LIEBMANN, Hanna
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Interviewed on March 28, 1992
Two audiocassettes

Abstract

Hanna Liebmann was born Hannah Hirsh in Karlsruhe, Germany on November 28, 1924. Her father Max, a successful photographer, died within 12 weeks after her birth. Hanna, her older brother, and mother lived in a very comfortable home. Hanna went to public school, where Jews were harassed. In 1936, she was forced to transfer to the Jewish school which had opened in September, and was shared with mentally retarded students. On the day of Kristallnacht, the showcases in Hanna's home were smashed, all Jewish men were arrested, and the conservative synagogue was burned. Hanna was sent to a boarding school near Hanover where she stayed until August 1940 when her mother made her return after the mother's arm became so inflamed that she couldn't move it. Hanna's brother had moved to America. On October 22, 1940, 12 men arrested Hanna, aged 16, her mother, three aunts, and 91-and-a-half year-old grandmother at the home they shared. They were on one of nine trains that took three days to arrive in Oloron Sainte-Marie. At Oloron Sainte-Marie, Hanna and her family were sent to the Gurs camp. The camp had mud knee-deep, raging dysentery, but a "tremendous cultural life" including chamber music and cabaret. Hanna worked in the camp's office where she met her future husband. Swiss Red Cross provided some food. A social worker asked Hanna's mother to allow her to go to the village Le Chambon-sur-Lignon where young people were helped to survive. After about 11 months in Gurs, Hanna left in September 1941 for Le Chambon. When Germans came to Le Chambon, Hanna was hidden by various people, including farmers who built a hiding place in woodpiles. In February 1943, she made her way alone to Switzerland. She contacted an aunt, and lived with the family until late December 1944. Hanna ran away because the family could not understand what she had been through, and Hanna came close to a nervous breakdown. She made her way to Geneva where she reconnected with her future husband, and worked as a maid. They had a daughter, and remained in Switzerland until 1948 when the Swiss declined to let them stay. They immigrated to the United States in 1948. Also after the war, Hanna's two surviving aunts immigrated to Cuba, and then to the United States. Five family members survived, including two cousins who were deported from Prague to Theresienstadt, then Auschwitz, and labor camps. Fourteen family members died. She concluded, "in spite of it all, life has been good to us."

Tape I, Side A

Anthony: Today is March 28, 1992. My name is Anthony Di Iorio and I am at the home of Mrs. Hanna Liebmann, Bayside, New York. I am here to interview her about her experiences and those of her family during the Holocaust. Good evening.

Hanna: Good evening, Tony. I am Hanna Liebmann. I was born on November 28, 1924 in Karlsruhe, Germany as the second child of Max and Ella Hirsh nee Traub. I had an older brother. My father died within 12 weeks after my birth which left my mother a widow. She raised us very well. My father was in business, he was a photographer. He started his business in 1901. He was then 21 years old with this younger brother who was twenty and not yet of age and couldn't put his signature on any business papers. Within a year my father had acquired a title as *hufphotograph*, grand-duke of Baden and, of course, subsequently to other small courts and what have-you. At the time he opened his business in 1901, he was actually despised by the rest of the Jewish population in Karlsruhe for going into such a profession because no Jew had ever done that before. A year later, when he had become known and had made his reputation, he was the darling of the town. It’s true.

Anthony: Jewish and non-Jewish?

Hanna: Right. So…

Anthony: He was the Grand-Duke of Court.

Hanna: Grand-Duke of Court, right. In any case, we grew up in Germany in a very comfortable home. It is true that we grew up without a father; our mother was a very good mother. She continued to run the business and did so till 1938, December 31 when we had to give up the business due to the laws in Germany. I started school, I believe, in 1930, I'm not quite sure of this anymore. I went to public school in Germany till 1936. I did have, in public school, gentile girlfriends, very good gentile girlfriends. But after 1935, I did not dare being friends with them because it would have been too dangerous for their parents who were in business and probably would have had to bear the consequences of their children having a Jewish girlfriend.

Anthony: Did you leave school in '36?

Hanna: I left school in '36 in order to enter Jewish school. All Jewish children whose fathers were not World War I veterans and front-line service had to enter Jewish schools.

Anthony: So you had to leave the public schools?

Hanna: We had to leave the public school and enter Jewish school.

Anthony: This would be the fall of '36?

Hanna: The fall of '36, yes. It so happens the school year actually starts in Europe, at that time, started at Easter time. But we had--the Jewish school was opened in September of 1936.

Anthony: This was a new Jewish school or an older one?

Hanna: No, it was brand new. It had to be created. We did not have in Karlsruhe a private Jewish school like there was in Frankfurt, the Philanthropin. We had to go to this school, we had no choice. We had wonderful Jewish teachers. We were housed in a school building, a public school building that was set aside for the mentally retarded. We shared this school building with them. However, we were not allowed to share with them, the courtyard. They had to stay on one side and we had to stay on the other side of the courtyard during recess. School was okay, we were no longer exposed to the harassment that we had endured in public school. So this part was okay. We come to November '38, the Kristallnacht. In the morning I went to school like any other day. On my way to the school, I saw the fire engines standing in front of a building where the orthodox Jewish community was housed. Now it was very strange; there was a building in front, you went through a courtyard and then came the synagogue. The fire engines were standing there and I didn't see any fire. I didn't see anything. When I came to school, I said very loudly to my friends, you know the fire engines are standing in front of that synagogue. They all looked at me and said, don't you know what happened? I said, no, what's going on? And here were some of the girls in tears because their fathers had been arrested. Being that there was no male in our house, obviously they didn't come to arrest anybody. What they did while I was away in school, is that they smashed all our showcases. I think they kept us in school for about two hours because again the male teachers were absent--they had been arrested. There were some female teachers and they made us write some silly composition. Around ten o'clock, they let us go home. When I came home and approached the house we lived in, I saw my mother in the street with a broom sweeping up the glass from all of the showcases. I had never seen my mother sweep the street. Around my mother, were a lot of people screaming and whistling and making fun of her. Our employee, which we had at that time, still in the business, a very decent person; his name was Josef Kohlmann, he's still alive, wanted to sweep the street for my mother. She would not let him because she was afraid he would be killed in the process or at least harmed, let's put it that way. The next thing I knew, I heard that the conservative synagogue also had been put on fire. I think Kristallnacht was on a Thursday because I realized all of a sudden that on Friday night, we would not be going to synagogue for services. It wasn't that I was so religious but I did belong to the choir. This was a children's choir and so that was the big thing to go there, not for services but a choir. What can I tell you? It was a horrible thing. The men were arrested. We heard all sorts of things that had been happening. My aunts' business was somehow spared. They had no showcases, there were no men in the household and there was a very peculiar situation in the house where my aunts lived. Downstairs was a business that dealt in wallpapers and things like that.

Anthony: Which aunt was this?

Hanna: My aunts who had the dressmaking business.

Anthony: These were the ---?

Hanna: Traubs.

Anthony: Two aunts.

Hanna: Three, actually. Their apartment was on the second floor and the business was on the third. But the son of these people who owned the house and the business had been a man who went to France very early in 1933. They were not Jewish. Every so often he would come home with his car, with the French license plate and drive this car into the entrance of the house. It was sort of built like the French houses where there's a big door to go in and then there's an entrance--okay. You could just drive the car in. He would place it in such a way that you could not get to the staircase. So nobody could go up. They see-the Nazis saw a car with a foreign license plate, they would turn around.

Anthony: They left it alone?

Hanna: They left it alone. So they were spared. He did the same thing on the first of April, 1933. It never dawned on us till later on what this was really all about. What the man actually did. Much, much later--only a couple of years ago I found out what it really was all about. This man had smuggled Jews and others from Germany to France. He would come at night with his car with the French license plate, take the people to France with his parents' passports, German passports, passed the border into France at night and take the people over. He did this apparently on quite a regular basis. So he made it his business to be there on the 1st of April of 1933 so my aunts were very nicely protected. He was there again on the tenth of November when the Kristallnacht happened. So at least they were protected. This was 1938. School became a sometime affair for quite a few months. We would have maybe school three times a week for two hours. What we would have was English, German and arithmetic. That was about all that could be taught at the time. It lasted probably two, three months before all the male teachers were back and school started to fall back into place. At this point so many of the young people had left that we were moved out of the building where the retarded children were to entirely a building belonging to the Jewish community next to the burned-out synagogue. School took place there. Makeshift, as more children left, the classes became smaller. They were being combined so two grades were put together. We learned anyway somehow. and I think sometimes better than the other public me. I had an eighth grade education and since I could not take an apprenticeship, there was nothing for me to do. She sent me to a boarding school, not a fancy boarding school, near Hanover in the north of Germany. This was a school that was originally built to teach horticulture. A Jewish institution that also taught housekeeping, or homemaking and all that sort of thing. So this was a solution for a few months and I was there, I think, from March or April, 1940 till August of 1940 when my mother made me come back because she didn't feel well. She had some sort of an inflammation in her arm, she couldn't move her arm. There were after all, my grandmother to be taken care of and she was then 91.

Anthony: She was living with your mother?

Hanna: She was living with us. She moved into our house after my brother left for America. My

aunts, my three aunts, the sisters of my mother moved in with us because not having a business any more, you had to conserve funds. One rent was enough. Besides that, if you had a large apartment and room to spare, the Jewish families had to move together. So this was our solution that the whole family lived in one place. My mother made me come back in August of 1940, in a way lucky for me because we were deported on October 22, 1940. Had I been still in that school, my way would have been to Theresienstadt and probably later on to Auschwitz or God knows where. I don't think I would be sitting here in Bayside today. We got deported to Gurs, six women, we were arrested this morning. The following thing happened. My mother went out very early around 8 o'clock to do some shopping. She came back a very short time later and said she met a man in the street, a Jewish fellow she knew -- who was, by the way, a very distant relative -- who told her that we would be arrested and deported this very day. My mother said you must be crazy. She would not believe it. On second thought, she went to the Jewish community, to the offices, the administration of the Jewish community and she found that it was locked. Then she realized that the man was right. She came home and she told all of us. The next thing she did was to tell me to take various items, very beautiful bohemian crystal stuff that she had promised to a friend who was gentile, that if we ever left, she would give it to her as a present. She said to me, take these things and bring it to her. The name of the lady was Erika Fite. Her husband was a lawyer and they were good friends of ours. When I came there to drop off the stuff, she said to me, my husband said, you will be deported to the south of France. I came home, I told my mother. We had no idea how he knew but he knew. Again, of course, you don't believe it.

Anthony: So it wasn't a believable--?

Hanna: It was not a believable thing to us! Right? Like my husband told you. It wasn't believable, right? So we packed the best we could. I packed for my grandmother; my mother packed for herself and myself; my aunts packed for themselves more or less. Here we are six women, age 16 to 91 1/2. There were twelve men arresting them! Six defenseless women, 12 men, okay. Now my grandmother, of course, could not walk to wherever people were being sent. That was clear. She was totally confused why she was--why was she thrown out of her place. What was happening, where were we going? She couldn't comprehend it. She was not senile, incidentally. She just could not understand what was happening. After all, her husband had been in the war, her children were in the war, why was this happening to her? Why was this happening to all of us? So we had to sign before we left the apartment, we had to sign papers turning all belongings over to the German Reich. We had to evaluate how much the apartment was worth. My mother did and she signed. My aunt, Helena Goldstein, she did not want to sign. She just did not want to sign. So the Gestapo man told her very simply, look, unless you sign, we will send you away from Platform Six on the railway station. Platform Six meant the trains going to Munich and Dachau. So she signed very quickly. Also we realized that what we had been told, south of France, could maybe be correct. We are not going to Dachau, that was sure.

Anthony: And it might not be as bad as Dachau. Dachau, you heard about--?

Hanna: Exactly, exactly.

Anthony: South of France, you didn't know of any camps there?

Hanna: We didn't know of any camps. We knew nothing at all. Not anything. Since my grandmother couldn't walk, they brought around a police car, but an open--like an open truck where they would move maybe 30, 40 policemen at a time for riot control, or whatever. It was an open car with benches. Now you try to get a 91-year-old woman up on that truck. There are no steps going up. There are only little foot things on the side that flip down. I tried desperately to get my grandmother up, tried to push her up. She had nothing to hold on to. There were people standing, watching this scene of me trying to get this old woman up on this thing. Finally one of the men who had arrested us, put her up there. So then it was running back and helping the others bring down the suitcases and all of that. And that's the way we were transported to the railway station. What they used at the railway station was an unused entrance. This was originally the entrance only being used for the royalty. They had a special entrance at the railroad station. This is where we were assembled. It didn't take my mother very long to see that certain things were being filmed. Because of that, there was a man standing there. He was a dentist and the tears were rolling down his cheeks. He was totally out of it. My mother went over to him and said, you know, we're being filmed. If you don't stop crying, I'm going to crack you one. She meant it because she was embarrassed that he would do that and show the Germans, you know, that he was so upset. He stopped. We were loaded in the train, probably sometime in the afternoon. I don't think that in the railroad car where I was--was my family there was any light. We were in the dark during the night. I don't know if the other cars had light but ours certainly didn't. The first stop that I remember making was in Mauthausen, and we were given something to eat. Also our money, the 100 marks that we were allowed to take along other than the luggage we could carry, was changed to 2,000 French francs. We were on that train till the 25th of October and we arrived in Oloron Sainte-Marie. On our train was the only person that escaped from any of the nine trains that made their way down to the south of France. At one time, the train had to stop and I believe it was to take on water for the engine. It was already in the French unoccupied zone and the Germans were gone. We managed, some managed--people went out of the train to get water to drink. I wanted to get out of the train to get water. My mother wouldn't let me because she was afraid the train would move away and I wouldn't make it back. I looked out the window and there I saw this woman running away, up the embankment on the side of the railroad station, was a very little railroad station. Someone, in fact it was a man by the name of Hugo Stein, a lawyer, threw the luggage out the window. This woman really and truly made it. She had relatives in the area; she knew exactly where she was. She made it, she was never arrested. She made her way to America where she had children. Unfortunately, her son must be mentally ill because he killed his mother about, I would say, twenty-five years ago. He murdered her. The poor woman was, by the way, a widow so it was hard. When we arrived in Oloron Sainte-Marie, it rained like you cannot believe. It was just like if you are standing under a huge shower. We were off-loaded but I would like to interject here, that on the train, my grandmother became totally confused. She did not know where she was, what it was. She was totally confused. There was another man with us in the same car. He also, very old, he also became confused. It was somehow possible and I don't remember how, to call the one doctor that was on the train, the one doctor who was still permitted to practice. He came and he took a look at the situation and he gave me a small handful of sleeping pills to give to my grandmother. I got them down into her. Unfortunately, she survived.

Anthony: Survived?

Hanna: She survived the handful of sleeping pills.

Anthony: So what was your intent in giving her these pills?

Hanna: The intent of the doctor was to put her out. To really finish it right there and then. It didn't work. Maybe it wasn't enough, maybe she was just too strong. I don't know. But it was a hard thing to do, to put this many sleeping pills into someone, knowing what it will do.

Anthony: Whose idea was it, the doctor's?

Hanna: The doctor's, entirely the doctor's. He was right. I don't--the man was right. When we arrived at Oloron Sainte-Marie, she and the other old--the other man--the old man, a Mr. Wital, were removed from the train, separately. My mother at the time said that she would want to go with her mother-in-law and she was not allowed to go. We never knew where she was taken. We were about ten days to two weeks in the camp before we found out that she had been brought back to the camp. She was perfectly normal. She recognized us, she knew her surroundings. She couldn't understand them but she knew. I mean, who can understand at that age, right? She was in a different block. She was not in our block, she was in a different block. Except they had a barracks over there that was set up for old people and they had some sort of beds for them. She was better off there than being with us on the floor. We had to leave her over there and my mother went to see her as much as possible. She lived till January 7, 1941. At that time, she just gave out.

Anthony: Passed away?

Hanna: She passed away. I supposed that she must have gotten pneumonia or whatever from lying there, you know. You have old people lying down a lot, this is the usual story. Not enough food and she was--she had a very healthy appetite, my grandmother. She could outdo a teenager very easily. She could.

Anthony: The time she died, was she sharing her barracks with anybody in the family?

Hanna: No, no. But my mother went over there as much as possible. There were people taking care of these old people. That was the good part about it, that there were people helping the elderly there.

Anthony: From the camp, or--?

Hanna: People that were, no--people from the camp. All of these things were left to the people in the camp, the inmates. The inmates basically ran the camp. Every block had its own administration. Surely the administration of the block was responsible to headquarters, if you wish, but on a daily basis, it was the people in the camp, the interned people that were running it. My grandmother passed away in January, my mother's oldest sister died in February. She was, in any case, a very sick person, I had no idea, at the time we were deported. Again it was hunger, cold, wet, what-have-you that she

just could not survive. She was also nearly blind from diabetes. Life in the camp--the biggest problem was mud because it rained all the time. You were ankle deep of earth in the mud. It was a big problem especially with the old people. They could not extricate themselves many times when they fell. It rained constantly during the winter, or almost all the time. Water was three times a day for two hours each. In the beginning we had to wash ourselves outdoors. The men always had to--the women eventually had a barracks where there was just, you know, a possibility to get washed and what have you. But the men forever had to wash themselves outdoors, no matter what the weather was or whatever. By the way, in plain sight of the main road of the camp, so that when people walked by, they could see everybody standing there. It was before nude beach. It was very, very tough. I eventually worked in the office of the block and this is how I got to know my future husband who came to see his mother who worked in the office. She worked there mainly because she spoke fluent French and people who could speak French were needed in order to deal with the administration. So I worked in this office and this is how I met my husband. Should we go and tell the rest of the story? So, one day we got supplementary food from the Swiss Red Cross. They had established a barracks there and the Red Cross was in charge of it and food was given to the young people, the children, the young people and to the adults that were ailing or so down, so malnourished that they really could barely walk. We had to go every morning and have our food right there. We could not take anything out of there to prevent black market, giving it to the family, what have you. It was a great help, a great help that we got this extra food. Eventually a social worker came around and asked my mother whether she would let me go to a village in France, Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon where there were people who wanted to help young people to survive, to get out of the camps. My mother asked me and I said yes. Then we didn't hear for many weeks. I would like to mention that there was a tremendous cultural life in Gurs. There was chamber music, there was an orchestra. There were cabaret performances, lectures. Eventually a school for the young children was established and the adults somehow formed some classes for English still hoping that people will make it to an English-speaking country, namely America. There were French lessons for the children and I did not participate in spite of the fact that my then boyfriend told me that I have to learn French. Never listened.

Anthony: Was your mother actively involved in these activities?

Hanna: My mother was involved in the English lessons, yes. She did not do anything musically, no.

Anthony: Your aunts?

Hanna: My aunts, the two remaining aunts after--no, no. They were also busy making maybe out of some old something, maybe a blouse or a skirt or something. Because this was really their background so if they got hold of anything that could be sewn together, they would do it.

Anthony: How much time elapsed before your mother found out about your boyfriend?

Hanna: Oh, no time at all. She knew. There was no problem there.

Anthony: She was happy?

Hanna: She didn't object, she didn't say anything.

Anthony: She thought he was nice young man?

Hanna: She probably thought it was a perfectly normal thing. After all I was sixteen years old and he was nineteen. No, there was never any problem there. There was once a problem when a lady was mentioning to someone else in the latrine that, and my mother was in one of the stalls of this latrine at this particular moment when the woman said, it's a terrible thing. This Hannah is pregnant from this fellow she's going with. Of course, it wasn't true. My mother heard it and my mother told me about it. This lady was busy with social work and God-knows-what and she liked to ask me to do things for her, to run an errand or to take care of this or that in the office. After I heard, my mother told me that when she approached me I said, well I guess from today on you're going to do it yourself. I'm not going to run for you anymore. This story had a 'very funny ending in that this woman also went to Cuba, just like my two surviving aunts. After our daughter was born in 1946, I wrote to my aunts that the baby this particular lady had talked into my belly back in 1941 has now been born. A long pregnancy from '41 to '46, better than an elephant. If I have a daughter and she had a daughter who was far away and I don't know what my daughter was doing, then I would be very careful to talk about other people's children. It happened that the letter arrived at my aunt's. My aunt was not feeling well and she was in bed and the lady came to visit. My aunt, innocently said, oh Mrs. would you please read that letter to me. Of course, she had to read what I had written to my aunts, which was certainly a great embarrassment to her. But in a way, I got my revenge for being nasty. But it brings us back to Gurs. One day, indeed, the social worker came around and said we were ready to leave. I left, beginning of September, 1941 to go to Le Chambon. Le Chambon was a marvelous experience. The people there were terrific. We could feel at home. Even so, I first had to learn French. The population to me is the best on Earth and you know there's a documentary about this village. I was there a year and a half. Now in the summer of 1942, my mother had been very ill around June, July, I think. May or June. I had for weeks, no letters from my mother. Finally, my cousin wrote me and said she had been very ill. She was operated in the hospital. This hospital, by the way, in the camp was only for desperately ill people and not the people who were suffering from dysentery and dying from dysentery in the blocks in the beginning when we were in Gurs. In Gurs, we would have in the beginning as many as 20 to 25 deaths a day, a day! Because dysentery was just rampant, other diseases were rampant. So she was operated in the camp hospital. Well, we found out--they found out in camp that she actually had diabetes. People who have diabetes are very prone to come up with all sorts of pus-filled what you would call boils, carbuncles, what have you. This is exactly what happened to her and she had a very huge one on her back. Later on someone who assisted at that surgery told me that the cut was about 15 centimeters long which would make it about six inches, right. It was decided that because she had been so ill that I could come to the camp and visit with her. All the arrangements were made. I had pass, a south country pass so I could travel without being arrested or what have you. I went down to Gurs. On the way I passed my boyfriend who was then just freshly liberated from the camp to a Jewish Boy Scout farm and I went down to the camp. When I came to the camp, the first thing I found out that the camp was closed to all visitors. The thing was that my husband, then boyfriend told me, if you come to Oloron, find out about the ambulance that

Gurs to Po because there was the ambulance from the camp would occasionally go up once or twice a week, go to Po, to the big hospital there. Maybe on their way back, you can hitch a ride up to camp. Well, when I inquired about camp ambulance in Oloron they told me it had not come for days and that the camp was closed. So I had very bad vibes right there and then but I went. Sure enough, when I came to the camp, they would not let me in. It was closed. .So I had to find lodgings in a neighboring little village, village of Chaooz (phonetic) (c.451). I then got in touch with people in the camp. I think the next morning, also, it was arranged that I could see my mother, oh about 300 feet away, through various rows of barbed wire. I was standing on the road and it didn't take long before the police came along and tried to chase me away. I saw my mother about two times that way. Then I was told that she would be deported; that the trains would be leaving. Again the organizations, the Swiss Red Cross, the Quakers, whoever was then working in the camp, saw to it that I was given permission to come to the railroad station, which was again the freight yard. It's always the freight yard. I went to Oloron. I stayed during the night in the street because I didn't dare go anywhere close to the railroad station. Found a house or two houses, there was a little wall, maybe two feet high between these two houses. I sort made camp on this little wall--had a blanket with me and a little pillow. Sure enough the gendarmes came around, the police came around during the night. Here's a young girl and they are two policemen. After they looked at my papers, their intentions were not too honorable. They said something, oh if she's pretty enough. I became very ugly, very suddenly and they walked away. Around five o'clock in the morning, I went over to the freight yard. At that point, everybody already had been loaded into the trains. I, not knowing in which car my mother was, I sort of leaned back against the loading dock of the freight yards and there was a French policeman standing there. He asked me what I was doing there and I told him. Then he told me what's going on here, tears my heart out, and then turned around and said to me, would you like to have a drink? Because he had a hip flask, you ever seen a French ---? So I declined that and he was helpful in finding the car in which my mother was. This is where I saw my mother for the last time. People were in a terrible condition--they were. You cannot even describe how these people--most of them were. Some still did not realize what this was all about. One woman in the car where my mother was, got ill so they wanted to call for the nurse that was along. I told them I think you will have to forget about the nurses now. My mother realized that she would never come back. In the car---

Anthony: Where were they told that they were going?

Hanna: They were not told anything. They were not told anything to my knowledge. I think they guessed very much what the destination, you know, that would be the end, end of the road. My mother left me no doubt. She says, I will not come back.

Anthony: What kind of a train was it?

Hanna: A cattle train.

Anthony: A cattle train.

Hanna: Yeah, a cattle train. In the cattle train, they had straw on the floor and there was some food in

the car, which the Quakers had supplied. This is looking back at the scene the best I can remember. I do not know if there was luggage in that car or not. It could be that they threw some luggage in there but I'm not sure but there was some food in there.

Anthony: Do you remember the date?

Hanna: The date was August 6, 1942. The last thing I saw of my--I went to the next car for two minutes to say goodbye to my cousin. My cousin, Lily Franken nee Traub. She was in the next car and I wanted to say goodbye to her.

Anthony: Lily was in the same convoy?

Hanna: The same convoy, so was her husband. A French policeman came over to me and grabbed me and said I had no business going to this car. What was I doing here? I was a civilian person and I explained it to him. I said I didn't do anything but say goodbye to my cousin. He dragged me of course to his superior. He was ready to grab me and dump me in. I explained it to the superior what I had done and I said I didn't do anything wrong. I just said goodbye to my cousin, that's all. He told this guy, forget it, leave her alone. So I was fortunate that they were not--that the superior, captain or whatever he was, was not that mean that he was going to throw me into the train.

Anthony: Were you ever able to talk to your cousin?

Hanna: Maybe for a minute, maybe for a minute.

Anthony: Was she as pessimistic as your mother was?

Hanna: I don't think we ever came to that point. You know, it was just a kiss, a hug, whatever. The last thing I saw of my mother after the trains was locked, was a white handkerchief fluttering out of those slits they have in the cattle cars, you know. Cattle cars in Europe are different. You have seen the one they have in the museum in Washington. So you see they are different from the cattle cars here in America, they are more open. Over there, they are more closed and just have little air slits on the top and that was the last I saw of my mother. It was abominable. The scene was abominable. I went back to the place where I had taken lodgings. It was a simple farm house, was renting out a couple of rooms. The next day I went back to Le Chambon. That is to say on my way to Le Chambon, I again stopped where my boyfriend was. I told him at the time what had happened. He told me that they found out that they will be roundups in France. I told him at the time, if it's not safe where you are here, then come where I am. Sure enough, within two weeks. . .

Anthony: He took you up on your offer?

Hanna: Took me up on what I said. He came with a friend, now a friend, not then. You didn't really know him at that time, Walter Jacobavich who now lives out in Palo Alto, Jacobovsky? Now lives out in Palo Alto, calls himself Water Chang, makes it much simpler. The two of them came. What

happened there is really is in Le Chambon--the seven of us who originally came from Gurs we were seven young people who left Gurs together, had decided, said we cannot, with the danger that it was, stay in the house where we lived. Said we wanted to go into the other house that the Swiss organization, the Swiss Red Cross was running there. So at night, we went to the other house thinking that they will not come where the little ones are. Because we were the big ones, we were teenagers and in the other house they had the little children. They will look for us where we are supposed to be and not over there. Well, we slept there a couple of nights. One morning, on our way back, and it wasn't far, it was just up and down the hill, it was a five-minute walk at best, I hear some whistling behind me. I was with my girlfriend...

Tape 1, Side B

She turned around and she said turn around. I said no, I'm going to turn around. It's the boys from the school here, I'm not going to turn around, leave me alone.

Anthony: She knew who he was?

Hanna: She had turned around for a whistle, you bet! Eventually, she took me by my shoulder and turned me around and here was my boyfriend who had arrived during the night and had made camp at a tennis court of a family by the name Erinches, right? Many years later we met the Erinches, that is to say we met their son and daughter-in-law and family. We told him the story and he was so amused that he took us over to the now totally different tennis court, totally overgrown and took a picture of us because he thought it was so amusing. Well, Max was hidden in the very same night, Madame Ontre Philip, Mary Philip who died last November, a great lady, terrific person who worked in the underground, French resistance. Her husband was right-hand to Gen. DeGaulle, a woman who was shot at Lyon and pretended to be dead and remained lying in the street till everything was okay for her to get up. The Germans thought she was dead. She was a wonderful human being. I took him to her and she immediately saw to it that he was hidden the very same night. He was with a family in some private home. The next day he was placed with farmers who took very good care of him. He lived in the hayloft. He lived in the hayloft for, I guess, close to four weeks. What the farmer had done--he cut out a square in the hayloft, which was absolutely above the stables where the animals were. So that was his toilet. He came down only once a day for the evening meal. That was it. He had nothing to read or do but the gospel, the New Testament. So it was an introduction to something he didn't want to know, I suppose. He stayed there for four weeks. They brought him back and the very next day he was sent off to Switzerland. This was before we, that is my friends and I, the seven of us, or maybe we were even more at that point; who slept in the other house made the acquaintance of the Gestapo during the night. Because indeed they came. Of course they knew exactly who we were. They had our names, they had everything. The man who was in charge of the Swiss operation in this village, Mr. Bonee explained to the Gestapo, said, they could not touch us. That we were under Swiss protection. No way. But he talked long enough and hard enough to make this person, this Gestapo official sort of start to doubt. He said, okay, I leave them here in your charge. I will ask my superiors in the morning whether this true. If it is not true, I will be back and we will arrest them. You personally are responsible for them. They have to stay here in the house. So they left. By the way, one of my

girlfriends tried to jump out -- did jump out of the house smack into the arms of the police who had surrounded the house. She wanted to run away, no dice.

Anthony: She was nailed?

Hanna: She was nailed, well; she came back into the house. They didn't take her. As morning broke, we went into the woods and disappeared. We just disappeared. We were all day long in the woods and evening time people came around and picked us up and brought us to various farms. We were totally separated from one another. There was one girl with me, which I had never seen before, did not know her. We were first on one farm. Then we were moved after two weeks to another farm. Both farms, by the way, were searched by the police. They came around and in the first one, we couldn't quite hear what was going on but the farmers there had built a hideaway for us. It was all woodpiles. Wood piled up from floor to ceiling built in a U shape. You could pullout one bundle of wood and slip in and replace this bundle of wood so you're totally hidden away. They were in the downstairs and they talked to the farmers and after some time, they left. The farmer, of course, came and said we can come out. Then we were moved to another farm and there again they came. We were hidden in a free-standing closet, an armoire behind the clothes. In front was a row of shoes so our shoes looked like the shoes that were standing there. The clothes was hanging very far down so you couldn't see the legs. We heard police downstairs asking the farmer, are you hiding any Jews? The farmer calmly replying, I don't know what Jews look like, and offered them a glass of wine. They declined, thanks God, because we were dying in that closet of fear. They left so twice they missed us.

Anthony: Did they return the next morning to the person who was held responsible for your group?

Hanna: I don't know. I never even asked him. I know him very well but I never really asked him. Next time I see him, maybe when I write him, I will ask him.

Anthony: But he wasn't taken away?

Hanna: No, no, absolutely not. In February of 1943, I made my way into Switzerland. I had my mother's sister in Switzerland. She was married there. They were very well to do people, more than well-to-do people. I made it known to my family in Switzerland that I would like to leave. They did indeed arrange for me to get an entry visa into Switzerland. Now in order to get the entry visa into Switzerland, you have to have an exit visa. Of course you could not get an exit visa, that was futile. So they arranged for a guide but that man said I had to make my way from Le Chambon to Annemasse outside of Annemasse on my own, which I did. All alone, I had no one to go with me. I did the whole thing. I had false papers.

Anthony: Traveled by day?

Hanna: Traveled by day, traveled by night.

Anthony: This is when this part of France had been occupied?

Hanna: In February of 1943 when all of France was occupied. When I came to Lyon railroad station as well as in (? c.701), there was a lot of German army people there, standing around. In Lyon, I had to wait a long, long time for a train going in this direction. I was sitting in the waiting room with a French magazine, right? Pretending to be reading it. I had taken with me a briefcase, a very narrow one, a very narrow one with a zipper. I had a little bit of food in there, some bread and a little bit of cheese, a towel, maybe a toothbrush. I'm not quite sure I still had a toothbrush at that point. I think a nightgown; I don't know why I took a nightgown. I wore everything double. I wore two skirts, two sweaters, two blouses, you know.

Anthony: It was cold then?

Hanna: Everything double because it's all I could take. It wasn't that it was so cold -- and a coat -- because unless I wore it, I could not take it. So I took nothing, nothing with me. I just had enough money to get from Chambon to Annemasse and left a few francs at the convent in Annemasse. This was supposed to be my contact point, the convent in Annemasse. Since I arrived at night, the gate was locked, the bell was disconnected. On the train, in the compartment, I was finally able to sit down. We were three people, two women and a man. I pretended to fall asleep. I figured if there they come for papers, I have a long time in waking up and -- you know. I heard them talk about the underground, which was very foolish of them. When we got off the train in Annemasse because it was the last stop then for this particular train, he said to me, where are you going? I said, I'm going to the convent. They're waiting for me. He said, you know how to get there? I said, no, but I will find it. It can't be so difficult. He said, I will take you there. I said, that's not necessary. I will take you there. So he took me, and of course the gate was locked, the bell was disconnected. Now what? I said, well then I'll have to go a hotel. So he was nice enough to go to one of the other hotels, and they were all fully occupied. He finally was able to find a hotel for me if you can call it a hotel. It was a bit unbelievable. To me at least, it was. I had never seen anything like that. I registered with my phony name, a totally phony address, a place I had never been in my life. I made it all up. The whole thing was made up. If they had asked me where is Rue Garibaldi in Lyon, I wouldn't have known where it was. But every city in France has a Rue Garibaldi for sure. Okay. I registered, I went to my room. I locked the door very carefully and I went to sleep. The next morning I left. I had no breakfast or anything. I went to the convent. In the convent, they told me what I have to do, where I have to go and how to go there. They gave me a breakfast, bread and coffee, whatever they had. I left them just about the last of my money because I felt it was very nice of them, you know. To give me anything, right? I made my way to Annemasse, partly by bus, partly on foot. On the way, I passed a customs place. Little customs house. I figured, hmm, it's wartime. There's no commerce going on between here and Switzerland, impossible, what for? Ah, walked by. Next thing I know, he called me back.

Anthony: Did you have anything to declare?

Hanna: Where you going? To Annemasse. Your papers. So I give him my papers. Then he looks at me and says are you Jewish. I still don't know where the answer came from and I said I've nothing to do with that dirty race. He closed my papers and smiled and said you can go. That was that. That was

the only time in my life I denied being Jewish. I don't know where the answer came from, but I guess it was the right answer. I walked to Annemasse and I think in fact the little place was called Duvin. I was supposed to go to the priest which I did. The priest sent a little boy with me to the guide. The guide had been paid by my family in Switzerland. There was a woman who already in the First World War did things like that. She was hard at work again. I came to the guide and there was a family there with twin boys and the guide was supposed to take us all across the border at night. It was the only time I played bridge, I know nothing about the game, I was the dummy. Then they came and brought a young man which they picked up in the church. The six of us were taken across the border at night. The guide was a big, heavy-set farmer. He was a widower and he had I don't know how many children. I guess he did much of it for the money. He literally carried us across this little river so we wouldn't be wet. He explained to us how we have to walk. He gave the father of this family Swiss money so we could go onto the streetcar that was going back and forth between Geneva and Annemasse. He told us how to walk in order to come out at the right place to catch the streetcar. There was only one thing. The first time around, we walked in a circle because it was dark and we came out exactly where he had started, under the same tree. The second time around, we knew better and we found our way. We boarded the streetcar, he paid for all six of us. That was fine and we were told where to get off and at that place was another contact person, someone of his family. She, in turn, distributed us into hotels that were willing to take people like that in the middle of the night, which was probably illegal. The next morning, she came and collected us. I told her, it was around 11 o'clock at night, to please call my aunt immediately. She said it’s 11 o'clock, I said do me a favor and call her right away. She did, and my aunt came the next morning and picked my up in Geneva. I lived with my relatives in Berne for--from March, actually it was the first of March when I got into Switzerland, till the 23rd of December, the 23rd or the 24th of December, 1944 at which time, I ran away, to put it plain. I left because I could no longer tolerate the situation. They had absolutely no understanding for what I had experienced. They opposed my future husband because how could I make such a decision without asking anybody? We have nothing, we have no profession, we have no savings, we are nothings. There was also the thing, that whenever something went on, what would your mother say? Well, I knew very well what had happened, okay. At that time in Switzerland the newspapers started to be full of that stuff, okay. We knew at this point exactly what was going on. Still, what would your mother say? One day, I had it enough with that, 'what would your mother say'. I said, leave her alone. She's dead. At which point my aunt who couldn't face the truth almost fainted. It was a major fight. I think I came as close to a nervous breakdown as I have ever been in my aunt's and my uncle's house. My cousin, my middle cousin, was no help. He resented me. I did not realize at the time nor did anyone else that he was basically a sick person. I left and I went to Geneva where my future husband was taking a course in social services to prepare for whatever, to have something after the war, to do. I went to Geneva and took a job as a maid, which was one of the few jobs that refugees were allowed to do. I was paid sixty francs a month, a Swiss maid got 160 francs a month. We didn't earn the same money for the same work. I was lucky to be working for a Bulgarian family where the son had been a diplomat. He had, however, resigned his diplomatic position because he was opposed to the politics. So they were refugees in Switzerland as well, but refugees with money, and with a permit to reside in Geneva. They had a very big apartment, furnished beautiful. I was the maid there, and they were very nice to me. I worked for them till we got married in April of 1945. At that time, when we got married, I entered the internment home to be with my husband which the Swiss

government gave me permission to do. Now sometime later, as my husband explained to you before, the Swiss had a policy that all immigrants who were living in refugee homes had to get out. They no longer wanted to support them. It also meant that I had to get out and I had to take a room in the town of Mortrick (phonetic) (c.818). I have not slept one night in this room. We had a newborn child, not quite as newborn any more. She was maybe five, six months old at the time when that happened who remained in the refugee home. But mother should live outside. Now this was an intolerable situation. I was in the home all day to take care of the baby, right? And at night, I should have slept somewhere else! I also could not have my meals in the home anymore. So then finally came a decision that yes, because of the infant, I can stay in the home and I will have to pay room and board at the same rate as the Swiss who were in the home. I could return officially to the home. The Swiss had done another nice thing. Since I was an immigrant in Switzerland and my husband was a refugee, they had a big problem. Well I came in with a visa, that made me an immigrant. I came in legally as a far as -- I crossed the border illegally, if you wish. But once I was in Switzerland, I was legal. When he and the others crossed illegally, they remained illegal, they were refugees. So they had a big problem, the Swiss. Was this baby now going to be a refugee like the father or an immigrant like the mother? It took several months to resolve this problem. They came down in favor of refugee, which was wonderful because otherwise we would have had to pay for her room and board as well. What are you going to pay with? The reason -- the way we could pay for my room and board was a very sad one. Because my brother who had come here in 1936 as a sixteen-year-old and by himself, had joined the American army voluntarily.

Anthony: How had he come here in '36.?

Hanna: He came here -- my father had a half-brother here who was willing to take him, who gave me an affidavit to come. He stayed with this uncle and aunt for maybe six or eight weeks, not very long. Then he struck out on his own. Because again it was a situation of a young fellow, a 16-year-old who all of a sudden found himself in strange surroundings with people he didn't know, with different habits and what have you. Because this aunt was not a very nice person, she went into my brother's correspondence, which he had locked away in one of those lock-away briefcases. She found there a letter from my mother asking him, because, my God, he was six-foot something and 16 years old and could eat a loaf of bread in one sitting; if he had enough to eat, a very normal concern for a mother, right? She found this letter and it provoked a storm and so he left and struck out on his own. Sometime later he was down at a university in Georgia, became a radio technician, then came back and took a job with the pilot radio company in New York and eventually, joined the army voluntarily. He was killed in the Battle of the Bulge, in January 1945. Incidentally, only a few days after his death and I did not know that he was dead till May of '45 because my aunt in Switzerland did not tell me. She kept this information from me until after we were married. That he had been killed in action. I got a letter sometime in the end of January. He asking if somehow I could come over to France and visit. We could meet if he has a few days furlough or something.

Anthony: So you were in contact with him?

Hanna: I was in contact with him. Of course, this was not feasible. The gentleman for whom I

worked then in Geneva tried everything if this was possible for me. Because he had a lot of contacts. The thing was, no, I could not, so I never saw him again. My aunt in Switzerland, who had the information that he had been killed, withheld the information from me till....

Anthony: Until the war ended?

Hanna: No, no, no. Till the end of April for sure, shortly after we were married. Then she did not tell me directly. She called and told my husband to tell me. She did not have the courage to tell me. She came when we were married. I invited her to keep the peace in the family, right? So I could not hear from each side, what did you do? She was at that marriage ceremony and didn't say a word. I didn't know till May that he was dead or end of April that he was dead. When we heard the war was over, it meant nothing to me. It really didn't mean much any more. I wouldn't say nothing but it didn't mean much. Right? We had lost everybody, we knew they weren't coming back. My brother was dead, the mountains looked the same. Switzerland was a peaceful country, and here we were. It was a very strange feeling to hear the King of England on the radio saying the war is over in the little English that I understood. He stuttered a lot so there was lot's of time to think about what he said. I sat down, listened to it and it took me maybe ten minutes before I went down to the office to tell him that the war was over. Then, we stayed in Switzerland till '48, before we came here. We had a hell of a time getting affidavit to come here. We tried to stay in Switzerland with his cousin who was in business and wanted him to stay. The Swiss wouldn't permit us to stay. So we came here in '48 and slowly had to start building a new life. Unfortunately we became ill in 1950 with TB and first had to spend close to two years getting well again. Our daughter was in a foster home. She was in a very good and loving foster home. Nevertheless, it left its traces for some time. We had to start building a life like everybody else. It's as simple as that.

Anthony: Now you left two aunts behind in Gurs?

Hanna: My two aunts in Gurs were able to leave in October of 1941 to go to Marseille because they could go to Cuba. They were first interned in Marseille in the Hotel Bumbaire. That was an old worn-out place where refugees were interned. They could go about, though, during the day taking care of the immigration business. They made their way into Cuba. They were in Cuba actually till 1948. In other words, from 1942 -- they left Gurs in October, '41; they left, I think, in January of '42 or before, first to go to Morocco and from Morocco to Cuba. They came after us. It must have been April when they came up from Cuba. The idea was that we would have a joint household. That I would take care of my aunts in return for not having to pay rent and this and that and the other. My aunt's son was going to take care of them. This was the arrangement. I could never do that because already at that time, I was not well enough to take care of two old ladies plus a child and a husband. It was just not possible. So other arrangements were made for them. It was a good thing because in 1950 we had to go in a sanitarium so the two old ladies would have been at loose ends anyhow. So they lived till 19 -- Mrs. Goldstein lived, I think, until 1962 and my other aunt, also a Traub, lived until 1969. She died at 99 years and two months and was fully aware of her surroundings. She was not senile for a minute. She was very aware that we were ready to go to the moon, which for her represented an unbelievable thing having been born in 1869 with the gas lamp. Imagine the whole revolution -- the industrial

revolutions that she had lived through plus the trip to the moon.

Anthony: It struck me that your aunt and your grandmother that you had family members who lived long lives when they had the chance?

Hanna: Yes, very long lives.

Anthony: You talked about your reaction to the end of the war, the loss of your brother and family members. I imagine as the war ends, you're finding out more information about other--?

Hanna: Well, all my family members who were deported from Gurs did not come back. The only ones who came back were my cousins in Prague, Czechoslovakia who had first been deported to Theresienstadt, into Auschwitz. I think I mentioned it at the beginning of the tape. She and her husband both survived Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and I don't know how many other slave labor camps. They had an arrangement that if they survive, they would go back to Prague and meet at the house of certain friends. Indeed, they both survived, and when she came back to Prague and she went to these friends, her husband was sitting there. It's a miracle that they survived. That was -- they're the only two other than my self and my two old aunts. So five people all told survived. We lost fourteen, I think the total was fourteen. A disaster, yes.

Anthony: You have any further reflections?

Hanna: I would say that in spite of it all, life has been good to us.

Anthony: (static) continue to be good and perhaps be better. Those were the years of the 20th century and the closing moments of this tape. The gleam in your eyes suggest to me that you have more to add. Why don't we take a brief break while I add a new tape to the machine and then we will continue on the new tape.

Tape Two

Hanna: Remember I told you at the time we were in the refugee home on Motrick (c.11), to be precise in (unclear) Switzerland, I had to leave the home because I was under a different status, that of immigrant and not refugee, which left the baby in the home. Eventually, of course, they allowed me to come back to the home. In return, I had to pay for room and board at the same amount of money or the same amount of money that the Swiss had to pay. I think it was five or eight francs a day. Now, you're probably wondering how come we had the money to pay that. I also told you that I had a brother who was in the American army and was killed in the Battle of the Bulge. He had made a life insurance before he went overseas. His life insurance was $10,000. It was paid out in monthly installments of $50 over -- I think a twenty-year period, as a matter of fact. This $50 allowed us, made it possible for us to pay for my room and board in the refugee home. So I forgot to explain that to you where the money came from so we could pay this room and board.

Anthony: Well, I remember when we were talking earlier that there were other family members that we hadn't talked about yet. Hard to believe that there are other family members we didn't talk abut yet, but the Monee family, these were your mother's cousins, your mother's first cousins?

Hanna: Yes, he was my mother's first cousin. His name was Heindrich Monee. His wife Paula and his sister Jeannette. They were deported with us to Gurs at the same time. Paula was already really starting to go into a depression in Germany, and had all sorts of peculiar ideas. She accused my mother and her sisters of being responsible for them not having been able to go to Israel, not being able to emigrate to Israel. Which was, of course, total fabrication. Neither my mother nor my aunts had any influence or whatever for them to leave or not to leave. It was something that got into her head and she, I can understand, wanted to go to Israel to be with her two sons, one from a previous marriage. She was left widowed, then married this cousin of my mother. Of course, her second son who was also in Israel and then of course, came to deportation and we found ourselves in Gurs. The poor woman really went into a very deep depression to the point where she wouldn't really take care of herself. There were weeks on end where she would not speak to anyone in the family. It was really very hard. She did come to the funeral of my aunt when my oldest aunt died. I think she might also have come to my grandmother's funeral. Incidentally, while we speak of funerals, let me give you a description of a funeral in Gurs.

Anthony: Yes, ?

Hanna: The funerals in Gurs -- the bodies were every morning collected in each block. When I first came across this, there were two or three men who would come with a truck, an open truck. They would come into the office and sort of kick open the door with their shoe and come in and say, you got something? Meaning, do you have any bodies? When I heard that for the first time, French speaking, I was absolutely shocked. You know, that you could speak of people like that. But I guess when you do this kind of work every day, it becomes sort of routine.

Anthony: These were French?

Hanna: No, they were refugees as well.

Anthony: Refugees?

Hanna: Yes, it was all done by refugees. The bodies were then taken down to the hospital and they were put in caskets, very simple caskets, like you would in a Jewish funeral. Just six boards. Then the funeral -- we had a cemetery which rapidly filled up. The graves were dug and since it was winter and mud and rain, the caskets literally were swimming. They plunged down into the water, went down for a second and then came back up and were swimming on top of the water. It was the most awful sight you could ever have imagined. First, falling into the water, the water splashing up and then the casket coming up again on top of the water. Then of course, it was covered by earth. But the funerals were really something, you wouldn't want to really experience. Now Paula Monee might have come to my grandmother's funeral, I do not remember. But she definitely came to my aunt's funeral. Maybe she

even said a word or two to the family, but basically she was in such a deep depression that she could not speak to them. Still and always was the idea, you are responsible for me being here. It's your fault we couldn't emigrate.

Anthony: How far back would these accusations go?

Hanna: They started in Germany in 19--early '39.

Anthony: After Kristallnacht?

Hanna: After Kristallnacht. The woman was totally desperate. Unfortunately, she eventually had a granddaughter who was mentally also not very stable. Only about eight years ago, committed suicide. So there must have been something. Heinrich Monee, he was a very nice person, a very good-natured person. I liked him quite a bit as an uncle. I really did because he was very good-natured and very nice, you know, just a nice guy too... There was a sister, Jeannette Monee, she worked for my aunts in the business. She was the bookkeeper and general office manager, if you wish. She was with us in Gurs. She was then taken to another camp. After all, she was an elderly person, and she survived. She survived in France and after the war, went back to Germany to live in a Jewish old-age home in Frankfurt. This old-age home existed already before the Hitler time and during the Hitler time. She went back there, probably, very simply because she could have there a life, a comfortable life. She was entitled to her social security in Germany. While in France, she didn't have a penny, and whatever little money she had, she probably got from some relatives in Switzerland. So that she was this way, independent. I cannot blame her for having gone back to Germany under these circumstances.

Anthony: Now Heinrich and Paula were eventually deported?

Hanna: Heinrich and Paula were deported from Gurs to Auschwitz. I believe they were also deported only four days after my mother, around the 10th of August, 1942.

Anthony: Yes, that's …? (c.88)

Hanna: Yes.

Anthony: I thought of some more questions regarding Gurs, and am very glad that you remembered to describe the funerals. When you were describing your uncle and your obvious affection for him, it occurred to me how sad it must have been that you were kept separate -- you were kept separate from the men, so you....

Hanna: Yeah. The woman and children were separate from the men. Once the boys were fourteen years old, they had to go into the blocks where the men were -- in the men's blocks. Whether they had a father or a relative there or not. In other words, at fourteen, they were taken away from their mothers. They had to go with the men.

Anthony: So I had the vision of you separated from one of your dearest uncles and forced to be with this complaining, depressed aunt.

Hanna: Well, she was in another barracks but it was difficult. I mean, you tried to talk to her, to be nice to her. After all, she was family, and here was this totally depressed person.

Anthony: What was it like to live in Gurs? You were there for quite a while.

Hanna: Eleven months. Very difficult, extremely difficult. The sanitary conditions were impossible. I don't know if I mentioned it before. There was a lot of illness. There was a tremendous amount of dysentery. We had no medications whatsoever.

Anthony: What kind of food did they give you?

Hanna: The food -- well, in the morning we would get what passed as coffee. We got a ration of bread, about two and a half pounds a day.

Anthony: Per person?

Hanna: No, excuse me. Half a pound of bread, something like that.

Anthony: Quarter of a kilo?

Hanna: Something like that. Lunchtime we would have a soup, maybe with some vegetables in it. Maybe with some chick peas in it. Occasionally, a little piece of meat. In the evening, it was basically the same thing. Very occasionally, we would be given a small portion of brown sugar. It was the first time I had seen brown sugar, was in France. The very beginning, we didn't get any soap. I think we got later on a little bit of soap. Living conditions were very hard. The worst thing really was the mud, the incessant rain in winter, the mud, the barracks that were leaking so when you were lying down, the water would drip down. If you were lucky, someone had taken along maybe an umbrella. The umbrella would be hung upside down into the rafters to catch the rain. So that was very nice as long it lasted. But then came the morning. You had to empty out the damn thing and when you took it down, more likely than not, it would spill. You know, it sounds funny today, it wasn't at the time though. Especially when it was always damp and nothing would dry. You know, it was... No heat in the barracks, was always cold in winter. There was a stove in a barracks but nothing to heat with or very little. [Male voice: "We forgot to mention…it is documented that a portion of the money which was allotted by the French government for food never reached us because it was stolen before we ever got food for it."]

Anthony: Sounds like you were a very resourceful---?

Hanna: The people in Gurs became very resourceful, yes. You had to be. For one thing, tin cans, large tin cans, oh about fifteen inches high and maybe six inches in diameter were turned into ovens.

Cooking stoves if you wish, whatever you want to call it.

Anthony: Portable stoves?

Hanna: Like a portable stove, right.

Anthony: How were they put together? Can you describe it?

Hanna: They were not put together. The top was cut open obviously because whatever was in there had been emptied out. You simply put opened on the bottom like a little opening so you could put in some wood. The pot you put on, the little pots that we -- they're not really pots, they were like mess kits from the army. They had little hands on each side. So they were hanging over the edge of the tin can and that would hold them in place. Sometimes if there was a little wire, they would put some wire on the bottom in order to put the wood on there so it would have some draft from the bottom up not unlike a grate in the fireplace so there would be some draft. And so whatever people could get hold of if they had a little money and could do maybe a little black marketing with the Spaniards, they would cook on these makeshift stoves. It worked.

Anthony: People in your barracks used them?

Hanna: Certainly. Whoever could afford to get a hold of one. Usually you had to pay a little money to get it.

Anthony: These weren't homemade? They were made by ---?

Hanna: They were all made in Gurs. They were made by the men. The Spaniards made them. They earned a little money that way.

Anthony: The Spanish prisoners?

Hanna: The Spanish prisoners, yes. They made a little money that way, you know. I guess they also found most of those tin cans, you know. It was a way of if you had a little money to add something to what you were given in the camp. Now some people did get money on a fairly regular basis in Gurs from relatives. The money would be paid out, whatever the amount was. That led to a tremendous inflation in the black market. So that we found ourselves in the situation where only a certain amount of money twice a month would be paid out to limit the amount of money that was available to people. So the black market or the inflation of the black market couldn't go even higher. The ones who had very little money or who got very little money from the outside were not totally shut out from buying some food, right, or whatever was available. Also we instituted at that time a percentage of whatever money you got had to be put in a welfare fund. I don't remember what the percentage was, maybe 10% or whatever, I really don't remember that. But it had to be collected from everyone who got money and was given to the people who had no money whatsoever, who had no relatives who could afford to send them any money or had no relatives on the outside. So they also could have a few

pennies in their pockets to buy something to add to their diet, whatever was available. Some people kicked a lot when they had to give up a couple of percentages of what they got. My poor mother was in charge of collecting this money in the barracks and there was always a hassle about this especially from some people. But as a whole, it was done well and it was a necessity.

Anthony: Socialism is not dead?

Hanna: It was not dead, no.

Anthony: There were reluctant socialists in the barracks?

Hanna: There was some reluctance, yes. It's funny enough, it's always the same thing. The ones who got the most money, kicked the most.

Anthony: Kicked the most, yeah. And probably complained too?

Hanna: Yes.

Anthony: How about like with these portable stoves? Those who had them, was it possible for someone who didn't have portable stove to use someone else's?

Hanna: Oh, sure. That was not, you know, that was not a problem. When I finish, you can have it. That was not...

Anthony: So they were shared?

Hanna: Yeah.

Anthony: The food that was cooked. Obviously it was possible to prepare your own food and this would have been smuggled?

Hanna: Well, prepared -- whatever you got, you made something out of it, you know. When we left Germany, my aunt went into the kitchen to get some food, which she had never in her life done -- cooked. She didn't know anything about cooking. What she took, she thought it was sugar. Actually, it turned out to be farina. That was a much better deal to have the farina because you could make sort of a porridge out of it, if you wished. Sure it was only water, right, but it was at least something. So that lasted for a little while. Maybe, you could later on buy a can of milk or you got some food packages from somewhere, which we could receive. You used whatever was in there and made meals out of it. Meals is an exaggeration, some additional food.

Anthony: You had some amateur cooks that were---? The image now is not one of people cooking every night -- it's not like your American barbecue and Fourth of July, right?

Hanna: No, no, absolutely not. It was an occasional thing. It was not…

Anthony: These are not heavily used?

Hanna: No, it was not a daily thing. It was an occasional thing.

Anthony: Very occasional.

Hanna: Right. [Male voice: “So occasional that I really don't have a recollection that my mother ever cooked."]

Anthony: Did the men do it?

Hanna: Less.

Anthony: Less. Were these portable stoves present in the men's section?

Hanna: ["Some of them, yeah. But I mean, you know, mostly it was a man who acquired it from the Spanish and it ended up in the women's barracks.“]

Anthony: Yeah, could you estimate how many of these were in use, just estimate?

Hanna: No way.

Anthony: No way?

Hanna: No way.

Anthony: Not even between the two of you, you couldn't?

Hanna: No, I really couldn't estimate how many of these makeshift...

Anthony: What would be a minimum number that you would have seen or smelled?

Hanna: I really couldn't tell. Whatever I would tell you might not be right. And so I rather not put myself down to a number.

Anthony: They were there?

Hanna: They were there.

Anthony: At least a handful?

Hanna: Oh, yeah. You will even find pictures and I am sure the museum has some pictures of these stoves. There is a woman sitting in front of one of these doing whatever cooking she can.

Anthony: So it was possible to get warm food but only if you did it yourself.

Hanna: Occasionally, occasionally. ["We got warm food the only thing is what quality was the food we got. "]

Anthony: And the quantity?

Hanna: Non-existent. ["And the quantity. The nutritional value was non-existent."]

Anthony: These empty cans, these large cans you're talking about, by any chance, could these be cans of food that had been sent to the camp for the prisoners?

Hanna: It could have been food. Well they were rather large as I described. It could be that they were cans that came into the so-called kitchen which was like a field kitchen, an open thing with, you know. That maybe some canned food came into these kitchens, I do not remember it but it is possible. ["I rather suspect that most of these cans came from the French personnel and the Spanish…"]

Anthony: Prisoners?

Hanna: ["No, sanitation detail just picked them up wherever they found them and didn't throw them away but kept them for..."]

Anthony: Recycling?

Hanna: ["Recycling."] Everything was recycled.

Anthony: You never saw any of these cans with the original label on them? They had already been stripped of their labels?

Hanna: Whatever it was, it was stripped. But they were around and they did help and when anything was available, they were used.

Anthony: Real kitchens were not available?

Hanna: Real kitchens? No. There was -- in each block was a field kitchen and that was it.

Anthony: Did anyone, to your knowledge, bring portable kitchens? I know it's been said that...

Hanna: No. No portable stove was brought. A lot of peculiar things were taken along like coffee mills. I mean, the most impossible things were taken along. No.

Anthony: There was no opportunity, for example, to use electrical appliances?

Hanna: Absolutely not. Absolutely not.

Anthony: This is a very, very primitive--?

Hanna: There was electricity in each barracks but there was no -- there wouldn't have been a hookup for anything. ["Don't forget in those days, electrical appliances were much less frequent than they are today."]

Anthony: That's right, yes, yes.

Hanna: You had no electrical… ["You had no electrical appliances, so to speak, especially not heavy appliances."] There was no such thing, there was maybe -- maybe some people took along a little field thing. You know, like you have -- fed by, what is this stuff called, it comes in a can --."

Anthony: Propane?

Hanna: No, little cans. ["There were little drops of (unclear?) (c.242)"] It was like dried alcohol. It was like little bars of dried alcohol that you would ignite and maybe one other person had taken one of those little things but they usually only were for a cup or two, at most. ["Eventually, other fuel ran out."] Then there was no more. But to say that anyone brought along any sort of cooking facility, appliances, or whatever, that is silly. Just plain silly, that's plain silly and not thought out. Because if you're being deported you don't think of these things. Surely people grabbed peculiar stuff but not that, you know…like the one woman who had taken along a coffee mill. Now what in the heck she grabbed that heavy coffee mill for, it was a Turkish one at that, a brass one, you know, I mean ridiculous. ["Don't forget most people didn't have more than two hours time to get their stuff together and pack."]

Anthony: You were an exception?

Hanna: [" I was an exception."]

Anthony: How did they wake you up in the morning at camp? Particular wake-up time? There was no--?

Hanna: Oh, yes. In the beginning there was a supervising person who came into the barracks and counted heads. God forbid if one of the kids had slipped under the blanket and the number didn't come up right.

Anthony: So they counted you in your beds?

Hanna: In the beginning, yes.

Anthony: And these were beds or bunks?

Hanna: No, no, no. We were on the floor.

Anthony: On the floor?

Hanna: We were on the floor. She was a very nasty person. She would come in in the morning and count heads around 6:30, 7:00 o'clock. When we had small children with us in the barracks. You know how small kids are. They are covered up to over their heads and she wouldn't immediately see them. She would be furious if she didn't come out to the right count, and she would go over it and over it till she had all the numbers right.

Anthony: These were wooden floors?

Hanna: Wooden floors. The barracks were wood. They were only covered with tar paper, nothing else. That's why we had so many leaks. No, we were on the floor. We were on straw. Open straw in the beginning, they just had bales of straw in the beginning when we arrived. Later on they gave us something to stuff the straw in, to make something that was a kin to a mattress.

Anthony: More like a stable for animals than a bedroom?

Hanna: Exactly, absolutely. In the beginning we were about 60 people per barracks. Later on, it sort of thinned out.

Anthony: Then how did people go to sleep? Did they just lie down and fall asleep or was there an hour, a moment when everything was--?

Hanna: I guess around ten o'clock or so, everybody, especially in winter, was ready to… ["Wasn't the light shut off?"] No, the light was not shut off during the night. The light was on.

Anthony: All night?

Hanna: They were on, at least one was on in the barracks so you could sort of... But around 10, I should think, 10, 11 o'clock, people sort of tried to go to sleep. You know, whatever sleep...

Anthony: How many muddy feet did you have to walk to get to the toilet facilities?

Hanna: ["That depended on the location of the barracks."] Barracks, depends. Some were very close to the latrine, some were rather far away so it was... ["I was in the barrack, for instance, where I could go on the rear and be closer to the latrine."] We were sort of in the middle of the block so we had quite a hike. [My mother was also in the middle of the block."] So it was quite a hike.

Anthony: Did resourcefulness enable you to deal with the mud problem, that is walking? Footwear? Were you able to--?

Hanna: Well, in the beginning, we had our own shoes.

Anthony: They were not designed for this kind of hiking?

They were not designed for that sort of thing and you would sink in and they would be, of course, full of mud. You would go and maybe when the water was running and wash them off and put them somewhere to dry out. If you were stupid enough to hang them on the fence as I did once, they disappeared. So I lost a good pair of shoes that way in the very beginning. ["That was irreplaceable."] Irreplaceable.

Anthony: What did you replace them with?

Hanna: I had other shoes and when I worked in the office...

Anthony: Because you had brought another pair with you? Otherwise -- what if -- maybe you even knew of someone -- what if you didn't have shoes? What if your shoes had been stolen or they were worn out, did anyone make provisions?

Hanna: Not that I can remember. Now in the... I worked in the office after some time, and I was a messenger and stuff for the office. Each block has its own office which then had to report to headquarters. They had a pair of rubber boots. I don't know how they had acquired them but they had a pair of rubber boots. So when I had to run the errands...

Anthony: You could borrow them?

Hanna: I had these to get around in.

Anthony: You had to return them?

Hanna: Absolutely. They stayed there.

Anthony: Now given the lateness of the year, when you were deported, imagine that people took winter coats with them?

Hanna: Yes, most people had taken winter clothes and no matter how much we had, we were still cold. No matter how many layers we managed to put on, we were still cold because it was damp and it Gurs through everything. So that the clothes never was really dry. You know, this dampness went through everything somehow.

Anthony: How was laundry done?

Hanna: Laundry was done whenever the water was running. There were some troughs which in the beginning were troughs where we had to wash, out in the open. Later on the women, at least, had a barracks with running water. ["We never did."] There were some...

Anthony: Men did not have--.

Hanna: It was simply a long basin probably about two feet across and maybe six, eight feet long. It was tin-lined. Above it was a pipe and simply had holes in it so the water would come out along these holes and the holes were placed probably eight, ten inches apart, something like that. There was the water coming out of both sides of the pipe. That was our facility to wash. But at least it was indoors, it was closed. We weren't standing in full view of the main street of the camp which the men always had to do. The troughs that were outside, they were wooden troughs, we used that to wash the laundry. So it was always a fight who was going to get the trough to put the laundry in there to wash. Since we had very little soap, we sort of soaked the laundry and let it soak before we would use soap to wash it. It was a hardship, especially in winter when it was cold. The water was ice-cold. Water was limited to three times a day for about two hours. So it was very difficult.

Anthony: And you would line-dry the ---?

Hanna: We would line-dry. On the barbed wire, we would line-dry our belongings and stay with it. Otherwise, bye-bye.

Anthony: Stolen? Socialism has a way of becoming robbery?

Hanna: Right. Look, some people came with very little. The Spanish people who were in the camp for years had very little. So ...

Anthony: You were rich compared to them?

Hanna: We were rich compared to them in many ways. They had many more small children that we had, in comparison. ["They were too much younger."] They were much younger, of course, we were an over-aged group of people basically, you know. Because most of the young people, whoever could had left Germany, right, and left behind were a small group of young people, a small group of children but mostly over-age people.

Anthony: In fact, I still remember your description of the deportation -- you and six old women.

Hanna: Five old.

Anthony: Being escorted by how many guards?

Hanna: Twelve.

Anthony: Twelve guards.

Hanna: Twelve guards with six helpless women.

Anthony: Was the water drinkable?

Hanna: The water in camp, yes. We could drink the water.

Anthony: This came from the Pyrenees?

Hanna: No. The water could -- you know there's a lot of water in France you cannot drink but the water in Gurs, you could drink it. There was no problem there. ["It probably came down from the mountains."] I have no idea where it came from. There was a water tank, very high up, as a matter of fact and insufficient, insufficient for the amount of people. That's why we were so limited with water. There is a picture of Gurs, I'm sure you have seen it. It is actually taken from that water tower.

Anthony: The water had better be drinkable since they were probably not serving wine.

["No. "]

Hanna: Hardly.

Anthony: You never saw anybody drinking wine, right?

["Oh, I wouldn't say that. I am sure that I saw in the hospital. Particularly when I was down there. The French personnel had access to wine."]

Anthony: Of course, yeah, yeah.

Hanna: Not the refugees, not the prisoners. ["Neither would we spend the money on something as frivolous as wine."] Look, in the beginning when we came to Gurs, we left Germany with 100 marks which was exchanged to us for 2,000 francs, right? In the very beginning, when we came, my mother had a chance to buy one egg from a Spanish woman. This one egg was 15 francs, okay. You have 2,000 francs. One egg was 15 francs. You think anyone would spend money on anything frivolous.

Anthony: No, although the French would not consider wine to be frivolous.

["No."]

Anthony: Can you give us some more idea of what the prices were? Do you remember other purchases?

Hanna: No, I don't really. But this really stuck in my mind that 15 francs for one egg.

Anthony: The 2,000 francs are not going to last very long?

Hanna: No, no.

Anthony: Especially if you have to buy a stove?

Hanna: Or whatever. ["Eventually we had canteens."] They were started by the Spanish. They were run by the Spanish in our block. ["In your block. In our block we started our own. We had one in the hospital which was run by Franken where you could buy some stuff…"]

Anthony: You mean Mr. Franken? Lily's ?

Hanna: Lily's husband. ["I was able to help him to get this which gave him some little income. You could buy certain things like cans of beans at more reasonable prices than the black market."]

Anthony: Yeah, even cruddy prices on the sardines?

Hanna: No, but in our block, in Block K, the canteen that existed when we came was run by the Spanish women. The way we talked to them, actually my aunt, Helena Goldstein, spoke a fluent Italian, and so she could deal with the Spanish women.

Anthony: Yeah, they're close enough, Italian and Spanish.

Hanna: She managed, and that's the way my aunt would, you know, manage to speak to them and deal with them. What the others did, I don't know. I guess with hand and any old way. Eventually, everyone learned a couple of words of Spanish and they learned a couple of words of German, or French or...

Anthony: French above all, right?

Hanna: Well, there were not too many among us who spoke French. I know and some of us were reluctant to learn French but eventually we all did, didn't we? They had to, we all had to. ["Those of us who did speak French were somewhat--had an advantage."] Had an advantage, definitely.

Anthony: The stubborn ones who didn't want to learn French learned eventually, right?

Hanna: Yes. Their life depended on it, eventually. ["The trouble you had if you spoke French was to acquire a sufficient amount of knowledge of the local dialect. Because a lot of the people who worked there were locals. This was not French."]

Anthony: Not Parisian French?

Hanna: ["It wasn't even French."] It was not literary French. It was not only not literary French, it was almost Spanish."]

Anthony: Yeah, or Casablanca…

Hanna: Yeah, it sort of changes there.

[“I had an awful amount of trouble to learn this."]

Anthony: You thought you knew French, and you found out that you had to re-learn it?

Hanna: He did, he did.

Anthony: No, but I mean he had to re-learn that French.

["At the time I left there, we communicated very well."]

Anthony: And then you had to go back to your more literary form of French when you finally got to Switzerland?

["Yeah."]

Hanna: But you know... Even that French is a little bit different, isn't it?

["Sure. That French is slightly different but not like Spanish."] Like in any country, regionally the language changes. ["But by and large, the personnel in the Swiss internment complexes -- we had German Swiss, not French Swiss."]

Anthony: They spoke *Volksdeutsch*?
Hanna: No, they spoke German. *Swissdeutsch*. But they know proper German, they're being taught proper German in school. They don't like to speak it because it's a little foreign to them but there was no problem there.

Anthony: Well, this is a lengthy postscript.

Hanna: We remembered everything? I hope so.

["I hope so."]

Anthony: Well, on that note I wish to thank you for....

Hanna: You're very welcome.

Anthony: We thank you.