United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Gertrude Granirer Flor
July 28, 1994
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Gertrude Granirer Flor, conducted by Randy Goldman on July 28, 1994 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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GERTRUDE GRANIRER FLOR
July 28, 1994

05:00:26

Q: I need you to start off please by telling me what your name was at the time of the war. Where you were born and on what date?

A: My name was Gertrude Granirer and I was born in a small town in Romania. Some 10 miles away from Czernowitz. And I was born September 28, 1921.

Q: The name of the place?

A: The name, Sadagura (ph). The meaning of that word, Sad means garden, and Gura means hill. A garden on the hill. And this is -- the word was, I believe, Ukrainian.

Q: Was it a lovely town?

A: Yes. For me it was a lovely town. Only three thousand people. Very small. And all my studying I did in the next town in Chernivtsi.

Q: Did you have a comfortable childhood?

A: Very comfortable. I was an only child and they discovered very early in my life that I had an inclination or a talent for music. I would go to the piano, which was almost in every house of a middle class family, and I would play whatever I heard people singing and so they started me very early -- I was four years old. And when I was six I already played little concerts. But my mother was not very keen for me to become a professional musician. It was only to round out my education. In fact, when she realized that I became very involved with music, she didn't like it very much.

05:03:01

But by that time it was too late. I was also, through my father, very interested in languages. My father had been turned from the first World War with a shrapnel (ph) in his hip which could never be removed. And so he was a -- what do you call it -- a disabled person. And he couldn't walk very much. He was a lawyer and he loved me very much and so I loved him too. I was constantly next to him and he was very proud of my achievement. Whatever he had taught me I knew. I would know all the capitols in the world of all the countries and I would know all the rivers and all the mountains even in America. And he never dreamed of going, leaving our home town. And so when I was about six years old I spoke five languages and had made up my mind that I would study languages. If possible, one new language each year. I came up to ten languages and then the world fell apart. And I realized that I could not afford that luxury any more.

Q: You said the world fell apart?

A: Well, 1938 and 39 we heard a lot of rumblings what went on in Germany. We saw many people running away from Poland. Some of them from Illwolf (ph) and coming into our town. And some of us opened our doors for them and they told us how horrible things were. And we heard a great deal about Hitler and on the radio when he was on, everybody listened. And everybody was afraid, but nobody believed that he would, in fact, come to our town. We just felt very sorry for the people in those other towns where Hitler was. And in 1940 Hitler and Stalin made this agreement. 1940.

05:06:05

Ah, and they were suddenly good friends. In this agreement Stalin got half of Poland, the Baltic States, Bessarabia, which was part of Romania, and for a good measure they also marched into the Bukovina which was never theirs before. Why they did it, we don't know. I don't know to this date. But suddenly one day there was an ultimatum on the radio and the next day the Soviets marched in. And before we knew it, we were Soviet citizens. We did not know what would happen to us. In fact, their propaganda was so good that we, in fact, thought it must be better than it was because before that the Rumanians were close friends with the Nazis and, in fact, they did the bidding of the Nazis and Atonescu was the head. Well, so we thought "this is an improvement". But somehow I have to get back for a moment. My mother has, had a brother in Columbia, South America. Very rich man. He saw it coming and he chartered a plane and came to Europe to pick all his relatives and none of them wanted to go, including my parents. In our case, my parents said -- my father, which was my stepfather -- my father died when I was nine. My stepfather said "ah I have no reason to go and live in Columbia, South America. I haven't done anything wrong. I haven't engaged in politics, nothing is going to happen to us. I'm not going to throw away all the things that we have worked so hard for." And they stayed and they didn't ask me, so I stayed with them. So, in fact, my uncle who came by to pick us up, and we didn't go, said to us that in case we changed our mind he will had prepared four visas to come to Columbia.

05:09:17

Two for my parents, one for me, and one, preferably if I had a boyfriend to bring him along. Because at that time I was sixteen, seventeen. Ah, it would be better he thought. Well we didn't go and so the Soviets marched in and the world fell apart for us.

Q: Times were not tough under the Rumanians?

A: Yes, they were tough. They were very tough. And especially 1937, 1938, 1939, our town had a garrison (ph). Soldiers and particularly officers. And they got often drunk and they roamed the streets and cursed the Jews and shot, you know, they went around with guns.

It was frightening.

Q: Did you feel particularly vulnerable as a girl?

A: Some. I had times where I felt very vulnerable. And I have a hard time trying to bring back many memories which I probably have absolutely wanted to forget.

Q: Were the girls abused?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: So you said that the Soviets came in and the world fell apart?

A: Yes. The strange thing at that time -- it was June 28, 1940. That is when the Soviets marched in. And, you know, during the day and in the early part of the evening, it was fantastic what kind of concerts they gave. What kind of excitement they managed to bring out in the people and nobody would have believed that a few days later, during the night, they came and people disappeared in the thousands. And at that time we didn't know where they were taken. And it so happened that in the town in which we lived we had a very beautiful house.

05:12:02

Probably the best house in town and we were very wealthy and that was very much against us. I didn't even realize it at that time because I was friends with all kinds of children, never thinking about these things. But, immediately there were people who wanted this house and they moved in and then one night three uniformed men came in the Russian uniform of what was called NKVD, which is now called MVD or KGB. They rang the doorbell. They came in. They searched our house. We didn't know why. My stepfather, my mother, my grandmother and I were made to sit in the corner and I noticed how this one -- after they had turned the house upside down -- this one of them said "hey look there" while he was pulling out a handkerchief and blowing his nose and I saw how he dropped something, and at the same moment he said "look here what they have" and it was either a five or a ten dollar bill. It was the first time in my life that I saw a dollar bill. But I didn't know the implication of this. I was going to say "you dropped this from your pocket" but I couldn't because the next thing all three of them came up to my father and said "you just have to come with us. We found foreign currency in your house. You just have to sign a paper and you will come home." We never saw him again. We don't know what they did to him. I know he was 48 years old at that time and my mother would go every day to some place where many other people stood in line with food to bring their husbands, to whom exactly the same thing happened. And after she went for -- I don't know, three weeks, one day another guard stood there and said "why are you coming here?

05:15:07

Your husband isn't here". She said yes is here. I've been bringing this food for three weeks. If he is not here for a long time? And then one day the head guard called her in and said to her "don't come any more". She said my husband is here. He's not here any more and threw his shoe at her. And he said "here is your husband and don't ask any more questions or you will have the same ending". So we don't know, but I do suspect that they killed him and I don't know where he is buried and I wish I would. This was so traumatic for me. I think it was worse than anything that came afterwards, including the Nazis. By the time the Nazis took us into the concentration camp I was so numb inside, I was so dead, I was not able to feel anything. And so when Sam told you about how we met, for me the world had ended and here was this man who had jokingly said "we can get married". That was the farthest from my thoughts. My mother had said "run and go wherever you can and hide." And I was running from our town that evening for about ten hours until I came to this other town. It was very difficult because they had -- what do you call this, at night when you are not allowed to go -- curfew. Well I made it somehow, very tired, exhausted and very sad. And I thought of going to my parents' best friends at whose house I had stayed a whole year until the end of May of that year. I came to their apartment. They opened the door and they wouldn't let me in.

05:18:01

And they told me forgive us. But last night, it was an apartment house, next door, there was a raid and they came into the apartment and they found one person in that family who did not have a permit with this particular address and because of that they took her and the entire family and they disappeared. And so these people would not let me in. At that moment I had no idea where to go. The only thing that remained was to remember the Philharmonia. That's a building where the conservatory was located where I had studied and where I had finished conservatory about also four weeks before the Russians came. And I went upstairs into a projection room where they also had a movie theater and I fell down on the floor and went to sleep. And when I woke up it was day and I thought if I could find somebody in this office and if they would give me a job as a pianist, as a accompanist, maybe I could simply hide. But I knew they were after me because they were after our family and so I went and I met the man who was in charge and he was just closing up the office. And I said I am looking for a job as an accompanist, as a pianist. He said to me "you look to me like you need a lunch, that's where I am going now". I said no, "please get me a job", but I didn't tell him what had happened. And he said how much money do you have and I said three rubles. That's 75 cents. And he said that's enough. I said enough for what. Enough to get married he said. He said I can see you don't know where you're going to sleep the next night, I can see it in your face. He didn't know my name, he didn't know who I was. So he starts walking in the street and I walked after him and I said please get me that job.

05:21:02

And suddenly he stops and he says "come up here with me". Two flights of steps, very dark, old, dilapidated building, and upstairs is a young girl, about seventeen, and this is supposed to be the Registrar's Office. And so she asks him if he came to get married and he said yes. This girl, asks "are you living with another woman?" "No". "Do you have children with another woman?" "No". And she asked me the same thing and every question is an insult in my book because I, I was so properly brought up I didn't even have a date. So when we were ready to sign this little paper she calls over the man who swept the floor in the corner. To this day I don't know his name. And he was the witness who signed and we went downstairs and Sam, my husband, said to me "by the way, what's your name?" And we went back to the Philharmonia and he enrolled me. Gave me a job as an accompanist, pianist, and he said "now no more running around. Five o'clock we meet in front of this building". I don't know what he thought. I didn't know where I would run but he had told me that he has a mother and a sister and an apartment. I didn't believe a word he said to me. I thought of one thing only. Where could I hide. And suddenly I realized that I had changed my name because I married. And my name is no longer the one that these authorities were looking for. So I went with him and when he came into the apartment, I had a big surprise. He did have a mother and he did have a sister and they were wonderful to me. And that was like a miracle somehow. That is the story. Yes. So.

Q: Did you, what happened to your mother after that?

A: A few weeks later - my mother had, in the meantime, also left the home because all these other people who wanted our home moved in and one person who probably had a little bit of heart said to my mother, "you better disappear from here or you will have a bad ending".

05:24:15

So my mother came into this larger town with her mother-in-law, and they rented a small apartment and they both went to find some job to become a proletarian, and my mother found a job to become a cook in an orphanage and I saw her a few times. I went every morning to this apartment to see her. And one morning I went there and there was a big sign. "This apartment has been confiscated and the inhabitants have been enemies of the people" and so I know that at this moment, my mother and my grandmother had disappeared, but we didn't know where. Now a long time later we found out -- not even so long, because in three nights 35,000 people had the same fate, and they were brought to an end station outside of the town into cattle cars, and when they were filled they were, left the area and nobody where to. But many, many years later we found out that they were taken to Siberia. And my mother was 17 years in Siberia. My grandmother died immediately, one or two days in the transport. And it's strange because my grandmother was only 73 and at that time my mother was 48.

Q: Did your mother come back from Siberia?

A: We found her in the most difficult manner. We, after we went through hell and came to this country -- actually first to Columbia, South America where my mother had a brother -- then we came here and my uncle, my mother's brother, found -- one day he received a letter by a lady, Mrs. Weisselberger (ph), who was in Siberia and roomed together with my mother.

05:27:22

And there was a moment in the Soviet's time under Khrushchev when he decided -- you know, you remember that he stood up and said how what a monster Stalin had been -- and Khrushchev had then permitted people over 65 if they had close relatives in Israel. And if these relatives sent an invitation to them, an obligated themselves to take care of them, he would permit them to come out. And this Mrs. Weisselberger who, by the way, was the widow of the, of the greatest Zionist in Czernowitz, and he was one of the first the Soviets did away with, and afterwards Mrs. Weissenberger was also taken to Siberia as the wife of the enemy of the people, and my mother had given Mrs. Weissenberger a photo that was taken in Siberia and on the back of it had written the address of her brother in South America because she didn't know what had happened to us. And so, when, when, he received this note he sent it to us. That's how we found her.

05:29:07

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

06:00:37

Q: You were telling us about finding your mother?

A: As soon as we got this letter, and we lived in Minnesota and were already very successful as musicians, and well known. We knew Senator Humphry who was at that time the senator of Minnesota, and we got in touch with him and he said he'd do whatever he could to see whether he could get her out. And after some time he said "sorry, the Soviets say they don't have such a person". Then some more time went by and we approached the other senator from Minnesota, Senator Phye. He said he would try. And this was maybe a year later and at that time the Soviets said "yes, there is such a person". They would, would, let her out if somebody, some relative in Israel, would ask for her. She didn't have any relatives in Israel but Sam had an uncle. He wrote to him and this uncle, who had never set eyes on my mother, had filled out some papers and she was finally permitted to go to Israel. But I have to tell you that this, from the moment we had this first notification that she had survived and until she came to Israel, was eight years. So after she arrived in Israel we did whatever we could and we brought her to the United States and I saw her again and we were like two complete strangers. She was so different. She was so hard -- so, so aloof.

06:03:02

I can't even describe it and there was nothing much I could do. I wanted very much to ask her to talk and she couldn't talk. Finally I got it out of her. One day I got very angry and I said "please, tell me what has happened; can't you tell me?"

Q: She started talking?

A: Yes. And she finally said to me that she had undergone some hypnosis and they had told her -- "you want to see your daughter again, you want to see your son-in-law again, you want to see your brother again, then you have to forget everything that happened to you". She didn't want to talk about it. She promised she would forget.

Q: OK, so you said that living under the Soviets was really horrible?

A: Horrible. And they said to me and to others, "you can never run away from us. We find you everywhere". You know, that sits so deep in me. I can't get over it. I simply can't get over it. So.

Q: Do you remember the things you saw, under the Soviet occupation?

A: You never saw anything because they did everything very, very smoothly. Behind closed

doors. You never saw anything. You only knew that people disappeared, and when, by chance, you found them like I found my mother, I couldn't get a word our of her to her dying day.

Q: So what happened, the Germans marched in?

A: Yes.

Q: And things changed again?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you married then?

A: Yes. At that time I was already married. And the first thing that I remember is that they came and took all the men. Not the women. All the men from our building and from the whole street and marched them, I think by foot, and we didn't know where they were taking them.

06:06:14

Then we found out. There was a big building that they, the Russians had called Palace of Culture and that same building, under the Germans, was used for certain purposes. They took those men -- these were all Jewish people -- and the rumor went that they took them to shoot them. And I knew at the moment that I will never see Sam again. And somehow it was very, very difficult to accept. But all of a sudden, some hours later, I saw him running down the street and I thought that I was having a vision -- that I was imagining. But he did come and he said that they had put them up to count one-two-three, one-two-three. Every one was taken to be shot. And he was not one, but they took him and many others to bury them. So they marched them down to a place near the river and they forced those that they had not shot to bury them. And Sam managed, knowing the area very well, managed to somehow to jump out of the line and, through certain side streets, he was out of there and he came home.

Q: Do you remember when this was?

A: This was a few days after the Germans occupied Czernowitz again. That is, 1941. When they began to, to, to, push east, and the Soviets ran like crazy. The Soviets had not believed that Hitler would do this to them. I mean the Soviets, Stalin. Stalin did not believe that Hitler was preparing to run into Russia.

06:09:05

And you know, in fact, his generals who told him that -- warned him, some of them were

executed because they said it. No, by the time this happened Stalin had executed so many of his best people. Generals. And, so when the Soviets ran away from Czernowitz, they couldn't run as fast as the Nazis followed them. And this happened a few days after the Nazis came into Germany.

Q: I understand that the Soviets in leaving were burning the towns?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you in the town at the time?

A: Yes. This is a big town and you did see lots of smoke, lots of buildings. But mostly you were hiding. You were trying not to see. You couldn't go anywhere. You were just in your place hoping that they will not come for you.

Q: Was there lot's of hysteria?

A: I don't know. I really don't know. I don't think there was much time for that.

Q: So Sam made it through this first --

A: Yes. And they didn't even notice that he had absconded from that line. Because otherwise they would have come for him. But it was all so haphazard, you know. It was not by name at that time.

Q: Now where were the Romanians who were officials. Didn't they eventually take over?

A: They were part of what went on, but I didn't see too many of them. They were probably together with the Germans. And I understood that some people were explaining away this horror of the German's idea and the Romanians to kill at random. You know our town, this little Sadagura (ph), that was horrible. When, on the evening of the departure of the Soviets they ran so fast that the Germans were not even in there and there was a whole night where nobody was in there, in our town.

06:12:10

And the local population who were mostly Ukrainians, rounded up all the Jews that were there. They pushed them up onto a hill and killed them and raped the women and everybody was killed. This was a massacre. This was an awful massacre. I've heard this from a few people who know exactly how that happened. But this was neither the Soviets nor the Nazis. This was the local population.

Q: Was that typical of the Ukrainians?

A: I suppose so. I don't know. You know at that time I was so innocent. I could never believe that people could do things like that.

Q: So was it shortly after the Germans occupied the town that you were herded up and put in a ghetto?

A: Ah, not shortly. I think a few weeks later. If you could call it shortly.

Q: What happened, what was that like?

A: Well, they, I think that we saw posters which said that as of tomorrow morning, such and such hour, all the Jews have to leave the area of Czernowitz and are allowed to live only in such and such streets. And everybody went meekly. Nobody fought. There was no, no possibility to fight.

Q: How long were you in this area?

A: This I don't recall.

Q: Days, months?

A: I don't know. I heard some say a few days, but I'm not even sure that this is correct. It, it was really awful. And you know, the whole thing is actually fear. The horror of what happens to you and the even greater horror of what may happen tomorrow, because you see in which direction this is going, I don't know. I don't know.

Q: Other than the fear, were the conditions horrible, did you have food, could you come and go?

06:15:03

A: I would say that the conditions were not eh, extraordinary. On the stone quarry they were horror. Pure horror. You know.

Q: So you were in the ghetto for some time near Interance (ph)?

A: Yes. By the way, we were in this house in this apartment of a friend of mine with whom I went to school and they happened to live there. They happened to have an apartment there and they took us in, so we shared their bedroom with them. And, we were not the only ones. There must have been 8 or 10 or 12 people in one room. But that was then --

Q: Were the selections beginning? There was a big deportation early on.

A: Yes. Yes. I can't tell you. I know very little about this. I don't know if I've forgotten or I don't know if I ever knew it.

Q: So what was your next move after the ghetto, what happened?

A: I suppose after the ghetto we were put into cattle cars.

Q: Were you pulled up, how did this come about?

A: I don't know. It's amazing. I do not know. Would you believe that a person could block out to such an extent? I do not know. Well anyway, we were in cattle cars. We didn't know where they were taking us and we finally arrived somewhere where the cattle cars stopped and we were told that this was near Mogilev. This was on the border of -- between Bessarabia and Ukraine -- and there came some -- by the way, we were told to take along only what we could carry. And, naturally most people could carry very little, but what they could carry was sometimes earrings, or a watch, or a necklace, or a bracelet.

Q: Did Sam take his violin?

A: Did Sam take his violin? I don't think so. I think he took his violin and then somebody took it away from him.

06:18:01

Am I right?

Sam: I prepared my worst violin because I knew they would steal it and so they stole it.

A: Anyway, before we were embarking on what Sam called a ferry, which I don't recall at all; I think it was a little boat. I know we had to go through the river, so there is no doubt about that, but to me a ferry is something large you know. This was a little boat and his sister said "I'm not going in. I'm afraid this boat will collapse." She was absolutely not aware of where she was going you know, but she did go. So before going into this boats you saw a mass of people on the shore of that river waiting to be taken on this little boat. Eh, if there were 2,000 or 3,000 or more people, there were maybe 4 or 5 maybe who could into a boat and there was, I think, just this one boat. And suddenly there was an announcement to all the people who were there on this shore. "No gold or valuables permitted. If we find anything on you, you get shot." And in one split second everybody took off their rings and their watches and their necklaces and dropped it as if it didn't belong to them. And in one second you saw a whole area full of gold. In the next moment you saw the natives of that area, the Ukrainians and the soldiers, the Romainian soldiers, picking up these things. That's my recollection. Then when we were taken over on the

other side -- we arrived in the carara de pietra (ph). The stone quarry. You know pietra is stone and carara (ph) is the same word like in Italian.

06:21:06

That stone quarry was an unbelievable experience. About a week before we came, they had taken the inmates of the insane asylum from Czernowitz, put them in cattle cars and brought them to the same carara de pietra (ph). Didn't give them any food and had them starving and a week later they took the intelligencia of Czernowitz, the, the people who were educated, and put them in cattle cars and we were among them. And they brought us to this place where insane people had been going for one week without food. And what we saw there was unbelievable. They were eating each other alive. This is absolutely unforgettable and incredible. And there we stayed, I cannot remember for how long. And Wassileskov (ph) was the Commandant. A fairly young man, I would say probably no more than 45, and he marched around with a whip and when he found a louse on a person, that person got 25 in front of everybody else, over their behind. Over their naked behind. So when I hear of Singapore I am no longer very impressed you know. So, what else can I tell you?

Q: What else was going on at that time?

A: I don't know very much. I think once a day it was permitted for certain people only - not everybody - to go down to the river on the bottom of this carara (ph) was a little stream, very little stream. The natives who lived in the area came with whatever they had to, to offer, to sell, to barter, a piece of butter or a piece of bread, or a piece of cheese.

06:24:13

The women usually were hiding them in their bosom. And they stood on one side of that stream and the inmates of our group stood on the other side and were showing what they had to barter. One had a blouse or one was offering maybe a pair of shoes. Anything for just a piece of bread. And then, if that person on the other side pointed at this blouse, yes, that's what I want and I have a piece of bread, then they come a step closer into the water and they exchange this.

Q: Did you exchange anything?

A: I don't recall. I don't recall. It's so unbelievable.

Q: How did you sleep there?

A: How did we sleep there? We slept, there was some housing which had all the windows broken because the war had gone by there and that housing was on top of that mountain -- there was a mountain, you know -- but without, without trees. Without anything. Just a,

a few long stretched houses and small rooms. And, in a small room I would say the size of our kitchen, we would be about 20 or 30 people sleeping on the floor. If one person had to turn around, everybody had to turn around. It was like sardines. And it was often that we woke up in the night and we saw one of those crazy people looking in through the broken window and trying to steal something.

Q: Were you working in the stone quarry?

A: In the stone quarry there was no working. The stone quarry was place, a holding place and from there, every time they needed 200 people to put over the Bug, that it was the closest one to the Bug, you know, that river. Once you were over the Bug you never came back.

06:27:02

That was, if they took you over the Bug, you did some work and when you were finished with work you were killed. And so, over the Bug these were called extermination camps, and other than that, one day they needed to have some people for a hospital and, as Sam told you, they had to have a roofer and a carpenter and a few doctors and a dentist, so you know that story.

06:27:50

End of Tape #3

Tape #3

07:00:35

Q: Just one question for clarification. When people from your community were to carara (ph), do you remember about how many people were in that group?

A: No.

Q: Maybe a 20, a thousand?

A: I would say definitely not 20 and definitely not a thousand. Probably several hundred. And, of course, I'm sure you have heard how horrendous things were when, eh, the people were hardly dead and their gold teeth were pulled out and things like that. These things happened on the carara. And later in Tolchin (ph) we had an experience. In Tolchin (ph), Sam and I had a little room by ourselves and, by the way, Sam called it a camp. I think I called it a ghetto in Tolchin (ph). It was one street that was just completely isolated from everything else and it was somehow a ghetto to me. Eh, one day a man was brought in and nobody wanted to let him sleep in because he had typhus and typhoid fever at the same time and eh, we decided somebody had to take him in. So we took him in and he shared the -- it wasn't a bed -- the cart with us. And we didn't know him at all. He died the same night and it was bitterly cold and there was lots of snow. He couldn't be buried. He was dead with us for two nights and two days on our cot until he was buried. And I don't know his name. Do you know his name?

07:03:04

Q: What more do you remember Tolchin? You were there for a long time?

A: Yes. I was very much persecuted in Tolchin (ph) by this man Saporshnikov (ph) who was a sort of administrator in the hospital. And I cleaned the hospital floors and the toilets with petrol and, other than that, I helped them in dentistry and also, I continuously peeled potatoes. What else do I remember? This Saporshnikov (ph), by the way, I was told, when the war was over he became the mayor of Tolchin (ph)?

Q: What did he do that made him so hateful?

A: Oh, I could feel his hatred. And he always talked in such terms.

Q: Did he make you do special things?

A: Yes, he gave me the hardest things to do.

Q: Did he physically abuse you?

A: Sometimes. Sometimes.

Q: Beatings?

A: Ya

Q: Now you and Sam had probably more mobility than some people there because of your dental careers --

A: Yes. Yes. Yes. We could go in the morning to the hospital and we could return in the evening to the place where we lived.

Q: Did the people have enough food there? What was it like?

A: It's amazing. My impression is that you can get used to anything. And I had a feeling that, in spite of the fact that there was not awfully much food, when there was a little bit of food, people sort of continued living. I don't know. I do not recall one case of a suicide. I'm not saying that there wasn't, but I do not recall.

Q: Did the Romainians officials people, was there any of that?

A: I hadn't seen any of that. I have also known that, in spite of the fact that they say a lot of bad things about the Romainians, I think that they can also be nice if they want to. We had a Romainian officer who came several times from Bucharest and brought us help from my aunt and uncle.

07:06:01

Help in the sense -- one time they brought us a piece of cheese and another time he brought us some eh, eh, medicines which were of great help to us. And he was very decent. I have a very good memory of him.

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Indiscernible. Another person (Sam, I think) is speaking.

- - - - - - - - - -

Q: Why do you think that he was particularly nice to you, or do you just think that people were just inconsistent?

A: I think he was a nice man. I think he was a good human being.

Q: My impression is that the Romanians were clearly not as systematic --

A: Yes, correct.

Q: Because violence was more random or --

A: Yes.

Q: And at times they were even rather stubborn or prideful of their independence from Germany?

A: Yes, you are right.

Q: So your impression is that they you experienced everything.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Is there anything else you can think, that should be remembered about Tolchin? You were there how long?

A: Two years.

Q: Anything else you remember?

A: No, I can't think of anything else. It is only a miracle that we survived and that we are here to talk about it.

Q: When were you liberated?

A: We were "liberated" in I'd say 1944. But very early in the year. I would say we began to hear noises like cannons -- I think it was January or February -- and I said to Sam "now the front is getting so close, now they will kill us all."

07:09:05

Because it was well known that the Germans, when they retreated, they set a whole thing on fire and they killed everybody in the camps and in the ghettos. And I said "it's unbelievable that we have survived until now and now we're going to die", and you know, this was January, February, no tree to hide in. At least in the summer the trees have leaves, you know, no tree to hide in. None of the native Ukrainians wanted to hide us. They would not risk their life, you know. And I said, "Sam, what are we going to do?" and I got so vehement and so excited that I banged with my foot on the floor in that room in which we lived, and suddenly as I banged, I heard a hollow noise as though it was empty underneath and I said, "Sam, did you hear what I just heard? It seems to me that there is nothing underneath. Maybe we could hide there." And we had a neighbor who

was an engineer, Rosenfeld, and he was the kind of man -- what his job was, he went also out of the ghetto in the morning, worked for, for the hospital, but he fixed radios. So he was the one who radios all day long and came home and told us all the news that went on in the outside world, which was amazing because we never had a paper or anything or a radio. So we told Rosenfeld -- I told him -- we are going to have to hide if we want to survive and nobody will take us in. Could we try and see if we could hide right in our room, I have heard a hollow sound. And he just had a smile but he humored me and he came into our room and he tried and he said "you are right". So he brought -- where he got this, I don't know -- a saw. Now these were, these were floors in the old fashioned kind, you know, long boards. And so he was sawing one board here and then two later, like this.

07:12:00

Finally he made an opening and we did find an opening down there which was very raw and nothing in there, and everybody who was in our area knew about it and laughed about us. They thought that I was crazy, out of my mind. And when the day came and they, the shootings, came closer and closer, we had amassed a lot of straw which we had brought into our room and since about 18 people knew about this crazy idea, these 18 people came and went downstairs with us and we thought it would be an hour or two or three. Well, they kept coming and coming and before we knew it, we were standing one next to the other and how many were we -- 68 people down there. We closed this thing and had all this straw on top and all of a sudden -- now this was already night -- all of a sudden we heard footsteps on top of us. We knew that the Germans were running away but we heard footsteps directly above us and we recognized by their marching, by their walking, that these were Germans. What had happened -- they had chosen that room to stay over night because they didn't see anybody there and there was a lot of straw there, and we sat there underneath, 68 people not daring to breathe or cough or anything, and the next morning they left. And then we began to, to smell smoke. And we knew that they had put some buildings on fire and someone in our group of 68 people -- a woman started yelling, "I don't want to die, to suffocate here. I want out. I want out." So by that time we opened the thing and the Germans were gone. We came out. We were green and white as a sheet and we saw in front of us three young Russian boys with very long coats and with rifles and we asked them "who are you" and they said "nastuyahschi (ph), Russki partisani (ph)."

07:15:10

We are the real Russian partisans. And they said to us "and who are you" and we tried to explain to them. They didn't understand. That's how we were liberated. They we could dream only of going home. That's a very different story. We couldn't get home until a few days later because we found a truck driver who wanted vodka and then he gave him the vodka and he took us up to a forrest and dropped us down there and said "that's enough for you." And then --

Q: Where did you get the vodka?

A: Where did we get the vodka? We ran around among the natives and whatever we still had on us we shared. And the worst thing was when we finally came to Czernowitz. We were dreaming of returning to our home. We came to Czernowitz on a train. We waited for hours and hours and the train was an open lorry. And on this train, when we arrived in Czernowitz, a woman came close to Sam and said "don't go up the Banastrasse (ph)", the street from the railroad people because they are taking people to Siberia. She said it only in Yiddish, in a short word mancopt (ph). That means they are catching people. So we did not go there and so we were sort of trying to get to our apartment which we finally made and there were some people there and they, when we opened the door and said this is our apartment, they said "it's not going to be very long your apartment because you are not going to be here very long because this is our apartment." So we very quickly disappeared from there. And then we tried desperately to get into the Czech Army, which we did.

Q: Why?

A: We had to go somewhere and we had to go as far west as we could.

Q: Why the Czech Army?

A: Because they were there. We had no choices. The Czech army were wonderful to us.

07:18:01

And we were good to them but they were wonderful to us. And we were constantly in the Czech Army between the devil and the deep blue sea. Because in front of us were the Nazis, never more than one or two miles, no more. And behind us were the Soviets. So, we were there from middle 1944 until 1945.

Q: Was it frightening?

A: Frightening? Different. Very different because, first of all, we had one or two meals a day. It was beans, always beans, but it was something. Much more than we had before. And frightening yes because at every step you were stepping on a mine or one of your colleagues were killed, or somebody lost their eyes, or somebody lost their limbs. I did a lot of concertizing (ph) for the Czech Army soldiers before they were sent out into battle with an accordion and singing folk songs.

Q: Did you play the accordion or the piano?

A: Both. And I knew that when I am sent out to sing for a thousand soldiers, I knew these

were being sent out into a battle. The next day I was sent to a hospital and I found many of these people without arms, without legs, and this was a very small army, so we were very good friends all of us. And this was very tough, but it was the best part of our odyssey.

Q: I meant to ask you, in all of this time did your musical background play a part -- ?

A: In the Czech Army. I knew that this was lost for me forever. I could not believe that I would ever return to music. I thought music is much too, too unimportant. But I found out music is not unimportant. Music is very, very important.

07:21:04

Q: So you were in the Czech Army until the war ended?

A: Yes. We liberated a number of towns. Our, our unit. By the way, I was the only woman amongst 75 men because I wanted to remain with Sam. I made a special petition to the commanding general to permit me to stay with him. They didn't like it because they did have women, but in the rear. In the office, in hospitals and so forth. I wanted to be in the front line because that's where Sam was. And they permitted me. And we liberated L'vov. And in L'vov I had a very interesting experience. Coming out -- I was in the front of that whole group, marching into L'vov and I had a small snare drum in front.

- - QUESTION FROM AN UNIDENTIFIED PERSON - -

A: Yes. And then, of course, we also liberated Prague.

Q: It must be very odd being the only woman?

A: I didn't even think about it. But I had 75 wonderful friends. They were the greatest. They were really the greatest. Wonderful people. You know who they were? They were people who had run away from Hitler when he marched into Czechoslovakia and they had run into Poland, but in Poland they thought they would be safe, but they encountered the Soviets. And the Soviets had a very, very interesting way of dealing with them. They would ask them, "What's your name?" "Edward and Povachkowve (ph)" after your father. "Adolfovich" (ph). Ahh. Adolfovich, three years", because Hitler's name was Adolph. So they gave him three years. And these people were all in Siberia when they put together the Czech Army.

Q: They were independent of every one else?

A: The Czech Army was fighting next to the Soviets, but independently. In fact, they got the uniforms and food from the Americans. We thought of ourselves as the allied army.

Q: Where were you when the war ended?

A: In Prague. They wanted us to stay in Prague. They would have liked very much for us to stay, and I said, "Sam, no more Europe for me, I've had it." And the funniest part was before we entered Prague, the first town we entered in Czechoslovakia was -- well anyway, we got an order to arrest anybody who speaks German on the street. Koshetse (ph). So we got this order and I said "Sam, if I have to arrest a person because they speak a language --"

Q: And they spoke it 500 years.

A: "-- and they spoke it for the last 500 years, this is not the place for me to live." And this is why we left.

Q: I want to ask you a quick question because I know that you have to go.

A: Yes.

Q: It seems as though you were able to immigrate fairly soon after the war ended. I mean, a lot of the people had a long time before they got out of Europe. How were you able to get out so quickly?

A: When the war was finished it was May 8, 1945, we were in Prague. And we decided, particularly I -- out. I don't want to live in Europe anymore. Immediately, we decided to hitchhike to the West, preferably to Paris, where I thought I would make contact with my uncle -- my mother's brother. And so we went by way of Stuttgart, Nuremberg -- came to Paris and there we make contact with my uncle. But there we have to wait six months before we -- the first boat left Paris, I mean -- Le Havre.

Q: Was he able to get you visas or money?

A: Yes. He had -- my uncle was the Honorary Czech Consul in Berekeya (ph) -- But this was not the reason, even if he had not been, he was able to do that. And, and there was no connection with South America. We had to go by way of the United States, and that did it for me. I never dreamed that we would go to the United States. But we came by, we were here about two weeks. And we found the most wonderful people in Philadelphia, who turned out to be a cousin of my husband. And they were so human and so wonderful that after two weeks when I went to South America, I simply could not forget how human this life was in the United States. And six months later, we were here. And I also wanted our child to be born in the United States, I wanted that very much. When I found out I was pregnant and we were in South America, I didn't even want to go to see a doctor. And I needed to go because I didn't go to see a doctor for five years. So I said to myself, "If I go to a doctor in South America, I am going to be stuck there" -- and my child has to be born in the United States and that is how it was.

NOTE: the text is missing from 07:28:38 to 07:30:12

End of Tape #3
Conclusion of Interview