little water. It was certainly forbidden to help them to survive.

Q. Did you know what would have happened to you and your parents if the Jews you were hiding had been discovered?

J. I saw with my own eyes soldiers with rifles, leading a family at whose home they had discovered Jews, to be shot somewhere. This was near our apartment, right in front of the house where they were discovered. They were hidden by somebody where the ghetto used to be, and they were led right past us. I was coming from town, and this woman looked at me so pitifully, to help her or something. I saw this group, how they were led away. My mother, when she saw, ran away, because she was in shock. This meant that we would be in the same situation if we were caught.

My father said, "There's one thing. They will not take us out alive from here. Either we'll survive, or in case they find you, I'll run up with my swords to the attic, and we'll con-

tinue to use our weapons until they kill every one of us. They will not take us as they did all those people."

D. She saw with her own eyes what would happen to her if they had discovered us in her attic. Another time, a Polish family did the same thing that they did, and the Jewish people were discovered with them. They took both families, the Jewish family and the Polish family, and she saw with her own eyes as they shot them to death.

J. There was no time to be in fear. Of course, it was dangerous, but to meet all their own daily needs and ours, we had to invest all our energy to supply the house with the minimal necessities. For instance, there was no electricity, there was no soap available, there was no firewood to cook. Our daily life was preoccupied mostly with getting those things to fill out all of our daily needs. So, there was no time to be scared.

D. Her father brought up to us two big bags of garlic and onions. He said, "If you eat this, you'll survive. If not, everyone of you will get sick and die." We ate part of it every day. And no one ever got sick. We couldn't even talk to each other. If we had to say something, we had to say it quietly, because somebody lived right next door to this attic. So, we had to be careful.

Q. Did you have any reading materials?

D. Yes, we did. Her father brought us two daily newspapers, one German and one Ukrainian.
I was the reader.

Q. That's how you followed the news?

D. Yes, that's right.

Q. And you read by candlelight?

D. No. In the attic, there was a small opening, less than a foot in diameter, with a piece of glass
in the wall. It was built into the brick. That allowed enough light in to read.

Franciszka Olesiejuk was born on August 23, 1924 in Romanow, Poland to a family of farmers. One day in 1942, two strangers knocked at their door. They were two Jewish women who were asking for help. Her family hid them, and eventually hid and fed 12 people in their barn, risking their own lives.

Q. You mentioned that two women came to your door. When was that?

A. In October, 1942.

Q. Did you know that their lives were in danger?

A. Yes.

Q. What were the circumstances of their coming to the door? Were they strangers? Who were they?

A. Somebody knocked on the door. I answered the knock, and there stood a young woman asking if she could come in. I said, “Sure, come in the house.” She then said, “But I am Jewish.” I replied, “Never mind, doesn’t matter, come on in.” The woman was taken aback, and she said to me, “I have another person with me here. She is hiding behind the door.” I told her, “That’s okay, you are both welcome. Come on in.”

Q. Did you know if there was any kind of penalty for hiding Jews?

A. I knew that they would kill me if they found out, that there was a death penalty.

Q. Then why did you do it?

A. I could not bring myself to refuse. We were brought up that way, it was that kind of home. In fact, one of the women asked me, “What about your father? Would he accept us? Where is he?” I told them, “He is in the fields working. Don’t worry. My father is a good man. He will not turn you away. He will let you stay.”

These weren’t the only two women we kept, because the group kept growing. There was one Jewish man who worked for the Germans carrying water from the well. I kept seeing him, because the well was in the city. I asked my father if he could do something to get him out of there. So, he took the horse and wagon and went into town. He waited until he and another Jewish man came to the well for water. Then he told them to get on the wagon. They both got on the wagon, and they started running away from the Germans. The Germans chased them, and they had to abandon the horse and wagon. My father finally got away and came back to the house, while the two men hid in the woods. They eventually found their way to our house.

Q. Were all these people strangers to you? Did you know any of them?

A. We did know the Finkelstein family, because they had a restaurant in town. Mr. Finkelstein

was one of the two men my father rescued at the well. But that was the extent of it.

Q. Was Mr. Finkelstein a personal friend of your family?

A. No. There was another family that suspected that we were hiding people, because my father had a reputation for being a very decent man. This neighbor, a landowner, had some dealings with the Germans. He warned us whenever there was going to be a search, as well as when they came to burn the village and search it for illegal people. At that time, we moved the people we were hiding to his house to be hidden there.

Q. How did you feed that many people? Did it arouse suspicion that you needed extra food?

A. It was very difficult to feed that many people, but we shared whatever we had. The suspicion was there, because we had to cook in very big pots of food. It was not in keeping with the size of our family. We eventually ended up with twelve people when two brothers of Mrs. Rodzynek, one of the women we were hiding, joined us. They had run away from a camp. My father said, “Well, if we have one or two Jews, we may as well take in all who want to come, because they’ll only kill us once.” So, we decided that whoever wanted to come was welcome. The word spread that our house hid Jews.

Q. How long did you hide people?

A. For 22 months.

Q. That is a long time to hid people. Were you ever afraid?

A. We never believed we would survive. We were afraid and nervous.

Q. You didn’t think that you, yourself, would survive?

A. Yes, that’s right. The whole time we kept these twelve people, every day was full of danger. We thought every minute was going to be the death of us and of the group. We paid for it with our health and with the aggravation. One thing stands out in my mind. The Germans often came to the farm, but one time they came with dogs. The people were hidden in the hiding place and near it was a doghouse, with a large dog chained to it. When the dog tried to smell out the people and was pulling to go to the place where the people were hidden, my father said, “You see, he is in heat. He wants to go to my dog, he just wants the dog. That’s all. Look at him, he fell in love with my dog.” The Germans believed him and retreated. That’s my most vivid memory of how close we came to being discovered.

Q. Would you do it again if you were presented with the same set of circumstances?

A. Yes, I would do the same thing all over again. I have four sons and one daughter, all wonderful people, good Poles, and they, too, would do it again. We were very friendly with the people we saved. We love them. We are even better people now, because we are

stronger. We can do more now than we ever could.

Helen Beck, née Brzeska, was born on May 10, 1925 in Proszowice, Poland. She was sent to work in the Zablocie brick factory in 1940. In the summer of 1941, she was interned in Plaszów concentration camp, where she remained until March 1943, when she was employed by Oskar Schindler in his factory. In the summer of 1944, it became necessary for Schindler to move his operation further east. Helen was sent, with her sister, back to Plaszów and from there to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Schindler arranged for her, along with other women who had worked at his factory, to be sent to Brunlitz, Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1944, where she remained until her liberation on May 10, 1945. Helen's number on Schinder's list was eight.

Q. When it finally came time to leave Plaszów, where did you go from there?

A. This was the time in March, right after the liquidation of Kraków ghetto. We were put on the
trucks, and we were the first large group brought to Schindler's factory.

Q. And Schindler's factory was located where?

A. A few miles from the main camp. But then Schindler built a sub-camp, and he had the barbed wires, the watch towers, and the Nazi guard, because there were a few people already working over there who came from the ghetto.

Q. What were the conditions like at Schindler's factory?

A. In Schindler's factory, for us, it was like day and night. Number one, I remember when we were brought to Schindler's factory. When we came into the building, the Nazis were on both sides with guns and the boots. And among them, we noticed a very tall, good-looking man, beautifully dressed. We all noticed there was something on his lapel. But, you know, we were so scared and in fear that we did not think. We went in shock. But we noticed this tall man, always with a smile and we felt immediately the whole atmosphere was different. We were assigned to the barracks, and the next morning we were assigned to the certain jobs in his factory.

Q. Were the barracks different from those you had just come from?

A. Quite a bit because they were much smaller. I was very fortunate as I was one of the first who was brought to these barracks. There were only three buildings which had the bunk beds, two, two-tier barracks. Later on, when Schindler was getting more and more people, they built a large barracks. It was built on the same style like the barracks in Plaszów.

Q. How else did the Schindler barracks differ from the ones you had just come from?

A. They were much smaller.

Q. How were the sanitary conditions there?

A. A little bit better. No question because where the barracks were, there were bathrooms, latrines, and there was running water so we could wash ourselves.

Q. And what about the food?

A. The food was much better. You couldn't compare. Everything was much better in Schindler's factory. But the most important ingredient was seeing Schindler almost daily. When he was walking through the factory where we were working, we felt like we were seeing a God-like person walking by. Of course, he did not start a conversation, but when he looked at us, we felt like somebody cared.

Q. Did he ever speak to you as a group?

A. As a group? I don't recall it. Of course, we must remember that over there Schindler had his confidants who worked with him, who were close with him, and they knew almost everything that Schindler was doing, what his intention was, and how he was doing things. But the workers at large were not involved.

Q. How many hours a day did you work?

A. Twelve hours.

Q. And what were you making in the Schindler factory?

A. When the Germans occupied Poland, a whole army of Nazis came to Poland seeking fortunes, making money, and Schindler was one of them. Of course, Schindler was not like the others, and in the end we knew the difference one person can make, and he did it. He also came to Poland and took over a Jewish factory which, before the war had been producing pots and pans. This was a good item for the black market. He did have advice from some Jewish professionals, people, you know, who knew the business. He was advised that this would be a good factory to take over to make money.

Q. Did you ever have the opportunity to have any personal contact with Schindler at all?

A. I did not, except, like I said, seeing him very close, when he would stop and look at our work. Sometimes we could almost hear him, like saying, quietly, "Just keep working." And again, we had the feeling that he was a man who cared, who had compassion.

I happened to have had a very unpleasant experience in Schindler's factory, because we were constantly watched by the Nazis. They always tried to reduce us, to make us look like we were not human. One Sunday, they made an announcement that we were not going to be working that day. We had the day off. So, immediately, it aroused our attention that something horrible was going to happen that day. However, the Nazis that day brought to the factory truckloads of striped uniforms. We were ordered at the roll call to bring back everything and to give back what we wore and only have those sack uniforms. We returned whatever we possessed, and we got the uniforms. For the women, it was a one-piece dress, a one-size-fits-all.

I was still a teenager, a very petite girl. When I brought it to the barracks and looked at it, I saw that I could not wear it. So, I asked the lady who was in charge of the barracks if she, by any chance, had a pair of scissors. She didn't ask me much. She gave me a needle and a pair of scissors, and I quickly went to work on my gunsack and redesigned my uniform. What I mean by redesigning, I made my sleeves fitted, I made it short, I made the waistline,

and I made a belt I worked very hard that whole afternoon, because I had to be ready for roll call in the evening. Little did I know that I resisted in some kind of a way, because I wanted to look like human, like a girl.

Well, at the roll call, the Nazi woman who was counting us noticed I was the only one among three hundred women who looked different. She called me forward and slapped my face very hard. My head felt like an empty box, ringing in the ears. Whatever orders she was giving, I didn't know, because I was brought into isolation. According to this Nazi woman, I was supposed to be brought the next morning to the main camp in Plaszów for execution. I was in a shock. I didn't know what was going on.

A few hours later, a Jewish policeman came over there where I was kept in the dark room. He told me to follow him and go to the barracks, to try to undo my new creation. Then he told me that the next morning I should come to work as usual. But this happened only when, during the roll call, this came to Schindler's attention. He accomplished the impossible. He bribed or did whatever had to be done. That's how I was brought from the dark room back to work, because he bribed the SS woman. I survived all because of Schindler. Beyond any doubt, he saved my life that time.

Q. Once you were returned to the factory to work, were conditions any different after that? Did
you see other people spared in the same way that you had been singled out for death?

A. Well, in Schindler's factory, the three hundred women, the seven hundred men, definitely. We were there, because Schindler did everything possible to spare us from certain death. We all knew and are still all saying and attesting to the fact, that Schindler was a remarkable man and did remarkable things. Not only what he did. For all those things he had done, he was risking his life. Yet, in spite of everything, he was going on and trying to save people. Just to give you an example, as we know and knew at that time, there were many Nazis who came into Poland to make money, to make big fortunes, and most of them did. And those other ones who'd made the fortunes, they made the money and went back home. Schindler made a lot of money, a big fortune, but later on, what did he do with the money? He spent the whole fortune, all the monies he made saving people. Among other things, he spent his money buying food, extra food for us on the black market.

Q. Were you aware of that when you were in the factory, that this was going on? That he was,
indeed, trading in the black market to get food for the people in the camp?

A. Most of the people, you know, those who were working close to him definitely knew it.

Q. How long did you remain in Schindler's factory?

A. We were over there until mid-summer of 1944 when the Russian forces were coming forward. Almost all those camps in Poland were liquidated. They were sending people to Auschwitz, to all those death camps, trying to eliminate as many as possible. Those who they couldn't, they were sending into Germany by foot, by truck, and on death marches.

I forgot to mention one thing. While we were in Schindler's factory, we were producing the pots and pans, but later on, he opened a munition department. He was very smart. He knew what was going on. When he opened the munition department, systematically he was getting more and more people. As the business grew, he kept saying he needed more people. So we were, at that time, three hundred women, seven hundred men when they ordered us to appear in the square. We were put on trucks and brought back to Plaszów, to the main camp. A group of men had to disassemble the machines from the munitions department. The machines were sent by train to Brunlitz, Czechoslovakia. At that time, Schindler ordered the reopening of the munition factory in Brunlitz. So, that's why some of the men were left over there for this purpose, but the rest of us were sent to Plaszów. Right away, the following day, most of the men, especially, were sent from Plaszów to Mauthausen in the cattle cars.

Q. Before we leave your experiences in the Schindler factory, are there any other incidents that occurred or memories that you have of your time in the Schindler factory that you could tell us about?

A. My very sad experience -- and this stands out in my mind -- when we were brought back to Plaszów, they were shipping most of the people, as many as they could, out to different death camps. We were re-opening the mass graves because the Nazis thought that by doing this, they were going to erase the evidence of what happened in Plaszów. And I remember, I was in the group selected, carrying the remains from the mass graves, carrying them to a certain square and then pouring gasoline on those remains of the bodies and turning this into ashes. It was horrible. I was thinking maybe this is the mass grave where my parents are buried. So again, we lived in such fear. We didn't have time to think about it. We followed orders.

Q. Was your sister with you during this time?

A. Yes. And this was the time where Schindler's list was made and, again, I would say that it is only a miracle from God that my sister and I were on Schindler's list. The number on Schindler's list, my sister's seven, and I'm number eight on Schindler's list. After being in Plaszów for a few weeks, witnessing the most horrible things, we heard from somewhere the news that we were on the list and that the three hundred selected women will bypass Auschwitz. We were to be brought to Schindler's factory in Brunlitz. However, things turned out differently. When we started for Brunlitz, we arrived in Auschwitz. Auschwitz will forever remain the most horrible nightmare.

Q. Do you know where the cross-up came between your landing in the Brunlitz factory and going to Auschwitz?

A. We don't know. Later on, we heard there was some misunderstanding in the bureaucracy, whatever. But we landed in Auschwitz. When we arrived in Auschwitz, we came in with

a list of names and because of Schindler, again, we never became a number in Auschwitz. We came with a name, spent a few weeks in Auschwitz which was hundred per cent a miracle because, when we arrived in Auschwitz, at first they didn't know what to do with us. So, in the meantime, they put us in front of the ovens in Birkenau. We were there for hours, standing and waiting. We didn't know what was going to happen, if this would be the end for us. I remember watching the chimneys, the heavy black smoke going in the skies and the flames and the stench of burning flesh.

Q. Were you aware of any of the things that were going on at the camp?

A. We knew something. Auschwitz was a death factory.

Q. Did they have you work at all while you were there?

A. No. We were just kept for the few weeks. The Nazis didn't know what to do with us. In the meantime, we hoped a little bit, but after the war we found out how hard Schindler worked to get his three hundred women. Schindler sent people with fortunes, with diamonds and gold to get three hundred women. The Nazis in charge of Auschwitz asked him, "Why are you hung up with these three hundred women?" They wanted to send other women, but Schindler said he wouldn't settle. He wanted his three hundred women. When the day came, and they made a decision to release Schindler's three hundred women, we got a special portion and a plate of a food. We were placed in the cattle cars and you know how horrible it was, a hundred women in a one cattle car.

Q. What time of year was this?

A. This was in the fall of 1944. It was already very cold in that time.

Q. And what was Brunlitz like when you arrived there?

A. For us it was a very special, if I'm not over using the word, "miracle." When we arrived from Auschwitz, in Brunlitz, the men, the seven hundred men went to different camps. Somehow, the Schindler's seven hundred men were already in Brunlitz setting up the machines. When we arrived, we entered the factory. Schindler greeted us at the door. He looked at us, but he quickly turned to us and I quote, the first thing we heard from him was, "You don't have to worry anymore. You are with me again." And you have no idea after this horrible experience how our faith entered, and our hope was lifted by what Schindler had said. And we felt almost, thank God, somebody cared, and maybe, we'll survive the war and tell the world what we experienced.

Ronald Guiking was born in Amsterdam, Holland on September 30, 1945. His parents hid six Jewish people in their home during the Holocaust, risking their own lives to save the lives of others.

Q. How did it come about that your parents hid Jews during the war?

A. What happened was, my father was renting some apartments to Jewish people and my parents hid about six of them. In the apartment building, a German woman lived on the second floor, and we lived on the third. Each apartment had four rooms, so there was a total of eight rooms. In one room, they built a wall in front of the door and after the door. They made a place between the floor of our apartment and the ceiling of the apartment below us by opening it with a saw. The six Jews could hide there when Nazis entered the houses.

Q. What year was that?

A. That was the beginning of 1943.

Q. Why did your parents decide to do that?

A. Well, it was not a question of a decision, it was more a question of they had to do it. They were human beings, and they had to help them. They couldn't see the Jews get deported. Of course, when they were asked for help, they gave them help immediately. It was more a question that if you know that somebody is going to be killed or treated very badly like in the camps in Germany, then they would do everything they could for them to stop this. So, they hid the Jewish people.

Q. Was it a decision they made on the spot, instantaneously? Did the people approach your
parents, or did your parents find them?

A. Who found whom first, I really cannot answer. But I can tell you that my parents would do it again immediately if the situation were the same right now in Holland. These were neighbors of ours, not really next-door neighbors, but they lived in the same area. Even if they'd been living in another area, they were people who were trying to escape from others who were trying to kill them. Those people had not done any harm to anyone at all, so why let those people go and get deported to Germany? So, they had to do this -- without asking anything for it -- they had a feeling they had to do this. There was no question about it.

Q. Were your parents aware of the consequences if they had been caught?

A. Well, they knew that they would be treated like the Jews were being treated by the Nazis.
At that time, they would have been killed or sent to a camp and probably killed afterwards.

Q. And they knew that?

A. They knew that.

Q. How did the Jews know they would be safe with your parents?

A. Well, they really didn't know they would be safe with my parents. They took a risk also. But the risk of deportation was bigger at that time, because the Nazis were sending them to camps. The Jews who still remained in Holland knew what was going on with the Nazis at that time. They had to find those people whom they thought would have a favorable attitude toward them and would not tell the Nazis that they were there. It was really hard for Jews to find the right people.

Q. There must have been some preparations that were necessary to hid these people. Maybe we can discuss them. You said they were in the crawl space. Did they have to stay there all the time?

A. No, but they had to stay there at certain times. The situation was that the Nazis were checking the houses about once a week. They went into all those houses to check if the Dutch people were trying to hide Jewish people.

Q. When they knew they were coming, they put them in the closet?

A. At the moment they knew they were coming, they hid them immediately in the hiding place.

Q. Did they have to go out and buy tools and lumber to close off the room or dig a hole?

A. Yes, my father had to go to a place where there were rails. They had to look for wood and
stones just to build the wall.

Q. Did that raise suspicion at all?

A. No. He just did it bit by bit. With a saw, they made a hole in the floor and between the floor and ceiling, there was already a space. They covered up the hole with a carpet and other material. It looked normal. Nobody could even see that there was a hole.

Q. Where did the people stay when the searches weren't going on?

A. Then they could stay in the one room that was walled off. They could also go out of that room, but only out of the back side of my parents' apartment because in the front side, it was all windows there. It would have been dangerous. Somebody could have seen them through the window.

Q. Were any of them ever able to leave the house with false papers?

A. No. It was not possible for those Jews who were hidden there. They would have been recognized immediately if they had gone outside. There were too many Nazis in the area controlling all the streets. It was too dangerous to go out.

Q. So how did they get enough food?

A. The Dutch government was ruled by the Germans. They made a rule that everybody should get food stamps. But then, of course, people had to wait in very long lines with these

food stamps, because there were food shortages. It was so bad that people were even eating mice. Anything they could find to eat, they would eat. My parents were lucky, because they knew a lot of shopkeepers. They also had to wait in long lines and finally, they did get some food for them. They also got some food from their own families, from my grandparents and from two of my mother's sisters. My father and mother tried to get as much food as possible, because they had to take care of all the people in the house then.

Q. And that didn't arouse anyone's suspicion?

A. They did it a little at a time with each person so that nobody was really suspicious.

Q. Did they share with you their feelings of how their lives changed?

A. Imagine, if you have to stay for about three years in one room all the time and not get fresh air. You cannot walk around. The way they described it, it was very hard for them because there was nothing to do. They tried to make jokes or play games, just because they felt so bad for them. It was always on their minds that there was a risk that somebody could see them or hear them, or that somebody might find out about them.

Q. So you mean they were living with a lot of tension?

A. Yes, especially for my father, I would say there was big tension. My mother was also under
a big tension, because her nerves weren't as strong as my father's.

Q. Did your grandparents know what they were doing?

A. No, they didn't even share this secret with their own parents, because they were afraid they
would worry and be upset.

Q. Why do you think that your parents were so dedicated to saving the Jews? What are your
personal thoughts?

A. Well, I think they were the kind of people who didn't want to see anybody hurt. If they saw
somebody in danger, I am sure they would do the same thing right now also.

Q. Where do you think they gained the strength to continue this? It must have been hard. You
said it made your mother very nervous.

A. Yes, it made her nervous. She had a very hard time. I can tell you, even after the war, she's been very nervous as well. She did go through a lot of hard times after the war, too, because whenever she heard a plane going over Amsterdam, she thought the Nazis were coming. Whenever she heard a very firm footstep, she'd still think the Nazis were coming. Even today, she cannot sleep during the night. She wakes up during the night, she sits up a couple of hours, and my father gets up to make tea for her. She wakes up all the time,

because she has terrible, terrible dreams about the war.

SAVING LIVES

Journey with me in space and time to meet a most remarkable young woman: Irene Gutuvna, born in 1922 in Poland, a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust in her own right, but more uniquely, one of the few Christian rescuers.

Irene was from a middle-class Catholic family who grew up in a small town near the German border and was accustomed to sharing with Jewish children: "We children were a United Nation. We played together regardless of nationality or religion, being more concerned about what mischief we could get into."

When the possibility of a war became the topic of conversation in Irene's house, being the oldest daughter to a family with no sons, she valiantly offered to join the Polish army. "It was my responsibility." Shortly after that, she chose a career which would change her whole life. "I developed the desire to become a nurse...maybe even a nun. So in 1938, my father enrolled me in the best nursing school which was in Radom, a town in the middle of Poland. I wanted to be another Florence Nightingale, traveling, helping others. All of a sudden, it was September 1st, 1939 and my dreams came to a halt.

It was early morning. I was going from my dormitory to the hospital when I heard a big noise. I quickly hid in a ditch.. .planes everywhere, explosions, fire. When the planes left, there were wounded and dead people everywhere. I was alone without my parents, so I ran to the hospital, my second home now.

It was bedlam there. They had already started to bring in the wounded, and although I was still a student nurse, I rolled up my sleeves and started to work helping to save lives.

Rumors came telling of the speed with which the Germans were pushing through my country. At that time, some of the older nurses said they were leaving to join the Polish army.

I being young and having nowhere to go, went along with them fearful, but proud that they would take me. It would have been impossible for me to try to cross Poland alone and reach my parents' home.

We joined an army unit. It was a dangerous time. We were constantly on the run, and the Germans did not respect the Red Cross on our truck, so we often had to hide in the woods during bomb raids. Three weeks later, we were near the Russian border and Poland surrendered. This was tragic to me!"

The group dispersed and Irene was picked up by some Russian soldiers who brutally raped her in the forest and left her there, badly beaten, to die in the snow. The following day, though, she woke up in a Russian hospital where she recovered and spent quite some time helping to heal people. This lasted until 1941 when Polish citizens were given the opportunity to repatriate. She chose to return.

Irene returned to a much changed Poland. In the summer of 1941 after passing a three week quarantine, she found herself in Radom, which was now under Nazi rule. For the first

time, she saw the "different" treatment that the Jews were suffering.

"....I went into town. I was alone and no one was expecting me, but I remembered an older nurse from the hospital and I went to her house. She took me in and during one of our outings, I noticed a group of people that was being pushed in the street. This is when she explained to me that the Jewish people were being taken from their houses and put into special places to work.

....I went to church one day and on my way out, I found it surrounded by Nazis who plucked the young people out of the confused crowd. I was one of them. We were taken to a place with barbed wire and barracks, where we were told that we would soon be taken to Germany as workmen for their fields and factories. Just before my transport was to leave, a small group of officers came to select a few of us out of the lines. We were simply pointed out. We (the few chosen) were taken to an ammunition factory where we were to work for a German major in his sixties.

We lived in barracks as prisoners and worked every day in the factory. My job was to pack ammunition into small boxes, but soon the sulphur in the ammunition made me very sick and I fainted right in front of the major during one of his inspection rounds by my station. Next thing I knew, I was sitting on a chair in an office, having to answer to his questions in my high school German and pleading for work that wouldn't put me in direct contact with the sulphur to which I was allergic. I knew that only work would keep me from trouble. Impressed by my honesty, he offered me a different job.

My new job was in the officer's diner, serving meals to them. I was blond and blue-eyed. I looked nice and spoke a little German, so I guess he thought it could work out well. This work allowed me more freedom and I could now sleep in town at my girlfriend's house.

One day, while preparing for a big dinner party at the Officers' Club, I heard a lot of commotion, yelling, screaming, coming from the street below. I went towards the windows and drew open the heavy velvet curtains. Below I could see the Radom ghetto...

There the Nazis were beating Jews up, killing them. There was blood everywhere. My boss, Sergeant Schultz, quickly shut the drapes and told me I should never speak of this to anyone, for "they" could think I was a Jew-lover. He could see I was very shaken up. That night I could not pray.. .I could not believe in God."

In the winter that same year, the whole operation moved to Lvov. Irene went with them, not having been offered a choice. During one of her outings to church, she met a lady who lived in town; her name was Helen and she was a Catholic married to a Jew. He, of course, was in Nazi hands. The two women struck a friendship. Shortly after that, news came of a prisoner transport to a town nearby. In hopes of perhaps finding her husband, Helen decided to travel there, not without first asking Irene to join her. Irene managed to get the day off and so they went. What they were to witness they would never forget...

". ..The SS opened a barbed wire gate and were beating, kicking, pushing the people out. Some faces I still see today: beautiful women, children, elderly, men on crutches, sick people. All being led in a march. We were crying. We could do nothing for them. Then I saw a group of children and all alone without their parents; big ones, little ones, two, three, four years old, crying and yelling "mama, mama" very scared. I saw a young woman holding an infant. All of a

sudden, an SS man tore the baby from her arms and threw him to the ground head first. She screamed and was shot instantly. I watched her fall near her baby, both dead now. This all took place in March, 1942, and God was not there. We quickly left and heard shooting. We knew what was happening. The dead were the lucky ones…

When I returned to my encampment, I was so shaken up that Schultz gave me the evening off. I never spoke of what I saw.

In May that year, we moved to Tarnopol. There was the hotel which we used for the officers, a laundry building where their clothes were washed and pressed and the factories. I was assigned to sleep in a small room near the kitchen. My duties still involved serving meals, plus as of that moment, I was in charge of transferring the clothes to and from the laundry and supervising the end results before redistributing them to the different officers.

I went to the little building and there is where I met twelve people, all Jewish -- the laundry work force who was brought daily from the camp nearby.

In the beginning they did not trust me, but soon I discovered that Helen's husband was one of them: Henry Weinbaum. This quickly broke the ice and we all became friends. They were Dr. Lipschitz, Mr. Heller and his wife Aida, Morris, Mr. Steiner, Mr. Rosenbaum and a few others. I delivered the clothes daily, sometimes with a little food. They told me awful stories of their camp life.

As I served dinners for the officers, I discovered that often a guest of the major's was the Führer in charge of their camp. I picked up valuable information about raids, etc., passed it on to them, and they, in turn, alerted the other prisoners. This way sometimes at least a few were spared cruelty.

Some Jews had escaped and were living in the forest. When Helen and I found out, I started to request Schultz for food, clothes and blankets for my imaginary large family. He often complied and Helen delivered the goods to the forest in her horse and buggy. In the meantime, the major was very pleased with me. I was a hard worker and a pretty girl.

One day, I heard over dinner that the area was to be made *Judenrein,* free from Jews. Liquidation was the order and I had to tell my friends. It was a tragedy! Six chose to flee to the forest. Helen and I helped them. The other six remained.

Some four days later, the major found a beautiful villa and decided to move there, taking me in as his housekeeper. This was a miracle from God -- it had to be. All of a sudden, I had a place for my friends.

One by one, the six came in and hid in the cellar. I soon discovered however, that six more had joined them; people I had never met before. Twelve people stood there with frightened eyes like little children.

I was then instructed by the major to tidy the house and get it ready to be repainted. I panicked... .what to do? Well, we found a way, and when the ground floor was being painted, I hid them in the attic and vice-versa. Miraculously, it worked. God helped us a lot.. .yes. . .God.

The major then said he was bringing in his orderly to help with the work; that would be the end of us for sure. In desperation, I pleaded with the major, promised to do the work of two people or more, if only he wouldn't bring the man in. I told him of my rape experience. He agreed. ..for now…

My twelve and I soon found a secret tunnel that led to a little room under the gazebo in the garden.. .a hiding place. We provisioned it well to last them for three days if ever need be, and we drilled often.

Helen often came to visit her husband and they would go in there alone. We called it the honeymoon hotel.

...One day, Dr. Lipschitz asked me to fill a prescription for Aida...it would make her abort. Aida? Pregnant? The baby should live, of course. After that day in Lvov when I saw so many Jewish children die, there was no choice for me. Also I believed in God's help. He had been there for us so far... I managed to convince them all and we kept her pregnancy.

One autumn day in 1943, I went into town and had to witness the hanging of two families: one Polish, one Jewish.. .with their babies, too. It was the punishment for harboring the Jews.

I ran home and was trembling. I was so flustered, I made unusual mistakes. The key was always to be left in its keyhole so that the major could never let himself in and surprise us. This time I put it in my pocket. The women had just come out to greet me, when all of a sudden the major walked in. He had discovered us. I will never forget his eyes, blazing with anger. He silently turned and went to the library. I followed him. ..I had to face him. I begged for his forgiveness, I cried, I pleaded on my knees. He was furious. He stormed out of the house saying: "When I come back, I will give you my decision. I don't know yet what I'll do with you and I need to think." I had deceived him. I had disappointed him.

I quickly went to my friends who were thinking of leaving. I encouraged them to stay and hide, for only three had been found.. .why imperil them all? They stayed and hid; we said good-bye and we waited for the major to return...

Hours later, he walked in drunk. I nervously followed him to his room. He pulled me on his lap and kissed me. Trembling, he said: "Irene, I'll help you; I'll keep your promise, but you have to be mine whenever I want you." He never hurt me.. .For me it was a small price to pay for so many lives...He kept his promise. Soon he became used to the three women, for we all waited on him during his meals now. He never knew who else was harbored in his house.

One day in February 1944, he announced that the villa had to be evacuated, for the front was closing in. I knew that the forest is all we had left. Early in March, he left for a three day trip to Lvov and Helen and I moved our little group then in her horse and buggy. We covered three at a time with blankets and things and made a few trips through countless soldiers into the forest, until all were out of the house and some provisions and valuables were gathered for all of us. Our "cover" had been Helen's husband Henry, who sat up front. He was a good fit for the major's extra uniform and spoke a beautiful German. So far, so good...

On May 15th, 1944 the Russians liberated that part of Poland. I never saw the Major again.

On May 4th, 1944 a little boy was born to Aida in the home of a forest ranger. He was named Roman Haller. My birthday is on the 5th...He was my birthday gift. I left the forest at the end of May. I joined the partisans. The war was still on and this was a way for me to inch back home. In the summer of 1945, I reached a town with a rabbi. There I inquired about the twelve names and the Hallers he knew. They lived close by and on my way to them, I was arrested by the Soviets for my partisan work. I was imprisoned, but luckily enough to have been able to escape ten days later.

The Hallers and I hugged and kissed. They made inquiries about my family. My father had been killed during the war and my mother and sisters arrested, then released and disappeared, whatever that meant. It was clear that I was not safe in Poland. They smuggled me out to Germany, to a Jewish repatriation camp, and gave me a notarized account of our story, which would prove I had indeed helped Jews, thus entitling me to some help and refuge.

I wanted to go to Israel, where I now felt I belonged and began to learn Hebrew. Scarlet fever infected me though, and I had to remain in the camp until late 1949 when, with the help of HIAS, I was allowed to come to America.

The Yiddish I learned with my Jewish friends helped me in New York. I worked hard, and five years later I became a U.S. citizen.

One day while sitting in a cafeteria a man recognized me from Europe. He was an American soldier who had interviewed me in the camp. He invited me to one dinner, two.. .six weeks later we were married. He is not Jewish, but today Mr. Opdyke is ill in California and being cared for at the Jewish Hospital free of charge. We had a daughter, Janina, who also lives there not far from me.

In 1982 I was invited by the State of Israel to receive the medal of valor. A tree was planted for me in the Avenue of the Righteous.

In 1985 I went back to Poland for the first time. There I met my sisters, all of whom survived. My mother had died in 1957. On my way back, I stopped in Munich, Germany to meet little Roman. Now married, he has two children, a girl and a boy. He told me about the major's fate...

The major had been kicked out by his family after the war. He was left a pauper living practically on the streets. Aida found him and took him to the Jewish community, where they found him shelter, and in this way, he passed his final years, becoming like an old grandfather to Roman. Schultz, I heard, was killed at the end of the war.

Irene spoke of a lesson we should apply beyond the Holocaust.. ."We all belong to one big human family and we must help one another, do what is right."

All twelve survived the war.

Johannes H. Lemmens was born on June 25, 1923 in Heerlen, Netherlands. His father, a social activist and a writer, was put in a concentration camp. His mother was very deeply involved in the Dutch resistance. For her work saving the lives of over 250 Jews, she was honored after the war by Yad Vashem, the Queen of the Netherlands, and the Pope. Johannes helped his

mother with her underground activities, helping to place Jewish people in hiding with other Dutch families.

Adapted from:

HONOR . . . WHATEVER THE PRICE

It was early in the morning, early 1941, when the German Security Police surrounded our home in the Netherlands and demanded entrance. When I opened the front door, three armed GSP's rushed in and went through the downstairs, then ran upstairs and unnecessarily screamed at my father to get up and get dressed.

As his captors were shoving my father down the stairs and disregarding my two sobbing sisters, my father stopped and told me in a tough, German-defiant manner, "They are taking away our freedom, but they will never be able to take our spirit and our future. You must believe this! Never go down on your knees for anyone, always be honorable and fight for what is right. Do you promise?" While I promised him I would do this, he was now being shoved forcibly out the front door to the truck. As he knelt on the ledge of the truck bed and attempted to crawl onto the truck, a GSP swung his rifle by holding the barrel, and with the butt-end sent my father headlong into the dark interior of the truck. I now saw a few more arrested men inside the truck.

In subsequent weeks, it became more and more clear that the arrest of my father had nothing to do with the underground activities my mother had been very involved in, which was primarily the moving of hundreds of Jews from the north to the south of Holland (where we lived) and finding safe places for them to hide and avoid deportation to, and probably death in, German concentration camps. It also became clear that virtually all who were imprisoned with my father in this mass arrest were well-known and respected Dutch men. My father was primarily known as a social activist and writer.

Six weeks after my father's arrest, we were informed by the now local Nazi-controlled police department that my father was "interned as a hostage." It was soon clear what it meant to be a hostage. When an act of sabotage was committed, the Germans publicized in the now Nazi-controlled newspapers that in reprisal, one or more hostages had been executed.

While my father's life was in serious jeopardy as a hostage, my mother accelerated her underground activities. It was still in the early part of the war. We now had small groups of Jews in our home with increased frequency. They could not walk outside, talk loudly, and their presence had to be transparent to the neighbors. They were moved only during the safest hours of the night, as well as the safest route. Their stays with us were short and only until a more permanent place of hiding was found.

We were most fortunate in having a German informer within the ranks of the local GSP. We did not know who he was. There was one contact in the Dutch underground for this informer (to minimize risk) and he, in turn, communicated as necessary with my mother and others. Once we had a much larger than normal, and therefore riskier, group of seventeen Jews in our home, which included four young children. We received an urgent message by our contact that the GSP

was probably already on their way to raid our home. We had survived two such previous raids, and the escape procedures were well-rehearsed. This included immediate pick-up of all personal items and evacuation through our back garden, through a brush-obscured hole in our back fence and into a back entrance of a tuberculosis sanitarium located in the back of our home. We had an agreement with the medical order of nuns who ran the center that they accept these Jews and hide them short-term as bedridden TB patients.

As the Jews were still exiting our back door and running through our back garden and we were rolling up blankets and pillows and checking for any evidence of their presence accidentally left, the GSP arrived. The warning appeared to have come too late. With my older sister yelling that the GSP were already running up our walk, my mother surveyed the hopeless situation and rushed out the front door to confront the GSP. In a very upset and loud voice, she demanded to know from the officer in charge, “What is this? Another raid?” as the Germans halted their approach and the officer in charge seemed confused, her voice quickly became hysterical, and she continued in her fluent German, “How can you? I have a husband in a concentration camp, and I have three children in this home and you think I’m doing something wrong in this home? You are crazy!” Realizing that precious minutes were being gained for the Jews to safely escape and to clear the house of any evidence, she concluded her tirade by forcibly holding the young GSP officer’s arm and demanding, “Take me to your commanding officer right now! I will explain and ask him!” By now, we were all clear.

To our utter disbelief, and by now also to the surprise of our aroused neighbors, my mother left with the GSP officer in charge, as she had requested. It was to see his commandant to make a personal appeal to this “obviously smart man” to stop these ridiculous and nonsensical raids. When my mother came back, laughing through tears of released tension and emotion, she told us that she thought she’d convinced him how stupid and absurd these raids were and that they, in fact, were a discredit to him and his department. He, in fact, made an apology to my mother, something she had not expected, not even in her wildest imagination!

There was no need or thought of sleep, only relief and feeling very victorious. Later, my mother became reflective and said, “This was not just luck. God was with us. Someday we may not be lucky. You and I already know too much. The Germans are very experienced at how to extract our knowledge, where we have hidden the hundreds of Jews, who the persons are in our local resistance movement, as well as many other critical considerations. If we were caught and talked, hundreds of others would be caught and with near certainty would die.” We knew too well. . . . We had two immediate relatives who had been caught, and who were subsequently executed.

It became evident in our ensuing discussion that my mother was clearly torn between motivations of love for her family and that of doing what was right and honorable. Then she said, “You must always maintain the capacity to love and to do so unselfishly. . . not only God, but everyone with no exceptions. You must be forgiving and instead build on the good qualities of people. Ultimately, you will never fail and your life will be worth living.” Recognizing, however, the more immediate realities of life, she continued, “If you are ever caught by the Germans, you must only do what is honorable . . . this is what we are fighting for! Do you know that keeping your honor may cost you your life?” I told her I was prepared. She finally asked if anything happened to her or to my father, would I promise to take truly loving care of my two sisters. I gave her my word of honor on that.

Morris Dziesientnik was born on July 30, 1919 in Przytyk, Poland. Shortly after the war began, he ran away from Lód~, Poland with his bride before it became a closed ghetto. They ran away to Russia, moving further and further east to escape the advancing German forces. They went as far as the Soviet republic of Kazakhstan in Asia. Morris wanted to fight against the Germans. He joined the Soviet Red Army and fought in defense of Leningrad. He was then sent to Finland, where he was transferred by the Russians to the Polish Army, and in 1944, he liberated the concentration camp of Majdanek in Poland.

Q. What happened when you returned home to Lód~?

A. My family was there. I spent a couple of weeks there, but I saw that in the center of the city,
they were hanging Jews.

Q. Who was hanging them?

A. The Germans. Every day, different Jews were hung upside down with their heads down. And when I saw this, I figured to myself, how long could I live here? Sooner or later, I will die. So I talked to my girlfriend, whom I loved very much. I told her, “Look, this is the time to run away. Maybe they’re going to make a ghetto for Jews and by then, it’ll be too late. Make up your mind. I’m ready to go.” So she said, “I’m going with you.” And we left. I wanted to help my parents, but there was nothing I could do. This was the only solution. I wanted to fight. And we went. It wasn’t so easy. We crossed the border at night.

Q. How far were you able to ride by train before you had to cross the border?

A. From Warsaw, a couple of hours.

Q. Could you take the train across the border?

A. No. We stopped at a certain point and waited there until it got dark. And then we saw a peasant. We gave him a couple of pieces of soap. He told us how to cross to the Russian side. So, we crossed the way he told us, and we got there.

Q. Were there any guards at this border to stop people from crossing into Russia?

A. We waited for the guard to go away. A lot of people got stopped either by the Germans or the Russians. But we were lucky to pass both guards. We went into a little village there. And we went up in a haystack. We gave the peasants whatever we had, and we went to Bialystok.

Q. Why were you heading for Bialystok?

A. Just because the Russians were there. We would be free from Germans there.

Q. And what happened when you got to Bialystok?

A. When we came to Bialystok, it was no good there either. I mean, we were free, but there was no place for us to sleep and nothing to eat. We wanted to go to a synagogue, but the caretaker wouldn't let us in. We had to call a policeman to let us in. Then, thousands of refugees came into the synagogue and slept there. It was horrible and dirty. Typhus existed there. People were dying. The only good thing was that the Russian government supplied all the refugees in the streets with a big bowl of soup and bread.

Q. What year was this?

A. 1939. They registered those people who wanted to go further into Russia. We registered
and traveled a long time by train.

Q. Were there many people who had been in Bialystok with you who chose to go?

A. Yes. We couldn't live there, we could only die there.

Q. Did they tell you where in Russia they were going to be taking you?

A. Yes, to Kuragina, about 700 miles from Moscow. We didn't care where we were going. We
figured we'd have a place to sleep and food to eat.

Q. Were you married at this time?

A. We were married in 1939 before we left. She was sixteen and a half years old, and I was
seventeen and a half, and she was a doll.

When we came to Kuragina, there were just houses for working people and a stolova [canteen], a restaurant for them. The living was not bad. But what was a problem was that we had to fill a work quota. A certain amount of stones had to be cut and placed on the wagons. We never could make that quota. So, we only got a little money and not too much to eat in that place. There were a lot of Polish people working there, too, not only Jewish people. They were complaining, and they tried to start a riot, almost. The KGB [Soviet State Security Police] was watching everything.

Then one day, they said they were going to send us away further, to Siberia. Because of that, I said to my wife, Karola, "Listen, I'm not going there. Tonight, we'll open a window, and we'll go out and run to the station. We are going to run back. Because over there wherever they want to ship us, if it's bad here, it's going to be very bad there." We went back to the station. We didn't have any tickets, any money, nothing, so we couldn't sit in seats. We were under the seats, traveling there maybe for two weeks.

Q. How were you able to get food during that time?

A. We met Jewish people in certain cities, and they took us in and gave us something to eat.

Q. So you were on and off the train?

A. Yes, we lived worse than dogs. Finally, after a couple of weeks, we came to the city of Brest-Litovsk.

Q. Where is that located?

A. In Byelorussia [White Russia]. We came back there. It was bad. A lot of Jewish people were standing in line who wanted to go back to Germany. They couldn't take it. They didn't realize at that time what was going to happen to the Jewish people.

We met a friend there who worked in Byelorussia in a little town. And he said to me, "Look, we are working there in a factory where they're making plywood. It was a Belgian-French factory before the war. The Russians took it over. We'll take you there. You'll get a job." We went there, and my wife worked in a restaurant. I was a tailor, but over there tailoring meant nothing. So, one of those people there -- I think he was Polish -- introduced me and said that they were going to teach me how to work with a circulation machine to cut plywood to sizes. And it was good.

We rented a little room with a Jewish family. The room had a bed and we had food. My wife worked, and I made some money. One day, we went to the toilets, and everywhere there were signs saying "Kill Jews, and free Russia!"

I was living there along the tracks, and one night I heard a noise. I said to Karola, "What happened? I'll go and take a look." I went out, and suddenly I saw the KGB with two guns pushing thousands of crying people into wagons. The next day, I heard that they took out thousands of those peasants and Jews from the factory, and they shipped them to Siberia. After that, it was quiet. No signs, no nothing, until 1941, when the Germans attacked Russia.

The naczalnik [boss] in the factory told us, "The Germans have attacked the Soviet Union. Get ready." So, we started to evacuate the factory part by part. Then the naczalnik told us, "The Germans are 200 miles ahead of where we are on the road. That means that we are already in their territory. All the Jews who want to go away, hurry up and go in the wagons, because the Germans will kill you. They will not spare one of you." But the native Jewish people who lived there in that little town didn't go. They said, "I have a home here, where will I go?" But we left. There were a lot of refugees from Central Poland who worked there, and we all left.

Q. Now were there Germans in your area at this time?

A. No. They were already 200 miles from the town. If they had entered our area, we would have been finished. We left with the train. It stopped at night on a bridge and didn't move. I said to my wife, "I'll open the window, and we'll go out. We're not staying here. In the morning, the Messerschmidts [German planes] will bomb everything to pieces." So, I opened the windows on the bridge, and we climbed down in the water by the edge, and we went into the woods. Then we heard bombing, and a lot of people got killed.

Q. Do you remember any of the thoughts that were going through your mind as you were running off the train and into the woods?

A. Only one thought was on our mind -- to survive.

Q. Who picked you up?

A. The police, the government. There were no private businesses or citizens there. Everything was the police. They asked us some questions, and then we were sent deep into Russia to a collective farm to work. It just so happened that the people who worked on this farm were Ukrainian.

Q. Now when you say deep into Russia, where exactly were you located?

A. It was in Panzer.

Q. And how long did it take you to get there?

A. About two weeks.

Q. As you were traveling, were you given food to eat? What were the conditions on the train?

A. Very bad. They didn't give us anything. If we were lucky, we got something to eat here and there. That was about it. But when we got to the collective farm, each refugee couple, like us, were put with a different Russian family. They were old, nice people. They treated us like their own children. During the day, my wife and I worked hard in the field. Lunch, they cooked there. Supper, we ate at home.

For a couple of months, we stayed there. But the front went forward, and the Germans went very fast. The old man said to me, "Look, Mischka." He called me Mischka. "You'd be better off if you would go away, because these are Ukrainian people. If the Germans come in, they'll kill you, because they are against the Soviet Union. Get dressed while you have time, before the trains are bombed and go."

So, we left on a train. I had some food with me, but a lot of people didn't have anything. There were women, children, Russian people, Jewish people, and there were babies who were dying. They put the dead babies on the platform outside. They figured that when they'd come to a city, they would bury them. But they flew off the platform and disappeared.

We traveled for a long time. Finally, we came to Stalinabad, which was the capital of Soviet Republic of Tajikistan. Over there, I met my brother and my sister just by coincidence. They had settled themselves in Stalinabad. We couldn't. So we went out to a collective farm again. In Asia, it was horrible on those farms, but the people were so good to us. We couldn't refuse them if they invited us over. We never had to lock the door at night. We lived in two little houses made from clay. They all lived like that.

Q. How long did you stay there?

A. We stayed there a couple of months, until it was almost 1943. We were sick there several times. In Asia, my wife and I both had dysentery. We went into the hospital. We didn't know if we were going to live.

Q. Dd they take good care of you while you were in the hospital?

A. They took care of us as best they could, and we survived. This was already close to 1943. My wife was three months pregnant. I was nervous, young, and wanted to fight. I couldn't get out of mind what had happened. I was like half-crazy. So I went and registered in the Russian army in 1943. They shipped us not far from Stalinabad to a training camp, and they said to us, "We're going to train you for two weeks. We don't have any time. If you're not going to learn everything, it's going to be just too bad for you people."

Q. Where did Karola remain?

A. Karola remained in Stalinabad. We had already managed to move to the city.

Q. How did she feel about your joining the army?

A. She couldn't say yes, she couldn't say no. It was a time that there was no way out. If I wouldn't have gone to the army, they would have taken me to the gulag [labor camp].

Q. So this was a decision to save yourself.

A. To save myself or to get killed. I mean, to get killed like a human being, fighting. So I went in that camp. It was a very tough training camp. It was so crowded that at night, we slept side by side. If one wanted to move this way, we all had to move this way. Room and time, we didn't have. We hardly slept anyway. They trained us for two weeks, day and night, on how to fight and how to protect ourselves. After two weeks, they gave us fur jackets, fur hats, and warm boots, so we knew right away where we were going. Before we left, the lieutenant said to the soldiers, "You're going to Leningrad. And I want you to know, this minute, the Germans are killing Jews and burning them by the millions."

Q. How many of the soldiers were Jewish, a good percentage?

A. Not too many.

Q. What were your feelings when he said that to you?

A. My feeling was to go there and fight. That's the only feeling I had. I didn't think about getting killed. I'm telling you the truth. So they put us on trains, and it didn't take us long to get there. We didn't go into Leningrad. The fight was on the outskirts of Leningrad, near Finland.

Q. What time of year was this?

A. Winter, 1943, and it was cold. In that division, there were 11,000 soldiers. The name of that division was Krasna-Znamionnaja, Krasna Armia [Red Army]. Whenever people were killed, they replaced it with more soldiers. The first night they dropped us off, the Germans started bombing. Almost all soldiers got killed. Out of 11,000 maybe 50 survived, and I was one of them. I was lucky.

Q. Describe some of the scenes to me that you saw that night.

A. First, I was on a tank with an automatic weapon. You could shoot out 74 bullets with that weapon, cut a man in half. We ran right from the tank to the trenches. And we were there, shooting and fighting. They started bombing and killing that very night. I had a partner who was a refugee like me. We were laying in those trenches, people were killed all around us or were without legs, crying and moaning. The Red Cross came right after that, and they picked up all the people. They picked me up, too, and they patched me up. The next day, they sent me back to the front. Then I was not on a tank any longer. I had a different kind of weapon which took two people to operate. We were there operating in those trenches, day and night. There was no letup. They brought us something to eat, but we had to stay there. We could only sleep for ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes at a time, that's all. We had to be careful not to sleep too well. Otherwise, we weren't going to wake up. A lot of people died that way.

We were there fighting from 1943 until 1944. One day, the Germans advanced a few feet, the next day the Russians went forward, and it went on like that every day. Then, one day in 1944, from the trenches, I could hear trucks coming. We looked out and saw covered trucks. They called us out and said, "You have to follow those trucks. Don't hide. You don't have to be afraid. This is it," they said. And then, we went through the German trenches near Finland, and they took off the covers. When we entered those trenches, there was nothing, not a soul living. Everything was burned to death. They told us not to eat when we saw food. We were always hungry. One time Marshal hukow came to visit us, and he asked us if the food was good. I said, "The soup is like water." He patted me on the back. "Tomorrow, it's going to be better."

Q. So you had fought your way to the Finnish border?

A. Yes. And we went up to the capital, Helsinki. The war was over there. They took out all the Polish citizens -- even Russians, whose parents or grandparents had been born in Poland -- and shipped us to the Polish army.

Q. Now what year was this?

A. 1944, in the middle of winter. Then they formed an army, and they sent us to be trained as
Polish soldiers.

Q. Why would they feel they had to train you after you had been fighting all these years?

A. Many of the soldiers were Russians who couldn't speak Polish. They needed those Russians in the Polish army to watch the Poles. There was another Polish army, Anders' army, in England, but it was an antisemitic army. Ours was the real socialist army.

They sent us to a school not far from Moscow to be trained as truck drivers. They needed us to drive to the front lines. So, we were there about two months. They taught us how to drive, but we only had a half an hour practice, because they didn't have enough gas. We learned how to fix the cars from books. You know, the Russian trucks were very simple trucks to fix.

In that school, there were a lot of young people from Poland. While the lieutenant was talking to us, they threw potatoes at us, at the Jewish soldiers. They were antisemites. The lieutenant saw that and said, "Everybody up! Get up! Do you think that you are here

in a Nazi camp or something? This is Russia. In Russia, everybody is equal. Look at me. I am a Gypsy. And I am a lieutenant. Here, it doesn't matter, a Jew, a Gypsy, or a Pole, or anybody. If I see one more thing like that, you'll all go to jail."

So we finished school there, and we got our license to be a truck driver. They gave me a truck, and I was driving for the Polish army. They sent us to Tomaszów, Poland. We were already on Polish territory, and we were driving the Germans back even faster than they had driven the Russians when they started the war.

Q. What condition was the German army in at this time?

A. It was in bad condition. They didn't know what hit them. We moved that fast. But then the Russians didn't want to cross the border to Warsaw, because the Poles had something else in mind at that time. In Warsaw, the Poles staged an uprising against the Germans. They figured the Russians would come in and help, and the Poles would gain control over Warsaw. So, the Russians waited until the Germans killed them off. Then we went to Majdanek. We were among the first to arrive there in 1944.

Q. And how long had you been in Poland at this time?

A. Two months, three months, something like that.

Q. Did you know that you were coming towards this camp?

A. We knew.

Q. How did you know?

A. The Jewish people were talking among ourselves. We knew that Majdanek was a Jewish camp. We learned that from the Poles. As we were coming with the soldiers, they were talking about how they killed the Jews. Then we entered Majdanek.

Q. What was the first thing that you saw when you went in Majdanek?

A. The worst thing I saw was that the factories were still working. They didn't know that we were coming in. We went so fast that the Nazis didn't know that we were entering Majdanek.

Q. Did the German guards try to stop you as you entered?

A. No. They saw us, and they ran away. The KGB caught them.

Q. What did you see as you went in?

A. When we came into Majdanek, everybody stopped breathing. We saw the dead people. They were carrying them out of the ovens. Dead, we saw dead people. The surviving people were dying. I saw a woman laying there with her breast bitten or cut off and a man whose organs were ripped out from between his legs. A dying man was laying there. I asked him, "Tell me, who did that? What did they do?" He told me that the Germans had dogs which they specially trained to rip off a person's genital parts when they gave a

signal. In an hour, that man was dead.

Q. What were your feelings at this time?

A. I didn't have any feelings. None of the soldiers had any feelings, nothing. We were all standing like we were blind. The smoke was still coming out of the oven. And I didn't feel anything. I figured to myself, what I did was right. I went to the army. I fought with dignity. I killed Germans there. The Germans were yelling, "I'm a communist." So we hit them in the head, and we killed them. The Russian lieutenant told us, "Bring some live ones." We never did. We killed them.

Q. You said you saw the smoke coming from the ovens.

A. Yeah.

Q. Did you see the ovens?

A. Yeah, sure. I don't know how to describe them to you. There were ovens, like in a bakery but bigger. I was used to ovens, we had a bakery. But these were the biggest I'd ever seen with dead people laying inside.

Q. Do you remember about how many ovens there were?

A. I saw two ovens.

Q. Were you able to talk to any other people in the camp at this time?

A. Nobody talked. Nobody could talk, for a while.

Q. How did the other prisoners of the camp look?

A. The other inmates couldn't walk. I never saw anything like that. Even rats have a chance to survive but not Jews. They were skinny and in bad shape. Very few of those people survived afterwards. They couldn't see. I went to them, and I patted them. I said, "What's your name?" One said, "Shlomo," the other one said this and that. I said to them, "Don't worry. You're safe."

Q. And what was their reaction when they heard that?

A. Nothing.

Q. Did they believe you?

A. They believed me, but there was no reaction at all.

Q. Did you go into the barracks at all?

A. Yes.

Q. And what did you see?

A. There were no beds, only people laying there on dirt floors. We carried them out.

Q. How long did you remain in the camp?

A. I remained there a couple of hours.

Q. Was the army that came in with you able to help the people at all?

A. Oh, they tried to help them. But the Russian army didn't have food. They could have good
hearts, but we didn't have anything to eat. So, we went to the nearby peasants for food.

Q. What were the reactions of the peasants? Did they want to help these people?

A. We didn't give them a choice. They had to give some food. They didn't want to help.

Q. Did anybody ask them if they knew about this camp?

A. Oh, they knew. The neighbors. The camp was next to Lublin, a city. The smoke went on as they worked there. They went to church there, they went to New Year's celebrations, to weddings. They lived with the smoke, and they liked it. They liked to see the Jewish people burning.

Q. Was anyone left in the camp to help the people after you liberated them? Were the prisoners aware of the fact that they could leave the camp now?

A. Oh, yes, but they couldn't walk, so they couldn't leave on their own. We had to take them
on stretchers.

Q. Did you do that?

A. I helped.

Q. Where did you bring them on the stretchers?

A. To the Red Cross.

Q. Was the Red Cross in the camp when you went there?

A. No, they were outside. They came in, but slowly.

Q. What did they do when they came into the camp?

A. They checked them out, the heart, this, and that. They brought some food, but they couldn't feed them too much at once. It was so bad, that it could not have been a worse life for those people.

Q. When you came out of the camp was there any discussion amongst the soldiers as to what

they had seen in the camp?

A. Yeah, they talked about it.

Q. What did they have to say?

A. The Polish soldiers liked it. They were antisemites. They said, “They’re still around, Jews.” But the Russians were different. They said that never in history had they seen a thing like that.

Q. Were you able to talk about it at all?

A. No. I couldn’t talk at all about what I saw. Nobody could talk. Not even the general could talk
about it.

Leo Mirkovi was born in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia on January 31, 1904. He was a well-known opera singer. During World War II, he went into hiding in Italy with false papers under the name of Arturo Testa and worked for the underground. He was sent to the United States in 1944 to a camp for refugees at Fort Ontario in Oswego, N.Y. until 1945. The 1,000 refugees interned there, who had been brought over from liberated Italy, were supposed to be returned to Europe at the end of the war. Ultimately, the refugees of Fort Ontario were allowed to remain in the United States.

A. I went to Rome, because I thought that this was the nearest place to reach the Americans. There was a Jewish organization already, the Red Cross from Switzerland, and the consulate, who helped us out financially. We had an organized underground in Rome. There were, for example, many apartments holding American and English soldiers who couldn’t speak Italian. We’d bring them food and bread. I was in the underground, because I spoke perfect Italian. I had false documents with Italian names.

Q. What false names did you use?

A. I used Arturo Testa. He gave me his documents in Zebello, a little Italian town. He wanted to help me out. He gave me his documents. I took his picture out and put mine in and falsified the stamp on the picture. With that document, I lived in Rome over a year, waiting for the Americans there.

Q. And how did you live?

A. Delasem, a Jewish organization in Italy helped, and we got packages from the Red Cross
in Switzerland.

The life in Rome certainly became harder everyday because we heard shooting, the cannons in Anzio. The Germans were pretty nervous. They were catching people for work and sending them to Anzio to dig trenches. Life became very hazardous. They were stopping buses and picking us up like dog catchers. And we were trying to change

apartments, because in lots of apartments there were spies who gave out information about where the refugees lived and they would come and pick us up.

We had in our underground, I'm sorry to say, people who were working for Gestapo also, and they were telling the hiding places of the Jews. And we had a very hard time then saving our people. One day I came to visit a friend, and I saw the German soldiers taking away my friend along with all the soldiers who were in that home. That means that somebody from the Gestapo got the address and were taken away and killed the next day as spies, because these soldiers were in private clothing, not in uniform.

After one year of this, the Americans started to move toward Rome. We were becoming very depressed about what would happen. We didn't know if the Germans would take everyone with them when they returned to the West. That troubled us, but it happened that the Germans didn't act. They didn't take anybody from Rome so that we didn't really lose too many. There were some French soldiers who made friends at the hotel where the French Jews lived, and they gave the Gestapo the hotel address. Two days before the Americans marched into Rome, all these French Jews were taken away from the hotel. But we caught these two soldiers, because they wore civilian clothing trying to hide themselves

in Rome to get free also. We found them, and the Americans knew very well what to do with them. This was in 1944.

Once the Americans came, President Roosevelt invited one thousand refugees from Italy, from all these liberated towns to be brought to America until the end of the war. And that's how I met Dr. Ruth Gruber who was sent from America, from Secretary Ickes.

Q. Harold Ickes?

A. Yes. He sent her. She was in charge on the boat. She, together with Delasem, the Jewish organization which gave her the list of Jews who were liberated, chose the people who could go. Not everyone who applied was chosen. Families with little children had preference. But, for example, my case was separate because I was in the underground and was known by Delasem. It seems to me that is why they chose me to go with that group to America.

Q. But generally speaking, they took women and children.

A. We had many little children. There was even a Turkish woman who was expecting a baby any day, and she was on the boat with me. We traveled over to New York for twenty days and twenty nights. She became hysterical. She had the baby before we arrived in New York.

Q. Do you have any idea how many applied?

A. Very many. But they couldn't take more than one thousand persons. There were not only Jews on that boat. Among these thousand people there were many White Russians who were afraid to stay in Europe, because the Russian communists were coming. We had Greeks and Poles; I think we had about twenty different nationalities. Most of them were Jews.

Q. What happened after you were chosen?

A. When I was chosen, they fixed a date on which the thousand of us had to meet in Naples. It was secret. They wouldn't tell us what kind of boat we were traveling on, because it was a military convoy. Nobody knew where the boat was. When we arrived in Naples, they put us in cars and brought us onto a big warship where there were wounded American soldiers. We had a very bad trip, because there were German airplanes and German U-boats nearby during the trip. They wouldn't tell us what was happening.

We met Dr. Gruber on the boat. She organized a school for teaching English, so we started to learn right away. That was the first thing. Then she even organized entertainment for the wounded soldiers. Unfortunately, there were fights on the boat because the people spoke different languages and didn't understand one another. But I was happy because by that time, I spoke about six languages.

I tried to help people with the food on the boat. They gave us frankfurters to eat on the boat. After so many years of not eating them, some were afraid that the children would get sick if they ate too many. The cook threw them in the ocean for the fish. He didn't want to give them to us a second time. The children were crying when we arrived in New York, because they were afraid all they would be given to eat was frankfurters. They still didn't know where they were going or if there would be food. That was very tragic for the children.

We arrived in New York at Ellis Island in 1944. We got off the ship, and all thousand of us were put on the trains to go to Oswego, New York. Oswego had high fences and military barracks, and we were divided throughout the buildings. Everyone got their own apartment. We didn't know how much longer the war was going to last or how long we were going to be in that camp. That's the reason they started to make an immediate plan to organize the whole camp. We were told right away that we alone must do all the work in the camp, even the heating of the rooms and cooking. The women especially had to learn how to cook for so many people.

Q. There was one big kitchen for everybody?

A. We had a kosher kitchen, and we had a kitchen for anybody who wanted only Jewish-style. We were divided into all these kitchens where we had to arrive for breakfast, lunch, and dinnertime. We had services Friday night in the synagogue. Then we had entertainment also. I was brought there mostly for the entertainment of these thousand people. I was supposed to organize concert and theater performances. We gave many theater performances in Oswego, and even the public attended. They were very enthusiastic.

Q. I would like to know a little bit more about the camp itself. Who was in charge?

A. There was a woman from a Jewish organization, Mrs. Shapiro, who came and asked, "What do you need?" She was in charge of bringing us some clothing, because nobody had anything.

Q. And what about the camp management?

A. We had a director of the camp who was American. We even had police. Sometimes we got permission to go into town to shop for cigarettes or something else if we wanted. At the door, the police were there to make sure we came back exactly on time.

Q. And, who shopped for you, who provided the food?

A. The food came from Jewish organizations that brought it to the camp. I think it was organized by businessmen who knew where to get the food and how to get it into the camp.

Q. Was there any help in education?

A. We had a teacher from a city. She was a good teacher and a nice lady. And that's how we
learned our English in the camp.

Q. What about the children?

A. The children, the same thing. The children had school, and some of them even started going to school in the city.

B. Q. Did they have to obtain special permission?
A. Yes. Some of the girls were very talented and wanted to study. They got permission to go into town and visit the teachers' college in Oswego. From this teachers' college, people would always come to the camp. We had visitors from towns all around Oswego. Sometimes people would come to the fence and try to talk to us, asking many questions, such as where we were from, or if we knew their families.

Q. They were able to come into camp?

A. Not in camp, but at the fence. But there were some guests who were with organizations who
came into the camp to find out what we needed.

Q. Did you get any news from the outside world?

A. We got news, because we all listened to the radio.

Q. Was there an attempt made by anybody to leave the camp?

A. Nobody ever escaped the camp. That is interesting morally, that we can say that the people were all happy that we were in a safe place awaiting the end of the war. ORT had a good organization in our camp, training women to be tailors and beauticians, for example.

Q. So, how long did this last?

A. It lasted until President Roosevelt died. And when President Roosevelt died, we made a big memorial service in the camp that was, I think, the only service in all Oswego during that time. We had visits from Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Morgenthau a few times in the camp. I even gave concerts for her, and she mentioned in her daily diary [which was published in newspapers around the country] a few times that she heard me in the Oswego camp.

Q. Before you went to the camp, did you have a guarantee that you would be able to leave?
What were the conditions under which you came?

A. We all signed papers that after the war we would all go home.

Q. In other words, these were not permanent affidavits.

A. No. After the death of President Roosevelt, Truman immediately became president. His first duty was to allow 50,000 refugees from all over to come to America. Because we were already here, we were allowed to stay as the first of these 50,000. The camp closed, because the war was over. Anybody who wanted to go back to Europe, left. People who wanted to stay in America didn't get their affidavits immediately, so we got permission to stay and went to New York. Then we took trains to Buffalo, New York and we crossed the bridge to Canada. We then entered America officially with the affidavit.

This excerpt is adapted from the original testimony of Leo Mirkoviá which is part of the Oral History Collection of the Holocaust Documentation and Education Center, Inc.

Halina Laster was born in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Poland on June 4, 1921. Forced to live in the ghetto there for two years during World War II, she was subsequently sent to Blizin, Auschwitz, Reichenbach, and Altona. She was liberated by the Swedish Red Cross at the end of April 1945.

Q. What happened then?

A. We were taken to cattle trains. We should have suspected that something good was coming because they were counting us, fifty to each wagon, which was a luxury. We could sit down, even if it meant we had to pull our knees under our chins. I was sitting next to a wall by the door, because whenever the train made a stop, they had to let me out. I was so sick. Every train always had two SS men assigned when it was this kind of a short trip. And these two SS men in our train said, "Well, whatever, now you're going to be free. We don't know what is going to happen to us." We looked at them as if they were speaking Greek, because we didn't know what they meant. And at one point, the train stopped and our Lagerältester [camp elder or supervisor], Mrs. Popper, was walking from one train to the other with a couple of SS officials. She was saying, "The war is almost over. Hitler committed suicide." We thought that she had lost her mind, that they were just leading her off to be shot. We didn't know what to make of it. We just didn't understand at all. It didn't penetrate.

Then we arrived in Padberg, which is in Denmark. It took us a few days, a trip that really normally should have taken a few hours. I believe that the tracks were bombed, and they had to go in a roundabout way. When we came there, they started making a list of our names. We didn't trust them, and we didn't know why they were interested in our names. So, everybody gave them the wrong name. They had do it all over again the next day.

They took us into barracks, which we were afraid to leave. The only way they could clean the barracks was to offer us food. So, as we left the barracks, we got our food. Also, when we first arrived, people had headaches and other problems. They gave us valeriana drops

[medicine used to alleviate stomach aches]. As long as they were giving them as well as sugar cubes, people fought over them. Later, nobody had a stomach ache because they administered them in water instead. And when we got our sandwiches, they were wrapped in wax paper, in the Scandinavian manner. It was just unbelievable. We were standing in the yard and comparing the sandwiches and looking at them. We didn't really understand why there was all this wrapping and re-wrapping and playing around with food. We were used to a chunk of bread in the hand and a liter of soup in a bowl.

And then I noticed a Danish man with three girls standing outside of the compound, crying. We quickly hid our sandwiches. We didn't want to be looked at as freaks. But, still, there was a farmer outside there who had a mound of potatoes and, sure enough, in the morning there was not one potato left. We ate them. We were hungry, because the bread they gave us was very delicate, very lightweight. We were used to this rough piece of bread, and we didn't feel it. We thought it was another way of starving us to death.

Q. Were the SS still with you?

A. They had gone. We were totally now in the hands of the Red Cross, but it didn't penetrate. We didn't understand.

Q. Were they wearing uniforms?

A. They were mostly women wearing nurse's uniforms with big aprons.

Q. You thought they were still Nazis?

A. No, we knew they were not Nazis, but we knew that only in our heads. We didn't feel that. We didn't know who they were, exactly. We didn't know why they would take care of us. We were just very suspicious of everybody and everything. And then they took us on trains again. Trains were not our favorite subject, even if those were real Pullman trains. We sat in those trains.

When we arrived in Denmark, it was a very sad experience for me, because the Danish prisoners were met by their families. And they came in clothes. They were wearing coats, gloves, pocketbooks, and hats. They came with bouquets of flowers and took the people home. I was sitting on the floor looking and thinking, "Where am I going?" I had nobody and no place to go.

Then the nurses put wooden steps next to the trains when they unloaded us and helped us down. I was looking at those nurses and was thinking they were like giants. They seemed so big to me, so terribly big.

This was the moment when I couldn't move anymore. I was paralyzed from my waist down, I just couldn't move. But my friends were camouflaging me so nobody would see it, because we did not want the authorities to know that I couldn't walk. My friends were shlepping [carrying] me until Sweden. When we got to Sweden, that's when they couldn't do it any longer, because they were not strong enough. At this time, somebody must have discovered it and put me on a stretcher. Again, we were taken on the Pullman trains, and we were to be ferried over to Sweden. One of the railroad workers, who was a Polish Christian man,

said to us, “You think they’re going to take you to Sweden? They’re going to sink the ship.” We believed him. So we were really expecting the ship to sink, because we knew that they sank some ships with prisoners in Lubeck.

Q. When did you hear that the war was over?

A. Well, at this time it wasn’t over yet. So, when we came to Sweden, another interesting thing happened. The train stopped, and a man came and stuck his head in the door. He said, “Shalom” [hello or peace] and we thought that meant we’re going to die. We asked, “Who are you?” He said he was the rabbi of the city. We said, “Jews? Are there Jews here?” So he said, “Yes, there are Jews here.” “And they’re free?” So, he said, “Yes. There are Jews who live here.” “Do they walk on the street?” We couldn’t fathom that there were Jews living free.

Suddenly, there was a commotion. Some of the so-called Polish-Christian girls who were there came running to us and said that they were Jewish. They had been in hiding. They heard the word, “shalom,” and they came. They admitted to being Jewish.

They brought us to Hälsingborg and put us in a school. But again there was a problem. The bus drivers had uniforms, uniform caps, and nobody wanted to get on the bus. Then they said that we were going to have a bath and, of course, nobody wanted to take a bath. Not that we didn’t want to be clean, but we didn’t know if the bath was for real. When we came in, they took my clothes off of me and disposed of them. They put us in tubs with a lot of soap. Soap, soap, soap. We didn’t want to leave those tubs! They gave us clean towels and dressed us. We were then shown to the rest of them, “Look, see.”

It was a terrible thing with our health, because everybody had diarrhea and dysentery and all kinds of things and the toilets broke down. So, then they had us using the outdoor facilities but nobody dared to go at night, because placed around the school were Swedish soldiers. They were not even carrying guns. They were just there to protect the population from all kinds of diseases that we had. This was more of a medical thing than anything else but, of course, we didn’t trust them.

Then we were moved from Hälsingborg to Båstad. Båstad was a resort where the King Gustav V used to play tennis. And we were in a school there.

Q. Were all of you moved or only the sickest ones?

A. All of us, yes, were moved. People were dying daily. When we arrived in Sweden, the authorities, the Red Cross, didn’t comprehend that we couldn’t be fed immediately in a normal manner. They had to give us food slowly. I would exchange my meat, fish, or whatever they gave us to my friends for the jello because jello was soothing. I could swallow it, and it was so easy to eat. And this was my luck, because I really was very ill and this saved me.

By the time I got a little bit better, I made a pact with myself. I decided, “Either I’m going to walk again and be a functioning individual, or I’m going to take my life.” Because by this time, I lost the incentive for living. I just didn’t see any sense in continuing. I had a very nice background, but I wasn’t able to earn a dollar. I didn’t have a skill or anything. I didn’t have a home. So I gave myself some time.

As soon as I was able to sit upright, I was sitting at the edge of my bed. I just got up and then moved my legs with my hands. I just moved them physically. One and then the other, and then the other. And then something happened -- but I really hesitate to tell people because it sounds like an imaginary thing -- but it really did happen this way.

It was as I got to the window. I was looking out the window and there was this fence around the school. A man came on a bicycle and looked up. He saw me and motioned to me with his hands to come quickly down. And my heart started beating. I said, “He must have some news about my family.” It did not occur to me that this man didn’t know who I was and obviously couldn’t see me very well on the second floor in the school. I most certainly didn’t know who he was. But I ran down the steps. He gave me a big package and said, “Bye, bye,” got on his bicycle and left. I came up to my room and opened this package. They were chocolates, candy. He came to give somebody candy. On the way, maybe to work, he was in a hurry, and he saw me in the window so he summoned me and I came. I cried like a baby. I didn’t want those chocolates. I gave them all away. But that’s how I started walking. I really walked. It sounds so stupid, but that’s how it was.

Q. Did you have any family in the United States?

A. Yes. I knew that I had relatives in America. I didn't remember their address, I didn't know English. All I knew was that they had changed their name to Seaman. At some point, I got a telegram from my aunt. We kept in touch, but I did not want to go to America. I got married. My husband and I became Swedish citizens, and I liked the country very much. One day in 1956, my aunt and uncle came to visit us. They started kissing and hugging the children. My children were just melting because a constant question was, "Why do all the other children have grandparents? Why do all the other children have cousins?" And they didn't have anybody. So when they came and started kissing and hugging our children, my uncle said to me, "Look, you work for somebody here, you can work for somebody in America. The whole family's in America." So we decided to come to America. And that's what we did in 1958.

Dvora Wagner, née Neiman, was born on August 3, 1930 in Lód~, Poland. She was forced to spend four years in the Lód~ ghetto before being sent to several concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, and Milhausen. Finally, she was sent to Bergen-Belsen, where she was liberated by the British in April 1945.

Q. You were in Bergen-Belsen at the time it was liberated. A few days prior to liberation, was there any knowledge at all on the part of anyone as to what was about to happen?

A. Nothing.

Q. Did the German soldiers all remain in the camp?

A. Yes, that was a surprise for them, too. I remember that they worked very hard, cleaning out and taking out the dead people.

Q. What was liberation day like? Can you describe it to me?

A. I remember that we sat together. We were so sick already, and most of us were crying. People didn't even have strength to pick up their heads. We couldn't drink the water anymore. I don't remember if they gave us bread to eat. All of a sudden, we saw English soldiers. They came, and some of them were Jewish people, too. Most of the Jewish people started to cry. Even the English could not believe seeing people in this condition.

Q. Was there any resistance on the part of the German soldiers as the English troops marched in? Did they try to resist the English coming in?

A. I don't know. We were in a closed camp. I think they surprised them, too, because they came so fast that the Germans couldn't run away anymore.

Q. Do you remember hearing any shooting or anything . . . any guns going off, as they entered the camp?

A. I don't remember.

Q. When were you first aware that the English troops were coming into the camp? How did you find out?

A. We saw them coming in. We saw different soldiers who had on brownish-green uni-

forms. Q. And what happened as they came in?

A. Right away, they gave us the food they had. This was a big mistake. They gave the people cans of beans and coke. Our stomachs were so weak that the people couldn't take it. Most of us were sick.

Q. But they didn't realize. They were trying help.

A. They saw dying people and the hunger. So they gave us everything. After the war, I think many people died from eating when they weren’t ready to eat.

Q. What did they do once they entered the camp?

A. They started to organize. First, they gave us food. Then they started to put some stuff on our beds and bodies to kill the lice. Then they took us out and brought us to a nearby camp where the Germans used to live. It wasn't far from Bergen-Belsen.

Q. They had taken all the German soldiers out of that

camp? A. Yes, sure. I don't know what they did with the

Germans. Q. Did any of the soldiers stop to talk to you at

all?

A. I think yes, but we couldn't talk with them. We didn't speak Eng-

lish. Q. Could any of them speak either in Polish or Yiddish to you?

A. I think the Jewish people knew Yiddish. So they talked with us. They took out the youngest children that were left over, and they brought us over to a nice place called a Kinderhaus [children’s house]. We stayed there for a couple months, I think. Right away they opened a school and started to teach us.

Q. Who did this?

A. I think Jewish English people from the army started to organize to help us as well as other Jewish people such as Hadassah Rosensaft, a concentration camp survivor. Her husband was head of the Jewish community in Bergen-Belsen. They did a lot for the children at that time; for all the people, actually. Then they brought us to a beautiful home in Hamburg, Germany.

Q. How many children were there in the group at this time?

A. There were about ninety children.

Q. And all ninety were brought to this lovely place in Hamburg?

A. Yes.

Q. How long did you remain there?

A. We remained there until we went to Palestine. We went to Palestine in May

1946. Q. So, it was about a year. What was life like in Hamburg once you got

there?

A. Oh, it was like heaven over there. We had people who were so wonderful to us. They started to teach us to play the piano and we used to study four or five hours a day in school. Then we socialized with the children in the afternoon and at night.

Q. And was there an effort made on the part of anyone to try to locate those members of your family who had survived?

A. Yes. After the war, I think it was the Red Cross that started to look for people who survived.

I remember it was a very hard time for me. Some of my girlfriends found members of their families. One found her father, one found her brother, one found her sister. Every day, there was somebody new coming in, and I had nobody.

Q. Did you ever find out what happened to your

brother? A. No, we didn't hear anything.

Q. How old were you at this time?

A. I must have been fifteen years old.

Q. What happened at the end of this year?

A. The head of the Jewish community was working with the British people in Palestine. I remember that [David] Ben Gurion came to Bergen-Belsen to see us with certificates for the children to go to Palestine.

Q. Did you realize that you were going to go to Palestine eventually while you were in Hamburg, or you had no idea what was going to happen?

A. Oh, no, we knew what was going to happen to us. We started to learn Hebrew right

away. Q. And had they told you that you were going to Palestine?

A. Oh yes. The brigada [brigade] right away prepared us to go to Palestine.

Q. How did you feel about that?

A. Oh, we felt beautiful, wonderful.

Q. You left Hamburg after a year and you went to Palestine. How did they transport you to

Palestine?

A. We left Germany and went to Marseilles. We were on a train, too, but a different train than when we went to Auschwitz. The teachers were with us. We waited for the boat to take us over to Palestine. The name of the boat was the Chantoleon.

Q. And how long did the trip take?

A. Five days.

Q. What were the sights that you first saw when you came into Palestine?

A. Oh, it was very exciting. We saw the mountains of Haifa. It was so beautiful. Then we got off the boat at the port of Haifa, and so many people were waiting for us. Everybody gave us candies and chocolate. They touched us, because we came from Germany. They welcomed us in Israel. I remember that I was so excited. I was crying all the time. I felt like I was coming home.

Howard Cwick was born in New York City on August 25, 1923. During World War II, he was a corporal in the U.S. Army 281st Combat Engineers. In April 1945, he was among the early liberators of Buchenwald, the largest concentration camp on German soil, because he happened to be in the vicinity when it was first discovered by the American forces.

Q. How old were you at the time of liberation?

A. Twenty-one. I was in the 281st Combat Engi-

neers. Q. What was your rank at that time?

A. I was a corporal.

Q. What camp did you liberate?

A. It's strange you say, what did I liberate? It makes me feel like I was John Wayne going in and shooting up. I found myself going through the gates of Buchenwald, outside of Weimar.

Q. Approximately what date was that?

A. It was exactly April 11, 1945.

Q. Did you have any advance knowledge of the camp before you got there?

A. No. Actually, we had a Jewish officer, and he came to tell me that we were going into Germany, and that either we should not wear our dog tags because of the letter H, for Hebrew, on the corner of them, or we should keep them in our pocket. It was felt that if we were captured by the Germans, being Jewish, we would be in much more danger. And as far as the camps were concerned, we heard rumors about how they killed Jews, but I was a typical young, American who knew everything, and in reality knew nothing. So, the fact that

the camp was there, we did not know.

We did know that for the last three or four days, we were outside of Weimar, Germany, and there was a horrible, horrible smell that permeated the air. We had no idea what it was. It was like nothing we ever smelled before, and no matter where you went, you just couldn't get away from it. But, we didn't know where it was coming from, or what it was. It was just there.

Q. When did you learn of the camp's existence?

A. Well, the morning of April 11th, a few of the men and myself were living actually in the back of a liberated truck, a German truck. It was better than sleeping on the ground and warmer. That morning, I was reloading the truck when a vehicle -- I believe it was a jeep -- came racing up to me. The other guys were out doing something else, and it struck me as strange, because the jeep didn't come from our side of the land. It came from the enemy side of the land. Yet, when it got up to me, the driver spun around by jamming on his brakes. He yelled, "Drop what you're doing, come!" It took about six or seven or eight minutes driving across land, across the terrain, and we came to this barbed wire city. It seemed to me that it went from that end of the horizon to the other end of the horizon. It was monstrous.

We came up to the fence, and it was an electrified fence. You could see the white insulators between the fence itself and the wires at the top. We saw people inside the camp in these strange costumes, just wandering around aimlessly. And we saw some bodies in the distance lying on the ground. We followed the fence until we came to the main gate. About the same time, another vehicle came up and stopped. Then a few minutes later, a truck came up with three more men. And we were all just sitting in front of this gate, until somebody -- I don't remember who it was -- just said, "What the hell are we waiting for?" We all got out of the vehicles. There must have been about a dozen or so there by the time, and we walked in.

What struck me was that on this iron or steel gate, this wrought iron gate, steel bars, in letters about four or five inches high, out of metal, it said *yeder fir sich alaint,* which I assume meant, from Yiddish, to each his own. Why that, I don't know. But the gate was not locked. It was partly open.

We walked in and found out later that this was Buchenwald. The things that we saw were absolutely horrifying. I had carried a camera all through the war as a hobby. From the time I was a little over seven years old when an aunt gave me a camera as a present, I carried one with me at all times. I was always waiting for that special picture, such as an airplane falling to the ground or a train hitting a trolley car. My parents would send me cigarettes and film. I used to trade the cigarettes with other soldiers if they gave me a roll of film. This particular day, I had just twenty-two shots left on the roll, and I photographed what I saw.

I wish I had a thousand rolls of film that day, because it was a world that couldn't possibly have been real. It was unreal. We thought we were living like animals, doing the things that we were doing. Taking human life is easy to talk about, but it's not easy to live with. But that day, I suddenly grew up, and I found out how totally ignorant and purposeless my life had been until then. What we found there changed my life, literally, forever.

We walked in, and ahead of us, people were walking around. They looked like drum skins, stretched over bony frames. There was no meat to them, like living skeletons. Every so often,

there would be somebody lying on the ground--some in ragged clothing, some in these long striped gowns that they wore. Some of them were already dead. Some of them were dying. Over on the side, there were many bodies, just scattered haphazardly where they fell and died.

Near the first building, there were long, wooden wagons. They had to be maybe fifteen, eighteen, twenty feet long. And they were piled ten, twelve, fifteen bodies high, for the entire size of the wagon, I guess waiting for mass burial, or burning, whatever it was. I tried to go over to people who were still living. A number of them would back away from me as though they were afraid. I imagine some of them thought that it could possibly be a trick of the Germans, so they would back away. And I kept saying, *"Ich bin ein Amerikaner Soldat. Ich bin* a *Jude."* [I am an American soldier. I am a Jew.] But they would back up. [crying]

One man pointed at my canteen, and he kept saying, *"Wasser, Wasser."* Water. So I gave him my canteen, and in one quick shot, he drained it. About ten minutes later, he grabbed around his stomach, and he began to wretch horribly. Nothing came out. He had nothing inside of him to come out. I guess he had drained my canteen too fast, and his empty body just couldn't take the shock of all of that liquid.

At that time, I heard them, some of the prisoners who had backed up away from us, in horror, speaking in -- I think it was Polish, I know no Polish, whatever, or German -- but in their conversation, I thought I recognized the word *Sam,* which I knew in Yiddish means poison. And I tried to convince them that no, we're not a trick, and we didn't poison him, and we wanted to talk to them. And I kept repeating, *"Ich bin* a *Jude. Ich bin* a *Jude."* (I am a Jew.) It was too difficult, I think, for them to realize that American soldiers were now in the camp; that their horror may be over.

We couldn't believe what we were seeing. There was a man lying on the ground. His head was totally encased in bandages. When he turned to face me, it looked to me like half his face had been obliterated. I walked over to another prisoner, and he started to yell at me in broken English, "Why couldn't you come a few minutes earlier?" [crying] "This is my friend." [sobbing] Excuse me. "We heard you were coming. He couldn't wait any longer. He just died."

A couple of the prisoners came over to us, and they said that they knew where a *Kapo* was hiding. Now for the sake of posterity, a *Kapo* was a fellow prisoner who, for some reason or other, began to work for the Nazis. Maybe he believed he'd have his name lowered on the death list. Maybe he thought he'd get a little extra food. But for whatever reason, he cracked, he broke, and he began working for them. We found out that a great number of those *Kapos* became more bestial than the Nazis were themselves. These prisoners told us, they knew where one of these *Kapos* was hiding, and we very nonchalantly said, "Bring him to us."

In the meantime, we were walking around. There were three of us, whom I didn't know from Adam. I'd never met them before. I was there totally by mistake. I should have been at company headquarters. We sort of stuck together. I was taking pictures, and they were talking about what they were seeing, and what they had heard in the past about atrocities. I had heard nothing about atrocities, other than the fact that the Germans were killing Jews, period.

We saw about eight or nine prisoners dragging this creature between them, amongst them. It was the *Kapo.* If you ever saw horror, dread on a human being's face, it was on his face. He knew what was in store for him. As they came closer to us, dragging this man, more and more

prisoners gathered around. They remembered him, they knew him. And they began to scream, "Give him to us!" I think that's what they were yelling, because they were yelling in every conceivable language. But the way they were reaching for him, I figured that's what they meant. As God is my witness, I knew [choked up] why they wanted him, and what they were going to do. And we very quietly turned around to discuss it. Not even as far away as you are sitting from me, which is like five or six feet, they punched and pummeled and kicked and stomped. They killed him. I could have interceded very easily. I weighed maybe 128, 129 pounds. But I had to be thirty, forty pounds more than they weighed, at the time. I had a rifle, I could have stopped them. I had a pistol, I could have stopped them. [crying] I took part in his death, just as surely as if I put my pistol to his head and fired. I've carried that, and his face, for the rest of my life.

A couple of years ago, I spoke to a group of Holocaust survivors. And when I finished, a number of people came up to talk to me. This little woman stood there for the longest time, trying to get a word in edgewise, and she couldn't. When she finally had a chance to talk, she said, "My husband became a *Kapo.* You did not do bad. We say, you did good. Six million say, you don't do bad." But even hearing her say it, didn't make it any easier. It's so easy to talk about killing. It's so easy to take a human life. It's not easy to live with it. [crying]

I stayed in that camp for the rest of that day. The next day, we went back in. By that time, there were hundreds of other soldiers and officers of every conceivable rank. They brought in people from town, at gunpoint, at bayonet point, to force them to go through the camp. Every one of them was totally innocent of information. They had to have seen the railroad cars going into the camp, with arms and legs sticking through the sides of the old boxcars, and coming out again empty. If we smelled that stench, five miles or more away, they in town had to have smelled that all the time. But they knew nothing. They were totally innocent. In all my time in Germany, I never met a Nazi. It was always somebody else. Or they would say, "The things that our soldiers did, they were following orders."

One of the men drove me back to where I remembered my outfit being. I told a few of the men in my outfit what I had seen, and they looked at me like I was talking about Buck Rogers in the 25th Century, when we were kids, you know. In one town, I don't know where it was, we found chemicals for processing film, and that night, or two nights later, a friend of mine and I took pieces of wood, and we made like a box on the ground. We took a raincoat, and laid it into this box, oh, no more than six or seven inches high. We poured the chemicals in. He stood over me, with another great big raincoat. And in that batch, I literally took the roll of film, and like the old days, I seesawed it up and down into the developer. And I developed the roll of film. Thank God, it worked, and they came out. I hadn't seen the prints. I just saw the film, and I took the roll of film, and I put it into one of these little metal canisters that the film had come in, and about three, four, five weeks later, I made up a package, and I sent that roll of film home to my folks. That roll of film lay in that canister, easily, ten years.

In the early 1960s, I think it was, I was teaching in New Hyde Park on Long Island. There was a film on TV that night about the Holocaust. My kids came into the photo lab, and they were saying that, "That's Hollywood. It couldn't have been that bad, it couldn't have been." That went through me like a red-hot poker. The next day, I brought in my pictures, and instead of teaching photography, I lectured to every one of my classes. The kids, of course, went out of the class talking about what they saw and what I told them. And that one class grew to every social studies class in the school, then the other buildings, the other schools in the district. And I began getting calls, like from the Lutheran church in town. They wanted to see them, and that's how I began lecturing.

Beate Klarsfeld was born in Berlin, Germany in 1939. She is a world-renowned Nazi hunter who, along with her husband, historian and attorney Serge Klarsfeld, has brought many Nazi war criminals to justice, most notably Klaus Barbie, "the Butcher of Lyon [France]."

A. When I was growing up, I learned nothing about Nazi crimes at home. My parents never spoke about the war, like most Germans, except to complain about having lost. In school at this time, teaching the truth about Germany's responsibility for World War II was banned. So really, I learned about this only when I came to France in 1960. I met my future husband, Serge. His father died in Auschwitz. He told me the story and so slowly, I learned what really happened in Germany between 1933 and 1945. I learned that Serge's family is Jewish. During the war, his father was deported. He and his mother and sister survived by a miracle, because they were hiding in the southern part of France in Nice. So this was the first time I realized the atrocity of the German people towards the Jews.

Q. When you first began to become aware of this, do you remember what your thoughts and feelings were?

A. I would say I was ashamed when I was with my future mother-in-law, and she explained to me how she had survived.

Q. Did you ever -- after you began to find out the reality of the German part in World War II -- go back to your family and confront them with these facts?

A. Oh, yes, when I returned to Berlin to see my parents. I asked them, "What did you do to prevent Hitler from coming to power?" Finally, I gave up, because I could see they were embarrassed. They never wanted to answer these questions and they didn't want me to ask them. They were very unhappy in the beginning about my work, and for years, I didn't speak to my mother. She was ashamed when I started to protest against Kurt Georg Kiesinger in 1966, after he was elected German Chancellor [Prime Minister], for having been a propagandist for and member of the Nazi party. So for a time, she and I didn't speak together.

Q. Could you tell me what incident prompted you and your husband to take on the life's work that you have chosen of hunting down Nazi war criminals?

A. Our first decision was to obtain Kiesinger's resignation as Chancellor of West Germany. In the very beginning, we were naive and new in this field of work, and we could not see in advance that it would be very difficult to oblige the Chancellor to resign. We carefully documented his past. I was running around to the German universities. I tried to explain to the students that they have to fight against this Nazi Chancellor. I interrupted a speech he delivered in the German parliament. For the first time, I saw that the newspapers not only had to portray the incident, but also explain why I was speaking out against him and asking him to resign, because he was a Nazi.

And then together, we decided to make a symbolic action. That means an action where the new generation would react against the generation of Nazi Germany, in other words, my parents' generation. Symbolically, it was the reaction of the daughter of the Nazis to someone who could have been my father and a Nazi.

I slapped Kiesinger in the face in 1968 in Berlin, during the Christian Democratic party convention. I think this was certainly a very symbolic action. I was, by the way, arrested and sentenced the very same day to one year in jail without parole. But then, it was revealed that I was French. I had, in the meantime, become a French citizen. We were, in Berlin, occupied by the four Allies [Americans, Russians, British, and French]. I told them I would like to be treated as a French citizen. They became afraid, and I was released until the appeal. Then I was sentenced to two months of jail without parole. As soon as I was freed, I continued my work against this Nazi Chancellor. In 1969, he lost the election, largely because of the slap, which did a lot to mobilize the German youth. He was replaced by an anti-Fascist fighter, Willie Brandt, and for us this was comforting. Our struggle at that time against the continuation of Nazi Germany succeeded. That the Nazi Chancellor was replaced by an anti-Fascist fighter, I think, was something very important for the German youth.

Q. In one of the articles that you wrote for the French magazine “Combat,” you said, if I may quote, “If Eichmann represents the banality of evil, then to me Kiesinger represents the respectability of evil.” Could you explain that statement to me please?

A. Yes. Kiesinger was a man who, when he was traveling abroad, represented the old, and also the young, German generations. This was a respectable man. He was not a beast. He did not kill the Jews. He was a man who, from his office as a deputy director of Hitler’s radio propaganda for foreign countries, had all the messages concerning the military situation. He also knew what was going on in the gas chambers. He was a lawyer. He was a highly educated man. So, this was the respectability of the evil. Because he was at this place at this time, he helped to make the propaganda for Nazi Germany. And you know, after the war, he did whatever he could in order to return to politics and become the chief of the German government.

Until the late 1960's, the Germans seemed to be ignoring the fact that these men were walking around holding political office, and there was no accountability for their evil deeds during the war. Those who had been active during the war and in administration continued after the war. Kiesinger was the top, but in the ministry of foreign affairs and ambassadors going to foreign countries, they had been older Nazis. There was an awakening of the student movement in Germany, because it was a moral revolt. They couldn’t stand any longer that Nazi Germany was continuing every day and at every place. So, they were all judges of Nazi Germany. They had to judge the young people, who protested against Nazism. The German population was very much aware, but they were very happy. Because if even a small member of the Nazi party was completely rehabilitated, the Nazis could continue.

Q. In bringing these people to trial and trying to make Germany responsible for the trials of these people, what were you trying to bring about as a result of this? I know that one of your goals was to have the Germans bringing these people to trial themselves. What were you hoping to accomplish by that?

A. My husband, a group of friends, and I later worked for the sons and the daughters of the Jews deported from France. That meant they wanted to get to justice and to jail those who deported their parents. So, what we took over in 1971 was to bring to justice the German Nazi criminals, who had been the high officials in the police in France and who were responsible for the deportation of 76,000 Jews from France to Auschwitz. In 1979, we discovered that even those sentenced after the war by French military court in absentia had returned to Germany. They became lawyers, judges, businessmen, where they had the high functions. You can imagine. To put an end to this, we had to select from all the 200 and more people who had been active in France and had been sentenced to life imprisonment

in absentia or to death.

We chose three very representative men and campaigned from 1971 to 1979, fighting against the German society to put on a new law, to have them sentenced in Germany. We fought with the German judicial system to indict them. We documented everything we could, collecting the proof against these criminals, as they had been the high officials who signed the documents of arrest and deportation. The documents were there, hundreds and hundreds. We gave them to the German prosecutors and to France as well.

On the other side, in order to advance the case, to oblige German society to act and the justice to indict, we had to provoke incidents. So, with our group, we came to Germany and these actions were illegal. We mobilized and always tried to show what a big scandal it was that nothing was happening with these criminals. They were still lawyers, judges. One was the Bürgermeister [mayor] in Bavaria. He was twenty-one years old when he was the deputy to the chief of the anti-Jewish service in Paris. His name was Ernst Heinrichsohn.

Sometimes we were arrested by the German police and beaten up. Constantly, we came back. We provoked incidents, and only in this way did we obtain the opening of those trials in 1979. It was not a question of vengeance but a question of justice. We were surrounded all the time by the survivors and by those who lost their parents or their children. I knew all of them, and I knew their stories. I knew they had nightmares and never found a quiet and normal life, while those criminals remained completely unpunished, working in high positions. So, this was one of our first aims, to bring them to justice, and secondly, through this trial in Cologne, to educate the generations.

We were able to get a young judge from the German justice. We were much impressed by the final speech he delivered. He said, “You know, for me, it’s not very easy to judge men like Lischka, Hagen and Heinrichsohn, these three criminals, because they could be my father or my uncle. They never committed another crime after the war. But we have to judge them, because through them, the whole system will be sentenced. We also have to sentence them in order to prevent these crimes from ever happening again.”

Q. How long after you began to collect information on Klaus Barbie were you able to finally make sure the trial took place and how did that ultimately come about?

A. Klaus Barbie, just like Lischka, Hagen, and Heinrichsohn, was a Nazi criminal who had been sentenced after the war by a French military court in absentia to life imprisonment or to death. Barbie had fled to South America. He was known as a German criminal in Bolivia. He himself admitted that he was involved in the war and the German club in La Paz. The Secret Services of West Germany, France, and the United States knew who Klaus Barbie was. But again, as in Germany, we had to provoke something in order to get this case working and advancing.

Several times, I had been to South America, to Bolivia, to unmask him, because he was living under a false name. I came with a Jewish mother, whose children had been deported from the Jewish children’s home in Izieu, because the telex of Barbie was to send all 44 children from Izieu to Auschwitz. For years, when the Bolivian government refused to extradite Klaus Barbie to France, we kept trying. We had friends who were surveying

Barbie.

We learned whatever we had to know about him. We had even tried to kidnap him and to bring him over to Chile, at the time of Allende, and then back to France but this failed.

Our connections finally put enough pressure on the government of France to obtain the extradiction of Barbie to Lyon, France for his trial. It was a trial against the deportation of the Jews, and a trial for the resistance fighters, because Barbie, as the chief of the Gestapo in Lyon, was a brutal man. He tortured resistance fighters. This trial was well-known and well-covered by the media all over the world. Klaus Barbie was condemned to life imprisonment. Here again, as always, my husband represented the associate plaintiffs, the mothers of the children deported from Izieu. We delivered this most important indictment against him. It was a telegram he signed in 1944 to send the Jewish children to Auschwitz. It was a very historic trial.

Q. If you were to leave one message to the young people of the world today, what would that message be?

A. My husband and I consider ourselves to be ordinary people. We didn't have a special background, even though my husband is a specialist in history, preparing us for the work we did. I think that everybody can do something. It was our experience in the very beginning that you can do much more than you even realize. Sure, there are always limits for everybody. Not everyone went as far as we did, but I think that young people today have to protest against xenophobia, against right-wing parties, and against antisemitism. I would like to tell today's youth to act immediately, not to wait, because if you see that something is wrong, you have to talk about it, and you have to do something about it. You have to shout against this and protest immediately. I think all our actions were a kind of education for the young people. If we have inspired some of them and they want to follow in our footsteps, I would be very happy.

Liesel Appel, née Steffens, was born on September 14, 1941 in Klingenberg, Germany. Her father was a high-ranking Nazi. During World War II, he was the Minister of Education in Poland who shut down all the schools and enacted policies denying an education to Polish, Jewish, and Gypsy children. He was put on trial in Nuremberg after the war.

A. Maybe I should tell you first that I was actually created as a gift to Adolf Hitler. My brother was already twenty years old, but my parents had wanted another child to dedicate to Adolf Hitler. I was this child. My mother had to undergo a special operation to be able to bear another child. There was a special doctor who performed this operation on her, and she was absolutely delighted when I was born in 1941. I was dedicated to Adolf Hitler at two weeks old.

Q. How did your parents earn a living?

A. My father was an educator. He was headmaster of the local school and later became Minister of Education in Poland.

Q. What was life like in those days in post-war Germany?

A. My childhood was really idyllic. My father adored me. We had a large, loving family with lots of uncles and aunts, and we were very close. There was also an uncle whose name was Erich Koch. He was constantly in our home when I was a young girl. He was my father's best friend and my uncle, and he was later condemned to death for the murder of 500,000 Jews and Poles.

Q. When did you first become aware of the war years?

A. Father and I went on long walks in the forest. Quite often I saw some smoke in the distance. I remember the smell of burning flesh. But I don't remember if I asked him about it.

Q. Was there a concentration camp nearby?

A. There was a concentration camp in Hadamar [Germany], just one of the smaller camps. I also remember being on the balcony of our house and watching the soldiers, the German army, go by with their goose steps. My father was making the salute. Then my father disappeared for a period of time. I later found out that he went to Poland with his friend Erich Koch and had been made Minister of Education of Poland. And Erich Koch was the governor of Poland.

After the war, I wanted to find out what a Minister of Education did in Poland in those years. And I found out, in fact, that all schools were closed, since Jewish, Polish, and Gypsy children were not entitled to an education. That, in fact, was the achievement of my father. But as a young child, I really adored him.

Q. How old were you when he returned from Poland?

A. I must have been six or seven years old. And then, later, in my very early childhood, something changed. All of a sudden, my parents, who had always been happy, were very secretive and withdrawn. My father had to go into hiding. He took off at night on his bicycle, and then soldiers came to our house. They were American soldiers who were looking for

him. My father was riding his bicycle at night and hiding in the fields during the day. But, eventually, he was caught and put on trial.

Q. How old were you at that time?

A. About seven years old. He was put into a denazification camp. I later found out what that was like, but that's the first time I heard about a camp. And, in fact, I heard the term "concentration camp" used for the first time. He was released for a short time. We took a vacation to help him recover while he was waiting for his trial. He was walking with me at the ocean shore in northern Germany, and suddenly he went onto his knees. He tried to get up, but he fell backward and he, in fact, died in my arms. I was nine years old.

Six months after my father had died, I was playing outside of our house when a man came walking down the street. He looked very different from any man I'd ever seen. He had a little cap on the back of his head, and he carried a brief case. He asked me, "Little girl, where do you live?" I pointed to our house and he nodded and said, "This is where I used to live. I used to live in the house right next door to you." And he looked at me again.

He said, "You were probably way too young, but I'm looking for a special man, a man who saved my life during *Kristallnacht."* I had no idea what *Kristallnacht* was. I'd never heard of it before. So, I asked him to explain to me, and he told me that his life had been saved by a neighbor. The Nazis had broken into the house. His parents were killed, and all the furniture had been thrown from a balcony on the second floor. Somebody had picked him up and thrown him from the balcony also. He was sure he was going to die, but a neighbor had stepped forward and caught him in his arms. So, his life had been saved. He had come back to Germany -- this was now 1951 -- to find the man who had saved his life and thank him.

I was very excited and told him, "This man was my father." I took him by the hand and rushed him into my house, thinking that my mother would be just as excited to see him as I was. The man and I rushed into the living room. There was my mother with another neighbor, a *Frau* [Mrs.] Lauder, and they were whispering. We came into the room, and the man froze by the door. Mother and *Frau* Lauder also stopped talking, so there was something going on between these people that I wasn't privy to. I didn't know what was going on. Then my mother told *Frau* Lauder to take me out of the room and put me into my own room and lock the door. I kept banging on the door. They wouldn't let me out.

I looked out the window. I pulled myself up on the window sill -- we had those large German window sills -- and I saw the man walking down the street, very sadly. His head was bent. Soon after, my mother opened the door and said, "I want you to come to the living room." She was very angry. I had no idea what was going on. I had no idea what I had done. She said to me, "Don't you ever do anything like that again." And I said, "*Mutti,* anything like what?" She said, "Don't you bring anybody like that into our house again." I said, "*Mutti,* anything like what?" She said, "You brought in a Jew." I had no idea what a Jewish person was. That was the first time I actually heard the word "Jew." And I said, "*Mutti,* did we not save this man?" And she said, "Why should we have saved a Jew? Your father was a good man." I was so outraged, and my mother got bright red. She took me and she shook me.

It was just a terrible confrontation. I had never stood up to my mother before. I'd always been a very well-brought up little girl, but this was the first time I stood up to her. I pushed her away from me and said, "Don't you ever touch me again. You're a murderess." And I just went out of the room and slammed the door shut. It was basically the end of my childhood. My mother and I never talked about anything important after that and I held onto this for over 37 years.

Q. With not knowing anything before that, how did you know that they had done something wrong?

A. In a split second, I connected what this man -- his name, I found out later, is Willie Meyer -- had told me. It was so horrible. I couldn't picture that my family was part of that but, in a split second, I connected that after my mother told me off in a very severe way for bringing him into the house. So, I realized that they were part of this terrible thing that had happened in my neighborhood and that the people that I had idolized had, in fact, betrayed me.

Q. And after that, what did you do?

A. I just became very difficult. I wouldn't let my mother touch me again. I was very alone. I was looking at people and thinking "Were they part of it?" Soon we had the first books coming into our local libraries so I got those and read them, like *The Diary of Anne Frank.* The total world of horror opened up to me. I just looked around and felt so terribly burdened by things that were living around me.

Q. What were they teaching you in school?

A. Nothing. They were teaching us nothing about it. I did my own research. I read books. But, basically, everybody was in denial. My mother never talked about it. People never mentioned those times. And then after, I didn't mention them anymore either. I only had that one confrontation with my mother. After that, I didn't speak about it for over 30 years. I didn't tell anyone where I came from. I didn't tell anyone about my family. In fact, I developed a story that my father had been the man who had saved the Jewish boy. That was the only way I could survive with my terrible guilt.

Q. Did you have anyone to talk to about it?

A. No one, absolutely no one. I didn't talk to other people my age, to my mother, or to my teachers. I was totally isolated and couldn't wait to leave Germany. As soon as I finished school, I just put a few things into a suitcase and took off for London. I couldn't wait to get out of Germany.

SURVIVORS AND LIBERATORS ON "WHY REMEMBER?"

The following passages are adapted from testimonies which are part of the Oral History Collection of the Holocaust Documentation and Education Center, Inc. The final question to which these individuals responded was: *"If you wanted to leave a message to the world about the Holocaust, what would it be?"*

From this tragedy of the Holocaust, we learned much in our lives. First of all, we respect the

courage and the attitude of the righteous people who risked their lives to save suffering humanity. This is indescribable, really. And we admire the courage for the freedom to fight and never to lose hope or faith in the Almighty.

Helena Bibliowicz, Survivor

We each have to make our own contribution to the future. The suffering cannot be forgotten, but Jewish history is much more than the history of suffering. It has had its glorious period. It has been enriched by all civilizations and has enriched other civilizations. The story must be told so that mankind can learn a lesson. If we don't, it could happen again and it may not be the Jewish people next time, but maybe another people instead. On a global scale, all of humanity today is in danger of having a Holocaust.

Rabbi Saul Diament, Survivor

Be tolerant. Don't generalize. Don't condemn. Don't use your own personal experience with one or two people to condemn a whole group of people. Try to understand the other person's point of view and be respectful of it.

Berthold Leidner, Survivor/Liberator

Six million Jews were burned alive. I saw it happening. I was there. They threw the children in the oven like a piece of paper. How come the whole world kept their mouth shut?

Nacha Krieger, Survivor

People should care about other people, not only their immediate family, but also those outside of their family. Too many people care about their children and their immediate family, but not about others.

If the world had not stood silent, Hitler couldn't have accomplished as much as he did. If Hitler would have seen that Roosevelt let the boats of refugees in, he wouldn't have had the courage to do what he did.

I would like people to learn to be good, not to be enemies. When I start talking about the Holocaust, some people tell me to forget it. I say to them, "If we forget, who will remember? We are the ones to remember and keep talking to our children."

Sala Pietkowski, Survivor

I think the Holocaust should be brought out and that people should be made aware that these things happened. It should definitely be a chapter in our history and should be taught in all schools, so that we never have a reoccurrence of such a thing. We must be on our guard, be well-prepared, and never let one individual accumulate that much power, such as Hitler, or even the Ayatollah in Iran.

Henry Pryor, Liberator

First of all, everything comes from the same thing — not respecting each other's religion or nationality. We can live in harmony. You don't necessarily have to like everybody else, but you should respect others so you can be respected, too. In that way, we can live in peace.

Nat Glass, Survivor

Students ought to be aware that these things happened. These are historical facts. If you teach history, you have got to relate the different events that happened in the history of our times. The Holocaust certainly is a big event, when you kill something like five or six million people, my God, that has got to be reported and talked about and brought to the attention of other people. It is a historical fact. It is just part of history, as any other part of the war is.

Dr. Rene Torrado, Liberator

My opinion is, you have to know the beginning, not the end. Everybody knows the end. Everybody knows about the six million, but they don't know how it started. It started with our neighbor, with our next-door good friend who went with us to school. We were sitting together, playing football together, eating together. Suddenly they became our enemy.

Theodore Weiss, Survivor

I would certainly not want anybody to experience what we innocent people had to go through just because we were Jews. No person should discriminate against others because of their religious upbringing or their birth. Everybody should have the right to be a human being.

Magda Bader, Survivor

Being part of the investigation of the crimes made me much more patient in listening to people. I might have been gullible and not believed a lot of stuff if I hadn't been there. Because of my role as an investigator, I would be glad to do almost anything to make sure these events never happen again. I think the Lord sent me there to do that job. I don't know why I was selected.

Dr. John Hege, Investigator of Nazi War Crimes

We should teach everybody. Everyone should know what happened. We don't want this to happen to anyone, whether they're black, blue, or green. When somebody is doing wrong to anyone, whomever it is, people should speak up. Because otherwise, it's going to happen again. It can happen to anybody. We should tell the story of the Holocaust over and over again, until people realize that we cannot go on like this.

Irving Graifman, Survivor

The Jewish people have to live. We have a legacy. We gave the world a lot. We gave the world a Freud, Salk, Einstein, big philosophers, and all kinds of great thinkers through the ages, but the world didn't return it. The world didn't give us justice.

Henryk Ehrlich, Survivor

Pastor Martin Niemoeller's Quote

Pastor Martin Niemoeller was a highly decorated commander in World War I. He later became a preacher and the most prominent leader of the anti-Nazi Confessing Church in Germany. In 1934, he formed the Pastors Emergency League. He was later arrested for attacking the state and was sent to a concentration camp. From 1937 until the end of the war, he was held in prison as well as in Sachsenhausen and Dachau.

"First they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out --
because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the Socialists
and I did not speak out --
because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out --
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out --
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me --
and there was no one left
to speak out for me."