

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Hana Bruml  
February 27, 1990  
RG-50.030\*0043**

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Hana Bruml, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on February 27, 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 Memorial Museum'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.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

## **HANA BRUML**

### **February 27, 1990**

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: Could you tell me your name please?

A: Uh my name is Hanna Bruml.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, uh May 30th, 1922.

Q: Could you tell me something about your family, and growing up?

A: I was very fortunate because we lived with my grandmother and grandfather in the same house. I was the only child. My mother had a child a year before me, but he died just before delivery. So I was the first grandchild in the family. And I...all my first memories are about my grandfather, and I feel very warmly about him. He died when I...three months before my third birthday. But nevertheless, all my memories are about my grandfather. And we simply had a love affair. Uh he would watch me to go across the street to buy his cigars. His cigars were "Virginki," which means that they were tobacco from Virginia. Uh we called them "Virginki." And he watched me to cross the street and give my little money on the counter, and bring him uh his cigars. And he very proudly looked after me, that I was able to do it. So at the very early childhood, he really pushed me to independence, to do things for myself. I remember he had a little wooden stool with a crack in it. And I loved peanuts, but I was very small to crack them. So I put the peanuts in that little crack, and he gave me a mallet; and I would push the peanuts and I could have to open it myself. And these are memories that nobody could have really told me that uh about my grandfather. Or we went walking; and uh I even remember the streets where we went. And he would give me a little coin; and I would go inside and give my little penny on the counter, and uh--whatever it was--and buy, you know, a little piece of candy. And he waited for me outside. And uh his birthday was in March, and he died just shortly afterwards. And I came to him to give him my little poem. I had to learn little tiny poems for the family, for the members of the family. That was my gift for their birthdays--to learn a poem. And I went to tell it to him, and he already didn't respond. I think he had a stroke. And I came out crying, because my grandmother...uh my grandfather didn't kiss me and he didn't say, "Thank you." That I don't remember. That I was told. It's interesting. I don't remember the kind of a rejection, which I thought at that time. That I only remember loving things about him. And my grandmother was with us all my growing up. She had her birthday five days before mine; so we celebrated, more or less, birthday together. She always kept a piece of her cake for me. She was the one who told me stories. Uh I would crawl into her bed, and she would tell me a fairy tale I had heard about fifty-five times; but I wanted to hear it for the fifty-sixth time

from her. Uh when I started going to school, she would cross the big street to help me cross back again. And I was more concerned about her crossing safely, but she was concerned my crossing safely. So it got a little complicated there. But she was in many ways the mother on whom I patterned my life. And she had in her...she had a very orderly closet. And in the closet, she had a bag with her white shroud; and she knew according to the Jewish religion this is how she would want to be buried, and wanted to be buried with my grandfather in the same grave. She never had a chance to use that shroud even though we sent it with her to Theresienstadt [Czech: Terezín]. But I knew that[']s what she wanted. Uh that was a sort of a thing to do every Sunday morning. We would go to Grandfather's grave, and we'd put little stones. That's a tradition--you put a little stone. And if she was not able to go, I always put a little stone for her on my grandfather's grave. And uh after the...after I returned I always...when I'm in Prague go, and go to my grandfather's grave. And since we were not able to put her there, we had her...I had her name put on the same gravestone. And my relatives in Prague are maintaining the grave, even though many...even though so many are neglected. And uh so she is there, at least in memoriam, as she wished to be.

Q: What, as you grew up, as you became a young woman, what was your schooling like? What were your friends like?

A: For the first five years I went to a Jewish school. It was more Zionistic Jewish school, not a religious school. We were twenty boys and ten girls. Out of the ten girls, we were five Hannas--because it was a very popular name. And out of the five girls, as far as...as far I can say, I'm the only one who survived. Out of the twenty boys, I know about five survived. I am in contact with one of them; and just recently, he sent me a picture of the second and the fourth grade, which was a real find for me. After that, I went to gymnasium--which was the academic level. And uh then I went into a business school, and I started working and be very... I was always very, very independent, very, very quickly. And my father led me to independence. Uh, I--as an eleven, twelve year old, I went to collect from his...from the builders money, so he would have for his payroll. And in the beginning they looked at this little girl who's coming to collect money, and would call my father: "Is that on the level?" And he said, "Yes." And I gave them a receipt, signed it. He told them it's OK, because nobody had an idea that I was bringing payroll money. So he was leading me, again, pretty much to independence. Because my mother was uh a rather sickly woman who had frequent pneumonias, who have had at least uh five, six miscarriages after me. I was the only live birth uh child. So I was uh uh freely very much led to independence, almost compensating for her; because she was really very shy, very sickly and had enormously uh uh heavy thick glasses because she was so near-sighted. Uh I was...my character was much more like my aunt--my mother's sister--and my father, who was much more outgoing.

Q: As you grew older, um you began to become involved with the young men?

A: Uh I was...uh I was fortunate in my age we were still able to have some social life and go to dancing schools. It's all, you know, with the long dress and uh formalities. I was still about

the last year that[s] where we were able to do it. And at that time, I was going with uh a student who was three years my age--so I was about sixteen, he was nineteen--by the name of Rudolph Schiff. We called him "Rudla." And uh when I was seventeen, and uh the gates were closing on us uh and uh...things were starting really getting bad, we got married November 14th, 1939, at the City Hall. Again, there was no housing for us. I went home. He went home in the evening, because there was no possibility. In his uh...his families lived a couple of blocks away from us, so that was no big problem. And uh as uh the Germans were closing in, we had to go into more and more cramped quarters. And his parents had a big apartment what had it sub-divided. And each bedroom was given to another family. And uh the uh...so there was really no where to go. Then one of the families were sent with transport to camp, so for couple of months we had one of the bedrooms. In the meantime, he got scarlet fever. And at that time, when you had scarlet fever uh you had to go for six weeks into a hospital. Today, somebody with scarlet fever--it's [like] a strep throat. A couple of days, and you are fine. They thought that you were infectious for six weeks, until your started to peel. I had scarlet fever when I was in the first grade, so I knew what it meant for six weeks to be in isolation--which I was. By the way, I was in that isolation at children[s] hospital; and the children[s] hospital was run by nuns. And the nuns said...came to us and uh said, "OK, children, get off your beds, kneel and pray." And I said to the nun, "I'm sorry, I'm Jewish. I don't kneel." And so she said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to pray in bed the way my grandmother taught me." And that was that. I did not follow the party line, and in many ways the nuns respected that. I was only seven--barely seven at that time, because I had my birthday in the hospital. And uh so he had scarlet fever. He had to go to the hospital; and while he was in the hospital, they brought in his room a little four year old--little Frankie. Cute little Frankie. The parents were Polish uh emigres who came to Czechoslovakia; and while he was in the hospital, they had to go with a transport and leaving the child in the hospital. They didn't allow them to wait until he was discharged. So my sister-in-law--my husband's sister, Margit--uh sort of adopted him and uh was to take him. He went to Theresienstadt, and while he was there she took care of him. But, of course, when she came with him to Auschwitz, she went to gas with him. But when he...we had really difficulty during that time of all kinds. Uh during that time things were getting worse in terms of uh getting supplies, buying food, working, going places. I remember going on the street and meeting one of my school friends. Of course, by that time I had the star; and as we came closer to each other, we walked slower and slower, thinking, "Should I stop? Should I talk? Who was it worse for, her? Is it worse for me? What should we go and do?" So... And so we slowly came together, looked at each other, winked at each other, and passed again. It...it was that sort of a situation. You had to think, "Wait a minute. Is today Saturday? Saturday, I cannot go this place. Friday, I cannot get that place." Because the restrictions were getting tighter and tighter. So it was a difficult time under any circumstances. Uh, now Rudie--my husband--had a brother, Karel Schiff, who was finishing his MD degree. By that time, Hitler came. And there were only two Jewish uh people who were supposed to get their degree. You know, that big day in Europe--it was a much bigger day to get your degree. Uh they gave the degree to everybody; and they took the two Jewish fellows to the bathroom, and gave them their diploma in the bathroom. And uh he had, as I

said, a sister and a brother-in-law. None of them have returned. Uh, my father-in-law died in the transport from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. He died uh on the way. And my mother-in-law, was a very energetic woman, and brother-in-law were in the familienlager [**Ger:** family camp]. And I was told how uh they knew what was going to happen to them. Uh, Rudla was with them; and uh I understood he was quite sick. And uh he died probably before he went to gas--in the familienlager, you know.

Q: Let's go back a little bit. Can you tell us a little more about the early years, of the German invasion, what that meant?

A: Uh, I remember the day they came. I remember the day I sto...I remember the place, the street where I stood, and it was snowing. It was a cold day and they were pulling in - I was by myself. I just walked there. It was not far, maybe three-quarters of a mile from where we lived. And we were uh uh watching them on their wagons with their tanks, with their half-tracks, with guns pointing to the rooftops. And it was snowing. And we knew that the screw is going to become tighter and tighter. Uh we knew what was happening in Austria. But somehow we still had some foolish idea we are in Czechoslovakia. Because, I remember so clearly, when I was about eleven or twelve, I read a book about the Marranos. These were the uh Jews in Spain who during the Inquisition had a choice either to give up their religion or be uh converted [to] Catholicism; and many of them became converted only in name, and still celebrated secretly all the Jewish holidays. And uh this was a very interesting story about the Inquisitor, etc. And I remember--you know, the kind of vignettes one remembers from childhood--I remember telling my grandmother, "Aren't we fortunate that we live in the 20th century in Czechoslovakia, that such a thing cannot happen to us!" Six short years, six short years [later, it] happened to us. Not only as to them, but much worse. Uh, kind of took away from us the protection that it happens to somebody else but not to us. One becomes and realizes how vulnerable one is.

Q: When did things begin to change--for your family, in particular? How did you... Describe some of it. \_\_\_\_\_.

A: Uh, I worked at that time what they used to call a Palestina Amt [**Ger:** Palestine Office]. Uh, at that time there were still people able to move, uh emigrate. And of course, when you signed your paper for emigration, if I was Hanna Schiff at that time, I had to sign it as "Hanna Sarah Schiff." All the women had to put down "Sarah," and all the men had to put in "Israel" as a mid...as a middle name. And I was go...going to the Department of Treasury where I filled up some papers, and uh they had to pay that much of a... They had to give a list of all their property they were going to take with us in the suitcases, and they had to pay that much for this and that much for that. And so I was working on that. And therefore, I knew that the Jacob Edelstein was the head of the Palestina Amt, and knew some people there--which later became very important to me. Uh the... (pause) I worked during the time, but I cannot... My father for instance, he owned a workshop. That was taken away; and he had to start working again, because he didn't have such means. But fortunate my

grandmother lived with my parents. Uh my parents' maid--who was worked with us probably ten, eleven years, was my mother's age--uh was very helpful and undemanding. And she went shopping, and she did what she could. But of course, her ration tickets were regular ration tickets; but our ration tickets were marked with a "J," so we couldn't shop when there was food in the stores. We could shop only at certain hours for certain things, etc. But nevertheless, she was very instrumental in helping us. Uh my parents were... Oh, I should go back to one thing. At that time uh when the Germans came, of course, they went to the Jewish Kultusgemeinde--the religious and cultural community--and wanted the name[s] of the Jews. And from there, they named...got the names of the transport. And we were so stupid, we went and we registered and we did what we could at that time. At that time, I had an infection in this finger, and uh it was following up my arm. And, of course, I couldn't go to the hospital. By the way, at that point we were not allowed to use the hospital. Little bit later, there was one private hospital converted; and Jews were able to use that little private hospital, which was very crowded. But at that time, there was nobody; and the infection was continuing. Uh the uh Aryan, non-Jewish, gentile uh fiancée of my brother-in-law--of Karel Schiff--uh took me without a star into the hospital, told them I am her cousin, had me operated, and took me by taxi home. By the way, we were not allowed to use taxis. So at great danger to her--because she had to tell them I am her cousin--I was operated in a regular hospital, and she took me home. Because otherwise I wouldn't have been able to get help. I mean, these were the kind of things one doesn't even remember, because there were so many things that happened so often. But uh it was only because she had took me as her cousin, and she was a physician herself. Uh we were trying to hide a few things with some friends, and some friends were very cooperative and kept them. Uh some friends were afraid. And some friends decided if we don't come back, you know, they will keep it. It very much depended on which person. Uh I was just trying to think of something, and it just escaped me. Uh (SHORT PAUSE) that the... we helped by our listening to the orders to go and register people so they can be sent by transport. And it depended uh what you did, where you lived, how you went with it. So you were continuously threatened: "Am I going to be on the next transport?" Uh, of course, I'm not even talking about it that we had to give up uh jewelry, radio and so forth. Because if we listen to radio, it was dangerous, uh because all these restrictions were coming out. At one point, Heydrich--who was the protector of Czechoslovakia--uh was uh killed on one of the streets when two paratroopers who were sent from England were...threw a hand grenade under the car. And uh he was killed, and they were looking for them. And it was told that one was on a bicycle. So they came around us and looking and confiscating bicycles and all of that. And we knew daily how many, we had uh lists of people. They were in the newspaper. They were posted lists of people who were shot, who were hung, etc. etc. Friend of mine was among them. Political reasons, or whatever reasons there were. It was like if you were in... It was a screw. It was a forever tightening screw, with more regulations. And the screw was tightening over our heads. Uh my parents went in July-- June or July...at the end of July (cough), July of '42, uh to Theresienstadt. My grandmother went with them. My grandmother was at that time bed-ridden most of the time. Her mind was fine. Her hair was black. At eighty-six her hair was black and was long; and when I was good, I was allowed to braid it. And uh she...her mind

was fine; but when my parents packed and went, uh she went with them because she lived with them. And when they came to carry her down, they carried her on a litter down the staircase and put her with the other old people on the bottom of a spediteur [Ger: "moving van"], of a moving van. And that's how they took her to the gathering place. The last word from her was: "Love each other. Be good to each other. Love each other. Be good to each other." As they carried her down the steps. There was no complaint; there was just kind of a blessing. And from my mother, I know--because I met my mother in Theresienstadt--she said in the moment she came to the gathering place, with all the commotion and all that craziness with her, she became so confused. She didn't know what was going on. She doesn't know what was happening to her. And uh they took her to Theresienstadt, nevertheless. They put them on trucks. You know, the kind of trucks when you move the beds so to slide things off. And then how they slid the old people off when they brought them to Theresien[stadt], so they put them to bed. She died three months...three weeks after arriving at Theresienstadt. And I was told [by] somebody she was begging for couple cubes of sugar from somebody who came to see her. And she was buried in one of the last mass graves at that time. The reason I know, when we came back after the war to Theresienstadt, we went to look up the original records. And in the original records, it showed when she was buried and what was the mass graves. We went to the field, because you could still see where they dug the furrows, put the bodies in and put the soil over it. So it was always like heaps and valleys, heaps and valleys. So we could figure out, of course; because, you know, Germans registered which row it was in. So we could count about which row it was, put some flowers on her, and had her name put on the grave. Because that's about all I could do for my grandmother at that time. But my memory of her is that her last word was "Be good to each other, and love each other." There was not many people to whom one could transfer it, but that was her last words.

Q: When and how were you and your husband taken ?

A: Uh, as I said, we were living with the in-laws and we knew that it's tightening. And we were in bed reading--I remember it so clearly. Steinbeck. John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath. And the knock on the door came, and our invitation to the transport. I don't think I ever finished reading the book. Uh we packed very carefully the suitcases. Very carefully; because this was the only possessions we were going to have. When we came to Theresienstadt we never got the suitcases. Our transport, which was the first transport of fifteen hundred people, gave these suitcases as a gift to the German nation for the bombed-up people. So I was so glad we had contributed something. But we... For the next years, we...we had only what we carried on our backs. Fortunately, uh when we came to the gathering station, uh we were told--we were fifteen hundred people--and all of a sudden said only a thousand will go. All the women will be pulled out. Then they pulled us back, so I didn't have the... They took my number next to my husband, and they gave me another number. So I went through all the years in Theresienstadt as "Transport BA" and "Number 1101." And uh in...uh during the time in this gathering place that used to be exhibition hall, uh we were... Over the mar...over the PA system came: "Anybody who has money on him,



or gold or cigarettes or matches will be shot, da da da da." I had all of this on me. We had to, because we had to protect ourselves somehow. In the lining of our coats, I had a metal...you know, Yardley talc used to come in a metal box. In that box, I had some jewelry. And so you heard all of this, and nevertheless you had to sort of stay with it. We came to uh our Bohušovice. At Bohušovice was the train stop for Theresienstadt. And as I said--I don't know if I said it, my husband was rather weak and sickly at that point. And we carried a big bag--each tried to hold one handle--in which were food, mostly, and in the other side we each had a bed roll. And on our backs, we had a knapsack with just a change of few things. Turned out that was the only thing we had for the next years, what we carried with us. When we came to Bohušovice there, in front of the train was Jacob Edelstein, whom I knew. And I said, "Hello," to him; and he said to me, "Try to get yourself to confirmed to work as soon as possible." I didn't know what it meant. But what it meant: if you are not going to get work immediately, then be [perfect (ph)] that you could go on. And many of our people. Of course, I went with all possible speed about protect ourselves. At that time, uh all the uh civilians of Theresienstadt were evacuated; and whole Theresienstadt belonged to us. Because before the people were only in the kaserne [**Ger:** "barracks"], into the barracks; and the civilians were in the town. We were able to move around. I was very short for a house; and I went to get myself confirmed, and I found a job as a nurse. There were two small houses right opposite of the main kaserne, where the uh leadership was; and it was... Germans in their organizations took away all the names of the street. And because Theresienstadt was built as a grid, they called all these named "L," and these named "quer," [**Ger:** "crosswise"]--"Q" and "L." "Lang" [**Ger:** "lengthwise"] and "quer." So Q told, you would know, typical German. So we were... these two houses were L-17 and L-19, 217 and 219. These were two smallish villas that were joined together; and that was to become the hospital. The first doctor was Hans Schauffer (ph), a gynecologist from--I'm sorry, a pediatrician--from Brno; and he eventually had three young doctors with him. We had first children who had whooping coughs. At that time there was no antibiotics, no vaccination. The only thing what we had was Persan...not Persantil. I can't...I told you the name, and I cannot remember now. Uh, from P. It was a sulfa drug. It made by Bayer at the same time. And it was red and it created everything, dyed everything red. And there was few people who had some uh uh sulfa that was Cibasol, made by Ciba in Switzerland. But that was very very rare to get. And if these children got... Protosol, was I think the name. Uh when they got it, even their vomit from the coughing, everything was red. Now, we had in these two small villas, there was a iron bed next to iron bed. There were not even little aisles in between them, because there was no space. Uh if laundry was possible, maybe it was changed every week, maybe every two weeks for these children; because we didn't have the laundry available. It was very difficult to get it. So all what we had was us and the kindness, to try [to] wash them. Also, so many of the children got impetigo...impet--I don't know what you call. And they were only painted with some purple--I don't know what you call that--purple dye to neutralize it.<sup>1</sup> Uh, at that time little TB came also; and we had one beautiful bright thirteen year old die of TB. His brother's still alive, and is a friend of mine. Uh many

---

<sup>1</sup> Possibly gentian violet?

of these, uh the mothers couldn't visit them. There were no visiting hours. It was impossible to get visitors in. There was only through the windows; because it was so crowded and many of these things were infectious. At that time came a very big uh ...epidemic, at that time for Theresienstadt, of scarlet fever and eventually typhoid-- abdominal typhoid. And the scarlet fever, the whole hospital was converted to scarlet fever hospital. Now, we came in and out; we didn't have any disinfection. I had sort of a...a...what we would call today a running suit, in black-- sweatsuit--and I had a...somebody gave me a white apron. And we had only one advantage. And this was a terrific advantage; because of our two small villas there was a small bathroom, and you were able... There...there was a kettle, and you could make fire, you can have... So two of us at a time could take a bath. And that was very, very precious for us. That we worked twelve hour shifts, and we could go and have a bath. Now when I meant "shift," that means we had to serve the food, which was brought in kettles. We had to wash the dishes. We had to wash the floors. We had to make the fire. We have to wash the patients. We had to do everything, because people couldn't come in to do other things. We did everything. We did get a little tiny bit of extra. Little tiny bit of extra food. But it was a very little tiny bit of food, and because my husband was sickly and he couldn't work, I was giving him the extras, anyhow. Uh it was hard work. It was hard work with the children. It was hard work with the people. At that time, typhoid started coming in, as I said. And we had one man, his name was Rudolph...uh, Rudie Kohn...Cohen, from Germany; and he and Rudie...and Robert Kohn, was Cohen and Kohn were in the same room. And they both had scarlet fever and typhoid. And I was on duty when Rudie died. And uh Robert was there; but this was our first real... No, he wasn't the first one; but from the typhoid was the first death we had in the hospital. Uh, Robert eventually did not survive. And then we got seven children who had both scarlet fever and typhoid. And because they were [live or arrive (ph)] through the yard, there were two rooms with a little bathroom and that was made to the wards for them. One room had two, and the other one had the less. And there was a stove, so (cough) as I said, we had to wash the floor and keep the fire going and wash the dishes, because people couldn't come in. Uh we washed them. We cleaned them. We did get typhoid shots. We got them in our shoulders, not in our arms, so we could work. And I have...the only thing we had to protect us from the typhoid was Lysol. We had Lysol, so we put. And we also knew the only infection from typhoid is goes through excretions. So when we dealt with excretions, we put the Lysol in the water and washed our hands. That was the only thing we had. Uh we had two boys--seventeen, one sixteen--and then little girls. The youngest one was Misha Lausher (ph). Uh one day I came in and they brought a little...was a little feverish girl in. I said, "What's your name?" And she says, "Misha." I said, "Misha Lausher!" That was my cousin's child. She was only five or six years old, but she knew her temperature for the last three days. A very bright child, in spite of everything. And her drawings, I kept; because she couldn't talk with her parents and be in contact. I was the only contact. I would take what she has written or drew, and I ironed it out with the heat; and this is...I could carry it out with them. And at that time, Misha has made--now this child was six years old--she drew a picture of a garden and a tree with a bird on it; and the bird had an opened beak and out of it came letters. And I said, "What is this?" And this is what she [said]: "It whistles." And she gave me the note, "It whistles." Misha is the only one who

survived, of all the seven children. (Pause) Uh, and for the parents, it was heart-breaking. They were outside. They didn't know what was happening to their children. They didn't know how they were. We were the only contact what we could tell them. In the meantime, they were afraid they will be called into transport and the children would be left there; because they didn't know what was going to go on.

Q: What was your husband doing all this time?

A: Uh, not much. Not much. Uh, he was in the the men's barracks the first time; and he was really going down the drain. He didn't wash properly. And that was always a very bad sign, when you didn't keep up with your personal hygiene. Uh, I had to go up into the kaserne--and the men knew me--and clean up his bed, and clean up this and that. And uh he was sickly. He really couldn't do much. It was getting worse and worse; and uh he was, in many ways, resentful that I had the work and I could do that. And I remember when I came after night shift...worked on the night shift, and I wanted to sleep during the day. He woke me up, because here I was. It was very, very difficult. It was getting very difficult. And the marriage...I, you know, I was seventeen at that time and a naïve. And as time went on, I realized more and more that the marriage could not last. When I--if I may back-track--uh, when uh I...when we came to uh Theresienstadt, my parents were there already for three weeks. Uh, and couple...after I was there about... So therefore I knew about my grandmother from my mother; and my mother had her suitcases, I think. I don't even remember if I got something from her or not. Because they did get their suitcases; but they were there maybe only uh three weeks, month at the most, and they got called in a transport. And I went with them as far as I could go before the collection place. And I was giving goodbye to my father and to my mother--in a way, much more emotionally to my father--and I knew in my heart of hearts that I was never going to see them. I really knew that I'm never going to see them again. And uh as far as I can see, tracing, they were somewhere in Poland. Uh the book says nobody knows where it was; but our maid, our Maru (ph), was in touch with them through some gendarme and sent them packages for a while. And I think they must have been somewhere at that point where L'vov [**Pol:** Lwów] is--which is Ukraine now. And uh we were there two years ago, and I asked what were...what were the camps around there; and they told me there was a great many camps there. But nobody could put their finger on it when I asked. And uh as far as I can again trace it, my father survived there and went to Auschwitz. Because somebody saw him in Auschwitz; and which was quite miraculous because by that time he was 55. And as...and he probably--as I say there's no certainty--ended when one of those three big ships that were loaded with prisoners and sank in February of '45 in the Baltics, in the North Sea. Uh, my mother, I don't know. Uh, but I knew quite sure that I was not going to see them anymore. Uh, meanwhile some more distance relative came through, and they went. So we were forever living under a threat. Who is going to be in the next transport? Who is going to be in the next transport? And because I was...we were graded, we were rostered, and I was always fairly well graded...rated as a nurse, I was protecting my husband for a while, even though he didn't work. And how did I get confirmed for a job? I went to this big kaserne, to this big barracks.

You know, these were big stone barracks with many, many hallways and yards; and I was looking for the labor department. And I knew the name of the labor department's name [NB: head] uh was Robert Weinberg, who's... I knew about him from when I worked in Prague in the Palestina Amt. But I didn't know him in person; and I know his nickname was ["Winczi" (ph)]. And I go the hallways, and I'm looking for the office; and I meet a person and I say, "Where is the office of [Winczi (ph)]?" And the man looks at me. Says, "Well, how do you know my nickname?" And he was just that person I met. And, of course, he was helpful that I got confirmed for work. It was just coincidences all along. Coincidences all along. Uh, so things got pretty bad that I really couldn't tolerate it anymore; and the marriage ended. Which would have been ending, anyhow. Even if my husband had survived, it would have ended. And he went with the December transport, with his parents and his brother. Uh, and they went to the familienlager--Karel Schiff, the doctor--and uh he knew what was the end, and my mother-in-law, too. Uh Rudla died probably of encephalitis in the familienlager. I had heard that he was asking for some mashed potatoes, for something to eat; which was, of course, impossible. And uh I uh made a friendship and then became a wife of one of the young doctors in the hospital. His name was Bruno Mandel. He came from Prost\_jov, in Moravia. He...he was there with his mother. Officially, we couldn't get a divorce and get married; because it was outside of the other jurisdiction. But within the jurisdiction of Theresienstadt, we got on papers changed that I would be divorced and married to Bruno after the war. And when we were... And I volunteered to go to Auschwitz with Bruno. We were the first transport of fifteen hundred people. Again, the second time around. There were five hundred women were allowed to volunteer. There were five transport of thousand men; and with the last one, five hundred women were allowed to volunteer. So, of course, I volunteered. And uh Bruno was carrying with him the papers, to be sure he had them with him. Uh, the... I don't know if I'm jumping from here to there...

Q: Let's...let's...let's slow down a minute, before you get on the transport. Tell me about Bruno. Tell me about how a romance could even flower under those conditions.

A: We worked closely in the hospital. He was uh...he was an internist. He would have trained for cardiology. He would have liked cardiology, and he would have been very good at it. Uh he has uh...uh he was very involved in his patients, and I could see it. So, you know, we worked together day by day. This is...this is the best I can say. It was very, very difficult, with all kinds of obstacles. Because these two private houses had a tiny little garden. We had a tiny little plot where we could plant little radishes or something, which was the only fresh food one could get. And uh it...it was both the proximity and the idea. He was also very kind to me, which was very different from Rudie. Uh, he spoke um English; and we were reading together *Lady Windermere's Fan*.<sup>2</sup> And I tried to read it and had to translate it, because he was trying to help me with English. He was trying to help me. We went over all the bones, so I would know them in Czech and German and Latin, in anatomy; and uh uh he was teaching me a great deal. He was ten years older than I. And uh so he was teaching me

---

<sup>2</sup> A play by Oscar Wilde.

a great deal, too. And uh I knew he valued me a great deal, too. So, you know, these were all the things. Don't forget, I was there by myself. And at that time, his mother very much wanted me to be with him; while uh at Rudla's parents were also saying what am I doing. So I was under a great deal of pressure, besides working twelve hours a day, six days a week. So it was a great deal of pressure all around it. Nevertheless, we went in the evening to lectures that were held on the...under the rooves of the meetings. We were working under the uh we went to every cultural situation we could go to. Uh at that time, they started sending the transports of the older Germans. And they told them, of course, they were going into a sanitorium. So they came in fur coats and big hats. And here they were brought from the train. At that time, ghetto had sixty thousand people, instead of the six thousand in normal times. And they were put under the rooves of the big kaserne. Now, these were huge rooves with huge uh...uh wooden beams; and they were behind the beams, in front of the beams. You didn't know if they were... I was in one of the transport. I was delegated to go and help out. You didn't know if they were sleeping, or if they were dead already; because they... It was cold in winter. It was hot in summer. And here they came, with their fur coats and hats; and, of course, all...the most of the work in Theresienstadt was done by young Czech Jews, because we were the main occupation. So they would say, "If Hitler only knew what the Czech Jews are doing to us!" They still couldn't comprehend it, they couldn't put it together. So, of course, the survival rate there, the hygiene there, was impossible. There were no bathrooms, you know. Uh it was uh...uh there were the uh the survival rate was very, very small. Uh, my aunts came through Theresienstadt, and then they went on; and then came my aunt, with her two children, who was most closest to me. Uh, they...we were four years apart--Eva...Raymond was at that time sixteen, and Joe was twelve. And they came in in October '42. In October '42, in the beginning. And my aunt was legally blind. She was very, very near-sighted, just like my mother. And she was legally blind; and because I was a nurse, I was able to go with her in the...into the gathering place. And they wouldn't even let them go in Theresienstadt. They kept them there, in the gathering place, as they arrived, immediately prepared for a transport to go on. We did everything to get them out, but we couldn't. So I took Eva and Joe out of there, and took them where --I have to explain to you, describe to you where we lived. And I took them where we lived, and I put them in my bed. And I - this is my memory - they had boots on. The two pairs of boots under my bed, and they were on the bunk sleeping together so they would at least get some rest to go on. And when I returned them, my aunt told me, "I know I'm not going to survive. I know I'm not going to be back. But I know that you will take care of the children." I would have, had...had they survived. When I returned, I was hoping that one of them would come back. But, of course, they didn't. Eva threw out of the window a card on the way to Auschwitz, which was addressed to Jiri Pollack (ph), who happened to be my school-mate. And after the war, I met him; and he told me that he got a post card from her on the way to Auschwitz which she threw out and somebody picked up and mailed. They were the first transport to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt. No children and uh women survived; and of the men who survived, there were not too many. That was uh 27th of...they arrived 27th of October in '42.

Q: What else...about Theresienstadt ?

A: Uh, a great deal. Uh (pause) when we came in, we lived in a former brewery. All the nurses who worked with the infectious diseases lived in this brewery. So there was on the second floor, there was a kitchen; and behind it--as I said, I don't remember--three or four rooms. So if you went to the last room, you had to go through all the other rooms. And in my room, which was the second one - the first one was a very small one and there was three bunks, and then in ours and there were two, four, six, eight people living in the other one. And, of course, we went through to the other one. And uh in these eight bunks we were all the nurses who came in from day shift, night shift, you know. So we knew each other. We worked together. And uh the life was there...at that time men could visit. Uh, we got sheets as a little curtain. And the privacy was minimal. Because, if you realize, when you washed your hair, you were there washing your hair from water you brought from somewhere. And the men were coming into the rooms that were past your room, and seven other people were there. It was difficult life, very difficult life. The one advantage was that I was able to take a bath in the hospital when we went off the shift. Uh, later I worked in a hospital where they had encephalitis; and that was uh also at one time there was encephalitis. I worked with some older people. When I worked uh I had a night shift at uh hospital where all the older people were. I found my grandfather's sister there, who was in her eighties at the time. I was giving out dinner, or whatever it was, and I was able to give her an extra potato. And Aunt Antonia was so happy she got the extra potato. Uh it was such a intensive life, because even with all this long work, and all the social things and all the personal things was going on, and all diseases around you. One day came a message that two hundred children from Poland are coming through. They were to be deloused, washed, bathed and dressed and prepared for a trip to Switzerland. **[SOUND DISAPPEARS FOR APPROXIMATELY ONE MINUTE OR MORE AT THIS POINT; APPARENT TECHNICAL PROBLEM]** [And some nurses were allowed to go and be with them; and for volunteering with them, they were supposed to protect their families. I volunteered. I had my few things packed up, and...this was still, I was still with Rudolph].

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

TAPE #2

A: So one day two hundred children were...

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. We're back on camera.

A: Uh, oh day two hundred children were sent to Theresienstadt from Poland to be deloused, washed, fed uh...fed a little bit and put clothes on. And uh we were told that uh if uh some of us nurses would volunteer uh for to go with them, we would be uh able to protect our families. I packed up few my things, but I was told that anybody who was married cannot go. Only single people. I knew some of the nurses who went. They went straight to gas. Apparently, uh there might have been some ideas; but they were misbegotten. And the children were transported back and forth, and annihilated. Uh the...uh there were many kind of things that one was never certain what will be happening, and that was the worst part, that we were continuously in uncertainty. There was a Damocles uh sword hanging over you all the time. You never knew how much time you had for what. Uh the daily difficulties, the daily life difficulties. For instance, as crowded as we were, the hygiene as poor as it was, the laundry as impossible as it was. There were bed bugs. In summer, it was suffocatingly hot. We lived so close together. So sometimes people tried to sleep out in the yard uh because not only that it was hot, but the bedbugs were multiplying and biting. The fleas were multiplying and biting, which made it also much more difficult to rest. I remember a scene where we got very little soap. The soap, we got rationed soap. The soap was of horrible quality. It was like a little stone. And I remember being in the yard, and washing my laundry with this little bit of soap, and there was a little bit left over. Every little bit of that soap was precious. Now at one point we were issued money, and we could buy things for the money. And one of the things you could buy was a little bit of mustard, or a little bit of ketchup, or so...another piece of this terrible soap--if they, if it was available. Now people were getting packages from abroad. It was wonderful. At one point--you see, there were always periods, they were like windows of permission, when you were able to get packages. And some people were able to get packages. The Danes were the best off; because the King and the Danish people, they were able to get a monthly five kilo--not pound, eleven pounds--five kilo package with salami, butter, cheeses, from Denmark. That was the gift of the Danish government to the few, few Danish Jews in Theresienstadt. There was a number also of prominents. These were Germans and Austrians, who during the war [NB: the First World War] got an uh...uh the Iron Cross, or any of the very high medals. And they were protected in Theresienstadt. They were not sent on, at one point. For some reason, that was honored. Uh of course, during the time Edelstein, who was a Judenältester, was a wonderful man; and he did what he could. But he himself was deported; and we had other Judenältester which made things worse. But nevertheless, there was this tremendous, vibrating cultural life. I remember seeing Fledermaus, a whole production of Fledermaus.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Viennese operetta by Johann Strauss.

Uh, I remember going to a poem reading. There were philosophical debate. There were concerts. Uh there was this need to live very intensively. And I think this was about the essence of Theresienstadt. You had these few years, so you have to live them so intensively. You have to use every minute you had. During that time I also had pneumonia at one point. I had uh middle ear infection, where they had to trepanate my ear drum; and you know with all the things we have, I was sitting in a chair like this, and they punctured my ear drum. And uh, you know, few things of that sort one had to endure. And you either got well or you didn't get well, though there were not many choices. Uh I remember in the room be...ahead of ours was Sister Miriam. Sister Miriam was a nun from Austria, of a Jewish background, but was converted to Christianity; and was a Catholic nun for about thirty years. She was in her fifties when she came. A kind, gentle soul. Now, of course, as a nun, she was shaved and wore a wig when she went into the public. And of course, all of a sudden she had to show herself without hair. But she worked as a nurse. She eventually died of cancer in Theresienstadt. But for her, it was an absolute--not only a cultural shock--shocking... It was a destroying of her life in any direction in which she had. Nevertheless, she showed a great gentleness and great kindness towards everybody, in spite of everything. Uh for instance, if you, they had a laundry. You were allowed to go there so many days, for so often, and bring in your laundry; and about two weeks later you got it back. So with few things it was very difficult. There was also a shoe repair, where you could get some shoes repaired because we could not replace anything, but everything was a difficulty. When they were opened, when you had your work hours, when you got it back. Everything was difficult. And then you have the sight of Theresienstadt was the hearses. Because the hearses were brought from all over, from all over Czecho...not all over Czechoslovakia, all over Bohemia, from the Jewish uh cultural groups that brought to the cemetery in their own hearses. So the hearses were brought in; and not only the sick people, but the bread was transported, and wood was transported, and everything was transported on the hearses. Because these were the only wagons. Uh then there was uh the comedy--organized and directed by Germans--where one day we were supposed to get the visit by the Red Cross. The houses were painted only outside, where the inspection was going to take place. We got better food for a week. The children were told if they... somebody comes to interview of them... Seidl was the SS man there, that they had. And they were supposed to say...they were supposed to get a box of sardines and say, "Uncle Seidl, Uncle Seidl! Sardinen schon wieder!" [**Ger:** "Uncle Seidl, Uncle Seidl! Sardines again!"] That became the joke. Uncle "Seidl." Calling him "Uncle Seidl." "Schon wieder"--"Again we are getting sardines!" Of course, we never ate or saw sardines. But here they was giving them, and showing: "We are getting it again!" You know. It became such a joke. We did get the coffee house at the end, where this concert, where you could see. Uh we used to call about the coffee, what you, how you make the coffees. You take one coffee bean, put it on a string and wave it over hot water. Uh the miracle was that the water was somehow blackish. It was chicory mainly. And uh it was warm. Uh then there was the counting of the people. One day there was counting of the people where all people had to go to this big meadow and there was this counting that was documented in films, etc. Uh we were, we were in the with the children in the hospital, so we didn't have to go; so we spent that lovely day in the hospital. But only taking of the



children, but it was so terrible because we didn't know what was happening with everybody. We didn't know what was going on. We didn't know what was going to happen to them. We didn't know what was going to happen. It was, I remember that day was so full of tension and misery because what were we supposed...what's going to happen. We didn't know. It was a terrible day, and then another kind of drudgery. A woman from Germany came, with a retarded child. This is, today we would say, the most profound retarded child I have ever seen. Was seven years old, couldn't sit, couldn't talk. Anything. And nevertheless, this woman tended this child so tenderly through seven years of... He was like a newborn child, except this big; seven years old. And you looked around, and you kept thinking of the human tragedy of this woman under these circumstances, was tending this child so tenderly. And you knew what's going to be in for her. Uh, in uh one of the other barracks was uh a little section for insane, where they were one day loaded and went in those transport, of course. I'm trying to... You know, there are so many stories that keep, you know, dropping out.

Q: Did you have any contact with Leo Baeck?

A: Leo Baeck? No, no. Uh, you know, as as I come all these different memories um pick up...(pause) of the various hospitals. Uh I was working for one time only... Of course, another thing--there were abortions. Uh Doctor Hahn, who was a gynecologist in Brno, came. And he was making abortions, because if women get pregnant they knew what it meant. Uh, so abortions were performed. Nobody talked about it; but abortions were performed, because they had to be performed. They were done by the gynecologist as kindly as could be. And that wasn't...that was a sheer necessity to do. And uh it...it was a survival. See, I'm...I'm trying... You know, there are so many aspects to look at; and I was in Theresienstadt from '42 until '44, for two and a half years. So there are a lot of stories, you know. How to replenish the few things how you you brought with you? At one point I was able to make contact; and I sold my... First, I sold a few of the...used up money I had on black market to buy extra food. The extra food was smuggled in by the Czech gendarmes. Uh so we bought some, as much as we could. And uh finally...we were allowed to keep a wedding ring, so I sold the wedding ring--exchanged it for bread. I thought the bread was more important. Again through the gendarmes. Uh Misha's mother, Irma Lausher, my cousin who had...who was teaching the children in the youth home, she was uh...she has an incredible memory. And she wrote me books of poems for my birthday. And even under these circumstances we tried to celebrate birthdays. You know, a slice of bread, a small loaf of bread was a wonderful birthday present. Somebody saved it up, or had the connections. Uh the the tendency was to try to uh maintain as normal life as possible. Misha's father had the access to go little bit uh where there was a little bit of grass; and he planted some tomatoes, so that Misha would have some fresh food. And tended it tenderly. The inventiveness of people under the circumstances was incredible. There was a group of women who worked in agriculture, so who were sometimes able to smuggle something in. It was not for us they worked on the agriculture. Oh, another interesting thing was--as I say, these stories keep popping in my mind--uh Lidice was the Czech village where as uh

revenge for the Heydrich affair, the Germans went and killed the men and many of the women and some of the children; and the left-overs they sent to Ravensbrück. I knew some of them. And there was this cleaning up to do, and there were sheep and goats and cows. So some of men from Aus...from Theresienstadt were commandeered to go to Lidice to clean it up and bring in the animals. That was not known, you know; but the guys from Theresienstadt did the cleaning up. Uh they were, once another group of men were sent to another uh transport in some woods to do some very hard work. I don't remember where it was. And the one man wanted to get out of it. And he thought that would help him; and he...he drank, I don't know if it was turpentine or gasoline, or he drank some substance that's completely ruined his lower intestines. And he was...he uh defecated himself to death when he, they returned him to Theresienstadt. He defecated himself to death actually trying to escape this way. Uh but it was through all of this pressure, there was this constantly... Transports are going. Are you going to be on the next transport? Are you going to be saved from the next transport? Who can you stay? Who is going to go? And, of course, the pressure on the people who made the lists were as well. Are you going to save your family? Who is going? Uh, my father's cousin came through who I was very fond of. I knew he was going. So you know, how do you - as a very young woman - how do you try to keep any kind of normalcy under these circumstances? Very diff... with very great difficulty. And somehow still stay uh a human being, feeling human being.

Q: You mentioned abortions. Did you assist him in any of these?

A: Yeah, I saw a couple of them. I didn't assist but I uh... I don't know if I assisted actually. I was there uh when uh when uh Hahn performed it, a couple of them in Hamburg Kaserne. Yeah, I saw them; but I don't know how much I assisted in it actually, at the time because I was total novice. He would have told me, "Give me this, uh that." I didn't, you had to take the dilator from the smallest to the biggest and then you have to stretch out. But I remember being there, and seeing it done. You know, they were very skillful doctors; very skillful doctors who did, under impossible situations, really wonders. And who tried to be very humane.

Q: Is anything else you want to add about Theresienstadt ?

A: Yeah, you know, the irony... Hans Schauffer (ph) was the doctor who was the head doctor in the children's hospital, where Bruno was. He was uh uh he was, he had a...he was deathly afraid of typhus. Not typhoid. He worked with typhoid all the time. Typhus. Typhus...the difference is typhoid is abdominal typhoid, which is different. Typhus is transferred from person to person with the lice. You have to have lice to get typhus. He died with typhus later in the camp.

Q: I understand.

A: He had like a premonition. He was always afraid he will die with typhus, and he did. He too

went through a divorce and another marriage in Theresienstadt. I knew all about the intrigues from him, from his wife, and all of that. There was, you know... It was so intense every day. (Pause) Uh in September of '44, there were transports going and they were saying they are going to labor camps. They need labor in Poland. You know, the front was moving. They need labor. And they were equipping the groups with uh shovels, with spades. That sounds like that labor, you know? They had also shovels, you know. And uh so there were five transports of men. In the last transport, they allowed five hundred women. So I volunteered to go along. Well, of course, you would volunteer. What else was to do? So we packed our things; and miraculously we were in uh...not in a cattle wagon. We were in a regular wagon. And we were sitting on top of our luggages, crowded, everything. And we arrived in Auschwitz, it must have been early afternoon. Because you know it's not so far in mileage; so if we traveled all through the night and half of the morning, we would have been there. When we arrived in Auschwitz, we got out of the train and we were told, "Don't touch anything. Leave everything as is. Don't touch everything. Leave as it is." But we still carried some things. I came from Prague to Theresienstadt in ski pants and good boots and a winter coat. Because, which was fortunate, I had it through all these bad winters. And this is how I came to Auschwitz--with a beaver collar. And this is how I came. Again I kept it, you know, for the transport. And I was still not...you know, I was still pretty strong and everything--still more husky, because I'm big-boned looking. We were supposed to stand outside of the train, always to five. Always to five, because Germans can count easier that way. So uh women here and men there, as we got off the train. We are standing there; and uh there's a young man in camouflage uniform, a soldier. And all around were...us were camps with wires. And out of one of the camp, runs a woman. And she yells--I don't remember if it was German, Polish or Yiddish, either one of the languages--and she was yelling at us, "They will take away from you everything! What you have, throw it to me!" And one of the girls had a knapsack, and she took it and she threw it to her over the fence. Now, you have to see this scene. I have it so much in my memory. That this young guy was talking to us, and I see this woman running and she's like this to catch it. And in that moment, he took his gun and go "psht" and shoot her. That was our welcome. This young man, who friendly chatted with us in German, he just takes out his gun and goes "psht." So that's...that was our welcome. So we are standing to five, and I was in one of the first rows. And in front of it comes the man in SS uniform, and in a white glove. And this was Mengele. Of course, I didn't know at the time it was Mengele. But I knew there was something very ominous about him, because he was standing there like with his gloves and going like this. And as we came by, every person, and that's all what he did. With his finger, right and left. The men went first. And as my...as Bruno went by... Oh, excuse me--well, I'll tell you later. As Bruno went by, he was yelling at me, "I'm not going to see you again! I'm not going to see you again!" And I didn't want him to say that. I didn't want him to say that; but that what he was saying: "I'm not going to see you again!" And as they went by, Mengele shoved like on this side. And when the men was gone, we was started to go. And when we came here, he shoved me on the other side. So I step up, and I said to him...uh in German I said to him, "My...my...my husband went on this side. I want to go this, too." And he said, "March on the other side!" And here were soldiers with guns around us. I just saw

this one shoved, so I went to the left. This was to gas, and this was to work. How did you know? Fate. Total fate. You know, then we were so naïve, we were so incredibly naïve--of course, depended (ph)--that when we got off the train, we saw the SS men or other older prisoners taking the carriages and the children off the train and putting them beside. We said, "Well, if they are not so bad. You see, they are helping." My foot! They were, of course, put to death. Uh, so that was our welcome. So that now by this time was getting dark. Now, remember this is end of October--no, end of September--in Poland. So they marched us first where we had to undress. Now I had a can of oil and a can of sardines in my pockets. And I had a good Swiss watch still. I...there were women from the...you know, prisoner's women, but who already had short hair. And we had to undress. I thought I will be very smart. I go to one of them and I say, "Look, I put in the corner my watch and the can of sardines and the oil. Keep it for me when I come through." Of course. And I thought I would be smart, and I asked her, "What is your name?" And she said, "Hannah Müller." That was my maiden name. Of course, I never saw her, I never saw anything else. We were allowed...we were supposed to strip completely, except keep shoes. So I had my...still my good shoes. Uh, we come to the next building where there was a shower. There was a shower shower. That means it was cold shower. We didn't have anything, but we had the cold shower. And we were supposed to put the shoes around the room. I go for my shoes, and my shoes are gone. This is the first time I to...started to cry. The shoes were the last thing I already had. I skipped one step. As we came and we undressed, we had to go through a hallway, naked except in the shoes. And SS came by and looked at our breasts and looked at our bellies. If none of us...if some of us might be pregnant. If they saw anybody pregnant, they pulled them out. So you know, it was...so we were standing there naked; and they came and they looked at our breasts and our bellies. Then we went to a room where they shaved us. And I remember seeing sitting there one of the people I knew with long hair and at that point half of her hair was shaven and half was still long. And I looked at her. And I had few bobbie pins, and I kept the bobbie pins. I thought when my hair grow I will have the bobbie pins. And of course, when you all of a sudden see you bald-headed, completely shaven, you look like monkeys. Everybody looks like a monkey. And not only that, with one blade, hundreds people. And then, with that German thoroughness, they also shaved our pubic hair--about a hundred people with one blade, pubic hair. Uh, no cleanliness otherwise, but they shaved the pubic hair. And uh from there... So this was the bobbie pin I'm still holding, and we go to the shower, and my shoes are gone. We go into the next room, and uh there we were given some old rags. I was given an old summer dress, some pants and something. Now, this is cold weather. And we...and we were given wooden shoes. The wooden shoes were killers, absolute killers. In the mud of Auschwitz--uh, no socks in the cold--the wooden shoes were rubbing your feet. Also, they were sticking in the mud. You couldn't pull them out. And when you had a sore on your feet, it would never heal. The shoes were killers. Uh so we were marched into the barracks, and we saw the fire from the chimneys. We...we wouldn't believe what it is. For three days...I didn't eat for three days. I was in a state of shock. You didn't eat, because they were telling us this is from... How could you believe that a fire was from burning our families? I mean, it was incomprehensible. How could you believe what was happening? And then you were given one big pot; and this is

like the last bit of humanity was taken away. Because in the pot they gave five scoops of soup, and the pot was circulated among people. And everybody slurped like an animal. You were being...being made to an animal by slurping the food. So at one point, I saw somebody dragging a bag... bag of spoons, and one was hanging out. So I pulled it out; so I was already more civilized. I had a spoon. I kept the spoon throughout. I gave it to the Museum, because anybody would say it's an old scarred spoon. But it's a special spoon. But it...it was part of becoming less than a human when you have to slurp like a dog. And in the beginning, we just couldn't eat. Uh...uh of course we slept five to a bunks, and we didn't have any any blankets and it was cold. We were warming each other. We were five friends who were staying together. But the dehumanization, when you went to the toilet. Of course, toilet: there were benches with holes in them. And you didn't want to even sit down; and if you didn't want to sit down, all of a sudden somebody came and pulled you down. Because the women who were in charge of those holes wanted them clean. So they just pulled you down very gently. Uh, periodically there was another cleanliness. I mean, this cleanliness business! You couldn't wash. You couldn't clean. But you had to wash the floor everyday in the barrack. Uh, we had to go through shower. Among us was one girl who had very heavy beard, and who was shaving. We never knew she had. Of course, she couldn't shave. We didn't have anything. We were just as we were born. And as we were standing there naked waiting for the shower... These were these portable showers, you know--again cold, no soap, no towel, nothing. We came there. These young soldiers, SS men, came and looked at us and said...one came to her very kindly and said, "One of us has to shave." Kindly. So we were taken, the laundry we had on, on that was poured disinfectant; and when we came out of the shower, we got somebody else's rags. If I may, so...at that time, this was the last time I had... was menstruating for many months; uh because, you know, we lost menstruation. And I very carefully washed out the pants, very carefully; but, of course, I couldn't hang them. I couldn't do anything with them, because they would be stolen immediately. So I carefully folded them and held them under my arm. Between my arms they would dry a little bit. And then I would fold them the other way and hold them for my...under my arm for about three days, hoping they would be clean and would be dry because my body warmth would dry them. Finally, I was able to wear them only to lose them and get somebody else's dirty pants. These were the kind of dehumanizing things, all the time. To be shaved again, uh with all the people walking around. And, of course, in between we heard shooting; because there were what they used to call "selection." The older people were selected and they were running around or shooting around while we were in the barracks. It was terrible. I happened to run, in our barrack, into two women who I knew from Prague before the war. One went to the same school I did. Was a... She came to the religious classes from another school. [Hanka Narastrukova (ph)]--she is now a physician, lives in Switzerland. And Jera (ph), with whom I went to gym...gymnastics. Uh, she is in Prague now. She lived in Australia. I was in touch in with them. They were in the Litzmannstadt [NB: \_ód\_] ghetto. They came to us, and they happened to be in the same barrack. Uh it was awful there. It happens...it so happened that uh a woman in charge of our huge barrack was from Slovakia, and she learned that the...the man who is going to come and look for labor is a pretty good one. At that point, labor was needed; so various uh

factory supervisors or directors used to come to Auschwitz to select labor. And we were told that this man had a pretty good set-up, so that...so they directed him to our barrack. And they took two hundred women--hundred twenty Slovaks and eighty Czechs. And I...we...we were the five friends together; and he took four of us. And one of the oldest he rejected, but she survived. Uh she was related to Bruno, an aunt of Bruno. And so we four were supposed to go. So they took us from Birkenau where we were--we were in the familienlager. We were in the Gypsy lager in the Birken...in Auschwitz; and they...in...in uh...in Auschwitz not but in Birkenau section. And they took us into another transit lager. There, we had another experience. We were about a week there. There were the Ukrainians. They had long hair. They had better dress. We had, instead of toilet, there were two uh buckets. And we stood in line to use the buckets; and, of course, a lot of people had diarrhea. But in when a Ukrainian came, she pushed us away and she went immediately; never mind the line. The leader of that barrack was a Ukrainian. The Germans had a stack, this high stack of blankets. But she wouldn't allow us to have them. By this time, it's October. The Ukrainians wouldn't allow us to have the blankets the Germans gave us. Uh, there was a black triangle antisocial woman--prisoner, but in some sort of a uniform; and there were rats. And she was shooting the rats in front of us. Fun! Uh another thing happened. While we were in this barracks, one of the lower leaders--there were, you know, hierarchy of leaders--one of the lower leaders, was a woman, her first name is Jana (ph). I don't remember her other name. And she came from the Ruthenia, the easternmost part of Czechoslovakia. And she lived in Náchod and had a boyfriend there; but she was taken, and she was in Auschwitz for long, long time when they had to go and work and the dogs were barking at their feet and all of that. And she survived. And she was telling us about it one evening. We were just listening to it, you know. It was pretty awful. After, the day after the liberation--we happened to be liberated in Náchod--I walk on the street. And, of course, everybody knew we were prisoners. We had no hair. And a man comes to me and says, "I know you just came back, I know it's a... But did you happen to run into Jana?" And I told him, "Your name is so and so." I remembered him--the name, she gave it to us in October. I just remembered it in May, and I told him. It was him. And I told him and we saw in October she survived; and she did survive, and she returned, and they married. I mean, I just happened to remember that. Uh, so then they took us and they gave each of us a piece of bread and something else, and we were loaded on trains. These were the cattle trains now. We just saw a little thing, and we were supposed to go to work. They did give us some better clothes. Well, they gave us some sort of a winter coat. I had some big black winter coat. Not a heavy winter coat, but some sort of a coat; and a sweater and a skirt. And we...we were going on. I took a piece of the lining and out of that I made a scarf, because if you have no hair it's very cold. So I made a scarf out of that lining. Uh somewhere I saw a big uh bag. It was like uh being carried still in a...in a... When we were in... in uh Birkenau, and a sock was hanging out. And I ran and got out the sock; and I don't know, maybe just one sock. And we had to stand in five for hours in appell [**Ger:** "roll call"], it was so cold. So we always, the five of us, we'll use one of the socks; and the one who has the sock would stand in front, because she is getting the coldest and she is sort of uh protecting the others. So I had that one sock. So later I cut it in half, and made two gloves out of it. You know,

just sewed it together and made two gloves out of it; 'cause otherwise we had to do only this, put it an inch.... Uh we had uh... So we got on this train, and we watched the stations, and then we stopped; and so we knew that there were also men on the train going westward, you know, from Auschwitz. It was not only women, [or] only men. Uh...oh, I know, I had a striped skirt and a sweater. That's what it was. And the men were in striped outfits, and...but they got hats. They didn't give us caps. And uh then we stopped for long, long time. God, we were going for like 36, 48 hours. And all of a sudden, we start looking out after we are standing, and to our absolute horror we realize we are going back again. Now, we knew if we were going back, it's going back to Auschwitz. And we knew what it meant. But then they realized they...they uncoupled some wagons; they didn't...and they moved us again, and we went back again in this direction. East, we went westward. Well, we arrived in Kudowa-Sackisch. Kudowa-Sackisch.<sup>4</sup> When we came there they told us, "This is a spa, but not for you." And we walked to these barracks. The barracks, wooden barracks were there. Uh we were a group of two hundred women. There were already three hundred women there, mostly Poles and Hungarians. And uh the Lagerälteste, the German Lagerälteste, first was a Sudet [NB: from Sudetenland] woman who was miserable. And she had an unterscharführer [Ger: a corporal], which [is] a non-com official. And she had...when she angry with somebody, he had to beat the women. But when, after...shortly she didn't allow people to peel the potatoes for our soup. They had to be thrown in as it was. But she was removed, and we got an older woman who had a great advantage. She was in many ways much kinder. She allowed the potatoes to be eaten. And when an SS came for uh inspection, she always slept with them and they left us in peace. So that was a great advantage. Actually, she wasn't that bad; but she was hung after the war. I know she was hung after the war. Uh, we...we were...we were twenty women, all from...we knew each other from Theresienstadt, together in this one room--double uh deck, you know, double deck beds. And uh that was from October '44 until May [1945], until liberation. We walked into the factory. There used to be big textile factories in that area. And they were changed into ammunition factories. Uh we particularly were making the part of airplanes in which the propeller sits. And next door was another factory where Russian prisoners uh were working on the propellers. It was a uh...a tower of Babel. There were all groups in this factory. There were German soldiers who went AWOL and were like prisoners under guard. They were the one who moved around heavy machinery. There were French. There were Italians. There were Danish. There were Dutch. Uh of course, there were the Poles. And I started working on a big turning place [NB: a lathe]. I was taught by an Italian by the name Antonio Pezutto (ph), and he taught me how to do it. Now, normally, I don't know if you turning places. But when you work on a turning place, there's a very sharp knife that goes to the metal and cuts, the metal cuts what it needs to be cut. But they didn't have enough material, so they put only the edge in the metal that was wedged in, which was very inferior to the \_\_\_\_\_. So of course, we were breaking them and they were very angry with us. Uh they...first they took us to a classroom and taught us how to use a micrometer. I knew how to use a micrometer. But we had to do that. And they wanted to know if we know uh uh

---

<sup>4</sup> Subcamp of Gross Rosen. Located in Lower Silesia.

fractions, and things like that. Uh the man who taught us was a German meister--you know, a foreman--and uh we were in we were like in school benches. And I--you know, we were curious. I looked at the school bench, and in one of the school benches I found a core of an apple. Somebody ate an apple and left the core. I didn't care who ate the apple. I ate the core. I mean, my goodness! That was fruit! Uh one day--we were there only a few days--but one day the master said the five of us, "Look, if you would like to take a bath, I will let you take a shower." Now, that was very dangerous for him to do that. And he took five of us and he took us to the shower room and let us shower. Now, mind you, we didn't have a towel. We didn't have a soap. We had to put the clothes on we had. But just to be under water, and to be able to shower was such a relief. So we went there. It took years and years before I finally allowed myself to remember why he did it. He stood in the corner and watched five young women naked taking a shower. He got his jollies; but, you know, it took me years to allow myself to remember why he did it, because it was very dangerous for him. Uh the Antonio Pezutto (ph), he sometimes brought me a piece of bread. He was one of the Italians who fought in Italy with Badoglio, who turned against German. And they came in as prisoners, but they were better off. They could move around. They got more food, etc. And so once in a while, he brought me a roll or a piece of bread and he hid it somewhere and I could take it. And some of the other women also got it from the meisters. Uh we were...slowly we were running out of material. Because the eastern front was coming in, the shipments were not coming. And at the end they finally loaded all the material, all the fact...all the machinery on trucks and took them to Germany. But they were bombed out on the way, which we were not sorry for. But at that point, we were working. I...that was a time where for nights and we worked twelve hour shifts again, we walked in the snow and ice three kilometers to the factory--which to me today three kilometers isn't much, but at that time it was terrible--and three kilometers back. And some of us had to carry the uh big metal containers with soup, which we had at midnight. Uh the craziness was, for instance, when they thought... They didn't know we lost menstruation; but when they thought we had a menstruation, we didn't have to carry it. I mean logic, never logic. Uh I remember once my...those shoes, those terrible shoes, were sticking in the snow and I couldn't get them out. And...and the last, and the women dragged me to the factory, absolutely dragged me. And I was out of breathe for about a half hour before I could catch breathe. I was totally out of it. Uh we walked through the village; and was night, you know--seven, or seven to seven. We never saw daylight. And here there were lit windows, and at Christmas people had Christmas trees. And there were people living behind there, living normal lives; and we were like animals, going back and forth, you know. Uh the...uh uh uh when we ran out of material, I had to sweep. I had to run one of these big brooms. Horrible thing, to sweep for twelve hours. The only thing is it gave me a possibility to move a little bit around the factory, and I made contact with a Czech guy. At that time, we had some very sick people; and I asked him if he could get some pudding. And he did get some pudding, and he hid it in some material. And I went in and got the pudding and put it in my pocket, and brought it to this girl who was very sick. Uh I sent him a letter after the war, "Thank you." And his father answered that it was...he got the letter on his birthday; and he says, "That was the best letter I could get, to find out how well my son behaved." Because, you see, these were



Czechs. Uh Hitler gave the year 1924 to Germany; and all the Czechs who were born in 1924 had to go and work as laborers in Germany. But they were able to go and visit, etc. And this is why I...the people with whom I made contact. Once, the Italian boys had a whole big can of soup that got sour. They said, "Do you want it?" Of course, we ate it. We said, "Well, we will think it's a potato salad. That's why it's sour." And we ate it. We get sick, so we can't get sick. Uh uh it...it was...I...I... This was the time when I really cried. I cried and cried in hours and hours, because with with the work, with everything, it was just foreign. And I was getting more and more desperate. And in uh December of that year, uh one of the girls of our group--Hannah, her name was also Hannah Klein; she was exactly the year I was in--became sick. And I became convinced (we didn't have a doctor) that she had typhoid, because I worked so much with typhoid. There was a certain smell about it, too. So she was moved into one empty room and I volunteered to be with her. And the girl thought...I thought really I was with so much typhoid, I'm immune. Nothing can happen to me. And which was not unrealistic, which was...I was pretty much immune. And the girls didn't even thought I went a little crazy, you know; and I left her soup outside so the others could pick it up, the two girls I met in Auschwitz. And uh she died on the 19th of December '44. And that was a really low point for me. That was a really low point for me. Now, miraculously, this uh last Lagerälteste allowed me to have a flashlight for her at night--which was unbelievable. And she did get a coffin, plain wooden coffin, for her. And so I didn't have...I had washed her, and I didn't have anything. So I put newspapers. So they...I got some newspaper, and I dressed her in the newspapers and stuffed it in the coffin. And it wasn't... And people asked, you know, "You are crazy! Why are you doing it?" You know. "Nobody does that." And I said, "That's the only piece of dignity I can give her, that I treat her. If I washed her when she was sick, why shouldn't I wash her now?" This is the only piece of dignity I could give her. But it wasn't until years later when I realized that somewhere in the back of my head--way, way back--was that the...what was the Jewish tradition. Visit the sick. Wash the dead. Comb them, clean them, dress them before they go. But that was not conscious at all. They thought I'm crazy. Under these circumstances, I'm brushing her and dressing her in newspaper. And she's buried there. In that camp, between October '44 and May '45, thirteen girls died. You might say that's not much--only thirteen. But you have to remember, thirteen out of five hundred in less than...five, in six months...in six months, five...out of five hundred, thirteen people died. And we were the women between eighteen and thirty-five. So, then it's a lot. Uh one girl uh had five children. When she realized that uh they were all gone, she went crazy. She went really crazy. But it took her that long to really accept it. Uh, miraculously that woman got coffins for these women. It was unheard of. Unheard of. Once SS man came and asked us, "What is the thing you want the most?" So we said things like a toothbrush. You know, we were used to it. You know, a toothbrush was so basic. I had to repeated dreams, repeated dreams, about taking a bath and having a nice towel. You know? Which means, you know, necessities were for us. And so he promised us toothbrushes. Of course, we never got them. But this was kind of teasing, total teasing. Not being able to clean yourself. I remember in that camp, our women--some were, there was a group of people who had to wash the laundry also for the SS. And the SS had also lice. They said they had lice even in their handkerchiefs. I, one day,

I saved...I didn't eat the bread at all, and I saved it and I exchanged it in some sort of a contraption out of which I could make a bra. I wanted a bra so badly. For me, it was so basic I couldn't...so I just didn't eat the bread for a whole day so I would have a bra. You know, the sort of left-overs of civilization. And I remember sitting on the bed, and looking and finding my first louse. Finding my first louse was another absolute downer. This was like the last drop of civilization was gone. So we had to look through for lice every day. Uh we all had one needle together. Needle got lost, which was a tragedy. So what did we do again? You know what we did? We had uh uh... When we were all there, we had uh a game. You had to make a menu card for a whole day, and then the next one had to make a menu card and you couldn't repeat it until everybody made all the menu cards for the week--you know, making menu cards. We were telling jokes. One of the girls read a book, uh [Margaret] Mitchell's Gone with the Wind. I never read the book, but I remember her because she told us the whole contents of Gone with the Wind. We were telling, uh saying...uh reciting poems--anything to keep our minds going. Uh I knitted for one of the SS women a pair of socks, because she was uh...gave, she gave me a printed material. We needed to read. I mean, for us, not being able to read was deprivation. And she gave me one of those Harl[equin]...uh romance-like things, you know--which was nothing, but I had something to read. Which was another necessity, you know. Uh she was a woman who could be...who could blow hot or could blow cold. Uh when we came to the factory for the twelve hour shift, we got two little triangles, metal triangles, with DMV--"Deutsche Metal Werke."<sup>5</sup> And when we went to the john, we had to put one in. She was sitting there, so we could go twice in the twelve hours. And, of course, we had diarrhea. It...it was terrible there. And once in a while, she talked to us and she told her boyfriend was at the front, etc. etc. And she could...on the other hand sometimes she could beat up people. She was hot and cold. But uh she did give me a piece of soap for the...for the socks. You did what you could. And then we had one SS woman, Hanelle (ph), who warned...she didn't want to be SS woman. She was drafted. And she warned us when the inspection came, and she escaped before the end of the war. Changed into a civilian. She didn't want any part of it. There were a few decent people. Uh we had uh, at Christmas time, it was cold as could be (cough). The screws on the inside of the barracks were white with ice. And we tried to celebrate New Year and do some fun and things, even under those circumstances. Uh (pause) uh you know, one tried humanity even under these circumstances. And when toward the very end of the...of April, I didn't...I didn't think I'm going to survive. I became very depressed. You see how I talk now? I talked so slowly, that people didn't have patience to listen to me. I trained myself to go to the bathroom every second day, to save strength. Uh ...

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: You know, keeping our humanity under impossible situations was very important to us.

Q: Yeah.

---

<sup>5</sup> Actually denominated in Nazi records as VDM, for "Vereinigte Deutsche Metallwerke."

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION [Sound backtracks at this point]

Q: OK. We're going to continue in a minute.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: Well, I didn't think I'm going to make it. The hills started to be green. Spring might come.

Q: OK. We can start.

A: Uh, as I say, I became very depressed. I didn't think I'm going to make it. We looked out. The hills were green. It looked fine. Uh...and let me back-track. At the end, they didn't have any material. They shipped the machines away. The front was coming. There was a pocket of resistance around Breslau [**Pol:** Wroc\_aw]. We were close to it. We could hear the shooting; and you know, we were happy and all the...we are [thinking], "Maybe the end is coming." And (cough) so they made work to do. Taking the bricks from here to there, then bringing them back, etc. In the camp next to us, one of the camps next to us, were Russian prisoners of war. But they were mostly the Mongolian--mustachioed, uh uh heavy-set uh Soviets. They were not Russians. They were Soviets. And we each had a bowl. That was the only, we each had a bowl and...and a spoon. That was all we had. And it was so cold, you know, at that time. So what we did is, uh we put it under the coat and put a string around us so, because we didn't have gloves. And again, we marched by five. And Mimi (ph) was the oldest of us. She was thirty-five. She was old, you know. And Mimi was also the most flat-chested of all of us; and here she's going with the bowl, and one of the Mongolian guys stepped out of his line--with great danger--and to touch her, because he thought it was a breast, and because... He touched the dish. Oh, we had...it was very dangerous for him; but of all of us, he happened to touch Mimi's dish. So of course, you know, this was like a irony of the whole thing. And uh you know, uh one of the...at the end, one of the girls was able through somebody else make a contact; because through the Czechs from the year 1924, we were able to make some contact. Now, because there was not enough material, they were going to build from Náchod--which was across the border in Czechoslovakia--uh a railroad connected with this on...on the Polish border. They were going to make a connection. And he was supposed to go and start working on it. Some of the Czech women [**NB:** from the village] got together, even though it was rationing, got food and bribed the SS women by giving them more food for allow our group to eat. They were wonderful. They were wonderful. So through them, there was also contact made with other Czechs in Czechoslovakia, etc., so that that walking... I was not among the group, but I knew about it. And was this contact with Náchod, and they were really truly wonderful. They did it at great risk; but the SS women took the bribe of the food, because they didn't have that much either and thought they would allow other people to eat. Can you imagine with this rationing everything? And these [Czech] women at the great risk did it. Uh Bo enna Levitova was one of the women. Her husband was Jewish. She protected him; and her three children were

all in camps. One in Theresienstadt, and two in Dachau. And she was doing this. Just a great woman. And uh, so we knew the end was coming near, but we didn't know when. So, as I told you, I trained myself not to go to the bathroom. I walked very slowly. Uh, I had these horrible shoes to walk in. So these two girls had each extra shoes, so I walked. When the war ended, I walked to liberation with two different shoes. But they were shoes. Uh as camps go, this one was by no means the worst. This one was pretty good. Even so, we were getting pretty desperate what's going on to happen. Uh came May 5, end of the war. The SS just opened the door and disappeared. We walked to Náchod. There was a tremendous uh crowd of people, all going from east to west, escaping from the Russians, going westward. In cars, wagons, uh motorcycles, bicycles--you name it. And we walked in the meantime to the border. We came to the border. Nobody told us what we are going to do, nothing. Spontaneously, totally spontaneously, we stopped and sang the Czech anthem. It was so spontaneous, I can't tell you. In that moment of that anthem and crossing the border, it was just like this: I was to normal. I spoke normal. I walked normal. Everything was normal. It was a real situation depression. And we walked into Náchod; and that night I volunteered for Red Cross, because there was still shooting. The Germans were coming through. The Russians were chasing them. There was still shooting going on, so I volunteered for Red Cross. And somebody brought us... Of course, they all saw in us that we are prisoners, how we were dressed. Uh, uh they brought us the Czech bread--about this thick--and on it was that much butter and honey. And I see the picture when I took that slice of bread with the butter and honey, and I bit into it. You know, the teeth were singing! I remember that first, eating that bread with the butter on it. We walked...uh we went to this uh Bo enna Levitova, and she took three of us... three of us in--this woman who had the children. She let us to have a bath. She put us in a bed with pillows and covers. Uh Trude, who was a friend of mine--we pinched each other at night. Is this a dream, or do we really sleep in a bed? And she fed us for a few days. This man whom I met on the street, who knew that Jana, he come and gave each of us some money. On the streets, there was...they took down the Hakenkreuz [**NB:** the Swastika] and put it on the floor. For one crown, everybody was allowed to clean his shoes in it. And uh this woman was just really terrific. All her three children returned. I have her picture. We visited her after the war.

Q: OK. We are about at the end of the tape. Is there anything you want to add?

A: Not about that part.

Q: OK. Thank you. Very much.

A: You're welcomed.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

- (1) Hanna's mother's parents, who lived in her parents' home in Prague while Hanna was growing up.
- (2) Hanna at age 23. The photograph was taken in 1945, one month after she was liberated.
- (3) Newspaper clipping showing photo of Hanna's post-war wedding to Charles Bruml. The clipping appears to be from The New York Times. Hanna states that the wedding took place at the city hall in New York.