That we had many political prisoners. In MalthausenNational Council of Jewish Women Sarasota-Manatee Section

Holocaust Oral History Project

Interview with Freida Treitel, Survivor

May 16, 1986

Sarasota, Florida

Today is Friday, May 16, 1986 and I am at the home of Friedel Treitel at Sarasota, Florida. Mrs. Treitel is a survivor of the Holocaust and has graciously consented to be interviewed so that there will be a historical record of her experiences during the Holocaust period.

Q: Mrs. Treitel, so that we may have an overall picture of you and not just your experiences during the Holocaust years, could you tell us a little bit about your childhood? What can you remember of it? How many children were in your family, what type of work your family was engaged in, where you came from. That is probably the best thing to start with – where you came from.

A: Yes, I was born in Essen.

Q: Essen, Germany?

A: Essen, West Germany. An industrial city, about population of 650,000. And, ummm, I was born in 1922. My parents had come from Poland. I’m not sure, probably in 1919. And in 1921 my sister was born and in 1922 I was born. And we lived in a neighborhood that, ummm, I mean it was a very primitive neighborhood (laughs) as I remember. And we moved from there when I was about five. We moved a little bit out of the city. My father, uh, tried his best to make a living; he was probably more a salesman in the textile business, and at one time he was self-employed. But in 1928 things became a little bit unsafe (pause) and...and...and

Q: Unsafe in Germany?

A: No, actually, the business just, uh, disintegrated.

Q: I see.

A: The times were very bad.

Q: This was during the Weimer Republic? And just before the…

A: That I really don’t remember. I never remember anything political. If you were (laugh) to ask me that, really.

Q: OK.

A: But I do remember we, uh, my mother, my sister and I took a trip to Poland just at that time after my father lost his job and his business. A very meager existence really. We took this trip to Poland with some of the families that had left behind. And, but the school demanded that we immediately return.

Q: This was a public school?

A: Yes, this was a public school and my sister had already been enrolled in the first grade. And I entered the first grade following our return and was sent home because I was very small and very frail.

Q: Frail?

A: Frail. Though I had to wait until I turned seven. Instead of six. But, uh, the first two years were not the most pleasant for me in school because I could already feel (laugh) that there was something against me.

Q: Because of being Jewish?

A: I do remember…just being the only girl in the class. The only Jewish girl, and my teacher…was…I could feel that she showed, uh, really resentment towards me and, in fact, one time she slapped me. She slapped my face.

Q: Did you think…understand that it had something to do with being Jewish?

A: Yes, I think it did. If I recall, that was really my impression. That this must be the reason, and she did, or tried everything to certainly not show her affection, because it turned out to be the opposite. Now, after the second grade, we were lucky to move back into the city. Where I attended a Jewish school.

Q: All day long? This was like your regular education, plus some religious education?

A: Yes, the complete elementary school.

Q: Yes, I see.

A: And also, we had a beautiful Temple that we would go to the Temple regularly, and of course I made a lot of friends. At that time, of course, things started to develop. And when I turned 10, about I think about 10, I joined the Zionist, um, Habonim.

Q: Uh, uh.

A: Youth school. We had a beautiful building. That was erected in about 1934 or 5, I believe

Q: What did the Habonim do?

A: Where we met, we met regularly.

Q: What kind of activities did they engage in?

A: Um, now they were trying to inform us about Israel. Erwetz as it was called.

Q: Yes, there was no Israel at that time.

A: No. Erwetz. They usually termed it this way. And, umm, well, they tried perhaps to influence us to emigrate to Israel. But I don’t believe I was a candidate because my parents would not let me leave. My sister, however, did go to a Hafsharah.

Q: Hafsharah? What does Hafsharah mean?

A: The Hafsharah is a preparation for the, umm, for the, uhh, you know, for the life in a kibbutz.

Q: Like learning to live on a farm?

A: Yes.

Q: And doing things with your hands?

A; In Israel you learn your agricultural skills.

Q: Yes.

A: And you remain there for several months until you get some idea of what life would be like.

Q: And you sister went through this?

A: My sister went and, umm, and she returned. And, umm, somehow she did not pursue her idea of going to Israel. Somehow she must have met someone, she was a nice looking young lady (laughs) and we, uh, we, uh,we were, let’s see, she was working, already. We had to leave school after the eighth grade. After we graduated we left school. In fact, for one thing you could not continue your education at that time, it was already restricted.

Q: Even in Jewish schools?

A: No. No. To go to High School.

Q: Oh.

A: There was no such thing as a High School. It was like a middle school, and, umm, I don’t know.

Q: Just for Jewish people, or for most people?

A: No, that would be a general, uh, attendance, you know, any students.

Q: I see.

A: I believe, but it was restricted. Although I am not quite sure. Some of the girls that I remember did go to a middle school, but, of course, you had to pay for that. It was not accessible to me at all because we (laugh) could not afford anything.

Q: So you were about fourteen years old then?

A: Yes, but I was fifteen when I left school. And, that was in April, around Easter we would be dismissed. And in May I already took on my first job that my sister had just vacated to take on another job with a family to be a nursemaid, to keep house and so. This is what she did. And so she had moved out from our home and lived with these people. Now I had left school and started my job, I learned office work and was trained to type a little bit, and continued, it was pretty hard, difficult because we lived under very, very primitive conditions.

Q: When you said primitive, can you describe it?

A: Food, food was not available. My, my father had to change jobs continuously because, it just wasn’t possible for him to hold on to, not because of his abilities, he was very capable, but somehow things changed, and he had to change too. He then worked for a family, a business, outside of Essen, somewhere in the suburbs. And he had to travel by bicycle, I remember him coming home very tired every night, and on Sunday he would sole our shoes.

Q: He would do this himself?

A: Yes. In fact, I used to sit and watch what he would do. He used to cut our hair. And he was, umm, very musically inclined. He would practice his mandolin. He was a very accomplished mandolin player. He also belonged to an orchestra. That would perform on weekends occasionally and he would take me there, um, for the, umm.

Q: Concerts?

A: Concerts, but to the… you know, before the concerts…the training.

Q: The rehearsals?

A: Rehearsals (laughs).

Q: Now by this time you are already talking about 1937.

A: I was still very young, when he took me to the rehearsals. But I became very, very interested in music. Of course, I still am. This is still a great part of my life. Which I enjoy immensely. So I was working, and, umm, I had to put in three years apprenticeship.

Q: In the office?

A: In the office. And, I was half-way into this process, that was 1938 now.

Q: Five years after Hitler came into power?

A: Yes, and in 1930, I never really knew that anything would happen, that we would have to leave town, and start a new life somewhere else, however, it became evident and I do remember that my mother had a sister living in New York. They would correspond and I remember, not much of it, but I remember that papers were being, um, prepared for immigration.

Q: I want to stop you for a minute, you used the term “it became evident”. In what ways, do you recall, that it became evident?

A: At that time, umm, you would hear, oh yes, I do remember, in school, I was still in school. Now I remember. You see, my memory is failing me at times. In school we would have to interrupt our, our, uh, studies, and listen to the Chancellor. I believe, I believe, it was regularly once a week that we would have to assemble in one room, and listen to the radio, where he would make a speech. Now, I didn’t really pay that much attention, because, ummm, actually, I was always very, very hungry, and my mind was (laughs) not on anything but getting home from school and, uh, helping my mother, and doing things. But we did have to listen to the radio. And, somehow, it was, it became a little frightening to me, the voice, the voice of Adolf Hitler was very penetrating. I mean, it was not the most pleasant thing. And, uh, we were told by the Dean of the School, I think it was a director, not a dean, in elementary school, you would have a school director. He would yell at us. We shouldn’t belong, we should be cautious, we should not make too much noise, because we are not that well liked. I think this is how he expressed it. I don’t know precisely what he said, but I do remember some of it.

Q: This was in the Jewish school?

A: That was in the Jewish school, but we were adjacent to the other school. In one building, therefore he wanted us to behave well and…

Q: As though if you behaved well, nothing worse would happen to you?

A: Ummm, well, at least, it wouldn’t cause any unpleasant incidents.

Q: Uh, uh.

A: This was a time when I became aware of what was going on. At least a little bit. And then, ummm, I remember on our street, there was a, umm, an auto repair shop. They had to provide the, umm, back yard or something for the SR.

Q: SR? What does that stand for?

A: The Storm…how shall I explain it? It is not the SS. But it was already the Nazi organization, the Brown Shirts.

Q: OK.

A: The Brown Shirts. They would march in. I could see from the window. They would march in. It was right across our street. And sing, and hold their meetings. And they had the roll call right in the middle of the street (laughs). And it was a small street. But I could see it (laughs), and feel it (laughs).

Q: Uh, uh, since it was happening right outside your window.

A: And that was the beginning of my awareness that, uh, life was becoming a little bit uncomfortable, unpleasant.

Q: Do you think, at least in retrospect, that your father’s difficulties in maintaining employment was related to anti-Semitism?

A: I can’t say. I can’t say. I think that business was doing so poorly he had to change jobs. In fact at one time he was unemployed, and he received a very small amount from the welfare organization.

Q: Uh, uh.

A: And also from our Jewish community center. It was a very, very dedicated place. We were helped with small additional gifts, from a grocery. For instance, we were given a certain amount and I would have to go, it took about an hour (laughs) to walk for me. To get some groceries. That was an additional help from the Jewish community center. And also we were provided with clothing. Used clothing, most of the time. I don’t ever remember having anything new, at that time. Until I worked, until I started to work. There wasn’t much that we were paid because of my apprenticeship you don’t get (laughs) a large amount.

Q: It was meant to be a training period?

A: But this was the first time I had anything new to wear. It is now 1938 and I was working faithfully, and, uh, during the night of November 9th, we heard, we were living in a small apartment on the third floor. We had Jewish neighbors. With three small children. And we were in communication and I would, in fact, on Friday night, I would, umm, we had to wash, to clean the, the stairs, every week. We would take turns, all families in that building.

Q: Uh, uh.

A: Would take turns. And I would do that for them. And they would give me a bowl of freshly made chicken soup. And all this.

Q: Considering you were always hungry, that was good.

A: Ya, very appreciated (laughs)…anything edible. Although I would go over there and bathe the children, the two little girls, and I would also, probably babysit, I do remember something, uh, oh, yeah, it was the night of November the 9th when we heard noises. We heard crying, in the meantime, they had a new little baby that was born in ’37, I believe. It was a small baby and, uh, we heard that baby cry, and we heard some man’s voices. My mother said to me, I got dressed, I got dressed, my Mother said why don’t you go over and see what is going on? So I did. And when I entered there were two people. I don’t remember if they were in uniform or not. I don’t believe they were in uniform. People who picked up the, uh, the Jews, were not necessarily in uniform. Just to disguise whatever they had in mind. And, uh, I was, I was, remaining there for a little while and offering my help, and she was kind because they were taking her husband away. Now, we were stateless. You see, we had never become German citizens, My parents. No, we were born there, my sister and I were born there. But we were given at the age of 16 a passport that said “stateless”. That means we had no country that we belonged to.

Q: Neither Germany or Poland?

A: Yes. Now, ummm, the people next to us were in the same position. And, for that reason, if they had been Poles, they would not have, they would not have let him go. They were taking him in, I think for a couple of days. And he returned. My father was not picked up, because they probably did not know who we were. We were not Polish and we were not German or anything. Uh, though, he returned and my father who would know what was going to happen, packed and went to Holland. Now Holland was the closest place to get away.

Q: Yes.

A: Without financial means.

Q: He went alone? The rest of you, you and your mother and your sister stayed?

A: He went alone. Oh, I forgot to say something else that concerns immigration. But, the ninth of November, the following morning. I was going to work as usual. Now, it was called the Crystal Night and I could see what happened that night. I went to work. Everything was smashed to pieces, and uh, my employer and his wife and I, we were trying to clean up the mess.

Q: Your employer was Jewish?

A: Yes, everything was smashed to pieces, and I really was so uninformed. I was really not a very mature 16 year old. Yeah, I was 16. Uh, I never asked questions, my parents did not tell me much. In fact they never told me anything political. I only knew I was Jewish, and, uh, and I have friends and we try to sing and laugh and, uh, make the best of it.

Q: Were you still active in Habonim at that time?

A: Yes, yes, we were regularly meeting. And, uh, so I went to work, and I knew that would be my last day, because they had to give up. I believe so. I discontinued going. I think it was too dangerous. We were afraid to go on a street car, which was actually the electric tram-tram? What is it?

Q: Tram.

A: We were becoming very fearful of being on the streets, and ummm, gradually my mother was trying, my father had left for Amsterdam. We had no idea where he would be living, but then I remember we must have received some mail. And then we knew the address and everything. He was living with a family in a large house that would later become a uh, what you call it, you know for many families that would be living there. They would be taking on families.

Q: Like a refuge?

A: Yes, yes. That’s what you might call it. So gradually my mother would not tell me anything specific. What we will be doing. But she began to make arrangements. Not much, we tried to get a few things and send them off to that address that we had possession of. We had a wicker basket, a very large one, and we would fill it up with linen, or whatever we had available. And, umm, then at one time, the family next to us, had decided to leave. Also to try to get to Holland. It was the easiest. And it became known as the most accessible. So, they offered, or they asked, if I would come with them. I don’t know why I ever decided this. But it was meant to, it was meant to be more like a fact finding tour. We would go to a city, I think it was Aachen, double a, ch, en.

Q: In Holland? Yes.

A: Er, on the border of Holland and Germany and Belgium. We would go, they asked me if I would go along. My mother made every effort that she would, that perhaps, I would be able to, uh, find a place that we would all get together again. I think this must have been the idea.

Q: Would there have been any difficulty in?

A: I don’t recall any conversation about this. Do you know it was all done and you would not discuss much. You would just do things. (laughs) So I would go with this family, and we lived in a place, I think, in a hotel…

Q: In Aachen?

A: For a day or two, and I became very sick. They had to take me to the hospital where I remained four days. I remember, in the meantime, they had left, they had left me behind. And went back, because there was no possibility. The arrangement, actually, to cross the border would be, uh, a farmer with a horse and wagon…to take us across the border.

Q: Hiding you?

A: Well,

Q: Hiding you, so they wouldn’t know?

A: Uh, not necessarily hiding us. Just to get us across. But it did not work out.

Q: So let me see if I understand. You went from Essen to Aachen and then…

A; With this family.

Q: And then they went back to Essen.

A: They went back because things did not work out.

Q: You were still in the hospital?

A: The arrangement did not work out. He did not show up, and I don’t know what happened, but I did, after 4 days recover. I was running a very high fever. I recovered and I returned home by myself.

Q: What was it like to be left behind like that?

A: Ummm, I don’t know. I really……

Q: Weren’t you a little worried?

A: I was worried just to travel on a train by myself, which I had never done before. All by myself. But this was a Catholic hospital, and they made arrangements for me to meet the train on time and I traveled home. And my mother, in the meantime, had, uh, sold, the only thing we had, we had a kitchen and bedroom, the only thing sellable, reasonable sellable was like a breakfront that my father had put together and painted beautifully. He was very, very talented. He was, he was a decorator, also. Interior decorator. He, he, I think he majored in his Gymnasium, I think that is what they call it in Poland, the high school, he was very talented and, uh, I believe she sold it to someone. We had nothing else.

Q: And what was this money used for?

A: I only recall thirteen marks, that we had in our possession, when my mother and I finally left for Holland. We had closed up the apartment, and I remember going to the police department, to, we, that is what I know now. We had to turn in the key. They would take possession of the apartment.

Q: And whatever was left behind?

A: Consisting of two rooms, not much in it really, a table and chairs, and two beds, three beds, and I believe my mother sold the breakfront, which, I still believe, in my opinion, very, the most attractive piece of furniture. So, my mother and I went to the police. It was in the late afternoon. We, I don’t know, we were, she was conversing with them, and I really don’t recall much. I only remember that somebody took us to the border. I don’t know if we traveled by train or we, I don’t recall that at all.

Q: OK.

A: I do remember arriving at the border, where we were questioned a lot. That began to frighten me, because they called me in singly. They called in my mother first. And, then they called me in and showed me a little picture of my mother’s brother. I don’t know. They acted as though they were suspicious of something. I don’t remember what they meant. But I do remember them asking me do I know this man. And I said this was my uncle, one of so many. They had both large families. Uh, so it now, got to be very late. I think it was two o’clock in the morning, when we were taken to the border. When we were taken across the border, by someone, he was a friendly person, that is all I remember. He would show my mother where to go, and cross the border to Holland, into Holland. And, uh, so we did.

Q: Were you in a car or bus?

A: No, nothing, on foot, just walking. In a distance I could see the tramway.

Q: What did you have with you? Just a suitcase?

A: I don’t think we had a suitcase.

Q: Not even a suitcase?

A: I don’t remember.

Q: OK.

A: To be perfectly honest. I don’t remember. I remember having a shoulder bag or something. It was very cold. It was 1938 that was supposed to be the coldest winter in Germany. That’s what I remember. It was so cold, I was crying. And I wasn’t dressed properly to begin with. It was a very light spring coat that I wore. And, uh, I remember not much, during that night. I think we stayed with a family in Mostrich. That is what I remember. And the next morning we would go on to Amsterdam.

Q: Is that where your father was?

A: That is where my father was supposed to be. But when we arrived at that address, all the men had been taken to the police department. For just to register. I don’t know why. We were told by the, umm, proprietor of this place, that they had not returned. That was the very day that they had left in the morning. They had not returned. And, uh, what really happened was the men were taken to the first camp outside of Amsterdam. Right near the, North Sea. I think, it’s the North Sea, isn’t it?

Q: North Sea, yes.

A: Yes. To a place called Hochvonholland. And we began to correspond. With open cards. We were living with this family, many rabbis would come. It was like a pension. What do you call it?

Q: A pensioner?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Had the Germans invaded Holland at this point?

A: No, not yet.

Q: I didn’t think so.

A: No, that was in 1940. I lived, we lived, my mother and I were given a room. And I, um, helped out in the house, serving food to all the people who came and were, um, what shall I say?

Q: Let me just interject for the purpose of the record. A pensioner was like a small hotel, or a rooming house.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: It is a rooming house.

A: Not very fancy, but clean.

Q: A rooming house is a better term for it.

A: OK. Umm, it was provided for a certain number of people by the committee, or Jewish Community Center of Amsterdam. That they would eat, and get their meals there-one or two meals a day. And I remember many rabbis coming there and we would, uh, on weekends, we would sit and sing the Hebrew songs together. And, uh, the grace after meals, and, uh, it became a little more pleasant, and, but, uh, immigration was certainly going on for those who had money.

Q: Why was your father in a camp at this time?

A: I don’t know. They began already gathering Jews, I believe. And, uh, what surprises me is that my mother and I were able to remain until 1940. This was 1938, the end of 1938, December, to be exact.

Q: Where was your sister?

A: Oh, yeah, my sister. My sister, oh, I have to go back to 1938. My sister came home one afternoon. And she was showing us a ring she had received. Now, I was never told much, I had no idea what this ring was all about. But it was presumably an engagement ring. She was probably engaged and, uh, she asked my father where she could turn this into a little money. Because she is about to leave with her fiancé. They had to leave. They were taken to Poland at that time.

Q: Hum.

A: I remember so little of this. I only remember the ring. That she would take it to a Jewish jeweler. I think my father took her there. And she said, I only want some money. And she, she said good-bye. But I don’t recall that vividly. Really, this is way back in my mind.

Q: OK. So you and your mother.

A: So she left. She was gone. In Poland, we had absolutely no idea what happens in Poland. We had no idea, at least I didn’t. So um, the men were taken to this camp. That was the beginning of concentration camps. And in 1940, my mother and I were called to the Police Dept. In fact every month we would have to report to the Police Department in Amsterdam. Promptly. Who we are, and what we are doing, where we were living. We were not allowed to work.

Q: How did you?

A: We were not given permission. At least I was looking for a job. But officially you were not given permission to work.

Q: So just the Jewish Community supported you.

A: Supported us.

Q: What did you do with yourselves all day?

A: Oh, I was working in this pension.

Q: Oh, that’s right. You said you were helping.

A; I was cleaning. I was serving, when mealtimes came. I was very busy and hardworking. I was also, um, became acquainted with a little group. Again we have a name. And we would gather occasionally and would sing together, and you know.

Q: It sounds like as much as possible people did things to maintain their morale. To make them feel better.

A: Yes, you really did not know. Realize what was happening around us. So in 1940, however we were told, we would all be reunited with my father, or husbands. Families would be reunited in Vestiborge, Holland. The outskirts of Amsterdam.

Q: Vestiborge?

A: Vestiborge, yes. That was, uh, more a family camp. And we were about 1,100 people. We were put to work. We were given a small place to live. Each family was given a two room, uh, not what you would call an apartment. It’s what you would call a barrack.

Q: But you had two rooms which was yours.

A: We had two rooms, and even a bathroom. Not to take a bath, a toilet. And we would remain there in the camp. We were put to work.

Q: Were you in fact reunited with your father?

A: Yes, we were. Yes. We were put to work. In various departments. On the fields. I was probably. In the hospital. In the kitchen. Washing dishes. That is what I remember. And in the linen supply. In the laundry department where I would have to iron all day. The girls or boys. There were a large number of boys which were living by themselves. They were without parents. That is what I recall.

Q: What kind of food did they give you?

A: It was, well, very minimal. We would get two slices of bread in the morning with an apple spread. Something like a spread, probably some margarine. I think that there was margarine available. And then around noon there was the main meal, I believe. Some potatoes and, I don’t remember. I remember potatoes a lot. But never enough really.

Q: Any meat at all?

A: But never enough really. I continued to be so hungry that, that it was indescribable. Because, as I was growing up, there was never enough and certainly not what I would have liked to eat. Like butter and bread. That is my most favorite food. And I certainly learned to spread it. (laughs). But we were working very hard. On the field, it was where your appetite would be building up. We would take a small sandwich out with us, but, it was hard work. We would wear overalls-one piece blue denim. We would go off to work, and sing along the way. It was a little walk. About a half an hour to walk to the fields. Where we would have to, umm, clear the weeds

Q: Uh, uh.

A: From the potato fields. And in the meantime there was different possibilities for me to work-in the sewing center, we had one room and we had one instructor and we would learn how to sew and we would also provide various articles for the people of the camp.

Q: How did the people that were in charge treat you? Were they cruel?

A: No, Those were our own people. They were still our own people. But we had a commandant who was, uh, of Dutch origin. He was the commandant and it was I don’t remember anything cruel. There was a jail. There was a jail, there was a hospital, and uh, a kitchen where people would work. That was probably the best place to work (laughs).

Q: Did you get a little extra food?

A: Yes, I remember some of my girlfriends whose fathers were working in the kitchen and, of course, they had a little more than we did, but, uh, this camp was at this time was called a transit camp. Which we would be the original camp inmates and we would remain as such for the next four years. But in the meantime, it was a transit camp, and it meant as soon as the Dutch people were picked up by the Gestapo. They would have to travel through this camp. They would arrive in the middle of the night and, uh, they were registered and sent off for deportation.

Q: Were these Jewish Dutch people or Christian Dutch people?

A: No. These were all Jewish.

Q: All Jewish?

A: All Jewish.

Q: The entire camp. Now by 1942 it changed a little. We had a German commandant. I don’t know if the Dutch commandant was still in existence, but I remember a German. And he was not what you would call a cruel person. He would do his thing and keep everything under control, but things became a little more serious with the deportations. That had begun in 1940. Even some of our own people.

Q: That came with you?

A: Yes. Some of them were also deported.

Q: Did you realize when these people were coming through the camp that they were possibly going to die? Or did you have any idea what was happening to them?

A: I only knew they were going to be deported. We did not know who or when. Deportations took place once a week. From then on.

Q: Meanwhile you stayed there?

A: Yes, we must have had some prominence because we were always going to leave from this camp. And we were working and we were trained and, uh, just to do our job.

Q: Did you have much interaction with these people? Going through the camp.

A: No, I didn’t know them. We didn’t know them. No, nothing.

Q: You lived a separate life from them?

A: Oh, yes. We had, I had girlfriends. We were also keeping group assemblies. It was creating everywhere. We would get together and sing and get together, and sit and take walks around the premises.

Q: So, while the quality of your life was not too great, it was not too terrible.

A: No. It was something you, you practically, accepted. What, uh, what was available at that time. We, we…

Q: And this continued for four years?

A: We had no idea what we will become. I never thought of the future. It probably did not exist for me. Only the present existed for me, and the only problem was that there was not enough food. This was really something that affected me throughout the war.

Q: Did people die from lack of food in that camp?

A: Uh, not that I know of. It was not an extermination camp. And I remember some people died of illnesses. But, uh, no.

Q: You say that continued for four years. What happened at the end of the four years?

A: Oh, now in the meantime, deportations would continue. Every Tuesday and in, umm, January, of 1944, yep, we were called to get ready for deportation- my parents and I- but, the only difference being-we were told we were going to Theresienstadt. I had no idea what Theresienstadt was. Did you?

Q: Yes, I have heard of Theresienstadt.

A: Yep. Yes. We were taken there.

Q: And Theresienstadt was in what country?

A: Czechoslovakia.

Q: All right.

A: We would take our knapsacks that we had in the meantime. Uh, made available. I was sewing all those things. Even for other people. We took old sheets and we would make knapsacks out of them. And, uh, I got a little extra piece of bread for doing this, because I did it for some of our friends.

Q: How did you get to Theresienstadt?

A: We were packing up, and a large number of our original camp inmates were included in this transport. To go to Theresienstadt by train. There was a train going. And that was a moment when I became very emotional. You were living for four years with wonderful people. With doctors, professors and all kinds of intellects. And, we were really communicating with all kinds of interesting people. And, of course, needless to say, my girlfriends, I was going to be separated. In fact, none of my girlfriends were included in this transport. And, I, umm, yeah, we were leaving the barracks, we were leaving the barracks, and, uh, uh, getting ready to board the train. It was not an ordinary train. It was a pretty primitive.

Q: A passenger train or cattle car?

A: I don’t remember. I think it was a cattle car. There were no passenger trains. No, it was a cattle car. It was very crowded. I was very tired. And I was looking for a place to sleep, and there was only a little place on the floor.

Q: There was actually room to lie down?

A: In that train probably. Not much. I think you would sit in a position, not necessarily stretched out. You would probably sit.

Q: Probably huddled up?

A: I only remember that night. Going through the whole night. And we were now in Czechoslovakia. Something new again. New surroundings. New atmosphere. And, uh, that was already a bit more depressing.

Q: Besides your feelings of sadness about leaving your friends, and your more predictable way of life, did you have any tremendous fears about the future- where you were going?

A: No. The strange thing about me- I never thought about the future- I never really thought about tomorrow. It did not exist for me. Only (laughs) the present. Uh, I don’t know how to explain it. It is one of those things.

Q: It probably helped you preserve some composure.

A: I was probably was hoping we would always be, uh, remain together. My mother, my father and I. This was one thing I was probably taking for granted.

Q: And by this time you were twenty- three years old.

A: Yes.

Q: In 1944?

A: Yes. In Theresienstadt. Oh, yeah, we were put to work, naturally. It was like washing the floors in the hospitals. And doctor’s offices. And, uh, I met a very nice young man from Czechoslovakia from Prague. And, and, I had, oh, yeah, I used to play the guitar. My father taught me to play the guitar since he played the mandolin. He told me to play the guitar and I would sing various songs in many languages. So I learned this over the years. And in Theresienstadt I had my guitar. I still had one. And I met this young man and he also was playing the guitar. Somehow we were introduced. Obviously because we were carrying the guitar around. And, um, we would go to hospitals. We became acquainted and we would go to hospitals and entertain some of the very terminally ill practically. But then I knew him for a few months and then he was deported with his whole family. So that was a short relationship. Very, very minor. But interesting. Very interesting. And, uh, then, uh, oh, yeah, now we were in Theresienstadt for the next eight months. In September, on the 23rd of September, all the members were separated from their families. We were not living together. The young people were in one area, and the men in the other and the women in yet another. All separated. On the 23rd the men were all assembled.

Q: 23rd of September?

A: September, 1944. They were assembled again. And, uh, they were prepared for deportation. Where to, I don’t recall what they were told. I do recall that when we asked the authorities, my mother and I, we wanted to know what is going to happen to my father. In fact, I remember the afternoon we were going to say good-bye to him. He really broke down. It was not very pleasant. Um, we were asking the authorities where they were going. They told us not to worry, we would all be reunited in Litzig. Yeah, in Litzig.

Q: In East Germany?

A: Which is what I remember. And we promptly believed them. That we would be reunited. That was the 23rd. Uh, I mean the 28th. On the, two or three days later, my mother and I were called for deportation.

Q: With a lot of other people?

A; I don’t know how that was done. It was probably announced. I don’t recall any papers. But I know we were packing our little bundle and we were waiting throughout the night, with this number. Because it was just that we were hanging around with a number. I think it was a number. And, we were told, we had to wait throughout the night. I was so tired. I was trying to sit in a corner somewhere to get a little sleep. And we were hoping that we would be put on the train and get going. The waiting was very tiring and disturbing.

Q: I can imagine.

A: Yeah. So finally we were put on the train. That was even more crowded. I mean, that was just women and children and we were given a small piece of blanket and a small piece of bread, I believe, and a tin with something in it. And I was sitting next to my mother. Uh, by the window, and I told her that I would keep this for my father. This small piece of food. I would keep it for my father and, uh, we were traveling for, I think, for two days and one night. I don’t know precisely. But, on the way, now that was not our way to Litzig. On the way my mother noticed a sign in Polish “Auschwitz”. The name “Auschwitz’. I don’t know if she knew what it was all about. I don’t know. She never told me anything. We never discussed deportation or what we will be doing or where we are going. But she had recognized something and probably in her mind she realized or had heard what this place was all about. But I had no idea. We arrived there finally. We got out of the train. And there was this shouting and running of these men in striped uniforms. The inmates. There was such a wide group. Nothing would have frightened us if they had remained a little bit civilized. They came storming into this train and told us to get out and we, we got out as good as we could. We dropped everything. I remember I had my shoulder bag and this little food product and we had to drop everything right before the train. I remember the picture still, and, uh, then, uh, we were supposed to go to a certain area. I remember at least three uniformed men standing there with their leather gloves, and hitting back and forth with their leather gloves. They used to do it like this.

Q: These were Germans?

A: Yeah. They were the German SS. And we were supposed to line up in two groups. Yeah. In two groups. No, actually we were one line that was divided in two.

Q: This was the famous selection process?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: The selection process, where people in one line lived and the others died?

A: Yes. I recall, uh, I was still next to my mother and we were lining up and this, this one person with the leather gloves. I don’t know, you couldn’t say anything. I mean, one thing we knew, we refuse anything or anything that they did not like they would hit you or shoot you. I did not see any shooting. But I saw the hitting, in the faces with the gloves. I mean they would hit you with the gloves. And, uh, I was still next to my mother and we would come to this person, and he could see who was young and who was old. My mother made the mistake of saying I am very sick. That was a mistake. She was indeed a heart patient.

Q: Oh.

A: And, she was on my right, and of course he would separate us. At that moment I must have, you know, you gradually lose your emotions. I did not respond to anything that I remember. I only knew this man was standing in front of me and he was taking me to this side and my mother to the other side. And she would march down that way. I remember it was about in this direction and I would turn around and look at her and she never turned around. She just was walking on.

Q: But you had no premonition what that meant?

A: No. It is, emotions were nonexistent from that time on. I fact we did not know how to cry, we did not do anything. We didn’t say anything. We were just trying to obey or not really obey, but you knew you ha to avoid any abuse. Especially physical abuse. So, I remember then we were in this group on the left with some of my friends. There were some people I remember. And, uh, we were taken with a very tall fellow and a dog. And, uh, whatever.

Q: A gun?

A: Yes, he was armed. He would walk us down very very slowly. He would walk us down to the first, the first building where I don’t remember. I remember walking in and there was, uh, a very large room. We were told to undress. Yeah. We were told to undress. I pulled my precious little things I had knitted so many nice sweaters and I was always keeping them in a neat place. We were folding them up and putting them in a neat pile against the wall. But I kept on a pair of old boots that someone had given me. Boots, black boots, that I had kept them on and, we were still in line waiting probably to go into a shower. Well, I don’t remember. Before that, we weren’t ready for that. Because we were first taken to a, barber shop. Shaved off all the hair, down to the scalp. Completely everywhere.

Q: What a shock that must have been.

A: Yes. That is true. That was one of my better possessions (laughs). My hair, it was long and very.

Q: And how dehumanizing, to be made to undress.

A: That was a moment when you really felt it. Yes. You would sit there and this girl. This is something I could never stand. When a girl would do this to me. She would shave off everything and then we would try to recognize one another. And we eventually did. I don’t know, by the sound of your voice. We were, I was still wearing my boots, and, we were standing in line and this Polish girl, a young girl, she was an older inmate from this Auschwitz camp. It was Bechenhold. Where we arrived. She was trying to tell me to take off my boots. She said give me these boots. I said no. It was the first time I dared to say no. I didn’t fear. I was very offended that this girl would want to take my boots. It was the last thing I was having. And I refused. I got very angry at that moment. And I never thought I would show anything. I got very angry and my friend behind me said Friedel, take them off, don’t, don’t, uh, try anything. Take them off. And I was very, very upset about the whole thing. I must have. I don’t remember if I took them off, I don’t remember. But I remember being very angry. So eventually we were taken to, the adjoining room. That was the brosabot. It was a shower.

Q: A legitimate genuine shower??

A: Yeah, it was a large, very large room, with outlets. And, uh, we didn’t know anything about gassing. At least, I didn’t. I had no idea what, what this, what cremation meant. I had never seen it before. But I did following the bath. But we were in the shower and we were disinfected. But, being disinfected was pretty nice, but then we were given the clothes that came out of the dryer somewhere. They were still warm. And they were still, uh, traces of lice.

Q: In the clothing?

A: Yeah, in the clothing.

Q: You had not talked about lice before. Was that a big problem for you?

A: No, very, oh terrible. It was unbearable. I mean, you could feel it all the time. It was in, even in your short hair. It would even get into that. So we were naked and this man was, uh, operating this whole, shower (laughs) business. And we weren’t. we weren’t given any towels to dry off. I think we just had to dry off (laughs). As it was. We were given these clothes, but we had no underwear yet. We had to wait another day for that. We were marching off to a, to a barrack. Our first barrack in Berchenoff. Very, very large with bunk beds. Not to each person. One bunk about the size of this settee in a square. Uh, to six or eight women.

Q: Like one huge bed?

A; One huge bed. Food was nonexistent. I don’t remember any food at all for the next few days. Then I remember. I mean we were not even sleeping. We had to line up at night all six or eight of us and when one of us wanted to turn the entire group had to turn. It was they were so mean.

Q: What month was this?

A: That was October.

Q: October, 1944?

A: In fact we arrived October 2nd.

Q: So it was getting towards winter? Towards light fall. It would be getting cold?

A:L It was, yes, it was on the cold side already. We were standing outside for roll call. Or we were standing for hours, I don’t know why. I just know I was hungry. And at one time I think they gave us at one time a little piece of cheese, a very strong scented cheese, just cheese, it made you thirsty, and it, but who cared? I didn’t see, I don’t recall any food, except that one time, only one time, I remember a little bowl with some cold cooked cabbage, cooked cabbage. It was grabbed by the whole group you could never see it. It was grabbed away.

Q: And you never got any?

A: I would never bother. Fighting for it? It was no sense. There was nothing left. When you know there is something about a person either you are aggressive or you suffer a great deal.

Q: And you were not aggressive?

A: I was not aggressive. (laughs). I was very shy, very shy. But once I got acquainted with people I would warm up with them very easily. And make friends very easily. Yeah, when it came to food, I don’t recall any food. It was about going to the bathroom at night. It was not allowed.

Q: Where were the bathrooms? Outside?

A: There were no bathrooms. There was a ditch behind the barracks. Way back. And once I did leave. I once left and then I returned. Oh, it was so terrible. I don’t know how you even completed your necessities there. When I returned, now we were given these wooden shoes. And when I returned, one was gone, one shoe was gone. And walking in the mud. These roads were not paved. And walking in this mud! And this shoe got stuck, so I left it. So I went barefoot. Until a few days later we were given some underwear. I remember a black pure silk (laughs) undershirt, or something.

Q: Pure silk. That was really ludicrous.

A: It must have been pure silk. Yes, they had all kinds of things there. And, uh, we were given a pair of shoes. Of course they did not fit. And, uh, you didn’t care.

Q: Well it was terribly important to keep your feet covered.

A: Yes, very important.

Q: And dry.

A: Yes, it was getting very cold. And I believe, we must have been there ten days. And one evening we were told, we are leaving. A small group is going to leave by train. And we boarded the train. I remember boarding the train. And the conditions were even worse than the first and second time I had traveled by that, uh, cattle train. It was so crowded that we had to stand up, definitely stand up, for the entire…we were not told where we were going. I do not remember. No. We were standing up this whole night. We weren’t saying anything. It was dark. But when it came, that the person had to go to the bathroom. I remember a little tin can was passed around and there was a hole in the ground.

Q: In the floor of the car?

A: In the floor of the car. So we had to use it the best we could. It was really an absolute torture.

Q: How did people behave under these conditions? Did they scream and cry, or did they frightened or silent? Do you remember this?

A: Yes, I remember it, um, I remember, yeah, in my stay in Berchenhold, the Polish women were very aggressive. They would punch you, and push you and they didn’t, they had no decency or compassion. Yes, I would feel it all the time.

Q: These were Polish Jews?

A: Yes, and that bothered me. That bothered me so much. That, um, to this day, I never wanted to belong to anything that would consist of a group of women. If you excuse me (laughs). This is how I felt about it. I was so offended, and I felt so abused by their behavior. I don’t know, it probably. I didn’t behave that way. I was a quiet, little kid. And obeying, though, we were traveling under conditions indescribable, especially when it came to this having to go. It was an absolute torture. So, I think we, we traveled through the night and we arrived in Lipsitz. There we finally got to Lipsitz.

Q: You finally got to Lipsitz? Let’s see, you were in Westerbrook, Theresienstadt Berchen, Auschwitz, and now Lipsitz.

A: Lipsitz, that was not a camp. We were brought out there to go to work in a factory. Iberg, Saxony. That was the province.

Q: Yes, Saxony.

A: Yes, so we were brought to this factory. I know we were from the train marching through the night. It was quiet. And, uh, the dogs next to us. All these women assigned to us, young women, Germans. Oh, they were impossible. Um, we were arriving at this factory, an airplane factory. And we, we were assigned to one bed, two people. I was not too lucky. The girl with me was quite a heavy girl.

Q: She was lucky, because you were small.

A: Yes, so we had to share this bed. And a small towel, a small linen towel. (laughs). She was the first one to take her, to wash up in the morning. And, it was, the conditions became so impossible. And there were bedbugs. The place was infested. These bedbugs. I couldn’t stand them. I would get out of bed in the night and, and I would stretch out on the table. In the center of the room. And it didn’t help much. They just got everywhere. It was really nauseating. And, uh.

Q: And painful and uncomfortable.

A: Oh, yes, and of course getting up early to a cup of, what they would call coffee. I was told that was made out of the rind of tree.

Q: Tree bark?

A: Yeah, tree bark. I think that is what I was told.

Q: Like a air sot coffee.

A: Yes, something brown. (laughs). And, uh, hunger was indescribable. It never ended. And your body will adjust to the emptiness. And, eventually, you don’t feel it anymore.

Q: You had been hungry since you were a little child?

A: Absolutely. So, we were working in this factory. That was very strenuous, and long hours – 14 hours. And, uh, I became ill with a, with an inflamed gall bladder, somehow. There was a lady doctor from Czechoslovakia and there was a woman doctor from Russia. And they, they.

Q: They were prisoners also?

A: Yes. They were assigned to take care of things. Medical things. And, uh, they examined me. And she pressed down and it was very painful. And, uh, but, um, you were hoping to be allowed to go to the sick bay. That wasn’t so easy, unless you were running a fever. And I never did. What I did have was a lot of pain. And, uh, the girls around me, now by that time I had met a Polish girl who was very compassionate. She was very, very sweet and another girl, a German girl, we were working together at one table. And we had a foreman, a Polish man, he was also very nice and very friendly. And he would, he would assure us that our things would be over soon. And, the war was on, needless to say. We could hear.

Q: You could hear the bombings?

A: We could hear the bombings and one night when the air raid, what do they call it?

Q: The air raid.

A: Yes, the air raid, when that was sounding, the SS would lock us up in the factories, and they would go to the shelters. We would be locked up in this factory and the bombs would be coming all over us, but the factory was never bombed. Um, you see, what we understand and were told later that the army was told just where factories with prisoners were located – that they should not bomb it.

Q: Isn’t that amazing that they should do that?

A: That took place most of the time, and what I heard later on. And, uh, but it was so powerful. There was, it was near Lipzig. It was Freiburg, near Lipzig. And Lipzig was a place that they wanted to hit hard.

Q: Lipzig was an important industrial town.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: I’d like to ask you a question about your experiences. You said people wanted to get sent to the hospital? Were there medications available? If someone needed surgery, was there a way to do it?

A: Yes. I think surgery was performed, but, uh, I don’t remember where it was done. Yes, surgery was performed, but, uh, I overheard a conversation between a Slavic women that experiments were conducted.

Q: Uh, uh.

A: But that was still in Auschwitz. These experiments were being conducted in Auschwitz, but they were talking about them later on in Dach(?). Maybe one or two of these young women had been the victims of the experiments.

Q: There were a lot of sexual experiments done on women. And children.

A: Yes, especially sterilization.

Q: Uh, hum.

A: So, um, oh, yeah, where was I now? We were working, oh, yes, we were working. I was very sick and it was very painful, but I was not sick enough to go to the sick bay. And one afternoon I simply walked up to the, to the Oberstunker(?)

Q: The overseer?

A: Yes, in uniform.

Q: Uh, huh.

A: He, he was, had mild manners and was soft spoken, he would just talk to us in a firm, not a cold manner. He would tell us where to line up for roll calls, we were told to, I don’t know exactly what we were told. But we were always told something. At the roll call. I would walk up to him one afternoon. I used to be very shy. Never even thinking of doing anything like that. Could I be sent to the sick bay, because I am very sick and in great pain? And he said, go back to work. He didn’t want to shout, he, he made no, he, just said go back to work. I had no chance to be privileged to go to the sick bay. And I was suffering a lot of pain. And one day a girl said your eyes are all yellow. Your all yellow. It evidently must have been the jaundice.

Q: Jaundice?

A: Yes, resulting from the gall bladder.

Q: uh, hum.

A: And I couldn’t, when I heard of food, I even got sicker. It was unbearable. I was, it was really affecting me. I couldn’t eat anything at all. And, the foreman, he tried to be nice. He brought me a little roll one morning. And I don’t think I could eat it.

Q: You must have been pitifully thin? With all this deprivation.

A: Yes, I was. We were all eighty pounders, I think. But, uh, I don’t know.

Q: Do you remember when you heard the war had ended?

A: Oh, it hadn’t ended yet.

Q: No, but when it ended do you remember what it was like for you?

A: Oh, yes. I do. I do. Now we were working, and it was the cold of winter, and things were getting rough with the cold. I mean we had nothing on our legs, and we were given little pieces of paper for the entire week to go to the bathroom. To be used.

Q: Toilet paper?

A: It wasn’t toilet paper.

Q: Just any?

A: It was from magazines, from newspapers. I was so cold and I just couldn’t tolerate it. I used to, to cover my legs. Now, the way we did it. The first thing when we got hold of a blanket. This had started in Auschwitz. We would unravel the entire fringe part.

Q: The border.

A: The outside. The border. (laughs). It was the first thing the girls did. To get a little thread to make that available for whatever it was needed for. I would use a little bit to wind the paper around my legs. I was so cold. It was unbearable. And the windows were open in the factory. And we would stand there all day, and I had to finish a part called the, the rudder. The rudder of the airplane. I had to, I used a pressure hammer. An air pressure hammer to go around the edges. I don’t know what it is called.

Q: To fasten the edges together?

A: Yes. There is a term for it.

Q: Welding?

A: Welding. It is probably a type of welding. Yes, yes. With a pressure hammer. It would, it would press this little part you would put in the hole.

Q: Rivet?

A: Rivet? Right. And into a flat position. It would hold it together. This is what I had to do all day. And, uh, the food was still scarce. And sleep was impossible due to the bed bugs. It was interrupted, and, uh, we had to work in shifts. And the day shift wasn’t too bad. But the shift that required you to get up at midnight was really a bit much to take. But you get used to it.

Q: They had this in this country during the war, they called it the swing shift.

A: Yes, you get used to many things. So, we worked there and, around the middle of April I remember a girl, one of the girls, had overheard from her foreman. He must have told her Roosevelt had died. That was in the middle of April?

Q: That’s right.

A: I remember that day when what I didn’t know much about America. I didn’t know much about politics. And, um, one, uh, lady friend, that I was very close to. She always told me, she always told to several of us, there will be an invasion and, things will finally end. She must have known something. But, uh, it was April, and things for the Germans were getting desperate. And that was almost…

Q: Could you tell that from the way they behaved or from the intensity of the bombing?

A: Yes, yes. For one thing that we were told that we were going to leave this factory, and moving on. Where to I don’t know. We were put into this cattle train again. For the next ten or fourteen days, I don’t recall. It was a long time. And, it was an open train. Open. And it was.

Q: Open on the sides or open on the top?

A: On the top. By then it was spring. It was April and we traveling, I don’t know we were crisscrossing throughout Czechoslovakia again. I don’t know. They were trying to get us out of that area probably. I don’t know. We were never told anything. (laughs). But we were finally arriving after all these days in Malthausen.

Q: Malthausen?

A: Malthausen. In Austria.

Q: Which was in Austria?

A: Yes. In Austria. That was a very large extermination camp again. I didn’t know much about Malthausen. It was towards the end of April. And, uh, we were, I mean our condition was so poor. We were probably not all realizing what was going on.

Q: You were probably more dead than alive?

A: No, we were taken down somewhere into a lower area. It was 180 steps down. Into an area that was used originally to slaughter cattle, I think. Because it had something like, it was a large area with faucets, water faucets, and it was made of stone, and it was I don’t recall, I only remember their taking us into this large room and we were lying down on the floor and that’s where we were lying until May 5th. No food whatsoever. I don’t recall any food, I don’t even recall going to the bathroom.

Q: Well, you wouldn’t have to if you had had no food.

A: No, we were laying on that floor, I remember that. I remember one girl coming with some potato peel. She was chewing on it. And the next girl was chewing. So we now have been without food for quite some time. It was May 1st, or? Then one morning, it would have been May 5th we were hearing some voices, some happy voices, like we had seen the white flag, or something, we are all free. The war is over and we are all free. So we were free, but we were laying on this floor and we didn’t know how to really get up.

Q: Down 180 steps you said?

A: Yeah. And now up the 180 steps because there was nothing around for us to, to support us in any way.

Q: And for days and days you had not seen fresh air or daylight. Or had food?

A: Daylight, yes. There was daylight, but we were just on the floor, and we had to try and get up. We were told the war is over and we were free and we were getting ready to. I don’t know if we showed any emotion really. From speaking for myself, I don’t remember anything. We were looking for some clothes. There was…I remember a pile of clothes and I found a…uh…English tweed coat with a KL painted on the back. Well, I got hold of this coat. I wanted to be sure I have something.

Q: What would KL have meant?

A: Koncentration Lager.

Q: Ah!

A: Lager.

Q: Actually painted on the fabric?

A: Yah. Yes. Well, I got hold of this and we were starting up those steps and when we arrived up there, we were met by some French – speaking people. I don’t know…at least with a French accent…or…I don’t recall much of that…

Q: Even though you were in Austria?

A: We were still lingering. We didn’t know what to do next. But then we were finally…we saw, we saw the first…oh yes. I remember one thing very vividly. On the outside, we saw a group of Americans. American soldiers marching through the camp. And, I saw the first black person, really…in my whole life.

Q: In your whole life?

A: Yes. I didn’t realize much what it meant, but I remember that. And, obviously, we were liberated by Americans, and followed 24 hours later by Russians. In the same area, in the same camp. They had met right there in Malthausen. And, we were then…we remained, and we

Q: Did you have any particular feeling, one way or the other, about being in the control of the Americans, or in control of the Russians? Did you have any preference? At that time?

A: No, I think we were…we were conversing with the Americans. I think the Russians were not that much around.

Q: Did you speak English at that time?

A: No. No.

Q: How did you converse with them?

A: I don’t know. I probably…must have picked up a few words.

Q: Did they make food available to you?

A: Yes. Well, they tried. There wasn’t much, really. I remember only some cheese that was full of bugs…full of worms. It was…but, we had to have something…then, you know…when we were…then there was a Committee. A Committee had been created. I have I.D. from this camp, that tells them that I was liberated and the Committee had started to look after our repatriation.

Q: Who made up the Committee? Jewish people?

A: I don’t remember.

Q: O. K. Go ahead.

A: I think one of the stamps tells me it was Sergeant Levy. So, he, most probably was Jewish. But the other man was German. There were Germans in the camp too. And, we…they made preparation…they were asking us where we want to go, and I couldn’t decide anything at all. I had been told, in the meantime, that my mother…that transport had been gassed immediately, and, I…

Q: When did you learn that? While you were still in Auschwitz?

A: Yes, during that last…during the month that we were traveling, and all, being there, and, I could not decide what to do, and one of the girls that I became acquainted with only shortly, and she said, “Why don’t you come with me to Hamburg?” And, that was then my decision to go with her. Because, I was not what you call an independent person. I was in need of having someone tell me what to do.

Q: Well besides that, I can see, given your situation, it would have been hard to know where to go because the places that had been home were no longer there for you.

A: Yah. Yah. I was told that my city – my place of birth – was destroyed at least 80% and I had no desire, really, to go into such a situation. Or, by myself, at least. There was no other person from that same area. So, I decided to go with her, and it took many weeks for us to get ready and leave. We were…I don’t know…we were together with some other people, who were going in the same direction, and they suggested, “Why don’t we all stick together and we’ll just hitchhike to Hamburg from Austria.” Which we did. It took a long time and we arrived in Hamburg in…

Q: Why would you have hitchhiked? Did no one arrange for you to go home?

A: No. Very difficult. We went into Linz, Austria first and stayed there maybe, I don’t know where we were staying…we were all dumped out to places, and we must have been staying in one of those places. I remember always remaining structures that were completely demolished, and we were…Oh, yah, that night, we came into an area, into the Russian zone, and we were a little bit, I don’t know why we felt this way, but we felt that they are a little more aggressive, and, I don’t know, but we felt…at least I did…I have to speak for myself…I don’t know…I didn’t know much about the Russians, but I heard they are a little bit on the wild side, and, uh, but they were…we met a very friendly group. We met a general – a Russian general and I became acquainted with a Russian soldier. He was a student from Moscow. He started to talk to me.

Q: How did you get food during this time? After you left the camp?

A: I don’t know. Now, this group…would go to a…I don’t know how they did this. They would go to a certain place where people were assigned to hand out stamps or permission to receive some nourishment.

Q: Like ration stamps?

A: Yes. Something like that. I have still the dates to prove it on that. It is like a card. Like a permission that you will seek, and that you will be treated fairly wherever you go from here on. Because I was a prisoner of that camp, and so …so, we managed to gradually…we slept in farms. We were traveling by train, partially. We were walking a lot, and our feet were…my feet were so swollen I couldn’t get any shoes on. And, we were eventually arriving in Hamburg. This girl and I. she knew where to go. We went to the Jewish Community Center and ask for assistance, which they gave us. They gave us some money. They gave us a place to…Oh, no. She knew a family, because she was married, and her husband had not returned so far, and she took me there. We stayed with that family and she went to the hospital. She had broken her wrist during the war…during her stay in that camp, and it had not properly healed, so she decided to go to the hospital and have that corrected. During that time, I was all by myself, not too independent, but I managed. I…I uh, looked for a job. That I remember. I looked for a job, but it didn’t work out. It was nothing much to speak of. Somebody said, “Why don’t you go to this DP camp. There is one on the outskirts of Hamburg, and you will meet some people – people, you know, that you will have something in common because they are all DPs”

Q: Displaced persons?

A: Displaced persons. So, I did. And that…I think it was a Wednesday afternoon…I did arrive there and I was walking around when I met somebody I had previously met, and he introduced me to my future husband. This is where I met my husband.

Q: Oh.

A: That was…it was still ’45. It was November…it was November or so, ’45.

Q: So quite a few months had elapsed from the time of the end of the war in May until November?

A: Yes. It tool all that time to repatriate. To return wherever a person wanted to go.

Q; And, as I recall, when I talked to your husband, he said you were unable to emigrate for another four years?

A: Uh, hum. Yes. It…

Q: Now, before when we talked, before we started taping, you and your husband were saying that there were people that wanted at that point to be identified as Jews because you had to prove some things. Would you repeat that again?

A: I don’t remember that. I don’t recall anything about this.

Q: Do you want to come and tell us about this, Mr. Treitel? You mean that there were people that tried to appear as Jews? Do you know any specifics?

[male voice: Yes, I have it in writing. Later, later…]

Q: You said earlier there were two things you had to prove. You had to prove you were Jewish…

[male voice: From the…after the liberation, I had to prove that I am Jewish while we got from the American Joint rations and religious things that came over there, so I had to prove that I am Jewish. How can they know I am not Jewish. And, later, when we…before we emigrate to the United States, we had to prove that we are…that during the Nazi time, that we are not…no connection with any Nazi]

Q: Activities?

A: Yah.

Q: O.K. But you also started to tell us how people that weren’t Jewish wanted to be known as Jews.

A: Oh, sure. Yah, sure. I know of Klaus Meyerbourg. Oh, oh, that was before my time. [male voice: Klaus Meyerbourg and Gentile. Some…don’t forget. There were some people in camp, German. They were gangsters. Before. They caught them before.] They were criminals. They were criminals.

Q: Not only were they Germans, but they were German criminals. You certainly didn’t want to be identified with them.

[male voice: We don’t want nothing. German criminals. Then they went on Democrats now for sure. Then they went to Catholics.] They went…they had …[male voice: they had in a church…by the Catholics in the church was sitting the Gestapo in the front. They were sitting there, the Gestapo, there what (words missing in original transcript) had the farzam this…in the church…like by the Jews, they say the Lord is the…]

Q: The Savior?

[male voice: Yah, and they hear more about that they tell people about Hitler, about…] That we had many political prisoners. In Malthausen [Mr. & Mrs. Neimler] Huh? […was sitting in Zachsenhausen. He died, I think…let’s see…he was a Lutheran…a very, very know person – a Lutheran church] church [church and a minister…very, very well known. He was sitting the whole time there. He let them…and they killed a lot…] There were Germans in the prison, too. [I have to say, after the war the American, the English, the Russian, which were fighting during the war, they were very good to us. The people what…the (words missing in original transcript) came after (words missing in original transcript) but no more in the war…they were no good. They were Russian, English or American.]

Q: Why do you think that was? Why did that change?

[male voice: Why that changed? They had a feeling what they went through, what we went through. But the other ones. They took only advantage to get…uh…the English collected carpetings…expensive carpetings, tried to get it to England for themselves, and others…] they were very greedy. They were acting really greedy. [The Russian…the Russian what the liberation were very good. You told us from buying Russian. But when we were in Hamburg, I went to High Holiday, I don’t know whether Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, we went to synagogue. The door opened and a big, tall officer came in, a Russian Jew], to the temple [in the temple,] to worship.

Q: Was there any one thing in all of these experiences that you have told us about that stands out in your mind?

A: Well, it would have to be the moment I was separated from my mother. That already…you were already in a certain state of not realizing what was happening…

Q: Almost being numb.

A: Yah, yah. Numbness is really the word. From that time on, I would say, that God did not exist and, as I said before, I was never thinking of tomorrow. I don’t recall.

Q: I was also going to ask you – was there one thing to which you attributed to your survival? Was it your not thinking ahead and just taking everything one day at a time?

A: No, I don’t know if it was in my power to make that possible. It just…I would say it just happened. It is coincidental. When…anybody who survived is coincidental.

Q: You must have seen a lot of bigger, stronger people than yourself who did not survive.

A: Yah. I know of stronger people who did not survive. They could…what I heard, they could not tolerate this sudden change at all. They would simply…completely collapse and give up the moment they arrived in the camps. This is what I heard. Yah. [male voice: we had to eat food out of brown dish, a fork, a knife or a spoon, and a weapon.]

Q: A weapon?

[male voice” Yah]

Q: But you didn’t.

[male voice: And they know they had sometimes in the top court – in winter, we had a right top court, on the side – we had a saw, a saw blade, and they make a knife and they caught somebody making…So, what I want to say, we had to drink first what you call the soup…]

Q: Yes, this very watery soup.

[male voice: like water, yah, and the rest, and they got, they gobbled it out with the fingers, and there were people, they couldn’t make it. They died in bed already. I can…I remember too…] for sanitary reasons, you just…not everybody could do this.

Q: So, by the time you left Hamburg, you and your husband were already married then?

A: Yah, we married in ’47.

Q: And you came to this country in…what year?

A: ’49.

Q: And you went first to New York?

A: Yah. We arrived in New York and we were…my…I had one aunt living in New York. She met us at the arrival.

Q: You came on a ship?

A: Yes, she came to meet us. It took a very long time for us to disembark. Because it was Saturday. It is another thing that is disturbing. It was Saturday, and some of the more religious Jews did not want to get off the ship. They had to…we had to linger on. I think we arrived at 8 o’clock in the morning…around…it was still early. And we were still on ship by 1 o’clock. By 2 o’clock were finally able to get off, and we were met by reporters, and they interviewed me and I…[male voice: I want to tell you something. They were very careful when we came. They took me out. By me, it was standing that I was Polish. I was never Polish. I was always…they took me in a room and asked me if I know, in Poland, the airports, etc. for the government. But I understood. But I want to say, with us they were very careful. And the other Nazis, they could come in here, and they say they were never Nazis, and, here, in St. Petersburg, are living a lot of people what were Nazis, not only Nazis, that is not bad, you know, but, when somebody is a Nazi and has nothing done, then you cannot blame them.] Well, I still…]

Q: It’s ironic and it’s not fair, but there were a lot of things like that.

[male voice; I had a soldier, a Jewish soldier, an American…]

Q: You have a Jewish what?

[male voice; a Jewish soldier] soldier? [male voice: Yah, a soldier, an American. Was near my billet…I’ll never forget. He was very good. He brought us bread that was laying outside, and one day, he came and said, “Get out here, the Russians come here and the Americans or the Russians. For us, was no difference what it is.]

Q: Well, I appreciate your sharing all this with us, and I look at you and I see that you are composed and you have a right to be proud of just being a person that survived a terrible ordeal.

A: Very proud Americans. And very grateful. Very grateful to be here, and in spite of everything we hope for the best.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

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