

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Magda Blau
June 11, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Magda Blau, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on June 11, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Research Institute's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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MAGDA BLAU

June 11, 1990

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. We're now about to start. Would you tell me your name, please?

A: My name is Magda Blau. I was born Hellinger.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born on the 19th of August 1916 in Michalovce, Slovens...Slovakia.

Q: Will you tell me about your parents and your family?

A: My parents. My husb...my father was a teacher of Jewish history. My mother was a very nice woman. He was...she was a real Jewish mother, who worked and cooked and baked and had a garden. So we had all the fruit and vegetable. And she helped all the poor, where they needed. So I saw already at home what it means to be helpful to others. That's how I was brought up.

Q: Tell me about your family. You had brothers at home?

A: Yes, we had brothers. But I haven't a...didn't have so much contact with my brothers; because there, in a small town, little children went to learn Jewish history early in the morning. Then we went to school. And then, as a only daughter between the four boys, it was somehow different. I had my...my group of children; but sometimes we played, boys and girls, together. But mostly I had my own crowd of...either at, at school or after school.

Q: Tell me about your childhood and growing up.

A: My childhood was a very nice childhood, because my father was um--like I told you that-- Jewish history teacher. And every night, I couldn't get asleep. You know, like you tell stories for children? He told me always the stories about the history, because he was studying in Frankfurt-am-Main; and he knew and visited all the places that the Jewish history was around. And so he told me the travels and all the stories what happened; and that was very interesting. And so, before I go to sleep, I crawled in his bed and he told me those stories; and then I fell to sleep. And they had to carry me out from bed. And um as a matter of fact...because this time wasn't a kindergarten when I was a little girl. So I always went with my father to the school; and I was listening to the stories. And the children, you know, they was spoiling me rotten. (Laughter) And um when I grew tired, so my father asked one of the children to take me home. Because I was just a child. I was a very bad eater. I was very skinny; but I already, as a young child, always worried about the poor. And I came

home to my mother, and I said, "You know, Mom, I saw...I been at my neighbor's pla...our neighbor's place. And they are so poor. They haven't got anything. And it's Shabbat coming, and they haven't got meat and fat and sugar and coffee and tea. So I am not going to eat, but please give them." My mother said to my father, "We have so much trouble for her to put a spoon of food in her mouth, (laughter) and she says she's not going to eat!" So I managed that this way, already as a young child, that we went to the families. I was talking with the lady of the house while my mother put it in the pots the food; because they was very proud to accept it. And that was the start of my childhood, and that's how I grew up helping people and helping the neighbors. And I always said I will be a doctor, because this is also helping the chil...the people. And later in my life, um there came from Poland some Hebrew teachers. And they came to the place where we girls was playing. And he introduced us a Hebrew songs and dances. And that's what happened, that they put us first in this way. That in...we just played around in the place where one of the children lived; but later he transferred us--like Jewish scouts--in a place which they called [Ma'adon (ph)], which means [louder (ph)]. And there I started to get to know with the history and what they want to try to make: that they should be in a Jewish state, we should have a home our own. And so it started my youth. And I was very much involved; and...because if they...in a certain organization, they found out somebody's willing and able, naturally they use. And I didn't mind it. I was sent out to start a new organization of Jewish scouts. And as a young girl, I had the idea that's the only way how you can start an organization, gather them under a flag. So I was very capable. I must say, today I don't even know how I did it. But I approach the all the right sources. I approached the teacher who was a sewing teacher, and I asked her if she would sew the emblem of, the scout's emblem, on the flag. I approached a man who was selling material if he would donate that for us. Which he did. Then I had the idea that, you know, to have golden nails with their names, which they donate. And...and the man who did it, he was doing it for...like for charity; but the one who had the nail written in the pole, he had to pay for it. So...and also I arranged a very nice evening with children--dancing and songs and a theater. And so a lot of money came together.

Q: And this was all for the Zionist Organization?

A: Yeah, all for the Keren Kayemeth [and Keren] Hayesod.¹ And you know what? I tell myself I been very smart, because the collection of the money--I started with the generals. There was three military generals. And I approached the one with the list if he was willing to support the nail of...the golden nail; and voluntarily how much he was willing to give. And every general was very generous. Then I approach the others. But on the top of the list was a huge amount, so nobody was... You know how it goes. And so things like that, I did already. They always send me to another place to organize a evening like for Keren Kayemeth. So I did all those things before I started; and I postponed my finishing my

¹ Keren Kayemeth [L'Yisrael], known in English as the Jewish National Fund, and Keren Hayesod (English name unknown) were established by the Zionist Organization in 1901 for the purpose of purchasing land in Palestine for Jewish settlement.

studying as a kindergarten teacher, because I thought it's very important. Somebody should do it. And then I finished there; because, in our town, wasn't able...I wasn't able to study for kindergarten teacher because there wasn't school. So I did it privately, by myself. I went practicing to another town, where it was a kindergarten. And then I did my...finished my study by myself, and I did the exams in Bratislava. This was the special town in Slovakia. And so I became a kindergarten teacher. But even as a young girl, during the holiday... I really don't know how, how...where did I get all those ideas? I said to my--I had a girlfriend. I said, "Look at the children running around, and there is not a kindergarten. At least during the holiday, let's open a kindergarten." And I approached there, there was a...we called her "Gleich Mamma."² That was her name; and she was in everything. And we said, "What would you say...the children is running around the streets, and if we would open a kindergarten?" She said, "I am totally behind you children. I arrange everything." And she did. Because when she went, two o'clock from home she went... You know, her social life was...she went through the city, everywhere she had somebody. She talked with somebody. If we ask her husband, "Where is Gleich Mamma?" And he said, "Wait a minute. Now it's six o'clock. Two o'clock, she was there. Three o'clock, she was there. Three o'clock...now, it's six o'clock. She will be in the shop there and there." (Laughter) He knew exactly her timetable. And she arranged everything. So during the school holiday, we gathered forty children. And there was a man who wanted to get married. And he had built a house, but he married in two months later. So she arranged he should let the house for us. And sand pits, and somebody made us the furniture. And we two young children...I was, I has then my birthday in August, and the school holiday in our place is June and July, August. So I was doing it before I was even fifteen.³

Q: As you got older, obviously things began to change. Um...what happened um...as indeed things changed, and the war drew closer?

A: When the real war came closer, I still...I had my kindergarten. It's true that all the doctors and the lawyers, they were stripped from their um possibility to work. Because it's already started the war. And um...but I didn't have even to wear a...a yellow star; because my school belonged, the Kinderheim [**NB:** children's home] belonged to the inspectorate of the other schools. So I, I...well, they didn't...they wasn't so strict on me. So I didn't feel much in our town of the persecution, so far as that they lost all their jobs--the lawyers and everyone. And they started to take away the businesses, and they put Arierstäter (ph)] in. That means somebody had their eye on that job, and he was member of that...was a Hlinka guard--similar like SS, or something--and so they took away the business from the Jewish men. And in

² "Gleich" means equal or equivalent. Perhaps she was given this name because she was like a mother to everyone? "Mamma Gleich" may also refer to Margit Gleich, who was active in the Michalovce community and a patron of the Zionist youth movements (she is mentioned in the Michalovce memorial book, published in 1969).

³ Since she was born in 1916, this would have been 1931.

came, without any um restitution or something for the...for the Jewish man, and he [**NB:** the Jew] had to go out and he [**NB:** the Aryan] came in. So that was bad for them. And um...and for me, it was... I don't know if we have time for it, but there was a shoemaker who lived in our vicinity, what he had a shop on the way where I went to the kindergarten. And I made all my shoes there. He made me beautiful boots. And, really, top job. But what I didn't know, that he fell in love with me. A father with a few children who lived in our neighborhood! And um every time I went to the kindergarten, he came out from the shop and he said, "How are you" and "Good morning." And I thought it's just neighborly. One day, he came to the kindergarten; and he said, "I want to protect you. In this way: that I will make one child, whichever child that is, is your child. Because first now they are taking the young girls. And as you have a child, I can make that you are exempted from this um transport." And I said, "But why are you doing it? I haven't gotten a child." "Can't you understand?" I said, "No." "I am in love with you. I want to protect you." I said, "And later, when the children will have to go?" "Don't worry. I will protect you always." And I said, "You mean, I should be your mistress?" He said, "Do I have to make it clear for you?" So...because I, I couldn't believe my eyes. But that's what he wanted. Naturally, I didn't want it. I told my mother; I said, "Isn't that funny? He's our neighbor, and he's my bootmaker. And he gives me such proposition!" So I... "What did you say?" "I said, 'Thank you very much. You are really very nice. You mean it well. But,' I said, 'I couldn't. You have a wife and children. How could you ask for me that?'" The same night, they came for me. The same night they came for me; because he was so angry. Because he was waiting that I will naturally say yes. But I didn't know...um, I wouldn't even... I can't believe even when I would know where I am going I would agree to it. But this time, they said to us...which they deceived us, and there was nobody to say something differently. They said we are going to work in the Bata factory. So I said to myself, "What's so wrong to go to factory? So we will go to Bata factory." That's what I thought. Nobody ever said that there is danger. And then it came that um they gather us, they gathered us like at night. But me, I was so sure that they will...I will be excepted...exempted as a kindergarten teacher. So I wasn't worrying about myself. I worried about others; especially, there was fathers whose daughter was hiding somewhere and they took the fathers instead. So I worried about the old fathers; and um run around and gave them help. And I did get excepted um papers. But what happened, there is always somebody greedy. They knew I have the papers. And one woman, a teacher, she bought my papers. She paid twenty thousand crowns, Czech crowns,⁴ for the papers. And when my father...

Q: To whom?

A: In the inspectorate was a...a man who was doing the papers. She paid him twenty thousand; so she got my papers. And my father found out and he went to the inspectorate...because he was also in...like teacher, you know. So they say, "My dear man," he says, "the times are changing. If you bring me twenty thousand crowns, I take it away from her, even if she paid

⁴ **Czech:** koruna. Official currency of Czechoslovakia.

it already. And I give it back to your daughter." But my father didn't have the twenty thousand crowns. He was crying like a baby, saying it to somebody who after the war told me... He was crying, "They tear the nicest flower out of my garden, but I can't do anything. I haven't got the money." Anyway, when we came on the train...so from our hometown, we went on normal trains. And we came there, and the girls was dressed like peasants woman. You know, because they lived in little villages. And I had my beautiful wardrobe. So I opened my suitcase and I dressed them all up. And there was a policeman--what they called them gendarme, a gendarmerie, because they was Czech. They... they had the quarters in the same street that we lived on the corner. So they saw me passing by, and they was always very friendly. And he thought...said, "I never happened to see something, that somebody should give away all the clothes!" I had only what I had on me. The dress, the coat and a muff, and a bag. All the rest I gave out. I dressed up all the girls, because... He said, "Why are you doing that?" "Because," I said, "we are going to Bata factory. I want the girls to be representing nice." "How could you be so naïve?" I was...nobody taught us any other way. And he wanted to help me; so he took me...he said, "I am taking you to say once more to say goodbye to your parents." And he took me there, and I said goodbye. And I said to him, "How about if I would now run away?" And he said, "Try." I didn't. I didn't, because I didn't know what, how...how will I... If...if not today, they will take me tomorrow; so something, I thought... So I didn't run away. And also, when they took us on the train, we arrived to a place, Poprad. And there it was already, you know, different; because there was um all girls was gathered and it was such a chaos. And he said to me, "I am taking you on a train which goes on a different direction." And I had a kindergarten help...in the kindergarten a helper; and I said, "But I am taking the helper with me." Because um she was helping me; and her brother, who is the headmaster--yah, of the school--he asked me, "Look after my sister." And I promised him. So he said, "I don't mind. Take her with you." And I said, "Look, let's stay here. Let's not go back, because this train goes the other direction." And matter of fact, I told him, "And how about if we are not going back with you, we will continue with the train?" And he said, "Listen. I'll leave it on you. But if I come back and you are here, I have to take you back." So I begged her. "Ilonka," I said, "let's go on the train, and let's continue." He [NB: she] said, "No. I am afraid what will happen to me. Let's not go." And I...again, naïve as I am, I promised. And my word is a word. So when he came, he said, "Are you here? So I have to take you back." And he took me back. But he said, "Write a few words. I'm going to give it to your parents. I will try one more thing," he says. "I have a uncle in the Ministeria, in the ministry. I will write to him to send papers to you that you are excep...exempted." And he did. Because it was that we are staying there two days; but to me...my bad luck, we went the same day. So, so much so I know, that he delivered the letter to my parents. And in the letter, he said that I will be a nurse wherever I are going. So 'til my parents was alive, they thought I...wherever I go, I am a a nurse. That's how we came. And now it started. They put us in cattle tru... You know, you call it?

Q: Cattle cars.

A: Yah, and now it started the misery; because there wasn't possibility to breathe, we were in so together. And also the toilet question was also a question. I managed one thing; that

because there was just a little window on top, you know, I asked the girls to lift me up. Because I knew where we passing by there is a working camp for Jewish sol...they been soldiers, but they had already a different uniform--not green, but blue. So in a...in Hebrew, I just said, "They are taking all...us in cattle trains. We don't know where." Because he survived, and he told me that he told everybody about it. But they couldn't help us. We arrived in the camp. And here came the SS with the dogs, with the scream..."Raus! Raus! Los! Los! [Ger: 'Out! Out! Go! Go!']" So beating us, hitting us. So this was the first introduction in the camp.

Q: Tell us...tell us about being on the selection platform. What happened to you?

A: In... On...

Q: You arrived at the camp. Tell us exactly what happened during the selection? What did you do?

A: Now in in the first, first thing they didn't select us. No. The first thing, it was that they put us to a...a barrack. During the night, we...we didn't know what happened. Just screams. And we been there during the night. And as we traveled so long, we been very dehydrated. The German woman prisoners--who consisted mostly of prostitutes and murderers and thieves--they delivered their tea, but they said, "It's poisoned." They delivered the food, and they said, "It's poisoned." So here we been dehydrated and hungry, and we didn't know what to do. So I volunteered. I said, "Listen, girls, we have to do something. We can't last so. We are dried out." Because we didn't get water for days. So I said, "I'm going to drink it. If I don't come back in half an hour, that mean it's poisoned. The same thing I will do with the food. Then you will know it's poisoned." But it was bad...I ate and vomited it, because it was so bad. I hold my nose up, because it was all rotten. But it was still a little bit warm. I said, "Girls, I am here. We have to drink it. We have to eat something. Otherwise we lose our [thanks (ph)]." That's how it started.

Q: Excuse me...you had arrived in Auschwitz?

A: In Auschwitz. In Auschwitz there was red barracks. And it was a little bit normal, because that was um beds--not bunks. And the next day, they took us; and we been standing in the freezing cold. And some girls collapsed. I was saying, when they asked us "Los! Los! Los!"--I said, "Girls, let's run. Let's run and let's be obedient. Maybe that will help us." So what happened, I was the first in the room; but when the girls collapsed...so I asked somebody to help me to put them somewhere 'til they recovered from collapsing from cold and from...from stress. So that's why my number is not 2000, but 2,318; because so many times I run with the girls to help. I was really physically very healthy, sport-minded. And ate the right foods--a lot of fruit from the trees what we had in the garden. I ate for months--I don't know what it is, it's something which you can't understand. I ate only the fruit for months. And my mother... I came back from kindergarten, and I just said, "Hello." And I run on the trees. And she came out and she said, "My goodness me. If somebody will see a

kindergarten teacher..." I pushed my shoes down and sometimes the skirt, and off I went to the tree. And there I had my lunch, my breakfast, my dinner. And my mother said, "I'm cooking the beautiful soup." And I said, "No, that's what I feel I need." I didn't understand how important was that. It was like...I don't know why I did it. But that's what I did all the...all the time just eating fruit. Fruit in season. And we had all the fruit for all the season in our garden. I remember once I climbed on the cherry tree, on the high branches up. And, you know, it was the branches went swaying here and there. And Mother...my mother says, "Please come down. The branches will fell." I said, "Oh, no. They are strong branches. And...and here are the cherries the sweetest, the healthiest." She said, "Please come down." So alright. I ...I had my lunch. Now I came down. "But have something to eat." I said, "No, this is my food." And, anyway... So the next what was they...like I told you before, they undressed all what we had um...they put us...like I am saying there in the article.

Q: Tell us on tape. I want...tell us exactly how they treated you.

A: Yeah. They undressed everything what we had. Now they let us stand there naked. Then they shaved our head with blunt scissors, so our head was all bruised--at least mine. And then the man, laughing man, stood me on the chair and shaved everywhere what was hair. And then, they call it "disinfection." They put us in big bins; and it was murky water. Ten at a time. And we had to go in, and with our heads in. And then naked, wet, we stood in that freezing cold wintry day 'til we got the remnants of Russian prisoner of wars uniforms, which was cotton top and cotton pants. And mine didn't have a button on top and a button on the pants. So I had to hold on to...not to lose it. And then we got wooden clogs, which we never was use to it. And so ...and naked and barefooted... And then that's how it was. The start. We...we thought looking one each other, we didn't recognize. We thought they are crazy. But we didn't see that ourself--we looked like crazy, too. Anyway, we went to the barracks. And in our room, there was about six hundred girls; and some of the girls under shock. What happened, they went crazy. Or, what you call it? Under the shock. And very soon, in the first day, we found out--because there is always that certain communication and certain gossip going around--that those who are crazy, they get a phenol injection. You know what's a phenol? Straight away, a phenol injection. And there was four girls. And I...I knew how to...I had experience; because I work ...worked like a um assistant to a very famous doctor, and so I knew how to handle um oh crazy. But they weren't crazy. They was under the shock. So I slept in one bed with four of those, which was really meant for two. But I slept with them. And my influence on them was so good they recovered in a few days. Others who didn't do that, they was dead.

Q: I'd like to stop the tape a moment. I'd like to take a break.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION - PAUSE IN TAPE

Q: We'll pick up with more stories of Auschwitz. OK. We are in Auschwitz, in the barracks at Auschwitz...

A: In a barrack in Auschwitz, and this... And there was, like I mentioned, about six hundred girls; and there was in charge a German um woman who was a politisch [NB: political prisoner]. And he was there...she was there as a punishment, because in P_aszów she had helped prisoners. Her husband was a famous doctor, but even so it didn't help. They brought her to Auschwitz and they shaved her hair the same way like us. But she was not well. Her legs were swollen. I don't know from what...what sickness it makes it. And so she asked the girls who would help her. So I volunteered that I will. And the first... first day, because we needed to bring tea to the um for the people. So we went there. But the German prisoners, like I told you, they were prostitutes, thieves and murderers. And the rumors went that we are prostitutes too, and we are competition to them. So when I came to the girls there for the drinks, so she says, "We don't need any competition. And anyway, you wouldn't be able to carry the...the kettles." And I said, "In case we are able to carry the kettles, would you not make any difficulties for us?" And...but she said, they said, "OK, we wouldn't. But you won't!" So I said, "Could you..." And I pointed to one of the girls. "...be a partner to me, and we are carrying together?" And usually they carry it four girls--two and two--because it's heavy. And I said, "But I would like to carry it with you by yourself." So she said, "Alright." So... and I grabbed the kettle, because I told you I was strong. And later, when we went out of their view, so I said, "And now you run, because I'm going to run." And so I was running. And it was a huge distance from where that food was given to the place where we been. Because we was in Barrack 9. That was...two more barracks was there, 10 and 11. And 11, it was the bunker where they killed politisch prisoners or whatever. So and then she... she amazed, she was amazed. She said, "I thought that you are all spoiled nobodies!" And I said, "No, we are not. We are decent human beings. And please, in the future, let us have that food. Because whichever wrong that food is, what we need something." So I got the respect from her. And she wanted to be...she was lesbian, which I didn't know. So she came and she wanted to make friends with me. But in our town, in our country, we didn't know about what it means. But she started to pet me. So I said, "Oh, you... Don't be angry, but I don't understand this thing." And I said, "I appreciate if you leave me alone." And she was decent enough. She said, "Would you like something? Would you like I bring you, I take you somewhere?" And she really did. And she said, "What would you like?" And there was food, all the food what people was bringing. And I said, "A little bit of a salt." Salt, because we missed salt. So she said, "Don't be so silly! Here, you have a piece of speck [NB: bacon], too." And she gave me. And so I shared that with all the others. But, you know, we were sucking on that skin so much that I broke my tooth on it. (Laughter) You know, because we been so hungry that that have it... So anyway, this was the first thing. In the morning, two o'clock, they woke us up with screams and with the sticks hitting us: "Raus! Raus! Raus!" Because it was the counting. And because they was so primitive, and so was the SS woman who came there too, thousand... They were so primitive, they couldn't make the counting. So we had to get up two o'clock at night in that freezing cold, bad climate. It was like a punishment from God, this climate there in Auschwitz. Lot of people, they...they fell because they couldn't stand the cold, standing on one spot. I was telling the girls to turn around--you know, like round, around, around. I...those... that mean movement on one spot, because you couldn't...you couldn't go out of the place. That's how it started. And then in the barrack, they started to say that they

need people for different work. Like in the kitchen and in the sewing rooms and different department. And the girls volunteered then. And you know, everybody wanted a inside job, naturally. And I was with that crazy woman, looking after them; and this um woman, the German woman, she said, "Why don't you go also look for something? You are sitting with those four crazy women. And look after yourself." And I said, "What I am...I don't want to be any time here. And otherwise, I want to go and work in outside and prepare myself. Because I believe once it will be a place for Jews to go, and I want to prepare myself." Morning came, and the Kommandos was standing. And I was volunteering to go...like working in the fields. But she knew better than I; so she slapped my face and pulled me in...

Q: Which "she"?

A: Hmm?

Q: Who is this "she" that slapped you?

A: That...that German woman who was in charge of our room, which she was from politisch reason there. So she knew about it, so she pulled me in. And she said, "You are going to work inside and help me and scrub the floor." I says, "With what? You haven't got anything." She said, "With your nails. But here you will stay." So I...I took water and I scrubbed the wat...the dirt with my nails. But I thought, "I am crazy. I'm going rather outside on the fresh air." Next day, the same thing. I did it three times. The third time she said, "What you think you are going to? You are going to work for the fields to prepare yourself? How long will you last? They will beat you there. They will, you know, run you there. And you won't last three days there. And I need you there; because look my feet! I need somebody who will help me." So, and she said, "Otherwise, tell me what you are from profession that you don't want to go to the kitchen, or...." I said, "I don't want to tell." She said, "Tell me." "I'm a kindergarten teacher." So she said, "I am a teacher, so I understand what you mean you don't want your profession. But come and help me." So let's go start my...my first career. She said, "Help me, because I am unable to do that." So I was going to carry the food, the bread, the evening meal. And we always had to volun...ask for volunteers; because us was a small number and for six hundred people to bring bread and this, that was a hard task. Because came tired from it. But we had to have the food, but straight away I used that that I am home for something good; because you can do good even where is impossible. So I approached the girls who are um working in so-called "Revier"--like hospital. I said, "Steal wherever you... whatever you could and bring it home to me, because I know what to use it for." And to those girls who are working in the sewing room, "Bring all the rags what you can. Steal it. Put it in the pants and bring it home." So they brought it home. And when the girls came home, I saw what it is. Now I understood why she didn't want to, because she...they had terrible experiences right away. So I bandaged them. So I gave them some medication what it was. And I was even, when I gave the food out, I didn't sit down to eat the food; because I was...I saw so many I had to help. And there was a interesting thing. There was a girl who was watching me doing that. And she said, "My name is [Bluma (ph)]." She lives in Israel. "I am a daughter...and I am a daughter of a

rabbi from Bratislava," where my husband was born. "And, you see, I think that God send me watch over you while you are helping others. And now you are coming and you are sitting down, and you have that little food. Otherwise you won't have strength to do what you are doing." And that's what she did. Every night, she said, "Enough is enough. Now you are going to sit down and have your meal." So that's where it started, that togetherness to help each other in the girls where the misery was. And the sadisms of the woman who took the girls out in kommando, and often they did hurt unnecessary. Like...you know, the demolition all the...or they didn't want that the civil population should know, being so close, and see Auschwitz. So they...they demolished some villages and they transferred them somewhere else. But there was ruins. So they took some woman and watched that; they let some woman go down and some woman on top. And they had them to demolish and throw the bricks down. And down the girls was working. And if they didn't want to, they beat them. "Throw that bricks down!" And they threw the bricks on their own friends; and often they came half dead, or dead already. Or they carried rocks from one place to the other. "Los! Los!" So this...this was the start. And the girls became sick, and the girl became weak. And some were...some run to the electrical um... We, we had an electrical fence which was with um electricity. So if you touch it, you been dead. But some girls, they said, "I rather that. I can't take it anymore. And I can't see any end to it." Because except that the work, there was other things that you wouldn't believe it. There was fleas, artificial-like breded to that they should jump only on places like eyes, ears, nose and mouth. You you couldn't help it. There was hundreds jumping on you. Then there was lice. Everywhere lice, crawling all over you. And then was lice who was crawling under your skin. And all that, plus the beatings and the starving and the brutality. So a lot of girls choose another death. But we lasted there in this camp Auschwitz about...I would say, beginning of August. I can't tell you exact days that I come. And then because...you know, days and weeks we didn't know. We didn't have that somebody says, "It's Monday" or "Tuesday" or... We didn't know. The days were just passing without us knowing. And so they took us um on walking to Birkenau from Auschwitz. If Auschwitz was Hell, Birkenau was thought on the biggest Satan what can exist. There was um barracks from clay, which meant before it was for horses. And the place for one horse suddenly became a lodging for thirty woman. Because they put two planks across, and some woman was lying down. Ten down, ten in the middle, and ten on the top. And they couldn't even move. They could just lie like sardines, covered up with one blanket. And this is not enough. But the whole camp was with holes, because they supposed to bring canalization there. But they didn't wait 'til they have the canalization, or they have water or they have anything. They brought us there in this stage. First of all, a lot of lice and this place. And it was muddy. And it was... You had that one... They... One thing, they took away the Russian uniforms and they gave us one dress. But nothing under it. 'Nother scarf, and the same wooden clogs. And they...in that you had to exist in rain, in shine. So the rain...imagine what it does--the rain and the shine--what it is to a little rag. It's felling to pieces. And some girls was falling in that...in those holes. And if you fall in this hole and you been weak, you couldn't walk out of it. That was the end of her. And except that it was, when it was raining it was muddy. And it was muddy; and so the girls had the wooden clogs. And when they walked in it and lost the clogs, they couldn't even take it out anymore; because it was "Los! Los!" So they run...so they run barefoot in the cold, in the

rain. It was terrible. And also, there was only one place where the water was. It was one well. When you took the water out in a...like a basket. You had to wind it up. But imagine, one for so many thousands. And the people came home thirsty. So one over the other. And lot of girls, they fell in and that was the finish. And then you couldn't drink that water because it was like that. And later they made like the water in the back of the barrack. But it was always a restriction of the water. Soon you arrived there, they closed up the water. It was all sadistically, brutality. You know, just make us like really swines. Because you couldn't wash yourself. You couldn't go properly to the toilet. There was just a hole, and over the hole a piece of plank. And you was sitting on the plank and there was... So, and a lot of people, one push the other. And if you fell in, that was the finish. And things like that, for you to see and to...to...to be able to...to...to go on with the life, it's unbelievable. Unbelievable. So...and on the other side, like I said, people fell in those--"graven," you call it. Like, you know, they dig ditches for the...the pipes what they wanted to put in. But they wasn't in hurry to put in. And often, they made...they call it "Blocksperr" [NB: "block closing"]. There was a siren and everybody had to run to the barrack. And say the girl was just on the toilet. And she wanted to run, but there was that ditch. They fell in. And when the siren was over, and whoever was found in those ditches, they took them straight away on the trucks to the crematorium. Often, I did that I saw some friend of mine...they, they just fell in. So I run out to pull them out and push them back to... Because I thought [to] myself, "Every day when you are alive, maybe...maybe there will be a chance that something will happen and prolong the life. Maybe some miracle will happen and the war will come to the end, and then they will recuperate." By one of these such occasions when I did it, and the whistle came up and I was there with the girls. So, naturally, I also went on the truck with all others to be taken to the gas chambers. And, you know, fate... This woman who many months ago had experiences carrying the water with me and I didn't want to be her lesbian friend...but she was just having a Kommando taken out to work and she was the kapo of this kommando. And she saw me on that truck and she knew. So she came up and she gave me one big slap; and she pulled me down from the truck. And to the SS who was guarding, he [NB: she] said, "I couldn't walk out with the Kommando because she is missing!" And she was, you know, pretending to scream at me. And when I came and she said, "And now, run! Run for your life." And that's... and it saved me. Anyway, and then...

Q: Excuse me. At this point we're going to pause and change tapes. This is a good place to change tapes.

A: OK.

TAPE #2

Q: OK. There was a story you wanted to tell.

A: There is...there is a short story I want to tell you. When I was a young girl...and because being a only daughter, my father took me to a famous rabbi, who came to the city, to be blessed. When he blessed and put his hands over my head, he says "This girl has a special mission in her life. She is chosen, and she is going to save hundreds and hundreds of Jewish sisters and brothers. And that's what her life will be." My father came home, told my mother. They said, "What? Seven year old girl, what he is talking about?" Um, but naturally I didn't know about it. Only before I went away, so my mother told me. Imagine, when you've been...the rabbi told that I don't know why he was telling it. And um my sister said, "Probably that's what you are doing for Zionism. That's what it is." But when I was in camp, I felt something that's... Often I opened my mouth, and I say things and I do things, like...it's not me. Like...I don't believe in...in...in unnatural or something. But it was like that. Because I undertook to save um my friends, and...and implanted in them to do that, too. So I thought, "Is it me doing that, or is something in me what is doing it?" So I just show you one sample. You see, because the girls was wearing one dress and it was in rain or in shine, so they used the blanket what they have to cover up. And they tore it up to put it around their chest or wherever. So they took all the girls who been in charge to a room they called sauna, where they usually had once in a while um shower. And they put a big table there. And all the commanders of the camp from all over were sitting there. And they invited all... Invited! (Laughter) I am talking invited! All the...all the woman in charge there, even the charge--it wasn't that we wanted to be in charge. They pressed us in the charge. And they...they said, "You know what the women are doing? They are sabotage! And you... They are tearing the... the German property. And you are there not to prevent them. So you know what the punishment is for that? The punishment for that you are going to go, all of you, to the gas chambers." Suddenly, something pushed me. And I stopped...I made a step forwards, announce my number--because that was...we been only number--and I said to him, to the commanders, I said, "I'm not wondering that they are doing that, because every human being 'til he's alive is trying to make his miserable life a little bit less miserable. If you...if you would be in the same position, you would be doing the same thing. And if you would give us new clothing after such a long time which they are wearing that one um dress--which from rain and shine it's going to pieces--you would do the same thing." So, he started to scream at me. He said, "You are a...a [chuke (ph)], a nasty [chuke (ph)]. How dare you talking to me like that!?" And that is expression "frech," which I can't um translate. It's...you know, who has a big mouth [**Ger:** "insolent, sassy, cheeky"]. They call it "frech." So, and he screamed at me. So I thought...and the girls in the back, they pulled me back. "Magda, don't do it. Don't do it." But I...and, and I tell myself and...and I said what I wanted to say. And to my surprise, one of the biggest sadists--which I didn't know he is such a sadist, I...I found it out much later--he got up, and he said, "Listen. She's not only a like big-mouth [chuke (ph)]. She has something in her head. She's right. We have to give them new clothing." Next day...and they discharged us, and the whole camp got new dresses. So, I not only saved us three hundred, but saved the camp. Because they got a little bit warmer

and...dresses. And this is what we did, what we helped each other. There is another case. One day, I was watching that the SS man came to select the girls--"left" and "right." And who was "left," she had to go to the gas chambers. And there was present a girl...with the SS man was a um girl present which was Report Schreiberin. She was the one who wrote the reports. And she had to make the...all the numbers who will go to the gas chambers. I was passing by; and I observed that she's writing something. And then she looks left and right. And she doesn't see any SS man; and she sends the girls back to the barrack. And so she saved about three hundred girls from immediate death. How long they will be alive, this nobody could guarantee. But she did it. And I saw many times she did it. And I had...didn't have even the opportunity to ask how you do it. But I met her after forty-five years, two years ago, in Prague. I went to visit her. And she told...and I ask her, "Tell me, [Gatka (ph)], how did you do it? I watched you writing, and then you send them back." She said, "Listen. We had to do something, because this was no...no end what they did to us. So I took from the [cart-a-take (ph)] the dead numbers, of the dead. And I pretend that I am writing. And nobody saw. And I send them, because the SS didn't check it later." Because anyway so many other was going; so they didn't check if those three hundreds are in it or not. And that's what she did many times. There was another um how the girls, they had only one way to help each other or to survive. By own help; we didn't have anybody to help us. We been helpless young girls to thrown in such unbelievable situation, which I don't know Dante couldn't um couldn't find out such situation what we been in. Sick and fighting with every minute. Because one minute you been alive, the next minute you been dead. So one more occasion, I tell you: that I was working in a charge, like um a little helper there. And we had to put the whole barrack on, because a doctor--by the name [King (ph)], and she...her name is Anna, she lives in Australia--and um they had to select the woman out. But she gave me a hint, while he was turned around, that "I am going to talk to him, and you girls try to pull the girls in. They should run in the barrack." So she turned facing him from the front, and she started to talk to him. She was very...a very clever representative woman. And she was telling him all different stories; and while the stories she was telling him, I was telling the girls to run, run, run, run back to the barrack. One--which is remarkable and I never forget, because I didn't overhear all what she was telling him because I was concentrating more girls to go in--so she said, "You know..." And she named the...the... how far he was Oberscharsturmführer, or whatever. You know, he was in... How many...he had on. And she said, "You know who is ...who is responsible for all the war?" And he was surprised, and said, "Who?" And she said, "The bicyclists and the Jews." And he said, "But why the bicyclists?" And she said, "Why the Jews?" You know, and he was laughing, "Ha, ha, ha." You know, it's a big joke. And meantime, the selection was over and the camp was saved. You see, that's how we could do. There was no other way. Just by tricking and being courageous. And our motto was: "We are just going once through the chimney, sooner or later. But 'til we arrive, we have to help each other." And that's how we helped each other. And often there was cases, like ... Like I told you, people were sick, you tried to help them. You had tried to steal some medicine and give them. But then I myself fell into it; because being always in touch with those sick people, I also got typhoid. High fever. My tongue was like the... Did you ever see a chicken stomach from inside, when you open it, how rough it is? So rough was my tongue. I had high temperature. I couldn't eat. And my

stomach, I had to run. And no medicaments. The only thing what I wanted is tomato. Where to get tomato? But then a group of girls was working for the Germans--they call it Rajska,⁵ in a garden. And endangering her life, she brought a tomato in under her dress. Because we been so flat anyway. So you didn't... And she brought a tomato, and with that I rubbed my tongue. And then what I was asking, it was lemonade. Where to get lemonade? But one girl was working in the SS canteen, for the SS. She was... And so the girls told her, "Can you steal a bottle?" She said, "I can't, but I will. If they catch me, I know I'll go to the gas chambers. But maybe, if I'm lucky, I...I save her." So she did. And she managed to steal a bottle, and she brought it and I was drinking that. Another girl, she said, "I can't give her any medication. But I can steal some tablets to strengthen her heart. That's all what I can give." So that's what was. And the other thing was because I became blind, and I became bli...deaf and I couldn't walk. So how can I...

Q: (Cough)

A: How can I op...

Q: (Coughing)

A: And how can I existed? So one of the girls told to the other girl, "Can you, after work, do a night duty? And so Magda could rest under the name that she is doing night duty. I'm going to steal potatoes. And when you come home, I will cook potatoes so you can strengthen up. And so Magda will be lying as she is on night duty." And as high temperature I had, she was telling me that hundred times: "You are on night duty, you are on night duty, you are on night duty. And when the SS man comes and he probably will see you in bed like the others, then you tell...you can jump out from bed if he wants you to." And there was a special SS man, who was the biggest sadist what you can imagine. And he just couldn't see some nice girls and they didn't...he didn't want them to survive. And by off chance, all the girls caught typhoid. And the girls was lying, because they couldn't get up. And he came and they was on bed. But we didn't expect him to come, because he had no reason to come there. Because there was SS man in charge of our barrack. So he came. And all the girls--young girls, beautiful--yesterday they was healthy, but today they caught the typhoid and high temperatures. So they was in bed. They all went to gas chambers. When he came to me, so I... You know, the sur...surviving is such a power that I said, in very quick German, that "I am on night duty, but if you want I jump out from bed..." So he said, "Shut up! Hold your tongue! You bloody Jewess!" But that saved my life. Saved my life. But I still couldn't walk, and I couldn't hear. So when the counting was, so they just dropped. Like, like a sa... like a doll, because I was limp. But um...and in this time, charge, you know, of barracks was a German woman, a prisoner. And she said, "I can't cover up for her. I must send her into the gas chambers like these others. She can't work. She's no good for nothing." But one of the girls says, "Listen, I tell you what. I can sew. If you bring me needle, thread and

⁵ Part of the Auschwitz I complex.

material, I will sew you beautiful dresses, whatever. Just give her a chance to...to...to be ali...to get better. And she will get better." So she said, "Alright. But you look after her. It's your responsibility. If some SS man comes and sees her and he says, 'To the gas chambers!,' off she goes." So she said, "I will take that chance." So she sewed her, and she let me stay. And so it was one more day and one more day. But what happened, there one day they decided that new arrivals are coming and they need the space. So they told us we have to go out from the camp. And there was a big empty paddock with nothing on, just snow and freezing. And there we had to stay all day. I couldn't walk. So two girls from each side, they took me here by my hand and they carried me. And my head, legs was dangling; and they carried me and they pinched me that when SS man came I shouldn't say something. Because I didn't see. I didn't hear. I just could talk. So they pinched me so I knew I should be quiet. And so they carried me like that outside; and one of the girls...and this is how we helped each other. She managed to get a bottle somewhere and she put tea in the bottle; and in that um what we got the food, it was a round dish. She put the bottle in the dish, and she put it here. As I said, we been so flat so it didn't made any difference. Can you imagine that I was so flat I didn't have anything? Nothing, just bones. Nothing, just bones. Nothing...breast, no. Anyway, so they took me there. And there was a rock. They put me on the rock. And from time to time, they gave me a sip of water I shouldn't freeze to death [on the] rock. And then they carried me a little bit around, and put me on the rock again. Now what happened: on the way back, they...a lot of girls froze to death there. And they was dead or half-dead. And the rest, when we came in, they selected seventy percent out of the girls--good or bad--to the gas chambers. Lucky, the girls from both sides which carried me, they been in better shape so they didn't saw me in between. Which saved me. And now we knew why they did it, because new arrivals from all different part of the world came. From Belgium, from France, from Holland. And so they needed the space. That's how they made the space. First they tortured them to death, and then they send them to the gas chambers. And um that was our existence. That was our existence. And I, by off chance, I had...I was in charge from time to time in all nationalities I had. Jewish and non-Jewish.

Q: Explain what were you in charge of.

A: First I was the... How you say? A vice...like a vice, vice president you have. So it was a block oldest [**NB:** Blockältester], and I was either the...like the vice um oldest or I was just um helping to bring the food, and block...

Q: An assistant block...Blockältester.

A: Yeah. That was for a while I was doing that. And funny thing, the way I tried to handle people... One of the girls who didn't know, she said, "Magda, you handle always people like... like they would be in the kindergarten. Like you would be a kindergarten teacher." I didn't tell anybody I am. But I tried to help them. I tried to talk to them, and encourage them. When what happened one day, you know, they selected people and they didn't send them straight away to the gas chamber. They collected them in one of the barracks, which was Number 25. And when it was full--and also outside the barrack, because it was a big

fence built around them. Because from beginning, it wasn't a fence and some girls they run through the fence. Even it was um like nails on the top, but somehow they run through. Because they wasn't really so bad, so they run through. So they made a fence all over. So now they let also on the floor sitting those girls awaiting 'til the trucks will come. And it was hot and no water, and their face was swollen up. And it was just...their their eyes was....it was just two spots and a nose. And it is... it is... I tell you, the heart was breaking. And I was...I, I saw it. So I volunteered. I said, "Let me go in." I asked. "I am going to to give them water." They said, "Are you crazy? If SS man sees you, you go!" "So I go with them. But I can't see those people suffer before the last minutes, being so swollen and and dying for a...for a drop of water, in that terrible heat without having anything on their head or protecting." So I took, you know, a dish and a cup; and I went from one to one. And I said to myself, "If I die with them, I die. But I can't...can't see it. At least, the last moment." They been so grateful. They knew they are going to die, but they said, "At least we have a little water." And you know, the selection was done in a terrible way. Like sometimes it was a sickness which is not even a sickness. It is just like a scratching. You call it "kretze," you know? It was also an implanted thing. But they knew about it. So they let the woman undress totally naked; and when somebody had a little mark of scratch, in they went to the gas chambers. Then later, I...I became a block oldest. And in every barrack, there was a SS man responsible for that barrack. And he had the right every day to make selection himself. Even so that many people went to work, but some was staying home because either they didn't needed them or they was not well; so they was at home. And that SS man made the selection again. So I said, "How could I stand by and see him selecting the people, my own friends and bro...and sisters?" So I arranged the girls so that in the front and in the back was a strong girl, and everywhere; and in the middle was the weaker ones. And I pushed the girls together. 'Cause usually you had to stand so that you can go through, here and there, and here and there. And he said, "Do you think I don't know why you're pushing the girls so much in together? So I couldn't walk through, I shouldn't see that they are sick or weak woman which I have to send to crematorium." And I said, "Yes, that's why I did it. But I'm going to tell you something. They are not so sick that a few days at home wouldn't...they wouldn't recover. They just need a little rest." "So, and what are you going to do? How...how you want to do that?," he says. So I said, "I tell you how. (Pause - drinking water) I want to do something good for Germany." "What you mean, 'good'?" (Pause) I said, "You know how many um shoes are lying around, and how many dresses are discarded everywhere? Lying around in heaps, and not...nothing happen to them. And those can be recycled." "What you mean, 'recycled'?" I said, "Washed and dried. And those girls can do it. All the shoes," I said, "could be gathered and washed and dried and band together. And while they are doing that, they will recover." "Where are they going to do it?" I said, "In the back in the barrack, there is a wash room. And they can wash there. I will look after them. I will get some string where they will dry the clothes, and they will dry the shoes. And it's recycled, you can use it again. And the good things, you can send to Germany. That's a...a service, isn't it? Give me that chance!" And he says, "Have it. If you want to bother with that, go on. Bother." I said, "Thank you." And I established that, that they was in the back doing what I said. And I tried to...you call it "organize" food. I said to the girls, the... Next to the kitchen, it was um onions and potatoes. And woman was peeling it; and there was a

fence clo...around it. Not Jewish girls do that, because it was too good for Jewish girls. Jewish girls would survive there. So they gave it to the Polish girls. But you know, one way or another, you make a eye contact; and when nobody sees... So we told them, "Throw some potatoes close to the fence. And in the evening when nobody's there and the SS man is out, so we will pull that before...between the fence out, the onions and the potatoes. And we will in this way help each other." And some of the girls could do miracles. They could cook from...from nothing. From nothing. They could um peel the potatoes; and they found some dish and they made holes in it and they (laughter) mashed it up. And then they, somewhere from the kitchen--also from...from Polish girl--they got flour. And they mixed it up and they boiled it. And it was food. Additional food. So you see, little things like that made a difference in helping, somehow. And some girls who worked outside and digging the potatoes out, sometimes... Again, it was dangerous. If they catch you with one onion, one potato: death. But they did it. They brought the potatoes. Everyone brought one potato or two, and so they helped somehow. How long, nobody had a guarantee; because came the selection was so often happening. So often. Some...and if...if it wasn't...if it wasn't then, they punished you this way or the other way, or...or beat you up. I tell you a sample. A nice girl--she was blond and blue eyes--and she was working. SS man came to her. "I show you blue eyes!" And he took the revolver...not the revolver, the big one. How you call that?

Q: Rifle.

A: The rifle. And beat her so long that he beat her to death. And he says, "Now you can have blue eyes!" And things like that happened very often. Or they say, "Would you run there and there. And bring me that, my cap." And while she was running and doing the order, he shot her. For nothing. So like ...like I told you, I was from time to time chosen from one function to another. I didn't want to; but when the SS said, "You are going to be block oldest," there was no excuse. You said, "No," right... So you been. And now it depended on you. You could...and you tried to do the best you could. Not everyone could. A sixteen year old girl in charge for thousands hungry, tired, sick girls, to keep order... Because order has to be, you know. The German order has to be. And if it wasn't, so she went to the gas chambers because she couldn't manage. But they didn't consider that she's sixteen years old, and how can you manage? Not everybody could manage. And cases like that was many, many. And um I had um... When I came in charge, so I had Czech not Jewish girls from Beneš--he was President of Czechoslovakia.⁶ The whole family came there. Then I have Polish woman, non-Jewish woman. And that costed me terrible much, because they had typhoid and they had diarrhea. And being on the third bunk, how can you run down with diarrhea to get to the toilet who was so far? It's impossible! So, first of all, um with the girls I choose from the girls on the new arrivals a few who would be my helpers. So I said, "We have to do something." So we steal some ...it was wooden boxes. And we cut a hole in, and we put a like...what you...what you carrying food in it...a bucket. We put the bucket in so

⁶ Edvard Beneš was the democratically-elected President of Czechoslovakia until he resigned in October 1938 just after the Munich Conference.

they could relieve themselves. But some couldn't even walk down. So what they did, the poor girls, in that dish--which is not even nice to say--what they had for food, they finish themselves there. And they threw it through the window out; because windows was broken. There wasn't windows, good windows. So they threw it out. But imagine, then came the sun. And that was terrible. So I found out that in back of the barrack, there is a certain clay where the gypsies used to make their houses to cover it from. So I said, "A good idea!" Then I approached one day a man who delivered all...for the Kommandant woman. And I...when nobody saw me, I said, "Please bring me two whitewash, and two..." How you say? Where the beer is in.

Q: Kegs.

A: Yeah.

Q: Kegs of beer.

A: Big kegs, big... How you call them? I don't know the expression in this moment. He said, "How you want me to? Where do I get it?" I said, "I don't care." "How will I get it in?" I said, "You're delivering for the kommandant. So if...if somebody asks, it's for her." "But what happen if they say, 'It's...it's not for her?'" "Then you tell it's for me. Then I have the responsibility." But, somehow, he went through. He put it down. The girls quickly grabbed it and took it in. And during the night, the one group... Yah, we steal some um leather and sticks, and rags which we covered the stick on. And they did that outside with that mud, which had the color of um...nearly color of the bricks; and the windows, and inside the girls did it with the whitewash. I thought I will disinfect the barracks. And I had already that here, and maybe it will help a little. But I didn't realize what I am doing. In the morning, they got up and here is the barracks standing with white windows. Can you imagine that? Oh! They run. You know, they say, "We are going to shoot you, hang you, because you are going to give signs for the...for the Americans: 'So here is a camp.' You know what you doing? You are doing the worst thing, and for that is punishment. Not in the gas chambers, but punishment. First punished, punish and then hanged too. But first you will get it." So I thought, "What I am going to do?" And meantime, I... that SS man who...you know, who was in my barrack when I did the ...what I did with the washing, he was in another barrack. And by one occasion, when he was in my barrack, some girls was so grateful. So from rags, they made me two dolls. You know the...I don't know if you know in America, but in Europe it was like um long legs, long hands, with black velvet. And here it had the pointed um head, and the face was white and pointed. And it was such a doll. And they made me that. I don't where they got the material and whatever, because the impossible was possible. And they put it on my bed. And I said, "My goodness! What I am going to do with that? They found it, so then I am in trouble and they are in trouble: where did they get it." So I thought myself, "Be smart. Give it to him as a present." So I ...when he came in, I said, "You are probably going one stage home. Take it to your wife as a present. She will be very pleased." He said, "Oh, that's beautiful. That's a good idea! I really was thinking what to get to my wife. That's what I am going to take." And he forgot to punish me. So...but what

now I use the opportunity. So I approached him, and I said, "You know what, they want to hang me, but first to punish me and...and get...beat me up and so on. But what I did, I do it for some hygienic reason." And I said, "And I did for you, too." "How you mean?" "Because you and the other SS who are coming to the camp, and they are approaching the bad barracks where the typhoid is, they will get it, too." She [NB: he] said, "Don't tell anybody. Just recently five SS man died on typhoid." First I thought myself, "Oh, let them go. Why only us? Let them be ill, too." But on the other side, he said, "Hold on." So I hold on; and he went to the SS men commanders. 'Cause that was the woman commanders. The man commanders; and he explained that "What she's doing is really for..." Not on...not for us, so much as for them, because they are coming to the barracks. So they was talking in favor of me. And now they came back, and you know what? "The commander says that you are in charge. And you will have to tell all others that they have to do the same thing what you doing...what you did." "Oh, my God. Did I have...did I need that?," I said. But I was running around; and when I came to the barrack where that was the 25th barrack--where all they was selecting to the death--so he said, "Are you crazy?!" Because there was a huge wall around, and you know how much work it has to do to paint that, too. So he said, "Are you crazy?! I'm going to...to listen to a bloody Jewess, she has crazy ideas?" And I said...announced my number, I said, "Would you be so kind and ask the commander?" He looked at me. He didn't say a word. And so... But what happened: now the women was very mad at me. And they wanted to kill me, and now the men saved me. They have to punish me somehow. So what happened: in this stage, the experimental barrack opened in Auschwitz, in Barrack 10.⁷ So they said, "Alright. They saved your life. But in you go, in the experimental block...barrack. But you will be in charge of the barrack." So I ask straight away, "But could you give me also help, because I can't manage." "Ah, take yourself!" So I said, "Sixteen girls." And I quickly named girls which are... they working outside, and I knew they won't last long. So I took those girls with me. And I went to the that barracks, which was the windows--that was the only women barrack in the men camp. So they close...the windows was all with shutters and wire wiring. So we couldn't look out, and they couldn't look in. And we been closed up. And a SS woman was there all day with us. And the food was delivered 'til the door and--by men--and the woman took over. But when I arrived there...so Hauptsturmführer Doctor Wirths,⁸ whose brain child this idea was, he came and he said to me... I was blond and short cropped hair. My hair grew a little bit. And I was slim, naturally. And he said, "You are not Jewish, are you?" And I said, "Yeah, I am Jewish. Like all others." "There must be a mistake." He said, "There must be a mistake. You don't act like Jewish. You don't look like Jewish. You don't behave like Jewish. You'll stand up for yourself. There is a mistake." And he said, "And what are you from profession?" I said, "Kindergarten teacher." "That proves it!" (Laughter) Incredible! That

⁷ According to the Auschwitz Chronicle, this would have been at the beginning of April 1943. See Czech, Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939-1945, pp. 366-387.

⁸ SS Obersturmbannführer Eduard Wirths, born 1909. Garrison physician in charge of all medical personnel at KL Auschwitz from 06 Sep 1942.

proves it! Why? Why does that prove it? So now I saw that he wants this way. So I said, "If you want that to be a hospital, then we need blankets and then we need bed covers, sheets and towels and soaps. And even nightgowns." I told myself, "Now he's going to give me a kick in my pants!" But he said, "Alright. You can have everything, and it will be delivered today. But the nightgowns will come tomorrow." You see? And now, because I managed to do that, so every SS man told that I am his protégée. I didn't do anything for him, and I didn't even try to make a nice face opposite. But that was written I am his protégée. And um now I tell you, you know, because it's a tragicomedy. Those girls was there in the barracks to chosen for the experiments. So I thought to enlighten their life a little bit. I said, "As the nighties come, you are not going to pick and choose. If it's a small nightie and a big woman, she has it or worse. And they can't exchange it." And then they are walking down from the step down. So imagine, with those miserables as they been, it was a laughter. Because a tall woman had a nightie coming here (showing hand on thigh) and (laughter) and a small woman had a nightie coming there (showing hand on ankle). So I said, "Don't laugh! This is the fashion parade." And then it gave me idea that, matter of fact, now where we are closed up--because the SS woman went away. Um, she was there 'til lunch time counting, and then she went. So we been locked up. So I said, "Is there anybody who is um like a little bit in the theater, or knows something? Dancing, acting, whatever. And we will make theater in the evening." And that's what we established, a little group. And nobody was there. We was sitting down, and somebody was performing. But I tell you what. I didn't last there long either. Why? Because I... First of all, I must tell you that that um about the experiments, closer I can't tell you. Because I wasn't a nurse. I just checked which experiments are the least dangerous, there I will put more people. So the sterilization was not so dangerous; because a doctor said to me that is his idea, and that Dr. Clauberg⁹ stole the idea for him before he finished it. So he...even if it's not pleasant, what they still will be able if they survive, to have children. But they didn't survive, from other reason. But then, naturally, they made also a very bad experiments. Brutal experiments, without any anesthetic. Terrible! And the girls suffered. And the radiation they made. And I tell you, it's terrible. And when they finished with the experiments, they send them to Birkenau where they didn't last long. Because now they been sleeping in bed and had a blanket and had a towel. And they even if they suffered, but they had a little bit and like could look after themself. And there was nurses which could help them a little. But that, they didn't survive. So even, like I said, the sterilization wasn't so bad. But they didn't survive when they... When it was the experiments was ready they sent in; and they are not needed anymore, and then send them away. What...

Q: Can you tell us something about the women in the experimental barracks, people there?

A: No. I tell you one case. Um they picked some woman which they made mask. And they said...they said the Jewish race is minor below the Aryan race, and they want to prove it

⁹ SS Brigadeführer (honorary) Dr. Carl Clauberg, born 1898. Physician in charge of the sterilization experiments on women at KL Auschwitz from April 1943.

somehow. So they took the mask, and then they said they are going to send them to a sanatorium where they will have a good life and the doctors will making certain experiments on it. They closed the women up in a room, and they give the key to me because I was in charge of this barrack. Like I told you, the protégée of Dr. Wirths. But suddenly... And they supposed to come at nighttime, twelve o'clock, to pick them up. Suddenly a girl pick...um knocked on the door. She said, "Please, let me out. I don't believe they are sending us to the sanatorium. Because how can they make to prove that our brain is not good? They have to kill us first. So this is not a sanatorium. It is a certain camp where they will kill us first, and then from our brain they will make the experiments." So she said, "Let me out." So I let her out. Another one knocked. She said, "I have a sister here. I want to be with her. Please let me out." I let her out. Closed the door. I didn't think what will be the after effect of it. I let her out. And, naturally, when they came, they didn't think that the um amount is not proper. But when they put them on the train coming to that camp where they did that--they killed them and they made. Later I found out. But after the war I found out; not during the war. So they counted up two are missing. And they said, "You know what you did? This is sabotage! What right did it give you to take the girls out? You know what you are going to get for it? You are going to be punished, and you are going to be hanged or shot!" And in 11, Barrack 11, was a man named Jacob who was the hangman. But he was a Jewish man and a very good-hearted man. But sometimes, he couldn't help it. He had to do it. Otherwise, they kill him. And he send a message to me. He said, "Magda, I will do it in the quickest way." So I was prepared. And they send me to the Politisch Abteilung. That means the "Politisch [NB: Political] Department." A woman came to pick me up. And there was Aumeier.¹⁰ He was a small man with a husky voice, who was a brute. Who came under his hand, with his own hands he murdered him on the spot. Whoever it was. And she said, "Goodbye, Madga. I know you are not going to survive that. Because he will tear you to pieces like he does with the others." What can I do? So we said goodbye. But I came in; and he said, "What are you thinking, Staatskriminal ...?!" You know, and made him... I said, "I did what I was asked for, and I think I did a good thing." He say, "What!?!". And he screamed, but he didn't touch me. I can't believe it, even today not. He didn't touch me. So I told myself, "Who did it?" Then I thought, "That's the work of Hauptsturmführer Doctor Wirths. He did it. He wanted to frighten me. And he wanted to please the woman [NB: SS women commanders], you know? But he didn't kill me. And what happened once, with Hauptsturmführer Wirths, there in the barracks was... in the um experiment barracks, was a lot of Greek girls. And I tried to help them; well, because either you try your best or you you don't care. But I cared. Wherever I could, I helped. So they were so grateful that, again I don't know where they got it, they made me two pillows. Hand-made pillows. And they put it on my bed. The same story. What do I do with two pillows? If somebody sees it: "Where did you get it? Who made it?" So they will be in trouble. I will be in trouble. So one day, Hauptsturmführer Wirths came in. And he left the door open and his car was standing before. I ran for one minute out. I threw the pillows in, and I run back. And I didn't say a word. He didn't say a word for weeks. But then he came and he asked me the

¹⁰ SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Aumeier.

same question. "What did you do? Didn't you do what, now what this for that punishment for what you did?" I said...I said the same thing to that, to him. And he just said so much: "The pillows was very nice." So much is said. And I came to the barrack, and the girls didn't believe I am alive. And you know, I don't know if you know this is [tilam (ph)], you know? The girls was praying [tilam (ph)] for that that I survived; because they loved me so much and I helped them so much. But that didn't help me for long. Because one day Grese-- the "Angel of Death" they call her, but I had experience with her before--came to pick me up. And "You are coming with me." And I said, "Where I am going?" She said, "You are just coming." I didn't know where I am coming. And I don't know...you know what's a bunker is? Yeah. There was a bunker under the earth which was so big that four woman could stand next to each other like sardines. My punishment was... The woman couldn't stand it that the men saved me again, so they wanted to punish me. So I had the punishment: seven nights to stand there all night, then to be on the call-- the Zählen Appell [**NB:** Census roll call]--and then punishment was to clean all the la...toilets or latrines. I wouldn't survive one day, because standing there and then the roll call for hours. I...I was... You know, one minute I would be finished. And now to clean all the toilets. But, you know, there was a certain um... You know, news travel. And the men who was working in the camp, they found out while I got this punishment. So they came to my rescue. They said, "You lie down here, and we will do your work. When SS man comes, then you will get up. Pretend that you are working." And that saved my life. You see, this is what I mean, helping each other. That was only the way that some, some--meaning from twenty thousand of us, a few hundred--survived.

Q: At this point I want to pause, and we're going to change tapes.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

TAPE #3

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. We are on. Would you tell me about...? Tell us about Irma Grese.

A: Yeah. I met Irma Grese in beginning of my life in concentration camp. I mean, in Birkenau. From beginning...um it was...it must be August, September '42. And I was a Stubendienst -- a helper. Not in my...stuben oldest, just like a little helper who went...carried the bread and the food. And I went to um... and I needed always volunteers to that. People who was working; and I asked them nicely, "Listen, I know it's very hard, because you're working hard. But if we don't get the food, the bread, you won't have any. And we can't...for so many, those few girls, they can't manage to... We've haven't got even time, because then it's the roll call and everything. So, please come." And I was talking to them on...where Grese was there, because she was in the...in the...where the bread was given out. She was in charge as a SS woman. She looked a chubby woman, young woman. In my eyes, she was about eighteen, nineteen; with long blond pleats...plaits, chubby. And she didn't even have the hat on. And while I was talking, I was telling the girls, "Look girls, um I know it's very hard, but please do it. And I will myself carry as much bread as you. So let's do it nicely and quickly." And while I was doing it every day, she called me and she said, "What's your name?" I said, "Magda." And she said, "I'm watching you, because you are talking to the people and you carry the bread. You are different like the others. You taking so much energy and time to...to encourage the people." And I said, "I will do it to the last breath of my life. If I can help, I do it." And...and I said, "And what's your name?" I forgot I am talking to the (laughter) SS woman. And she said, "My name is Irma." And I again said, "Nice to know you." Then later, I said, "My goodness! What are you, crazy? You're talking to SS woman!" But that did it, that I said to her. And um so, for a while she was there and I was...and she, every time she was talking with me and asking me something. And she pretended, that woman...you know, deceiving me. She said that she didn't...part maybe was right. She said, um, "I was um living in a small place, and suddenly they asked for volunteers. But I didn't know where they are taking me. So I volunteered, and here I am." But later, I found out they first they took them to a place to brutalize them and prepare them to be brutal; and then she came. But that I didn't know then. Anyway, so we been in contact like that; and suddenly we lost touch about each other. She went her way, and I went my way. And later I found out that she was wanting to be somebody, suddenly. And then one day I met her, and she was slimmed down. She had her hair up and very nicely the cap on. She had boots shining like glass, or silver or whatever. And she had...in her boots, she had a whip and she had a belt with a pistol who was shining also like silver. And she said, "Hello, Magda." Nobody called me Magda, because I was for everybody number. And I said, "Hello, Irma." And I said, "Oh, but now you look dressed!" And I said, "Shining like that, and like a real SS woman. I hope I will never see you brutal like the others." She didn't say anything. She didn't say, "This is not your business," or...or "How dare you." She just listened and went away. Later, I found out that since she is like she is, she's riding out on a

horse and going out to the Kommandos and with that whip she's whipping the girls. And mostly she's whipping on the breast, because that is very sensitive part. And often it breaks it. And what is the end? Death. But I didn't know. I found it out much later. And then, what happened: the...I was working in a office [at] one stage. I was so happy to work in the office, not to have that responsibility and to see the...all the cruelty. Because there I was working on the [karteustaschs (ph)]. You know, the Germans are punctuality plus! And I learned the, the... I had anyway a nice writing as you saw; and now even I made it even nicer. And I was happy. But one day, I heard the news that the Hungarian arrivals are coming from Budapest and from Hungary. And one day I was called up by the commander replacing the commander-in-charge. And he...she said, "You will be the Lagerältest in the new camp where the arrivals are coming." So I said, "Oh, I am so happy here in, in where I am." And she laughed. She had teeth standing out like that, you know. She said, "Oh, ho, ho, ho." She said, "Oh, you are happy here, are you?" She said, "But you are taking that. You will be in charge." And I said, "I don't know how to be a Lager oldest." I said, "I never been one." And she laughed with her teeth, and she said, "Where could you be? There was never a camp...where there was a camp." And the other reason was, I said because for the time being I heard that in this camp are men on one side. And I'm so afraid that I got involved...I will get involved with some man for what is punishment there, and I don't want that. She said, "About that, you don't have to worry. We will watch you carefully." Nothing helped me. So...and there was the report um writer which I knew, and I approached her. I said, "Please, [Gatka (ph)]. Don't let it happen. I know how can you help all thousands and thousands people? And when we really would, by any miracle survive, how many enemies will I have? 'Cause you can't help by the thousands. Somebody...I, I didn't look nice or whatever." So she said, "Look, this is not that the SS wants you. But the underground wants you; because they know that you will try the best to save people, as many as you can. And if there another woman comes there which is a sadist, she will have the pleasure to do it. So there is no way. They choose you. The underground choose you. You have to take. And it's up to you how you will manage." What can I do? So they took me to the camp. And the Lagerkommandant, Kramer¹¹--which was a man of six foot six, with hands like that--he said, "Here you will be Lagerältest." And I looked in. There was empty barracks, nothing in it. Not bed, no straw sack, no blankets, nothing. And I said...clapped my feet and announced my number, and I said, "Lagerführer, please. Here you want me to be, that next day or the Thursday you can call all the woman 'Jewish swines.'" Because they're...where can they... they will sleep on top of each other, and they probably won't be able to go to the toilet and they will make on each other!" So I said, "Why don't you send them straight away to the gas chambers?" And I said...and he said, "Why you worrying so much about the other people? Worry about yourself, that you take care of yourself!" And I...but wonder of wonders... Now I tell you, I don't know who was talking from my mouth. I said again, that ceremony...I said, "If you, in reverse, would be in charge and you will be a Lager oldest; and the prisoners

¹¹ SS Hauptsturmführer Josef Kramer was Kommandant of Birkenau from May 1944, when the Hungarian Jews began arriving, until December 1944, when he was transferred to KL Bergen-Belsen by Rudolf Höss.

would be your fellow Germans and you wouldn't help them, I would call you 'Coward.'" And I said it. I said, "My goodness! Magda, are you crazy? Whom you talking? This is the commander who whenever somebody he doesn't even like or who is just in his way, he grabs it by his neck, squeezes it a minute, throws them like a doll. And he is killed. And you telling him what is?" But I stood straight, and I said, "Be strong, and don't move from this space." And he looked at me, and he saw I am not shaking. I am not crying. I am not begging. He says, "You know what? You are right. Tomorrow you will have what you want." So I said, "I want beds. I want straw sacks. I want blankets. I want um a utencils to eat; and I want spoons." "OK. Have it." And I said, "And I want some woman who...who will be in charge. In every barrack is thirty barracks, and I want some thirty girls which I can have which I want." He says, "Have them! Just tell them which one you want, and have them." So again, miracle [of] miracles, they thought--you know, the news traveled--that I am the protegee of Kramer. But that's nothing. Never mind. I couldn't do...I couldn't just save everybody. I can't... couldn't, but where I could. I was running up and down from morning to evening. Where I could, I explained, I begged. I...I ...I watched the...the...the girls in charge. I said, "You try your best. If not, I personally punish you." And I did. I came in; and I saw that the girls didn't take care that they should have the proper kind of food. And they was a little bit leger (ph) on it. So I called them to the front where I _____. And I said, "You are going..." There was water for in case there will be fire; so it was from that it would be taken, the water. "Around that water," I said, "you are going to jump. Because you are here for helping, not for making yourself comfortable. You saw me running from morning 'til evening to the camp Birkenau. You saw my feet um swollen like that. You look at my face, how it's swollen. You I picked and choose, and I took you out from maybe you wouldn't be alive. So you do your duty. And now this was a punishment. I know you are my friends, and I know you will be angry at me. But you will remember, because it's still better like a SS man would come in and something is not in order." So that was it. But this why I said I was so strict on my own friends. But one girl um who who was a...she could write poems, she got a paper and she wrote a long poem about me, to me. That, you know, she appreciates that she knows what I am doing and it was wrong for them to be negligence, a little bit. But, you know, persons is like that--if he can make himself the life easier, he is. But not with me. So one day Commander Kramer came... Because here was the women camp, there was a road and the next after the road was the main camp. And often the woman husbands was in the camp. And they just arrived. So they screamed over to each other. Or sometimes the man, if he had a chance to get something extra, so he put it in a piece of paper um in in a rock and he threw it over. So...and he [NB: Kramer] found out that they are doing it. So he put me in charge that I have to...Sunday when SS are not in, I have to watch it shouldn't happen. So I have to watch next to the um fence. I have to walk up and down. But naturally I said to the girls, "When I am up, down you can talk. And...but watch if you hear some automobile or whatever coming, or SS man." So the little runners which we have watch it. One day Kramer came. All the girls disappeared. And he said, "What are you doing here?" I told myself, "You know, you put here in charge." So I said--unbelievable--I said, "I am...I want to go to the theater, and I am thinking what I am going to wear. I haven't got a dress. I haven't got soap. I haven't got a mirror. I haven't got perfume,

and all those things which needed to the theater. That's what I am here standing and thinking about." And you...would you believe? And he said, "You are right! Tomorrow morning, I am coming to pick you up. And I take you there, and I get you all what you wanted." And I came to the girls and I told them. So, you know, the tragicomedy...they started to laugh. "Magda, are you crazy?!" I said, "What could I tell him? Should I tell him I do the duty?" And I thought...I said a very bad expression. I said (laughter)...you know, and I said, "I am not going to satisfy that 'I am doing what...what you told me to be here,' because then I am a little crawling rat." And I said, "No, I am not telling him. I am telling him the impossible. Tomorrow he will forget it, anyway," I said. But you know, in the morning the runner came. "Magda...Lagerältester, to the front! Lager Commander Kramer wants you." So I...I arrived there. I announced myself. He said, "So here I am." And I said, "But I need fifty people for this." "Fifty people?" And I said, "Yes. Fifty people or nothing." So he said, "Have them!" So quickly I said to the runner, "Bring the fifty people in the fifth...by the five, five, five..." Whichever, whoever was the first fifty; and we went to the place that all the clothing was done. I never been there before. I was standing outside. And I left the message through that they should prepare little...um it looked like... How could I say? Like a big box, and in the front was two sticks and here through; and you could um carry it like...you could wheel it. It was um... How could I say? You know what I mean? So I said, "Get me five of those trolleys, or whatever you call it. And give the message all over they should put there soaps, towels, medicines, blankets, clothings, sweaters. But pile it up to the full capacity." And that's why I needed fifty; because to every one, ten woman would be able to to wheel it. Alright. It was all prepared. Suddenly Kramer came, and you know he brought me antique little um...like in on the boudoir you have it. It is a mirror coming here and back; and here two...two drawers. And he showed me. "Here you have the soap, the perfume, the lipstick, the comb, the brush. Everything." And on his hand, he had a most beautiful silk dress. "And here is the silk dress. Do you like it? So now you have everything, and you can go to the theater. Are you satisfied?" I said, "Very much so." And he pretended not to see the fifty woman. And he...I said, "I take it." He said, "No, I take it. I told you I bring you, so I take you 'til your camp. And then I give it to over to you." And he came 'til the door, 'til the the place of the camp. And then he said to...they're in charge, "Let the woman through, the fifty. And when they are ready let them...the empty, and one with them is going to deliver those back. And here now you can go to the theater." So quickly we wheeled that in in one of the barrack where I've been. It was a big foyer there empty, and I said, "Unload quickly the things, and um select the soaps." And all...all the girls I...I took which was there, the little runners, "Come on, quick. Put the soaps here, the sweaters there, and then go outside. Don't say anything, but put the people in the rows, always by the fifty. Bring them in and discharge them, this...give everybody." And I said, "Everyone has to save it on the bed who with him. The soap, the towel. One gets the towel. One gets the soap. One gets the..." You know, and like that; 'til we emptied everything. And nobody should know about that. It had to be done very quickly and very quietly. No SS man saw it. This was the second thing. The third thing what he did: one day I should come to the front. The Lagerkommandant is there with his black car, and he wants to discuss certain things with me. So I come there. Grese is...she became the Lagerführer of our camp. The other side is Mengele; and here in

the middle with the car is Kramer. And he says, "Lagerältester, come and sit in the car. I want to discuss with you some matters." And I said, "But um Kommandant, please. I am just a bloody Jewess. Here is Dr. Mengele. Take him in the car." "Let him bloody walk. And you come and sit in the car." Grese heard that. She didn't believe her eyes. But you know, my status symbol went high; because she thought who knows what I have with the Kramer. But I still said, "No, I better don't sit in. It wouldn't look nice." But, you know, this was a old car which outside it had like a stand on it. I don't know if that cars are still in. I said, "I better stand on it outside." And I forgot one thing. I forgot that I had the ring which the War...Warsaw uprising people made. And they brought it in, in some miracle way. And when they heard about me, how I am to the people, they donated me. And that was also not a easy thing to bring in, and I just got the ring on. So...and while I was, while I was standing I leaned with my hand on the car. And he said, "What! You are wearing a ring of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising before me?!" And he grabbed a pistol. "I am going to shoot your hand with the ring up!" And I said, "I am in your charge. Whatever you want, you can do. I am just a bloody Jewess." He looks at me and said, "Ah!" He said, "Ah, get away!" And he put the revolver back. And all that, Grese saw. So, you know, these are the unbelievable believable thing. So now about Grese: like I told you, she became Lagerführerin in our camp. And our contact was still the old contact. When I became there in the camp, I gathered all the doctors from the camp, they should come to me. And I said to..., "Now I am going to divide you. In every barrack will be how many you are, two or three." I can't remember, but minimum two. "And you are watching, and you are going to help those people. I am going to try to get some medicines, whatever. We can't do miracles, but whatever. But you watch; and especially watch the mostly for an epidemic." And they said, "And what we are going to do?" So I said, "What I am afraid is scarlet fever. And what you doing with them, straight away come...come to me and tell me about it. And that person who has that, put in the..." Back of barracks was a room which supposed to be a washroom, but they didn't finish it. "So that will be the quarantine." So, suddenly, all the doctors came that "We found two," "We found three." "But now how to...we are to do with the counting?," asked me the girls. So I said, "Leave it to me." So it was summer...hot. Hot! The sun was incredible shining, you know? Like I said, if it was as Satan...Satan was there in this place, in...in Birkenau. So I approached Grese; and I said, "Irma, look. Why should you run around in this hot weather and do the counting? I am going to do the counting for you, and you be comfortable. Sit down here in this room. And the report writer, and I will announce her and she will count it up. And when it's all right, then you..." "You are right." But she said, "And what will do the Lagerkommandant in from the camp to mine camp?" And I said, "Are you Lager um Führer of this camp?" She said, "Yeah." "Then you do what pleases you the best. And she has nothing to say in your camp." And she sat down. And I sent the runners down, and they put the legs down on the bed, you know? So it was easy to count. And they counted, you know, like this. They didn't go out, because then it would be missing. So nobody knew about it. And nobody should know about it. It was kept secretly. And so I did the counting for six weeks, 'til the scarlet fever is over. The worst part is six weeks. I did the counting, and Grese agreed with me. And it was always the counting right, so she didn't have any excuse. And that we saved thirty thousand people. Why I am saying

that, because there was a little camp across or across the road. They called that camp "Mexico." It was B...zwei...drei, three.¹² And there the scarlet broke out, and there wasn't so prepared. And eight thousand five hundred--healthy or not healthy--all went to the gas chamber. So that's what it is what I am saying. That you could be in function which was not very pleasant--because always a Damocles [NB: Sword of Damocles] was hanging over your head--but you had the chance to save people. I saved the people some other way, too. Mengele came to select and often I had to be present. And he did it in the most unbelievable way. He was whistling the Donau Waltz. And he said (humming a bar of the Blue Danube Waltz), that means that went to the left. (Humming the subsequent bar of the Blue Danube Waltz), was to the right. (Humming from Blue Danube Waltz) And that was left, right, left, right--healthy, sick, that's how it came. He didn't touch anybody. He didn't! But he just pushed them to the gas chambers good or bad. So what happened: when he finished um like the selecting and he went away, so I run to the door. And I don't know, I couldn't...I couldn't steal them all. But I just came like...like I would be in charge of it, and I cut a certain part. And I said, "Turn backwards, and with me march." Nobody knew. Nobody knew. And I saved that woman. Sometimes it was twenty. Sometimes fifty. Sometimes hundred. Sometimes two hundred. And back to life. How long, I don't know. But the most um thing with Grese was, that like I told you, before me she was good as gold. So much so that even she introduced me her boyfriend. She had the boyfriends galore. She had the boyfriends, every day somewhere else. Matter of fact, to point out, one day she came and she said, "Magda, I have in the main camp a man. He's a prisoner, and I fall in love with him. And I would love to visit him." So I said, "Now, why don't you? You are in charge. Go to visit him." She said, "No, that wouldn't look nice. Because what I am doing there?" So she said, "But you come with me." I said, "I?" I said, "Why?" "Because then I make it official. You are coming. We have some...something to finish up. And I put you there in the un like in the schreibstube." In the... where the papers are done. "You will be waiting there for me, so they think you have some... Nobody will check." So I said to myself, "Oh, you give me [there (ph)] occasions!" So I sent right away my runners; and I said, "Woman who has husbands in the other camp, write quickly. We will organize some paper and pencils. Write quickly a few words and give it to me; because I am going, say two o'clock or three o'clock, and I take it with me." So I took the letters and I been there. And I asked the man in charge there who was the writer... I said, "Look, you have the number of the barracks. Please do me a favor. When they catch you, I am. But they won't probably ask you, because you just going like on official business. Take it to them. It's a letter from their wife, and if they... Take paper with you and pencil. They just have to write one or two words, because we haven't got more time." And so I was a delivery man. A postman. Just because she had that fantasy on a certain man. So I show you that unbelievable. She needed me, I should go with her. So it was for a while I did it. And she even introduced me another boyfriend, what I think about him. If I agree with him. She had every day another one. I don't know why she did it. But she asked me, "What you think?" And he was a good looker--a tall, broad-

¹² Camp B3 was part of the Birkenau complex. The term "Mexico" was coined in the Spring of 1944 because the prisoners assigned there wrapped themselves in blankets.

shoulder. And he didn't look like a cruel man to me; but um yet you never know. So things like that she did. But one day she was in camp, and suddenly the words was coming, the runners: "Magda, please! Come quickly! Quickly! Grese got...Grese got...Grese got crazy." "What is she doing?" She's...with the whip, she's whipping the woman through the breast. And it's opened all the breast, and it's blood running and the woman are crying. Come quickly!" So I said, "Oh, my goodness! That vicious, vicious, vicious witch! She had to do it when I am turned away?!" So I came there, and I saw. And I said, "Now you can be proud of yourself! What did you do? You know what you did? Imagine somebody would do that to you!" And I said, "And if I don't get quick help for them, tomorrow they are going...or in an hour in gas chambers. Because they will get infected." So I quickly sent some to the Revier, and they should at least give them First Aid. And she lifted the whip on me. So I said, "Go ahead! Whip me! You like to do it. You like to do it for woman, especially on the...on the bust. Do it to me!" She looked at me, that I am standing there. She put the whip down; and I said, "I am offended!" And I walked away. Would you believe it? I didn't believe it myself. And half an hour later, she came. And I pretended that I am offended still. And she said, "Forgive me." She said, "Forgive me." And the girls heard that. She said, "Magda, I don't know, what you have a sypo...hypnotic um power over her or something?" She [NB: I] said, "I don't want you to see it once more again, what you did before." I didn't. She did it somewhere else, but not before me. Imagine. Imagine. So this so far I can tell you, she was the worse sadist ever been; and she wanted to be in very high. You know, that how good she is, how brutal she over does all everybody. And she looked million dollars, because she was very pretty. And especially now, being always dressed--everyday immaculate shirts. A matter of fact, a cousin of mine was...I put her in charge to work to wash her clothes, because in this way she was saved and she helped her. And everybody was happy. So every day, she was washing and ironing her shirts. So she was starched collar and beautiful. But um...but then people said what she can do, she was terrible. She was terrible. But um that's how we existed together.

Q: Did you know anything about Irma Grese's lesbianism?

A: I...I knew. I knew. I knew about her lesbianism, because she wanted approach some of the girls in the...in our camp too. But I, I heard about it. So I said, "You can cleverly avoid it, because she has plenty other German woman and other woman. But why should she use a Jewish woman to..." And especially she liked dark-haired woman. She approach; and she told me that Grese came and she told her. But, you know, you can um you can say it in such a way it's too obvious. But I said, "You be very diplomatic about it, not to offend her much. But you just say that you don't know. Because you don't know that, because we don't know. We never heard about it. 'And there many others who'd be willing, because you are so beautiful.'" And so I know...I knew about it. But um luckily she didn't try with me; and like I told you, I warned the girls because I heard she is. She was having affairs one after the other, and even prisoner. It didn't matter. And one I was there...(laughter) That was a funny part. When we been in the experimental block, from some...from no reason whatsoever--because she wasn't in charge of that--she came and she said, "Magda, came with me." I said,

"Why?" "Because I like a man in this...I know in barrack. And um I want to see him." But you know what um the coincidence is and the irony is, when they delivered the food... I must say something. I managed from Hauptsturmführer Wirths to ask that the girls had all day locked in, and they can go out and either to collect herbs or collect flowers and be a little bit on the fresh air. And he said, "By all means." You know? And so the girls went out, and a herbalist came and they collected herbs. And also they...also they always brought some flowers. And they been an hour or so outside in the fresh air; and the food, when they delivered, the men--because they saw the girls out, so everybody picked one--and they... In the kettle, when they lift it up between the food, they put a little either packets of some special food, or just a letter or a little present. And so a man send me letter on little parcel, and to...directed to me. And this is the man she picked (laughter) for liking. He wrote me love letters which was... Yeah, love letters! He saw me just walking by. I didn't...I didn't even see him. He saw me. But then I found out that who he is, because signed the name and we found out. And one day, she said, "I want to go to this and this." And now we faced each other with this man who was writing me those love letters. And she said, "You wait here, Magda. I am going with him. And I will try if I can... You wait here outside." She was waiting...I was waiting outside, and... But nothing came out of it. I don't know how he got out of it; because he...he was um he was a Polish man, but he supposed to be um released. So maybe that's why he, he um... I don't know how or what, 'cause I didn't um go in detail. But um when she came out; and then in the next letter, he wrote me that she wanted him...to go with him. But he... (laughter) he just didn't feel for her nothing, so... So he just wrote me. I, I don't know if they went; probably they went. I don't...but what, what that made difference? He was...he writes me. Alright, I took his word. But I took with reserve his word, because he just wrote me letters. So never he mentioned anyway. So I tell you those... those things, you see, incredible. Unbelievable. This was Grese. This was Grese. She could talk to me like...like a friend; and the next minute she was a devil. That...that's what she was. A real devil. A sadistic devil. But she was so pretty, you know? That's why they called her "Angel of Death." That's about Grese; because I think that covers it, more or less. Now...

Q: (Cough)

A: I want to tell you about a French woman, because that has also something to do with the experimental block. One day, arrival of um...

Q: I just want to make time clear. We're now going back to when you were in the experimental block?

A: No. No. I been in Birkenau.

Q: We're still in Birkenau.

A: I am in Birkenau, and I am going to the "Revier"--so-called Hospital--with some woman to

get some medication. Because we didn't dare to leave them here...there for long, because soon as the "Revier" was filled, they went over to the gas chambers. So we are there, and suddenly we heard woman singing the Marseillaise. And every...after two woman a police, an SS man with the... How you call it? I forget.

Q: With a rifle.

A: With a rifle. And the whole camp had to turn to the face away from them, so not to get in touch with them or they were afraid we will make a revolution. Ho, ho, ho. But this is...suddenly the...the girl who was in charge, the report um writer, she was looking for me. "Magda, Magda! Where are you? I need you." I said, "Why you need me?" "I want you to take those French woman over. You will be in charge." I said, "Oh, my goodness, leave me alone! I am now in so hidden. I want to have a little peace. But what you want?" "They are French woman. They are all politisch. They are writers. They are um doctors. They are nurses. They are professionals. They are... they all have red triangle, because they are politisch. You want them to to get somebody who won't be able to handle them, and they should die or or take them to the chambers?" So she said, "You take them." But I said, "I don't know French." You know, excuse. She said, "Oh, my God, you don't know French! You know 'essayez-vous,' or a few words. (Laughter) I know that you went to gymnasium, so what you telling me? And the rest, I leave it to you." Anyway, nothing helped. I went in charge. First thing, I said, "Who is speaking German here?" So it was Maria Elise. She was a journalist, and she spoke German. And I explained to her I didn't volunteer for that, and I don't want that position. "And it's not a pleasure. And the whole life here is not a pleasure. But I am going to try to make your life as easy as possible, with your help. We have to communicate. We have to manage to help each other, because typhus is raving. Um flies...lice are there. Everything. Try...um take the hygienic as possible, with all the little possibility as it is." Because I...for example, when I didn't...I couldn't wash. So at night when the kettles from the tea was empty, so I emptied the left-overs from all the kettles and poured for that what was there. From that I washed myself. Somehow, I had to wash myself. Because I knew how important is. And wet. Naturally, I didn't have a towel, too. (Laughter) Anyway, so I told...I told her everything, to explain to them. When is the roll call, then roll call. When is to take food, then is taking the food. Not to hesitate, because then they make life harder and I don't want to scream at them. I don't want to be cruel to them. And so they have to help me. So they did. What I did the first day, I said to them, "Tomorrow I am going to wake you up a little bit earlier because we are going to do exercises, because I believe that in healthy body is a healthy spirit. And the moral [**NB:** morale] is very important." And I got up with them. And the rest said "Magda, that crazy Madga! She thought that...(laughter) She's doing exercises. She's getting up earlier. She could be in bed a half an hour!" So I said, "Never mind. Never mind. Let me be crazy," I said. "I'm doing it." So...and the girls was very appreciative. And so much so that...that Maria Elise, she said ...after a while she said, "Tell me, Magda. How could you survive being so human under such unhuman circumstances? I don't believe I could. I don't believe I could." So anyway, now I just give you a little backwards, forwards. After fifty years I

found out her name is Maria Elise Cohen, and I found out her address. And before I went away, I wrote her a letter. Because, you see, it works and I have to run backwards and forwards. It...it takes two to tango. It's always working. You help somebody, it gets back to you. But I come back to that later. Just remind me; because I want to tell you when I was in the Barrack 10, the experimental block. So one of the girl...woman, of the French woman, was chosen to be a doctor for these experiments. But she was the only one who refused to do unnecessary operations. And she said...you know, like when we promise so to be a doctor, so we are helping the others. And she's not going to do any operation which makes wrong. And not anesthetic...without anesthetic. If she can repair something which a woman has, that she do. But not to make terrible things what they do. So they said, "And you know what you are getting for it?" "Whatever I getting, I am taking it." So they said, "All right. Now you are going to be placed in the Straf bunker... kommando." Which means a "punishment kommando." But her being a doctor--tall and slim--she wouldn't survive a day. Because those sadists would just make a toy out of her, because she was so clumsy probably in this work what she has to do there. So I got in touch--and it was always ways, unbelievable ways--to this woman who was in charge of report writer. And I said, "Look, this woman, Doctor Adelaide Hautval, is on the way to go to this Kommando. Please transfer her quickly somewhere else, because she won't survive." So she transferred her...on the way coming, she transferred her to that Revier. But the next day went a transport with French woman to Ravensbrück. So she added her quickly so nobody knew about her existence. I didn't know about her existence for many years. Once I been in Israel, and there is a forest on honor of people. And I said to my husband, "Let me have a look there at trees." He said, "There are hundreds of trees! What are you going to look for?" I said, "Never mind. Just let me for one minute." Because, you know, men are sometimes so impatient. And the first tree I see is Dr. Adelaide Hautval. The tree is donated from France on her honor. I said, "Béla, Béla, come quickly! Make a picture here." And he made a picture of me, and there was Adelaide Hautval. So meantime, I got her address from Dr. Lore Shelley. I don't know if you heard about her; because she wanted to know our experimental block and I helped her. And so I asked her, "Do you by any chance know the address?" So she knew. So I wrote Adelaide Hautval, and I sent her this picture. And she was very pleased with that picture. And she said that "I was surprised, because you looked so well. So I wish you everything the best in the future." And so...so we been in contact with each other, and unfortunately she died. But the family of hers send me the announcement of her death, and so I sent my sympathy. So you know, it's going backwards and forwards. It's...somehow it's entwined. And now if you want to know further on, I was there in the...in the Lager C;¹³ and some women went on transport. They was chosen people who had good hands, in certain factories. Who had good eyes, I had to bring always to the front because some specialists from this factory and this factory came. And I had to um send out runners: Who had good eyes? Who can see well? Brought them there. And he selected so many, and they went--who had good hands, they are good with the fingers. And so lot of transport went; but unfortunately, a lot of people went to the gas chamber. Which I couldn't, by all my strength

¹³ This was the women's camp designated as B2c in Birkenau.

and influence, I couldn't... Because Eichmann was here. Not I was the one who dictated the...the running of world. Eichmann did. Anyway, so the Lager finished abruptly; and Kramer came for me and he said, "Now, come with me. I am going to take you and you are going to work hard." I said, "Like all others." "No, you are going to work harder." So I said, "This is my fate. I am going to work." And imagine, he took me to the kitchen, and--the lager kitchen--and he announced to the SS woman um...um Schultz... No, I don't say the name because maybe it comes back. And he said, "Here I bring you a new kapo of the kitchen. She will be in charge." And she said, "Fine." Franz. Did I said Franz before? Franz. Because we called her "Franzka." Franzka. And um she had a sister there, too. She was working somewhere else. And um I knew that there is a kapo, a German woman, who is a lesbian friend--you know, because you knew those things--of a Lagerältester. A German woman with a red triangle. And I said, "If I take the position of her lesbian friend, how she will handle the other woman? Because she will be mad; and mad on...on innocent people." So I said to her, Franz...I said, "Listen, I am not good in those things. I wouldn't even know how to manage those things. She is doing a very good job." But I said, "I would rather do the counting out, the Lager office work. I'm good in that. I will count on the food. How much, so many." So she said, "But what will the Lagerkommandant Kramer says?" I said, "He will be satisfied." Like he would tell me, you know. I said, "He will be satisfied." So, in this case, he said, "Go and do the counting." And I was in the counting; and another woman who used to be in the kitchen in the C, she was suddenly here and she didn't have what to do. She said, "Can you help me somehow?" So I said to Franz, to this SS woman Franz, "Listen. There is so much work. It's two camps to handle and a little bit too much for me. Could I have another help?" "Ah, have how many you need!" "No," I said, "one will do. And now I can count wonderful." People didn't know why they suddenly got double portions. (Laughter) Because I counted so many. But it didn't last long. With me, it never lasted. I felt very comfortable there. You know, we...we did the counting, and...and I was happy to know that people are happy. Suddenly, they called my number to the front. When you call the number to the front, that meant that you are going to the Politisch [NB: the Politisch Abteilung] and probably did something terrible, and they are going to kill you. All the girls said goodbye. They kissed me, hugged me. And I went to the front; and here again Kramer with his black car. And he said, "Sit in the car." I sat in the car. So now, he said, "Tell me what did you..." It's a German expression: "ausgefressen" [Trans: "chewed out" or "finished"; colloquialism] Which means, "what did you do wrong?" What is special, more than wrong. And I said, "I did always to the best of the people and the running of the camp." And he repeated it hundred times, and hundred times I said the same thing. And now when we went to...in the car, so if he would go straight then that means he would take me to the crematorium. Suddenly, I see that he goes in. And that was again to the Camp C, where I was. Why I was afraid that when he said that "What did you do wrong," because I still had the letters which I didn't have time to deliver. And I thought they found the letters, and now the punishment will be gas chambers. But no...because he said, "Step out. [Ranken (ph)]." And he said once more, "What did you ausgefressen?" And I said, "I did to everything to the best of the camp and the people." "Is that so?" "Yes, that's so." "So here you will be Lagerältester again, but you will have a Weberei." That means, a Weaving

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*30

34

[Room]. They...they will be weavers in the camp. So I became again Lagerältester.

Q: We must stop. OK. The tape has run out...has ended. We are going to break.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

TAPE #4

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. We are back. Um, Madga, would you tell us about being returned to Lager C?

A: Yeah. As I mentioned it before, I was um returned by Kommandant um Kramer to Lager C. And there was a Weberei. We been for a while there. And in another Lager, in another camp next to us a... It was emptied the camp. And there was a Lagerführerin, her...her name Danz, was her... And she was a terrible brutal woman. But the camp was emptied. And also the girls, whom she was working with, um was free. So she thought she will put me down, and she will put the other girls on and herself. And she is push...and she pushes Grese out, too. So, yah. She came to the camp; and she says, "Magda, you are not Lagerältester anymore." And she was watching me what I will say, I will beg for it. But I said, "That's alright." So she said I will be um somewhere in a barrack. I accepted it. And the other girls came on, with her together. But she was even more brutal than...than Grese; because she was running like crazy all over the camp with the whip, and whipping left and right. I was very sorry that is happening, but I had no way to stop her from it. But there was a German um prisoner, and who was really a...with a black triangle which he was a thief sometime. But he was sitting many years there. And he was saying there to a young girl, who he sometimes he rested in...in her barrack; because it was the last barrack on the camp, and he used to come with the kommando there. And he had different privileges, so he asked if he could rest there. And he told to that girl, "I will fix her! Madga is coming back, and that's it!" So it was really lasting three days. And after three days, I was back. Back again in the... like...like Lagerältester. But it didn't last um very long, because it was coming already close to the march of January 18th [1945], when the death march started. But...and may I...? Before I go with the death march, I have a few interesting things which I forgot. First of all, in Lager C--the first time--it was in one...in two barracks was concentrated all the young girls who was from fourteen 'til about seventeen. And in one of the barracks--and Mengele who couldn't, you know, stand such beautiful girls, Jewish girls, being there. So just when one of the barracks was emptied, either part went on transport or the other part into the crematoria, he asked to transfer all the barrack from one block to Block 3. And there, at night, they supposed to come for them to be gassed. He put there, in the front of the barrack, a post man. Not a post man--a SS man who was...he didn't have a big...a big function, you know? Just a ordinary man, who should um be there on watch. When I heard what happening, so I went together with the report uh writer of mine. And I said, "What can we do to save those children? After all, from no reason whatsoever, from there one day or 'nother they should be gassed. This is our future, if there will be a world. We need that generation!" So I said, "You know what? We are going to approach this man. And we will have a little chat with him." Because it was already after the "appell," the counting; and in the camp was no other SS man but him. So I started to talk with him. And I said, "How are you" and so so. And he told me that he is going...tomorrow morning he is going to the Siberia, to the front. I came with the news together, and said "Oh, here is our chance. We have to do something." So she

said, "What?" "We have to get somewhere a bottle of schnapps and make him drunk." So we found a bottle of schnapps. Matter of fact, at that girl's place where the German with the black triangle used to rest. And he left a bottle, so next day he should drink. We...we searched all the barracks 'til we came to that barrack, and there we find. So I said, "Gerda, ..." She was...that was her name. "...Go there with a cup and tell him, 'Have a little um drink. Tomorrow you are going to the front. Be a little bit merry.'" So he had a little drink. After a while, I went and offered him a little drink. Again, Gerda. The fourth time, I gave him the whole bottle. I said, "Look, be merry! What...you know what happens. Forget the world." He was already a little bit tipsy, so he didn't need much. And when he drank the bottle, he fell asleep. You know, he slammed down and fell asleep. I said, "Gerda, that's our oppor...opportunity." I went to the back of the barrack--which I told you there supposed to be like a wash room, but wasn't. I knocked on the door. They opened the door, and I said, "Shhhh..." And I put the girls down in the five, about hundred a time. And then I just went, and I put the girls in every barrack. I said, "You have hundred girls more tomorrow on your counting, and don't say anything." And so by the hundred I took them, and I divided them all over the camp. And we left. When everybody was divided, we just left the barrack, closed the door; and we went to bed. 'Til today, we didn't know how it is possible that nobody was claiming the girls and nobody claimed anything. If they killed the man, or they sent him to the Siberia anyway. What happened, we don't know. But one thing I know: that in this way, we saved the eight hundred girls. And the eight hundred girl... Yah, just with that thinking how can we overcome and play out at Mengele. Because I was so mad at him that he did it. Anyway, but um later it was very interesting that... Um now I have to jump ahead. On that death march when we been already um going towards Malchow,¹⁴ but I will come back to it. So an SS man, in a orderly manner, approached me. And I don't know from what reason he asked me, "What are you from profession?" I said, "My goodness me!" I said, "We are going to Malchow. What do I need to have profession?" "No, no. I need, because I have forty young girls here. And I want you to be in charge of the forty girls." And that was a part of those forty girls. Where the other girls are, I don't know; but I just recently heard that they are still... A few of them, I don't know where else or how many, are living in Israel. So this is the one thing which I thought I will mention; because it was not such a easy thing. How when we went to sleep 'til we woke up, we thought, "My goodness! If they found out..." But they didn't, thanks heavens. Then (cough) the other thing which I forgot. In Birkenau, one um day I was called again to the front. Always called to the front. And the Lagerkommandant said to me that a Russian um village is coming here as an exchange for the Russian...for the German generals. "And we found in the papers that you are a kindergarten teacher, so you will take over this whole um Russian village except the the woman between eighteen 'til thirty-five. The rest--the little babies, the pregnant woman, the whole, the old ones--belongs... Um, you will take them over." So I again open my mouth; and I said, "In this case, if I have to take over Russian village who has to be exchanged for Russian general, so I want." And I put conditions. I said, "I want them to be bathed daily. I want them to have not to stand on the app...on the counting. I want to pick um sixteen girls

¹⁴ Subcamp of Ravensbrück, located near Mecklenburg.

out from the Russian woman to be my helpers. I don't want to them to stand "appell." And I want them to get the food of the German SS." You know, I was waiting; and I was thinking, "Madga, you crazy?! What you are...(laughter) What you are asking? Who are you to demand?" And he said, "OK. You get it." And so I got the Germa...the Russian village, with the little babies to the old woman. And, naturally, didn't take them long to find out that the...how the other people lived and how they lived. So they um...really, they admired me; carried me around, took me to the...to the room. And they said they will take me to [batushka (ph)] Stalin. They take me to Russia to show me to Stalin. Thanks very much. I didn't know then (laughter)... I didn't know what Stalin is, anyway. And so they stayed with me, and they was very grateful. One thing, which is a cruel thing of the Germans; that one day they gathered all the children from about um four or six, and they send them to Germany. And matter of fact, Grese, you see--who always was telling me things... She said, "You know where they going? They are going to Germany, and they will be um...they will be given away to um the farmers, who hasn't got children, for adoption. In a few years, they won't even know they are Russians. And they, the parents, will have a new genera...new children." Anyway, and um also anoth...another occasion, Grese told me, "You know why we are putting Jewish woman in charge? With all the strength which you wouldn't want to, I know. But imagine, if the war will be over and the Germans are losing, so they won't...they won't remember the SS. But they ... Because they don't see them so often. But they will remember those girls with whom they been everyday, and who had such a hard position, when they are so hungry, thirsty and tired. And now comes a woman in charge; and maybe she raises her voice or demanding. **Her**, they will remember! And that's what we want. We want to be unknown. If we either um not succeed, but we do succeed." I tell you, she said. Anyway, this was the other thing. And now um coming back, um... So that was the Russians. I really did...um we went to [bombard (ph)], and they had a beautiful food. And imagine, the whole camp was saying, "Magda is crazy! What she is doing, nobody can do that like her! Demanded Russians should get the SS food, for the SS man!" But anyway... Then we went on the march, which you heard it so many times displayed. So I'm not going to details, only...

Q: I do want to hear your story.

A: You want to...?

Q: Yes I do.

A: Yah, so when we went on the march. So um before we went, so they broke in the kitchen. And the girls, they took what they could; because they knew what...they didn't know how long the march will be and where they are going. So they took some um salami, bread, margarine, sugar and salt. And they went; but naturally who... The...the SS men was running away, because they knew the Russian are coming close. So they...yah, they was rushing us with all the speed possible, because they didn't want to be caught by the Russians. And anyone who...who moved down to fix her um shoes or bend down for something, they

straight away um put her to death. And my aim was: "Girls, we in the front." Because in the back, they was shooting everybody. And um the girls was carrying the...that we found there some rucksacks in the store room; and they, in the rucksacks they put the food. But it was heavy to run and to carry; so slowly, they threw most of the food away. And what I asked them to keep is margarine and sugar, because this time we thought that this is the source of energy. And so we marched, and we came to Ravensbrück. Ravensbrück...um we been put on the floor, and there were just a huge tent. And in that tent, we been in without food, on the floor--nothing, no mattresses, no blankets. The situation was terrible. I don't think...many, many um lost their life. And I was very sick there. But, you see, again the fate wanted something. So I told you about the French woman who was so grateful to me, and there was in Ravensbrück. Because they was, like I told you, intellectuals; and they was working there in the offices. They found out that the Birkenau girls arrived. So... and they came to the tent, and they looked for Magda. So they found me. They took me to them, and they really brought me back to health. And they...they let me have [butna (ph)] wash. There they feed me. They been...they gave me medicament. And so, 'til we had to march, I just went to the roll call there. Otherwise, I been always in their barrack. (Cough). When it was the time to march farther on, I was good again. But on the march, (cough) suddenly the Germans, they drove us to a empty um...like where the trees are. What is it? A...(cough) (Pause) Not a mountain, but where are the trees....

Q: The trees...the hills? Trees, in the woods.

A: Woods. They...they... Yeah, thank you. In the woods, and there was nothing. It was snow and freezing...just was an empty...empty barrack there. And they put us there, and they went away. And we been finishing nearly with that little margarine and sugar, which I every day made a little bowl. And I divided to everyone which the group which I had. Like a hand with the little chickens. I had always around me, you know, like a harem. Whom I couldn't help everybody, but whom I could. So it was getting to end, and we been very hungry. And I was um, you know, dozing away in the weakness. And suddenly I had a dream. And in the dream, my mother came. And she had a big dish, with fresh beautiful um cakes what you make for Saturday, you know? From butter, butter and milk and little...round little cakes--like roll-types. And I want to grab one in my dream, and she is pushing it always away. And I said Mom, "I'm so hungry. Why you taking it away?" She said, "Because I want your promise." And I said, "What is the promise?" "Promise me when you marry and you will have children, you will bring them up as Jewish children." And I, in my dream I said, "My goodness, Mom! Where I am alive? Where I am married? Where I have children? What you want that promise, when I am so hungry?" She said, "You can't have it 'til you don't promise." And so I said, "Alright, I promise." In this moment, somebody's touching my shoulder. And I open my eye. And the Russian woman--like I told you, they been very good--and they already heard that in the woods are people from the um from Ausch...from Birkenau. And they...and when she heard, she was working like a nurse in the SS hospital. She made a big bowl of peeled potatoes, like potatoes in the peel. She wrapped that all over in blankets, and she was going through the woods and was looking for me. And she found

me. And she said, "Magda, I brought here food for you." And this was when I was just reaching with my hands in my dream. And here I have my hand like that, and she is petting. And I open it, and here she offers the fresh boiled hot potatoes. And we been...you know, it was the biggest delicacy. And that really saved our life for a while again. And so I say that it's never...like when you do something good, you never know when you are getting um repaid with some goodness again. And that was it. Then um we marched, um and we came to the place Malchow, like I said. So I had the forty girls there. But meantime, there was a girl who knew me um a few years ahead and she knew how I was. So she said, "The forty girls can hand to somebody else. But there is um many like thousands um woman, and they need somebody to take care of them." So I was exchanged, and I became there again block oldest. And again I was explaining the girls that we have to keep together. We are to help each other, and we will survive. "And...and I will try to do everything you should get food, and I will make sure that everybody...nobody is left over. I divide the food evenly. Whatever I have, you have." And so it it was for a while. And suddenly the news came that Danz is coming here. So...and I saw her again with the whip running around the camp. So I said, "Oh, my goodness! What could we do to stop her?" But she made the decision herself. They needed a a woman who would um divide people to go to work; and they called Arbeitsdienst--"working in charge," or something.¹⁵ So um everybody wanted to be in that position, because it's not that bad position. I didn't. And she choose me. She choose me. So when she choose me, I [**NB:** she] said, "You know why I choose you? Because I have a respect for you." And I said, "Do you?" "Yes. You remember when I put you down as from Lagerältester, and pushed you down and you wouldn't be maybe alive now. And you didn't for one moment say "Why," or beg at me that I should give you the position or nothing. You just accepted and you been proud standing there. And...and I have respect from you, that you weren't afraid and you didn't ask or you didn't bring me or you didn't want to bribe me, that all...that I should put you on. So I...I am picking you for that position." So I said, "Now I have the chance!" There was, you know, in all positions like that camp or prison, there is always that you are looking... reading from the palm and all things. So while she got acquainted with me again, she told me all her story: about a brother she has in Siberia, and how she's worrying about him and all those things. And I listened, and I said, "Now is my chance." I looked for one of those girls who was also reading for my palms, and I told her the story about the Danz and her brother, and that. I said, "You have to be very careful. What you know the facts, but you don't have to make it obvious. You have to just slowly, gradually... Because you have plenty time; because while you are occupying her, she's not trying...running around with the whip around." So she went around. And she um told her this and that. But it finished up that, "Oh, your brother is worrying about you." "What you mean?" "Because he is in the Russian front." "How you know?" "I can see it in your hands. And he is worrying you." "What you mean, 'he is worrying you?' You mean he's worrying that the war is to the end, and that I am like I am, doing that to the prisoners, and he is afraid that maybe I will get the punishment for it?" And she said, "I don't know what you mean, but that's what is written in your hand. That he is very worried, and he is really thinking on

¹⁵ **NB:** Labor Service.

you with all his heart. And he loves you so much, and he's caring for you and he's scared for you." So, that did it. Next... And I was keeping away, meantime; I didn't want to know. And then she calls me, and she said, "Magda, this woman is wonderful. Do you know what she told me?" And that and that. So she said, "You think I should stop going hitting people on... on the...with the whip?" I said, "I don't know." I said, "I don't know. Um, is that your brother's wish?" She said, "It seems to be." So I said, "I leave it to you." But it left her this way; but I thought maybe she would think it over, because... So I found somebody else. There is...was a...is a girl, she lives in Melbourne. She's a very good portrait artist, not a professional but.... And I came to her the next day, before she has a chance to reading her whipping again. And she said...I said to her that, um, "Oh, I have a very good um portrait writer ...um painter, who thinks you would be very good um to make a portrait about you." "She...and she thinks I have the face for it?" "Definitely!" I said, "Definitely. Would you like her to come, and...and she will make you a nice portrait. It, it...she doesn't want anything. Doesn't cost you anything. You just have to sit and see. If you like it, good. If you don't like it..." But I knew she would like it. So that was it. I kept her from the street again. And I said to her--Edith is her name--I said, "Don't rush with the...(laughing) with the painting. But always show her your progress, because then she is interested." And one day she told me, "You know, this girl. She's very good. She's doing a wonderful job. I wonder when she finish? I am really anxious to see how it will look." And anyway, then I said, "You know, you better make it now quicker. Because um that would not be good." And...and so she finished the um portrait. And she was very happy with it. And you know what? She never used the whip again. And I was very happy because, you know, such a whip. It wasn't just a whip. With inside, it was uh like...like iron, you know, a certain thing. It was...outside it was leather, but inside... When you got whipped with it, it really hurted. Anyway, and meantime the war was getting closer. And again they was rushing us out from the camp and they wanted to us to go closer...um deeper in Germany. And on the way, it was...the population was moving backwards and forwards with their baskets and with their furniture and everything. And suddenly some Russian girls arrived. Because they found out that we are marching, and...and they thought I will be there. And they knew that the Russian are coming close. So suddenly they been there. And they said, "Magda, we came to save you. And we are going. We are partisans. We been partisans, and we know how to hide a person in the woods. We will make like a little hut for you, and we will hide you. Because when the Russian will come--which we have heard that they are very close--there, first of all, they will rape you all...um like not one, but all. And then if somebody pointed that you been in function, then they will kill you. And I want to have a chance...we want to have a chance to explain who you are, and then we take you out." So first, I...I was arguing; because I was the hand with that little chickens. So I argued, and I said, "I want to take girls to hide." She said, "Magda, you ask the impossible! How...then we had to make a real...not a [place to] hide, a bungalow. A bungalow! So we can't do." Anyway, on the end, three. Three we managed, and they really hide us in the woods. They made branches, and so we been inside like in a cocoon. And the Russians soon arrived. Meantime, before they arrived they um stopped in a... Uh where ...where they made um flour. No, how you call it?

Q: In a mill?

A: In a mill. And in the mill, they was... They run away, the Germans; but there was a store room of everything what you think. In the cellar: food, meat, everything. They had supplies for years there. Anyway, so they always brought us something to eat. Meantime the Russian arrived. And they settled in this mill, because it was so big. And they settled in; and the girls, they used the opportunity to slowly brought them to the idea that...about me, and that how now they was explaining how I was to them and like a mother, like a this, like that. And when that was explained, so they came to pick us up. And when they came to pick us up, so they put us to the head table. And, you know, was like personality plus I was. And when I wanted to help to cooking, you know, how because there was a lot of... So he said, "No." You know the Russians said, "Nyet." You know how they said, "Nyet. You sit down. You have the celebrity. You did a very important thing for our Russians. Now the...let the others work." So that was that. But naturally they had to continue their journey; and we continued, too. And then we came to a place, and um where all the Czechoslovakian people gathered. And now they started to bring them with the trucks back to Czechoslovakia, 'cause it wasn't very far. But I can't tell you the place, which is not important. Anyway...but what happened: there was a lot of Hungarian girls, and the Hungarian girls went on the rampaging, you know, in the houses and... How you call it? Um, stealing the jewelry and then the bed and carpets and everything. So the Czech girls, they said um they are very upset about those girls and they don't want with those girls to go home. First of all, the Russians wanted them to send to Siberia and to work, or to the harvesting. So and they came to me: "Magda, listen. They are sending us to harvesting! We want to go home, and see what...if somebody is alive. And we work enough. We don't want again." So I went to the commander; and I spoke by the time, you know, very well Russian. And I told them, "They are not your enemies. They... they been Jews. That's why the um Hungarians threw them out. Now you want them...to send them to work to Russia, because they are enemies of...of um...like of the Russians. Like they are like friends with the Hungarian! They are not Hungarians. They are Jews who suffered because they are Jews." So they...he said, the commander, "Yes, you right." Then they wanted to send the girls to work in the meat factory. So again they came. "Magda, what we are going to do? They send us to the meat factory!" So I again went to the commander. And I said, "Look. They are girls who live three, three and a half years, two years concentration camp. And now you want them to work here? Isn't that enough German woman here who was living here in comfort? Take them!" And he said, "You're right!" And so I saved those also. But then they didn't want to take the Czechoslovakian girls home, the Jewish girls. So a woman, like a older woman, from my hometown, she said, "Magda, you have to do something or they will leave us here. They will take the Czech people, and be...leave us here under the Russians and between the Germans. What will be our fate, I don't know. You have to do something. You have to go to the Committee of the Czechoslovakians." And... and I said, "Please leave me out. I was sweeping enough. Let somebody sweep." And, you know, that's a song like that... (singing) "that I swepted already enough." Anyway, so she said, "But this is the last time you have to do something." So I went there...(laughter) I went there to the Committee; and I said, "I

heard that you are sending away the Czech girls, but you are not sending the Jewish girls." And...and he said, "We haven't got enough trucks." And I put my hand on the table, and I hit the table so that the papers all jumped up. And I said, "If I would be a cousin of President Beneš, then would be trucks for me. But because I am not, I am only a Jewess who was a very good citizens for the Czechoslovak Republic. We been honest and right citizens, and you threw us out like rubbish. And now, after the war, you don't take us back? This is not fair." And he got up; and he says, "I am the cousin of President Beneš." And I said, "Then you are going home. But we are going to stay here?" And he looked at me and he says, "The first trucks which arrive, you will be on it." I came there; and they say, "Oh, Magda, you saved us again!" And that's how it finished up. And that goes the story now, which is not important, how I meet my husband.

Q: No. I'd like to hear that.

A: You would like to hear it? So we arrived in Prague, and I announced right away I want to Palestine. I didn't...I didn't even think on Béla, or something. But I thought, "I am going to Palestine. I'm not staying in this place where they threw me out like dirty linen." So while I am signing all the papers I am going to Palestine and everything, from far away--because it was a huge room and there was hundreds of people there--somebody screams. I know he was a doctor, and I know from what town he is. And I don't know how he knew; but he says, "Béla is alive!" Béla is alive. Fine. And um...and he said, "You should go after him." But he screamed that over hundreds of people, you know. (Laughter) He screamed, "Ah..." And I...you know, I listened to that. And so I...he told me, while...while he told me that I should look after him. And he told me that he has a sister in a certain place, the first thing I should go there. When he came home, then...

Q: Which...which...which "he"s are we talking about?

A: Pardon?

Q: We're talking about Béla?

A: Béla! When Béla came home to Prague, so girls told him on the station, "Magda is home in her home town." Everyone told him that I am home. They saw me here. They saw me there. They saw me there, and they saw me there. So as he heard that I am home, so off he went to my hometown. Meantime, because he said the first thing I should go to his sister's place, so I went there. I am coming there; and they said, "But he is looking for you in your hometown!" Anyway...so I was there a few days, and then I went to my hometown. I'm going home, and he is coming back. (Laughter) When he came back and found that I went home, so he wrote me a letter. And I should straight away come, because he... So...so I came back to _ilina, was the name; but I felt very awkward to live at his sister place, who didn't know me ever. And...and I had there some friends from my hometown, so I went to live there. I thought, "'Til Béla comes home, I don't want strange people." But his nephew,

who was twelve years old, he came to pick me up. And he said, "You know, Magda, my uncle loves you very much." (Laughter) He is...he was a tall boy for twelve. And he says, "And he is the best man on the world. So please don't run away from here, because he will be very unhappy. So come with me, and wait till he is coming home." And that child didn't move 'til I didn't go with him. And he was going with me to swimming, to exercise, to um the pictures, whatever, 'til Béla did come home. And so then I...that night I stayed at their place, and at night Béla came home. And then he saw me, he grabbed me in his hand, run around in...in a...in the... Because he was happy. And that's we...how we met; and the rest is not so important anymore. But that's how we met anyway. And um that, matter of fact, I think finishes up. Because there was so many other stories, which I go away for hours. But I think the most you heard. You heard enough.

Q: When did you--just tell us, briefly--after the war about when you and Béla married and when you moved to Israel and then to...

A: Yeah.

Q: Just bring us through to the United States.

A: Yeah. When, when we...when we met then, then I said, "I'm not going to stay here. We have to move away from here." So we went first up to Prague, and we booked in the hotel. He, meantime--that's why he went away, because he wanted to earn a few...few crowns that he would have. And because for those who been in camp, there was a possibility to get somewhere...like to settle, to start. A new start, because we didn't have a penny. So, so we went. But Béla, being as he was--broken down, lost his wife and child--and something broke in him. He didn't have that really business sense, or... So he didn't pick a big factory, or big shop or whatever. He picked a little...in a little town. On the end of the town, a little house which used to here have a woman whose husband was working and she was doing the repairs and meantime she was selling something. A little... So when...when I saw that what he choosed--because he wanted away from people, you know? He suddenly didn't want to see many people. So I...I told myself, "That little place! Couldn't he pick something bigger, that we should have a chance?" Because it was all empty. We had to run away for material, and...and get things done. And ...and you know that place had stairs like that. Spiral stairs. So I had run up and be in the shop and cook. And...and...and sometimes customers came in, and...and I was running down. And I said, "Don't worry. You can't touch anything, because everything is on wire. And when you touch anything, it's...(laughter) it's um ...the bells are ringing upstairs. So, and tell it to everybody," I said. Sometimes I had to go up; but I know, and then I know. And, you know, you can tell people and they believe you. And they believed me. Anyway, so they didn't touch anything. And um so we started to work it up. But, you know, because really with hard work and with friendliness, with our personality, we brought people from...from the town to the end of the town. And so we started to do a little prospering. And then I was um pregnant with my first child...was our first child. And when I was in hospital even... This time, in Czechoslovakia, they made, you know, from feathers a

little...like um feather [bed] and this is like--like I said--like a wurst, and here it gets over and you have to attach things. And the baby is inside; and here is lace around. And when Maya was born, so baby...Béla made it up and brought in. And there was a woman who didn't have that thing, and she liked it very much. So Béla said, because he was so happy, he will make [for] her. But then it come to pay, because he didn't have it for nothing. So worked out that her husband is a very high um in this business to checking everything; and...so he didn't want to pay. And when Béla demanded he should pay, so he send a committee and they gave us a punishment. A financial big punishment. Imagine! I said, "Béla, you see how it happens. When you're good and good-hearted, somebody--not that he doesn't say thank you because you made it for his child. He makes us all our saving and our hard work went on...on it." And here we been, and somebody on top of it was jealous because we brought all the customers there. He wanted that shop. So they took away the shop. So then I went again to Prague to demand that what happened, and with no reason they took it away. So we gave another shop. But now was the question that they wanted...it came a change, and they wanted Béla to be a member of the Communist Party. He didn't want to be. So they closed him out from the party, without being in the party. And they said...again they take all the business away, because if he is not a member... So I said, "What you mean?" They said, "You can have it, if you divorce him." So again...so we had a lot of bad luck like that. The fate wanted to see how much I can endure. And naturally then we got another little... I was running after this member and this member, and we got another little business. But Béla had to travel, and it didn't bring much money.

Q: When did you go to Israel?

A: And then I decided...I said, "Look. You...you are not a communist. And whatever will be, they will find out a reasons of you." And they was...did find out. They said that he wants to overthrow the government; which I said, "I didn't know he was so smart." (Laughter) I said that to that man who...who said it. "I didn't know my husband is so smart." You know, I could always talk. But um...but that didn't help me. And then Israel started, so I said, "We are going to Israel." All my life, I wanted to go. All my friends and relatives said, "In this time, beginning with a baby of one and a half and three, you are going to Israel? You know where you will live? In tents on the sand." I said, "I don't mind. Israel was um born, and we belong there." They said, "But you can't...you can come with us first to Australia, and then go to visit Israel when you made already money." And I said, "If everybody would say it, where would Israel be?" So I think, "I'm going:" and we went. And naturally we was being in the camp in the tents. Wasn't the best thing. So the only thing was that I...I uh said that I want a kindergarten job. So I went to the directress, and I said, "Would you give me a kindergarten job?" And she said, "Can you speak Hebrew?" I said, "A few words." But he [NB: she] said, "So how do you want to be a kindergarten teacher?" I said, "Did Danny Kaye talk with all the children, with all the nations which he didn't know the language? So I will be!" So she looked at me. "I give you a chance. I go in that camp, and I take all the teachers out and the helpers. And you go in. If you survive ten minutes, you get it." I went in; and in ten minutes, the children was on the floor and on top of me. And we been

laughing and giggling. So she say, "Ah, have it!" She made, "Oh, have it." So that's how I got a job. And I need a job most of it because the food wasn't made for Europeans. It was made for Africans. And for a little baby of one and a half, she started to get sick. But then I...as I was on the staff, so I got the food of the staff. And, you know, a mother is never hungry when it comes to it. And I said, "Could I take the food to her home, when I will be hungry?" She said, "By all means. Take it!" And so I brought the food home, divide it between the children and Béla, and what was left was mine. I was so skinny...

Q: We need to move a bit. When did you come to Australia?

A: Um first...and then we went to live in um Holon. And then again I put um my furniture out, brought a kindergarten in; and then again the kindergarten out and the furniture in. And Béla had to go always to the military service, which he didn't like very much because he wasn't as young anymore. And one stage, he was there for a month. And it was terrible; and they been attacked and then it was it was wet and everything. And meantime, my cousins from Australia send the papers. "Come to Australia." And Béla came home. He said, "Send the papers." My cousins wrote, "You have to wait anyway for two years, so...so then send it quick as possible." We send the papers; but a fluke luck, in six weeks we had the papers to move. So that's...in '65 we went to Australia. But again, without a penny; because the place what we had we sold, and that was just enough for our journey. We arrived again penniless. So, again a hard time. Hard time all the time. But I never lost faith. We brought our children up in a very good way, and they are...they... Because they had to work. They had to help me to clean to the place where the children... And they helped. They had to wash the floors. And the neighbors said they know better the bottom of my children than the faces. (Laughter) And that's happened.

Q: Magda, thank you. You had a statement you wanted to read.

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: We wanted to know the effect of the war on you, and I think your statement does that.

A: Yah. Must still be a little wet. Yeah. Can I take my glasses?

Q: Sure can.

PAUSE

A: (Reading from paper) My number is 2318. Under this number, I survived and endured unbelievable dehumanizations, beatings, screams. I suffered all kind of sicknesses. I had malaria. My Lager sisters took me to the Revier (kind of hospital), so I could at least rest a little. But rats been running around me, biting on my toes. So I asked my lager sisters to discharge me rather to the barrack. The same day, unfortunately, the whole Revier been sent

to the gas chambers. I had typhoid, and all different sicknesses. As a consequence, I lost my eyesight, my hearing. I couldn't walk. I was many times close to be sent to the gas chambers. By one occasion, I was one the track together with other victims on the way to the gas chambers. Against all the odds, I lived through three and a half years; first in Auschwitz, then in Birkenau. My hair been cut many times, with blunt scissors so after my head was always bruised. On a chair, (looking up) I was telling you already that, (reading from paper) um while laughing men been cutting or shaving everywhere where hair was. On SS order, all my possessions were taken away. And I was dipped in murky water in large bins, ten at a time. Then I stood wet and naked, shaking in the wintery cold 'til I got remnants after the Russian prisoner of wars. Cotton pants and top. On mine, all the buttons been missing; so I have to hold the top and bottom with my hands, not to lose them. And a pair of wooden clogs. Before I start to tell my story, I wanted to mention this part as a start. Because there are people, some writers, professors, scientist, who from unbelievable reason try to deny that the Holocaust existed. They try to say Holocaust was only a hoax. Unfortunately, all the barbarism of the German SS, sadism, deceiving, the cruelty, was true. Believe me. Often I feel I should ask from all those people why are they doing it. Wasn't there enough our suffering? And now, on top of...on top those people claiming it should have the last laugh? And a lot of followers? So I turn to you, all parents, to all the teachers, professors, scientists, preachers, priests, rabbis. Educate the children, the people, about those horrors that the German nation under the Nazi system did to all other nations, not only Jews. I been witnessing that, nobody was excepted...exception. (Pause) Make the wrong right. Be understanding and helpful to those survivors. It's not right not to talk about it for shame or frustration. Some will say, "It happened a long time ago--forty-five, fifty years ago. Let's forget it." But on the other side, they continue on thousands of places to preach two thousand years history about the Golgotha. Don't believe those so-called professionals whose informations are coming from, to me, unknown sources who have the reason and own interests. And who, for a lot of money, tried to persuade the world about the non-existence of the gas chambers. But would and could you, and you, and you, forget it, if you would live through all the horrors which changed your life, your career? We're tormented by nightmares. When you close your eyes, you relive the misery again and again. So you don't even go to sleep. And how about the millions and millions of babies, young, innocent children, people young and old? So, please! Don't minimize the Holocaust as a old story. But try to work against it, that happenings like the Holocaust shouldn't have ground to happen again ever. (Looking up) Finish. That's it. Hmmm?

Q: Beautiful. OK.

A: OK.

Q: OK. That's it.