

INTRODUCTION TO THE TESTIMONY OF Martha Saraffian

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Introduction

Martha Saraffian (neé Kummermann) was born in 1907 in a suburb of Prague and grew up in the German-speaking borderlands of Bohemia/Czechoslovakia, where she lived until shortly after the annexation by Nazi Germany in October 1938. Her observant Jewish family belonged to the upper-middle class – her father Friedrich Kummermann was a successful textile merchant. Martha was well educated, and an entrepreneur herself. In 1931 she married Hrand Saraffian, an Armenian Christian refugee from Constantinople, with whom she had two daughters, Noemi and Hanna. Despite her civil marriage to a Protestant, Martha Saraffian remained a member of the Jewish community and their first daughter, Noemi, was raised as Jewish. After the annexation the Saraffian family was discriminated against, persecuted for their “mixed marriage.”¹ Martha Saraffian was eventually deported to the Ghetto Theresienstadt/Terezín in 1945 and her husband interned in several forced labor camps. While many of Martha’s family members perished in the Holocaust, including her mother who was murdered near Lublin, the couple and their children survived in occupied Czechia. After liberation, they emigrated to Argentina and later, in the 1960s, after Hrand had passed away, to New York City, where Martha lived until December 2006.

¹ The terms “mixed marriage” (Ger. *Mischehe*), “intermarried,” “Jew,” “Mischlinge,” and “non-Jew,” as used in this introduction follow the Nazi definitions laid down in the infamous Law on the Protection of German Blood and Honour and the Reich Citizenship Law of 1935, and their implementation regulations.

Martha Saraffian's testimony is unique in two ways. First, it is one of the few first-generation testimonies in the Fortunoff Archive of a Jew surviving the Holocaust in a mixed marriage.² Indeed, her testimony concerns the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, where conditions for such families were in many respects even worse than in many areas of the Reich proper. Second, she was married to a survivor of the Armenian massacres in Ottoman Turkey, a stateless refugee, who was nonetheless considered "Aryan" under the Nuremberg Race Laws. For Hrand Saraffian, the Holocaust was the second major experience of persecution in his life. This intersection of the history of the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust in the lives of one family is certainly unique. Their experiences during the Holocaust are nevertheless representative of the fate of many Czech and Sudeten-German mixed marriages. Martha Saraffian's testimony revolves primarily around her experience as an "intermarried" Jew, the fate of her children, persecuted as Jewish "*Mischlinge*," of her husband's slave labor, as well as her own experience as a forced laborer in Prague and later in Theresienstadt ghetto. In the end, hers is also a story of seeking justice.

This testimony sheds light on a chapter in the persecution of mixed marriages that hitherto has been largely ignored: the experiences of intermarried Jews in the peripheries of the "Greater German Reich," outside the large urban centers, and in occupied Czechoslovakia in particular.³ In this brief introduction, I will first introduce the setting of the testimony, recorded in 1984, and then attempt to reconstruct Saraffian's family background, which is only briefly

² While testimonies of children who grew up in such "mixed" families in Germany and its annexed territories are relatively numerous, only about a dozen interviews were given by the parent generation.

³ To date, no extensive studies on either subject exist. Some of the more recent studies on the persecution of "mixed marriages" include (on Austria) Evan Burr Bukey, *Jews and Intermarriage in Nazi Austria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and (on the "Old Reich") Max Strnad, "The Fortune of Survival – Intermarried German Jews in the Dying Breath of the 'Thousand-Year Reich,'" *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 29, no. 3 (2015). The most comprehensive study on the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia is Wolf Gruner, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia: Czech Initiatives, German Policies, Jewish Responses* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019). Jörg Osterloh's extensive book on the Holocaust in Sudetenland is only available in German: Jörg Osterloh, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung im Reichsgau Sudetenland 1938–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006); for an English summary of the key aspects see: Jörg Osterloh, "Sudetenland," in Wolf Gruner, Jörg Osterloh, *The Greater German Reich and the Jews: Nazi Persecution in the Annexed Territories 1935–1945* (New York City: Berghahn Books, 2010), 68–98. Both Gruner and Osterloh mention various aspects of the persecution of "mixed marriages" in their works.

mentioned at the beginning of her testimony. I will contextualize her experience of persecution in the larger history of the Holocaust in Bohemia and the Sudetenland and the specific situation of mixed marriages in this region. My focus is on the lesser known aspects of this experience, in particular, the special labor camps that were maintained for both intermarried Jews and their non-Jewish spouses.⁴

Setting of the Interview

Saraffian gave her testimony for the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale on February 26, 1984 in New York City. By this date she had lived in the United States for 21 years,⁵ having lived for about 15 years previously in Argentina, where the family emigrated to after the war. While her command of English was certainly not bad, it lacked the fluency of her native German tongue, and was perhaps her fourth or fifth language. While some parts of the testimony are rich in detail, others lack “thick description” and levels of detail. Strikingly, none of the members of her family – neither her husband, her children,⁶ nor her parents – are mentioned by name in the testimony. However, when Saraffian did mention names of persons and places or specific events she demonstrated an extraordinary memory, only occasionally confusing places and dates. This accuracy of her testimony has allowed for the reconstruction of some of the “gaps” in her narration and the finding of further documents. As stated, her marriage to a non-Jew, an Armenian refugee, and the complicated status of her children – one was a member of the Jewish community, the other was not – were important aspects of her life story, of her experience. These were the aspects she wanted to start her testimony with and to which she continuously returned.⁷ However, she was frequently interrupted by the interviewers, who were apparently pushing for a more chronological and “scenic” narration.

⁴ Her experience in the ghetto of Theresienstadt/Terezín from the beginning of February 1945 until the liberation in May 1945 constitutes an important and detailed part of the testimony but is only touched upon briefly in this introduction.

⁵ Her American Social Security number was issued in 1963. Social Security Administration (Washington D.C., USA), Social Security Death Index, Master File. Accessed via Ancestry.com.

⁶ At one point in the testimony, she reads the name of her older daughter Noemi from a postcard.

⁷ The small number of such first-generation testimonies makes it relatively difficult to identify common themes and patterns in narration among them. For certain reasons there are also very few interviews from the peripheries, the more rural areas, where the experiences differed in many aspects from those in

In the Fortunoff collection we find three further testimonies given that day in New York City in the same setting. This may indicate that the interviewers were under certain time constraints. Each of the testimonies – all approximately the same length – was conducted by a different female interviewer, together with Dori Laub. In Saraffian's case the interviewer was Bonnie Dwork. This was apparently Dwork's first interview for the Video Archive and Laub's intended role was most likely to guide and supervise her.⁸ At the beginning of the recording, Laub can be heard explaining to Saraffian: "Bonnie will ask you most of the questions. I'll be mostly silent." This, however, did not quite prove to be the case. Laub would eventually ask just as many questions and make as many comments on Saraffian's narration as Dwork. At times he also served as a translator from German into English.

Martha Saraffian's meticulously neat appearance in her interview is striking. In her testimony, we learn that she was a trained milliner. Her carefully precise appearance mirrors the accuracy of her narration. She is soft-spoken, but nevertheless determined. An important feature of her testimony concerns several items that she brought with her and some of which she showed or read to the camera: postcards, letters, documents and even remnants from the camps, such as a piece of mica glimmer and an armband. As mentioned, the interview was conducted in English, with frequent occurrence of German terms and phrases. Localities and place names are almost exclusively given in their German version.⁹

Berlin, Vienna and other major urban centers. Many of the second-generation testimonies, especially from Berlin, were recorded in the mid- and late 1990s, when the topic of "mixed marriages" had already received considerable attention in the public discourse. They tend to echo this discourse and to stress – at times even revolve around – certain events that were very specific to Berlin (e.g. the Rosenstraße Protests. Cf. Wolf Gruner, *Widerstand in der Rosenstraße: Die Fabrik-Aktion und die Verfolgung der 'Mischehen' 1943* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2005)), but not necessarily mirrored experiences elsewhere. For further details on this problem see my upcoming article in S:I.M.O.N.

⁸ Altogether she conducted 77 interviews for the Fortunoff Archive and its affiliate projects, according to the archive's catalogue.

⁹ In the annotated transcript, and in this introduction when referring to the testimony, the modern Czech names are provided after the German name. In additional footnotes the modern Czech names are used. Other geographic references are given in the form most common in English.

Bohemian Jews, the Kummermann Family and the new Czechoslovakian State¹⁰

Martha Kummermann grew up in the period of great political, national, and social transformations before, during, and after World War I in the northern border region of what was to become Czechoslovakia. When she was born, on September 15, 1907, her birthplace, the town of Vinohrady or Königliche Weinberge, as it was known in German, was still an independent suburb of Prague, by then the capital of the Austrian crown land of Bohemia.¹¹ A year later, her family moved to north-eastern Bohemia, near the Silesian border. This crown land, one part of the historic Czech lands, which had received a certain degree of autonomy after the Austrian-Hungarian compromise of 1867, was the major site of an ongoing national conflict between Austrian Czechs and Austrian Germans.¹² The Czechs, who were the majority in Bohemia, had strived for national autonomy or even independence for decades. Most Germans in the region fiercely opposed any such initiative. Bohemia was therefore an epicenter of both German and Czech nationalism and radicalization. It is thus not surprising that in 1903 the German Workers' Party, an early forerunner of the Austrian and German-Czech National Socialist movement, was founded in the heavily industrialized region. Bohemian Jews were caught in the middle of this national struggle between Czechs and Germans, which also extended to other regions of the monarchy, such as Moravia and even Vienna.¹³ In the 18th and 19th centuries the majority of Bohemian Jews had identified as Germans, at least on paper, as the Austro-Hungarian system of nationality was based on self-identification and the self-declared everyday language of its citizens.¹⁴ Hence these national identities were always fluid and never

¹⁰ I am very grateful to the archivists at the State District Archives in Trutnov (Dr. Pavel Zahradník) and Nymburk (Dr. Michal Řezníček), who provided me with the archival documents and further information cited hereafter.

¹¹ In 1922 the town was merged into the capital city Prague. Hence in many later documents Martha Saraffian's birthplace is listed as Prague.

¹² Cf. Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars & Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹³ For the “identity struggles” among Bohemian Jews see Katerina Čapkova, Czechs, Germans, Jews? National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

¹⁴ Cf. Peter Judson and Marsha Rozenblit (eds.), *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (New York: Berghahn, 2005).

cemented. Identifications began to shift towards the Czech side at the turn of the century, especially in the Czech majority areas, and a vocal minority of Bohemian Jews also supported Zionism. However, many citizens of the region, whether Jewish or not, were in the truest sense “multicultural” and bilingual, at least to some degree, and shifting identifications were also a matter of political allegiances. According to the 1910 census, 62.66% of the inhabitants of Bohemia spoke Czech (including Slovakian) as their daily common language, whereas 36.45% were German speakers (in Austria-Hungary as a whole 23.36% were German speakers, 19.57% Hungarian speakers and 12.54% spoke Czech and Slovakian, the rest other languages). Jews accounted for only 1.5% of the entire Bohemian population at the time. However, in Prague, Jews accounted for a large part, perhaps even the majority, of the city’s German population.¹⁵

Many Bohemian Jews may have adopted also a “tripartite” system of identification, as Marsha Rozenblit suggested: Austrian by political loyalty, culturally either German or Czech, and ethnically Jewish.¹⁶ This complex social, cultural, and political situation, involving having to choose sides while at the same time experiencing in-betweenness, or even being “othered,” as antisemitism had been on the rise since the end of the 19th century,¹⁷ became incredibly more complicated as a result of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.¹⁸ Bohemia and Moravia, the other major historic Czech land, as well as formerly Hungarian Slovakia, and some smaller territories, emerged as the new and independent Republic of Czechoslovakia. While the new republic was hailed for its liberal and tolerant policies, neither the national conflict nor antisemitism vanished. In many ways only the roles were reversed between the ethnic groups: now it was the Germans who became the separatists (as well as the Hungarians and Ukrainians

¹⁵ Frank Meissner, “German Jews of Prague: A Quest for Self-Realization,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 50, no. 2 (1960), 98–120, 104.

¹⁶ Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁷ Cf. Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 133–36.

¹⁸ According to Meissner, Bohemian Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries originally faced five alternatives: preserving their traditional religious identity; identifying with the Czech national awakening; identifying with the Germans/Austria; conversion, intermarriage and total assimilation; or overseas emigration. In the 20th century “Communism and Zionism became real alternatives as well.” Meissner, “German Jews,” 102–103.

in the East). Many Germans, especially in the Bohemian periphery and in Moravia, agitated either for reunification with Austria or, increasingly, for the annexation of the borderlands by Germany. These voices grew continuously louder after 1933. Jewish citizens, even if they identified culturally as Germans, were mostly loyal to the new Czechoslovakian Republic, which was religiously tolerant and curbed antisemitism for the longest time.

In May 1908, the Kummermann family moved from the surroundings of Prague to Trautenau/Trutnov, a mid-sized town in north-eastern Bohemia near the border with then Prussian Silesia (today Poland). The historic city of Trautenau is located at the river Aupe/Úpa, a tributary of the Elbe/Labe, in the south-eastern foothills of the Sudeten/Sudety, a large mountain range between Bohemia and Silesia, today roughly along the border between Czechia and Poland. At the time, Trautenau, just as almost the entire northern border region, was almost exclusively inhabited by Germans.¹⁹ In the interwar period, the term “Sudeten” – previously only referring to the mountain range – began to take on a new meaning: Sudeten-Germans (*Sudetendeutsche*) became a quasi-self-designation of the Czechoslovakian Germans, especially those living in the northern and western border lands. German separatists began to refer to these regions, which did not form a political unity until the Nazi annexation in October 1938, as *Sudetenland*, the land of the Sudeten-Germans. While these areas were not granted any form of autonomy by the Czechoslovakian state, German was still used as an official administrative and educational language. In her testimony, Saraffian refers to this linguistic and political change in meaning: “And we moved to the Sudeten. At this time, it was Austria. It was not Sudeten.” Despite the political changes after World War I, Trautenau remained an almost entirely German-speaking town with around 13,000 inhabitants.

A tiny number of Jews, usually just two families and a few individuals, had lived in Trautenau since the early modern period. A significant Jewish community – entirely Ashkenazi – with a synagogue and other religious and communal infrastructure, only existed from the 1860s

¹⁹ Only few works on the history of the town exist. Many of the more comprehensive works are decidedly revisionist or ethnocentric, e.g. Rheinhard Lamer, *Trautenau: Geschichte einer deutschen Stadt* (Wien, München: Volkstum Verlag, 1971); Antonín Just, Josef Šabacký, Jaroslav Procházka, *700 let Trutnova 1260-1960: Jubilejní průvodce dějinami a přírodou města pod Krkonošemi* (Trutnov: Okr. vlastivědné muzeum, 1959). For the Jewish history see below.

onwards, when Jews from other towns and cities moved to Trautenau. The town promised good economic opportunities, as it was well connected by railway to its hinterland, the major urban centers, and to nearby Germany. In 1910, the town's Jewish population peaked at 478 persons and then slowly declined in the interwar period. The small Jewish community (at any given point less than around four percent of the population) was well integrated into the civic society and social fabric of the town, and played an important role in the linen industry, which was the strongest industrial and commercial sector of Trautenau.²⁰

We learn from Saraffian's testimony that the Kummermann family was observant ("My parents were religious, and we had a kosher home"), financially well-off, and that Martha and her sister enjoyed a very good education and comfortable live. However, as previously mentioned, the description of the family background in the testimony lacks important details, such as the names of her immediate family members and the other more distant relatives she mentions. With the help of a handful of archival documents and other materials, mostly preserved in the local archives and in libraries, we can piece together some additional parts of her family story. This background information may help us to better understand Saraffian's specific experience after the Nazi occupation and during the Holocaust.

Her father, Friedrich Kummermann, who also went by Fritz, was born on April 26, 1869 in the town of Humpoletz/Humpolec in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands.²¹ The city had an old Jewish community dating back the 14th century.²² As in many other peripheral towns, the Jewish population began to decline in the 1890s as the younger generation – including Kummermann himself – moved to larger cities, such as Prague or Vienna, or even emigrated overseas. His father, Emanuel Kummermann, born in the mid-1830s, was a merchant in

²⁰ Rudolf M. Wlaschek, *Jüdisches Leben in Trautenau/Nordostböhmen: Ein historischer Rückblick* (Dortmund 1991). See also the entry for "Trautenau" in Klaus-Dieter Aliche, *Lexikon der jüdischen Gemeinden im deutschen Sprachraum* Vol. 3 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008).

²¹ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Czechoslovakian Census 1921, Domicile collection sheet (Sběrný arch domovní/Haussammelbogen) and Census sheet (sčítací arch/Zählbogen), Friedrich Kummermann (February 16, 1921).

²² Cf. Adolf Brock, "History of Jews in Humpolec," in *The Jews and Jewish Communities of Bohemia in the past and present* (translation of *Die Juden und Judengemeinde Böhmens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Brno-Prague: Jüdischer Buch- und Kunst Verlag, 1934), 193–96, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/bohemia/boh193.html>.

Humpoletz. When he died in 1906, he and his wife Fanni had at least seven children, all of whom lived in different Bohemian towns.²³ One of Friedrich's brothers, Robert, was trading in Humpoletz in fashion accessories.²⁴ Perhaps Emanuel Kummermann had encouraged his children to move to different towns in order to facilitate a merchant network among the family. This social practice was quite common among Bohemian families at the time, especially in the textile trade, for which Bohemia – and also Humpoletz – was well known.²⁵ Friedrich Kummermann's later wife, Elvira Louise Steiner, Martha Saraffian's mother, was born on July 25, 1881 in the very small village of Dlouhá Lhota (in German sometimes called Langlhota), halfway between the towns of Neveklau/Neveklov and Beneschau/Benešova. The village also had a small Jewish population belonging to the larger Neveklov community in the nearby city.²⁶ During World War II it was mostly destroyed, as the Germans turned the area into an SS-proving ground (training area). In the early 20th century, Friedrich and Elvira Kummermann lived in Königliche Weinberge/Vinohrady near Prague, where both of their daughters were born. Their first child, Gretl, on June 28, 1906 and just a year later, Martha.²⁷

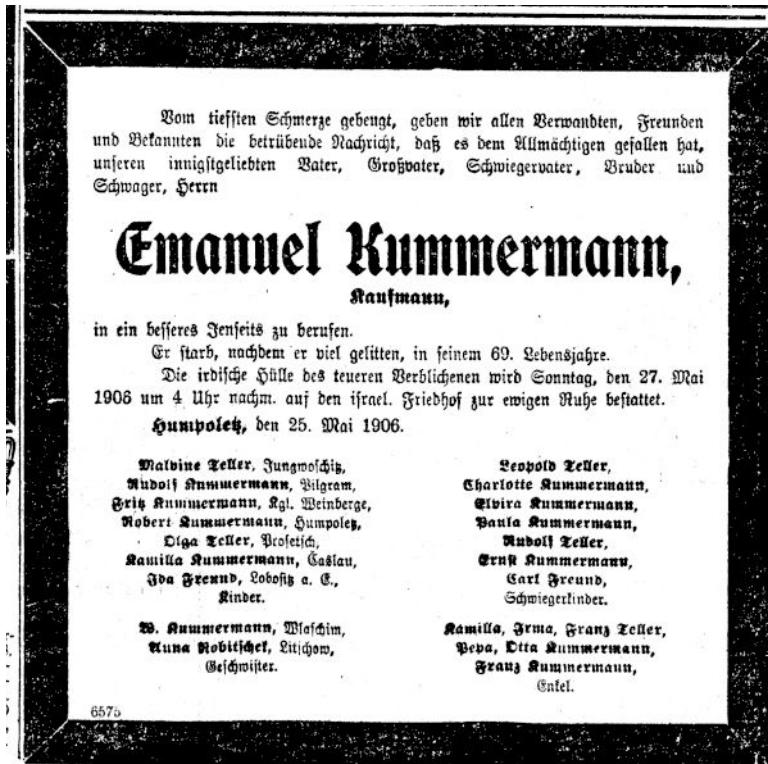
²³ Obituary "Emanuel Kummermann," *Prager Tagblatt*, May 26, 1906, 18.

²⁴ *Österreichischer Zentralkataster VIII/2: Böhmen* (Vienna: Volkswirtschaftlicher Verlag Alexander Dorn, 1903), 1958.

²⁵ See for example the Perlhefter/Palmers family and its textile dynasty: Hanno Loewy, "Die diskrete Familie Palmers," in Peter Melichar, Nikolaus Hagen (eds.), *Der Fall Riccabona: Eine Familiengeschichte zwischen Akzeptanz und Bedrohung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau, 2017), 76–101.

²⁶ Jaroslav Polák-Rokyan, "The History of the Jews in Benešov-by-Prague, Neveklov and Divisov," in *The Jews and Jewish Communities of Bohemia in the past and present*, 26–27, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/bohemia/boh026.html>.

²⁷ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Czechoslovakian Census 1921, Domicile collection sheet (Sběrný arch domovní/Haussammelbogen) and Census sheet (sčítací arch/Zählbogen), Friedrich Kummermann (February 16, 1921).



Obituary announcing Emanuel Kummermann's death. Several of his children and children-in-law were murdered in the Holocaust, including his daughter Ida Freund and his daughter-in-law Elvira Kummermann (Source: *Prager Tagblatt*, May 26, 1906, 18).

Soon after Martha's birth, in May 1908, the family moved to Trautenau, where Friedrich Kummermann opened a linen trading business, initially together with a partner. The Austrian commercial register of 1908 contains the following entry: "Trautenau, Kummermann & Steinhauer. Production of linen and cotton products. Open trading company since 1. VII. 1908. [Partners] Friedrich Kummermann and Max Steinhauer, both in Trautenau."²⁸ According to the town's 1912 street directory, the company was located as Reichstraße 25.²⁹ This address may have also been the initial residence, though in 1921 both the family and the company were registered in nearby Reichstraße 5 (today Polská 98), in the Nieder-Vorstadt, the "lower suburb." The household also included Elivra Kummermann's mother, Louise Steiner, who was

²⁸ k.k. Handelsministerium, *Zentralblatt für die Eintragungen in das Handelsregister* 7, August 12, 1908, 592

²⁹ Alois Falge, Hermann Benisch, *Adreßbuch der Stadt Trautenau* (Trautenau, 1912), 39.

born in 1857 in the Příbram district.³⁰ The Kummermann residence was in the northern part of the town, not far from the historic center, tucked between the river Úpa and the railway line.



The central town square of Trautenau/Trutnov in the early 20th century. (Source: Author's private collection)

Despite the war Friedrich Kummermann's business seems to have flourished. In 1919 he expanded his commercial license and began to produce linen products, both on site and through weavers he commissioned in Rochlitz/Rokytnice nad Jizerou to work for him.³¹ By this time he was managing the company on his own. In a register of Czechoslovakian industrial enterprises of

³⁰ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Czechoslovakian Census 1921, Domicile collection sheet (Sběrný arch domovní/Haussammelbogen) and Census sheet (sčítací arch/Zählbogen), Friedrich Kummermann (February 16, 1921).

³¹ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Records of the District Office (Bezirkshauptmannschaft Trautenau), Registration of business enlargement, Friedrich Kummermann, July 9, 1919.

1929, the Kummermann company was characterized as a hand loom weaving business (Ger. *Handweberei*).³² Another indicator of the modest wealth of the family is the 1921 census, which reveals that they had a household help living with them. Marie Ende was a Catholic, born in 1895 in a village just outside Trautenau. The house at Reichstraße 5 also contained a second apartment, by then rented out to a single tenant.³³ Both Kummermann daughters received a very good education and enjoyed what could be described as a small-town bourgeois lifestyle:

[...] my father sent-- sent us to France to learn-- to learn French. And I learned millinery, and [...] my sister was studying in French. And we went off to Prague and even to Austria, to Vienna. We had really a nice youth. My father was well off and he wanted that we learn-- I was also in Germany in business school one year. And, uh, then [...] I had the millinery diploma I made in small business. In my father's house, he gave me two rooms. And I had-- I made-- I had three girls employed and I made these hats. Not-- not-- I didn't have to do it, but I liked it.

While we don't know any specifics about the school Martha Saraffian attended in Germany, it was very likely located in the Lower Silesian border district Landeshut in Schlesien (today roughly corresponding with the larger Polish Kamienna Góra County), which was linked with Trautenau by a railway line.³⁴

³² *Compass Industrielles Jahrbuch Čechoslovakei* 65 (1932), Prague 1932, 1735.

³³ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Czechoslovakian Census 1921, Domicile collection sheet (Sběrný arch domovní/Haussammelbogen) and Census sheet (scítací arch/Zählbogen), Friedrich Kummermann (February 16, 1921).

³⁴ According to her registration card, she was continuously registered at her father's house between 1919 and 1932, so the school was most likely close to Trautenau. Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Trutnov citizen registration, Martha Saraffian, 1919–1939.



House at Polská 98 (formerly Reichstraße 5) in 2020 as seen from the street. In its substance this seems to be still the same building that the Kummermann and Saraffian families lived in and where the Kummermann company was located (source: Google Street View).

Another interesting detail from the 1921 census is the national affiliation of the Kummermann family. Independent Czechoslovakia had adopted, by and large, the Imperial Austrian system of national self-identification based on everyday language. However, for the 1921 census the authorities also introduced the option of “Jewish” as a national affiliation.³⁵ German and Hungarian nationalists decried this as an attempt to weaken Jewish affiliation with their respective minorities. In 1921, under 15 percent of Bohemian Jews identified as “national Jews” – the others as Czechs or Germans. In total, however, about half of the 354,000 Czechoslovakian Jews made this identification; in the East, Carpatho-Ukraine and Slovakia, it was over 90 percent. By the late 1920s the numbers of “national Jews” increased in Bohemia, with around 20 percent declaring Jewish nationality, 50 percent Czech and 30 percent German.³⁶ According to Jörg Osterloh’s estimate, about 30 percent of Jews in the later Reich District Sudetenland, which included Trautenau, identified as national Jews in the early 1930s

³⁵ On Czechoslovakian Jewish nationalism and Zionism see Tatjana Lichtenstein, *Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia: Minority Nationalism and the Politics of Belonging* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

³⁶ Gruner, *The Holocaust*, 25–30.

and most of the others as Germans and some as Czechs.³⁷ The exact numbers for Trautenau were 13.35 percent in 1921 and 19.23 in 1930; the other Jews identified as Germans.³⁸ In 1921, the entire Kumermann family declared German nationality and Jewish religion.³⁹ This is perhaps not surprising in a then almost exclusively German-speaking town, where even the bilingual Czech-German Czechoslovakian census forms were filled out entirely in German. As Wolf Gruner convincingly argues, in the mid-1930s the situation of German-speaking Jews in Czechoslovakia became increasingly precarious. On the one hand radical antisemitism was rapidly increasing, foremost among the Sudeten-Germans, on the other hand, Czech nationalists labelled them national traitors, siding with the Germans.⁴⁰

From her testimony, however, we get the impression that events in neighboring Germany – Hitler's rise to power, the erupting antisemitism – and the increasing radicalization of Sudeten-German nationalism did not affect Kumermann. She also makes no mention of experiencing antisemitism prior to 1938. The early 1930s was when she met her future husband and, while this relationship caused a rift with her parents, she describes married-life in the 1930s as comfortable, a time of hope and joy:

And then when I met my husband and I married, so I gave up the business and we moved in a nice apartment. We had-- when my daughter was born, we had the dog and bird and the-- we had the house housekeeper. It was really a nice life. We had a car and sometimes we went by car to Vienna. And really, it was a nice life.

³⁷ C.f. Osterloh, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung*, 59

³⁸ Wlaschek, *Jüdisches Leben*, 24.

³⁹ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Czechoslovakian Census 1921, Census sheet (sčítací arch/Zählbogen), Friedrich Kumermann (February 16, 1921).

⁴⁰ Gruner, *The Holocaust*, 32, 34–35.

Zum Ausschneiden für Frauen:

Spinat auf türkische Art .

Auf 1 Kasserolle einen Eßlöffel voll Reis auf Öl oder Butter geben, dazu $\frac{1}{2}$ kg gewaschenen, geputzten Spinat, die ganzen Blätter, Salz und vorher schon ziemlich weich gekochtes, in Würfel geschnittenes, Rindfleisch dazu, dünsten lassen bis der Spinat weich ist und noch Fleischsuppe aufgegangen, damit es nicht zu dick ist. Schmeckt für hiesigen Geschmack mit Butter sehr gut und hat den Vorteil, daß der Spinat nicht auskocht und kein Spinatwasser abgeschüttet wird. Ohne Fleisch, vegetarisch, mit Zitronensaft.

Martha Saraffian, Trautenau.

A recipe for “Turkish style Spinach” by Martha Saraffian, printed in the *Prager Tagblatt* newspaper on August 29, 1936.

It is unknown how Martha Kummermann met Hrand Saraffian, whom she married in 1931 in Trautenau. Her husband was born on June 17, 1891 in Constantinople/Istanbul in the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹ At that time Istanbul had a large Armenian population. Initially discriminated against but now tolerated and considered loyal to the Turkish authorities, in the last quarter of the 19th century a strong movement for Armenian national independence grew throughout the Empire. The Ottoman authorities answered with severe repression and several bloody massacres in many Armenian communities in the 1890s. The years 1894 to 1896 saw a campaign of mass killings, the so-called “Hamidian massacres,” with 80,000 to 300,000 Armenians murdered, according to varying estimates, and up to 50,000 children orphaned.⁴² It is very likely that Hrand Saraffian and his siblings were among these orphans and were brought to Europe in a humanitarian effort, perhaps organized by Armenians living in the diaspora. According to a post-war document of the International Tracing Service, Hrand Saraffian left Istanbul in 1897 at the age of six and “since

⁴¹ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Trutnov citizen registration, Hrand Saraffian, 1929–1939.

⁴² Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Hamidian Massacres, 1894–1897. Disinterring a Buried History,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* no. 11 (2018): 125–34.

then he has not acquired any other citizenship.”⁴³ His background, his experience of flight and persecution, left a great impression on Martha Kummermann when she met him:

He came to Germany, with a transport, children. What—what were left after a massacre. When the Turks massacred the Armenians, he came to-- to Germany. With an-- it's like a self-help organization what brought this children to Germany. He came there with about four sisters and brothers. He never saw them again because they were all placed in another foster home. So he-- he searched, but he didn't get any-- he didn't see any of his family. Only one uncle was in Köln am Rhein and he had the business with stamps. That was the only connection he got. And he was alone and he told me this story.

At some point, most likely several years before World War I, Hrand Saraffian moved to Vienna, where he “lived for a long time,” according to the testimony. While we lack further details, one indication that he indeed moved to Vienna as a boy or teenager is an Upper Austrian newspaper report from 1908. The newspaper reported a 16-year old Turkish servant from Constantinople, by the name of “Rhand Sarafian,” who was the victim of sexual harassment by a known offender when he stayed overnight in Wels during a journey. The police intervened and the servant continued his journey to Vienna, according to the report.⁴⁴ Perhaps even before the end of the war, Hrand Saraffian moved to Bohemia, and began to trade in Persian carpets. Trading businesses, especially those importing Turkish and Oriental goods, were widespread among the European Armenian diaspora. In a Czech newspaper from April 1924 it is mentioned that, in 1922, Saraffian already traded with Persian carpets in Karlín, which today is part of Prague.⁴⁵ According to his citizen registration card, he moved to Trautenau on December 7, 1929, coming from Rumburg/Rumburk, a town in northwestern Bohemia.⁴⁶ Another interesting detail on the

⁴³ Arolsen Archives, 3.2.1./1718000.

⁴⁴ “Der Türke,” *Salzburger Volksblatt*, February 12, 1908, 6.

⁴⁵ *Národní osvobození*, April 15, 1924, 8.

⁴⁶ The district archive responsible for Rumburk (Státní Okresní Archiv Děčín) unfortunately has no further evidence of Hrand Saraffian’s presence in the town.

registration card is that he apparently had already been married before: in 1922 Hrand Saraffian married an unidentified woman in Hohenelbe/Vrchlabí, just west of Trautenau.⁴⁷ It is unclear if the marriage ended in divorce or if his first wife died.

For all we know, Martha Kumermann and Hrand Saraffian got to know each other in Trautenau, perhaps in early 1930. From the testimony we learn that their romantic involvement must have been going on for some time before they eventually married. Martha was especially intrigued by Hrand's stories of the Armenian persecution, as she mentions in her testimony. In the testimony she draws parallels between the Jewish and the Armenian experience. Her parents, however, strongly discouraged the relationship and sent her to Berlin, where one of Martha's cousins studied at a rabbinical school. Apparently, they hoped that her cousin would talk her out of the relationship to a non-Jew, but he did not. During this time, Martha's grandmother, who lived with the family, died, and Martha was blamed for causing her grandmother's death. According to Martha's mother, the grandmother had been so deeply disturbed by her granddaughter's plan of marrying a non-Jew that she fell ill. Her parents' opposition caused emotional hardship for Martha, which were exacerbated by her father's poor health and his temporary refusal to speak to her. Nevertheless, Hrand Saraffian and Martha Kumermann eventually married on June 30, 1931 in Trautenau in a civil marriage.⁴⁸ Her decision to go through with the marriage deepened the rift with her parents:

And it was very hard for me when I-- I married a man that was no Jew. My father didn't talk to me one year. And when I married, my mother took the suitcase and went away, and I and my father was in the office. Only my sister went with me with the lawyer to the-- what you call it, where we were married.

⁴⁷ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Trutnov citizen registration, Hrand Saraffian, 1929–1939.

⁴⁸ Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Trutnov citizen registration, Hrand Saraffian, 1929–1939.

At the time, Friedrich Kummermann was member of the board of the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde*, the Jewish Community of Trautenau.⁴⁹ According to historian Rudolf Wlaschek, the Trautenau community was fairly liberal in the interwar period, not strictly observant or orthodox, and attendance at services was often only during the high holidays. Nevertheless, he characterizes it as a tightknit community, with many institutions, clubs, and a vibrant social life. Conversions were relatively uncommon in Trautenau. Intermarriage rates, however, were high throughout Czechoslovakia towards the 1930s (around 30 percent of all marriages involving a Jewish spouse). Martha's parents were apparently deeply unhappy with their daughter's choice for a life partner. It may have been a small comfort that she did not convert to Christianity, as the Czechoslovakian marriage law allowed for interreligious civil marriages. For Martha Saraffian this rift with her parents was quite painful, as we learn from the testimony. It seems likely that it was not only religion alone that caused the opposition of her parents: Hrand Saraffian's national status, his citizenship, was extremely unclear, and contemporary citizenship law mandated that Martha Kummermann lost her Czechoslovakian citizenship when she married a foreigner.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, half a year after their marriage, in December 1931, Hrand Saraffian temporarily moved into the Kummermann house in Reichstraße 5. Perhaps this was a first sign that her parents had begun to accept their son-in-law. The birth of their first daughter, Noemi, seems to have finally appeased Martha Saraffian's parents, especially since they decided that the daughter would be registered as Jewish. "And then it took a long time before my parents got used to-- when my first child was born. So they say, we are very happy. But they wanted that she be Jewish and that's what we did." Noemi Saraffian was born on February 2, 1934 in Trautenau. By this time the Saraffian family already lived in a separate apartment at Anastasius-Grüngasse 1 in Mittel-Vorstadt, the central suburb. In March 1935 the family moved to Walhallastraße 16 in the same district.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Wlaschek, *Jüdisches Leben*, 19.

⁵⁰ The Trautenau municipality registered the whole Saraffian family as Armenians, based on a passport issued by the Armenian mission in Paris in 1929. By that time, Armenia was part of the Soviet Union. It is unclear what this passport really meant. Effectively, the Saraffian family was stateless – and was treated as such by the Nazi authorities and, after the war, by the Czechoslovakian state.

⁵¹ Státní okresní archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Trutnov citizen registration, Hrand/Martha/Noemi Saraffian, undated.

The Annexation of the Sudetenland and Czechia

In March 1938, Nazi Germany annexed Austria, Czechoslovakia's southern neighbor. From this time the long lingering threat of an annexation of the German-speaking border regions by Nazi Germany – something Sudeten German activists, affiliated with the Nazi Party, had agitated for increasingly from 1933 onwards – became a very real possibility. According to many reports, most Czechoslovakian Jews, including those in the Sudetenland, had seen the rise of Nazism in Germany, especially in the early years, as a purely German affair. They felt safe in Czechoslovakia for the longest time and most made no preparations for emigration. Things began to change slightly in the mid-1930s, when more and more German-Jewish refugees arrived in Czechoslovakia and reports of the Nazi persecution of Jews and political enemies circulated widely. At the same time, domestic antisemitism was also on the rise – both among the Sudeten-Germans and the Czech majority. Nevertheless, until early 1938 the threat posed by Nazism seemed far away. With the annexation of Austria, Czechoslovakia was suddenly encroached upon by Nazi Germany from the north, west, and south – and the situation became more threatening.

Around the time of the “*Anschluss*,” Friedrich and Elvira Kummermann left Trautenau and moved in with a brother of Friedrich, deeper inside Czechoslovakia: “He left about, uh, half year, one year before I left, with my mother. They left all and went to a brother from my-- my father. And then my father got sick again so they went in the spa and lived in a hotel.” Her parents most likely temporarily moved in with either Robert or Rudolf Kummermann. Eventually, perhaps towards the end of 1938, they decided to move to a hotel in Podiebrad/Poděbrady, about 50 km outside of Prague. In the interwar period Podiebrad developed into an internationally known spa town. As Friedrich Kummermann suffered from various illnesses for a long time he was probably also seeking the comforts of the spas. While he was gone, Hrand Saraffian took care of certain financial affairs for his father-in-law. This further

improved their relationship. Eventually, Friedrich and Elvira Kumermann rented an apartment in house Nr. 619/II.⁵²

In the meantime, the Munich agreement of September 30, 1938 forced Czechoslovakia to immediately cede the German-speaking border regions to Nazi Germany. In the months leading up to the agreement, local Nazis and their collaborators from Germany and Austria had waged a campaign of terror in the Sudetenland, delivering the pretext for the annexation. Immediately after the agreement, in the first two weeks of October 1938, German troops occupied the Sudetenland, which was carved out of Czechoslovakia very roughly along ethnic lines. Throughout the region, including Trautenau, riots and violent attacks on Czech and Jewish businesses and persons erupted.⁵³ In Trautenau, according to Wlaschek, it was allegedly SA-men from nearby Silesia who were responsible for most of the violence against the Jewish community. It seems very likely that local supporters of the Sudeten German Party – the regional Nazi affiliate – also partook in the violence. The Kumermann house in Reichstraße 5 was looted during these annexation riots:

They broke the door from my parents' house. They took out everything they find in-- in the shelves, in the closets, in-- in the drawers, in the offices. Everything was on the floor, it was high like this. From the wall, pictures. And from this handles from brass, everything. What they could damage, they did.

Jews and Czech inhabitants of the Sudetenland were forced to sign documents, declaring that they would “voluntarily” leave the region within days. Many, perhaps the majority, complied. Within weeks, much of the Jewish population left the Sudetenland and moved towards the Czechoslovakian rump state. At the beginning of 1939, only a fraction of Jews remained in Sudetenland. Among the few that stayed longer than others were mixed families such as the Saraffians, who hoped that their only partly Jewish status would spare them from the worst:

⁵² Statní Okresní Archiv Nymburk (District State Archive Nymburk), Archiv města Poděbrady (City Archive Poděbrady), List of Jewish Inhabitants (undated, ca. 1939–1941).

⁵³ Osterloh, *Sudetenland*, 73–74.

And my husband always said, nothing can happen to us because I'm not Jewish. But then when the Grynszpan affair-- affair came, they-- they we're like animals. They hit an old Jew [...] throwing all over on the place, on the-- on the-- from the town, the big place, they, throw these Jews around that everybody see it.



Trautenau/Trutnov after the annexation of the Sudetenland by Nazi Germany in 1939 (source: author's private collection)

In Sudetenland the terror campaign leading to the Munich agreement, the immediate annexation riots and attacks on political enemies, Jews, and Czechs in its aftermath, almost seamlessly transitioned into the anti-Jewish pogrom of November 9/10, 1938.⁵⁴ In Trautenau the synagogue was burnt to the ground. Many of those who had still hoped to reconcile themselves

⁵⁴ Osterloh, *Sudetenland*, 76.

with the new situation now also fled over the new border to Czechoslovakia. For weeks, Martha Saraffian barely left her house, as she was afraid for the safety of her Jewish daughter and of herself. In late 1938, perhaps during or after the pogrom night, Hrand Saraffian was arrested and only released after he provided documents from Vienna proving he was not a Jew. “And so then he realized the danger and he-- he said, you must go out from here. So we had a car and the driver took me over there, over the custom with my daughter.”

According to their Trautenau registration cards, Martha and Noemi Saraffian left Trautenau for Podiebrad on January 14, 1939, where she joined her parents. In later documents the Saraffian’s address in Podiebrad is given as Ringstraße 722.⁵⁵ Meanwhile Hrand Saraffian stayed in Trautenau and took care of the family’s properties and his business. On August 18, 1939 he also left Trautenau for Podiebrad. He had tried to acquire a permit to move the family’s belongings over the border. According to the testimony he received it, though in the meantime the situation had again changed completely.

In March 1939, Nazi Germany had annexed the remaining Czech rump state (“*Zerschlagung der Resttschechei*”) – Slovakia had simultaneously declared its independence – and renamed it to the “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.” This “Protectorate” was formally a part of the Reich, though with a degree of pseudo-autonomy for the Czech population. The occupation of Czechia meant that the Nazis gained control over about 118,000 Jews,⁵⁶ among them many who had fled from the Sudetenland just months or weeks earlier. In June 1939, the Germans extended parts of the Nuremberg laws to the Protectorate.⁵⁷ The small number of ethnic Germans were immediately granted German citizenship, whereas Czechs received second-class status as subjects of the Protectorate. While the Protectorate was primarily a propaganda trick of Nazi Germany to curb Czech resistance and secure its control of the region, historians still debate the degree to which the Czech side was able to partake in the regime and the Holocaust. A recent study by Wolf Gruner paints a nuanced picture: while Berlin ultimately had

⁵⁵ Arolsen Archives, 1.1.42, Ghetto Theresienstadt Card File, 5078445, Noemi Saraffian.

⁵⁶ *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945*, Vol 3: *Deutsches Reich und Protektorat September 1939–September 1941*, 14 (hereafter cited as VEJ Volume, Doc.).

⁵⁷ VEJ 3, Doc. 247.

the final say, Czech authorities advanced their own initiatives and agendas, as did the regional Nazi apparatus and power structures.⁵⁸ This is particularly true for the implementation of the Holocaust in this region. While older studies often ignored the Protectorate or assumed that the treatment of Jews mirrored that in Germany and Austria, today we know that the situation in the Protectorate differed in key aspects, many of which influenced the situation of “mixed” families.

From the testimony, we learn very little about the annexation of Czechia, the establishment of the Protectorate and of family’s life in Podiebrad in the years 1939 to 1941. We do not know if Hrand and Martha Saraffian contemplated emigration or even tried to acquire the necessary documents. By any means, it would have been very hard by this point in time. Unlike many German and Austrian Jews, Czechoslovakian Jewry was caught mostly by surprise by the events of September/October 1938 and the full annexation in March 1939. Suddenly surrounded by Nazi Germany and its Slovak Ally and the immediate outbreak of the war against Poland in the summer, there was nowhere in the vicinity left to flee. Obtaining emigration visas had already become increasingly hard by mid-1939. Perhaps Martha Saraffian was also occupied with caring for her daughter and parents, especially her father, who was increasingly sick. She and her husband may also have clung to the hope that eventually the situation would become better, despite all indicators pointing in the other direction. Friedrich Kummermann eventually died of cancer on May 1, 1941 in the district hospital of Městec Králové/Königsstädtel, leaving behind his wife Elvira. His death was registered by the Jewish community of Podiebrad.⁵⁹ According to Martha, he had not received proper medical care.

Martha Saraffian may still have clung to the hope that the situation would improve: “My husband always said that I’m indolent. I don’t read newspapers. I don’t hear the radio. So I didn’t know what happened. It was the spa and I had my-- my child. I had enough to do.” Were there any grounds for hope? At the end of December 1938, Hitler had decided that, under certain conditions, he would spare intermarried Jews from forcible resettlement to so-called

⁵⁸ Gruner, *The Holocaust*, 3–6.

⁵⁹ National Archives Czech Republic (Národní archiv), Registers of Jewish religious communities in the Czech regions (Matriky židovských náboženských obcí v českých krajích), Poděbrady, death register 1901–1949, <https://vademecum.nacr.cz/vademecum/permalink?xid=3384d494-f579-4b28-a58f-06eb7ac7bf24&scan=c0edbb9f1f9e6c326e73808c268f67b3>.

Jewish living areas.⁶⁰ These exemptions – foremost for families in which the husband and the children were non-Jewish – were the first steps in what would evolve into the precarious statuses of a merely “protected” and of a “privileged” mixed marriage.⁶¹ The latter were granted further exemptions, depending on gender constellations and children. Following this initial decision, most antisemitic regulations contained special clauses for mixed marriages. One such exemption was implemented in the police decree mandating the visual marking of Jews through a patch. From September 1941 onwards, all Jews in the Reich and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were forced to wear this patch on their clothes, visibly identifying them as Jews.⁶² Paragraph 3 of the police decree ordering the mandatory identification contained an exemption clause for Jews in mixed marriages, if they had children raised as non-Jews, and for Jewish women who were married to non-Jews; not, however, for Jewish men married to non-Jewish women without children. Such exemption clauses prompted mixed families to hope that they would be spared from deportations and eventually even regain their rights. However, the protection awarded by these exemption clauses was treacherous and precarious – and could have been revoked at any time.

Two days after he was appointed the Acting Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, Reinhard Heydrich,⁶³ also head of the Reich Security Main Office, decided to eliminate the status of protected mixed marriage in the Protectorate. His decision was announced on September 29, 1941. In breaking with policy in Germany proper and Austria, Jewish spouses in such marriages were to be treated just as all other Jews. This decision was reversed by the authorities in Berlin in October of the same year, when it was decided that, for the Protectorate’s German-Jewish marriages the exemptions would still apply, but not, however, for Czech-Jewish marriages.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Bundesarchiv Berlin, BA R 18/5519, Field Marshall Göring, Secret express letter informing about Hitler’s decisions on the accommodation of Jews and the treatment of mixed marriages, December 28, 1938.

⁶¹ The German terms were *einfache Mischehe* and *privilegierte Mischehe*.

⁶² *Reichsgesetzblatt I* 1941, 547; *Verordnungsblatt des Reichsprotektors in Böhmen und Mähren* 1941, 497.

⁶³ Cf. Robert Gerwarth, *Hitler’s Hangman: The Life and Death of Reinhard Heydrich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 218–77.

⁶⁴ Gruner, *The Holocaust*, 267; Gerwarth, *Hitler’s Hangman*, 256.

From this point onwards two different types of mixed marriages existed in the Protectorate. Essentially all Czech-Jewish marriages were robbed of their “privileges” and became merely “protected”. It is not clear how the Saraffian family was categorized in this respect, given their non-German citizenship and their statelessness. It should be noted that the relevant parts of the Nuremberg laws defining Jews and non-Jews did not differentiate based on citizenship but operated with the terms Jewish and “of German and related blood”. A person without German citizenship could thus still be “of German and related blood” and the marriage would still be considered “mixed” and protected. In fact, the German census contained information on intermarriages, with Germans and stateless persons in one category, and persons with foreign citizenships in the other. However, most exemptions and so-called “privileges” granted for mixed marriages only applied when there were no children raised as Jews. For example, the exemption from wearing the yellow star stated that the children must have been registered as non-Jews. In the Saraffian’s case, Noemi had been registered as Jewish, as her Trautenau citizen registration clearly shows, making her a “*Geltungsjüdin*,” a *Mischling* who was “deemed Jewish.” So even if the Saraffian family was indeed considered a German-Jewish couple (which we do not know) and not a Czech-Jewish mixed marriage, the family would have not been “privileged” and Martha Saraffian and her daughter were still required to wear the patch: “We got these stars, my Jewish daughter and I. And we had to carry all the-- through the end of the war.” Martha Saraffian also received ration cards marked with “Jew,” which were considerably lower than those for non-Jews and even those for Jews in “privileged” mixed marriages. Jews usually did not receive any rations of meat, fresh fruits and vegetables, and other essential foods. Even basic staples such as fat or salt were issued in insufficient amounts.

When these latest antisemitic regulations were introduced in the Protectorate, Martha was already pregnant with her second daughter. Hanna Saraffian was born on May 30, 1942, during great turmoil in the Protectorate.⁶⁵ Three days prior to her birth, on May 27, Czech resistance fighters, affiliated with the Czech government in Exile, ambushed and attacked Heydrich in a suburb of Prague with gunfire and explosives. Heydrich was severely wounded

⁶⁵ Her name and birthdate are listed on her sister’s entry in the so-called Theresienstadt file card. Arolsen Archives, 1.1.42, Ghetto Theresienstadt Card File, 5078445, Noemi Saraffian.

and eventually succumbed to his injuries a week later. Initially, the Czech attackers were able to flee and hide successfully.⁶⁶ In revenge for Heydrich's death the Germans carried out draconian punitive actions against the Czech and Jewish civil populations in the Protectorate. On June 10, German police and SS units massacred the male populations of the villages of Lidice and Ležáky, which had allegedly supported the attackers, and deported the women to concentration camps. The names of these villages became symbols of the German atrocities carried out in Czechia.⁶⁷ In addition, the Germans also executed several thousand Czech political prisoners and enacted martial law for two months. Parallel to the massacres, thousands of Jews from the Protectorate were deported to Ghetto Theresienstadt/Terezín and concentration camps outside the Protectorate. Among those Jews rounded up for deportation was Martha Saraffian's mother, Elvira Kummermann:

I was in hospital because I just got my second child. And my mother, five day after my child was born, my mother went in transport. And she was first going to Kolín, that massive town from where they shipped all the Jews to camps. First to Theresienstadt, and from there, via-- via Lublin to Majdanek.

Elvira Kummermann was deported on June 9, 1942 with transport AAc Nr 211 from Kolín to Ghetto Theresienstadt. Three days later she was deported from the Ghetto to Trawniki concentration camp, about 40 km southeast of Lublin, where she was murdered.⁶⁸ Another parallel transport, the so-called "Heydrich transport," which Martha mentions in her testimony, went directly from Prague to Majdanek camp on June 10, 1942 – also in "retaliation" for Heydrich's murder.⁶⁹ In total, between late 1941 and mid-1944 about 74,000 Jews from the

⁶⁶ Gerwarth, *Hitler's Hangman*, 10–12.

⁶⁷ Cf. Jessica Rapson, *Topographies of Suffering: Buchenwald, Babi Yar, Lidice* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 133–80.

⁶⁸ Holocaust.cz, database of victims, Elvira Kummermannová, <https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/103577-elvira-kummermannova/>.

⁶⁹ Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 233.

Protectorate were deported to Theresienstadt, most of whom were subsequently transferred to other camps.⁷⁰

The family's precarious existence in Podiebrad became less and less bearable. Two months after her mother was deported, the family's pets were confiscated, according to a document she shows in the testimony.⁷¹ Valuables, such as fur clothes, were confiscated too. "We couldn't fight because we were-- we were-- the Czechs were the same, anti-Semites, like-- like the German maybe worse." Martha Saraffian suffered from malnourishment, due to the inadequate food rations. Her daughter Noemi, who was forced to wear the yellow patch, suffered from abuse by other children on the streets:

It was always-- my husband said it was always this sword of Damocles because he always feared that my-- my Jewish daughter will be attacked, too. She-- she was with the star. From the Czech children, they bounce her on the head and told her always. You are Jew. You are a Jew.

However, the Saraffian family also received help from non-Jewish friends. Hrand attended services at the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in Podiebrad. The local priest, Josef Jeschke,⁷² supported the family and hid many of their valuables in a garden. Hanna, the second daughter, was registered as a member of his congregation. As a non-Jewish *Mischling*, Hanna received higher food rations than her mother and her sister, who was labelled a *Geltungsjüdin* (deemed-Jewish).

⁷⁰ Gerwarth, *Hitler's Hangman*, 258.

⁷¹ The document, dated 28 August 1942, is bilingual: in German and Czech. It identifies her as "Sarafian Sara Marta," living in Podiebrad 722. The form had the entries "dog," "cat" and "bird" pre-printed. It confirms that she gave up one dog. The document is stamped with a seal showing a Star of David.

⁷² Dr. Josef Jeschke, born in 1902, was Pastor of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB; also called: *Bohemian Brethren*) in Podiebrad/Poděbrady from 1931 to 1961. After the war he was a university Professor. The ECCB has a small overview of his professional career on their website https://www.evangnet.cz/cce/kazatel/629-josef_jeschke and the Bibliography of the History of the Czech Lands contains a short biographical note and picture of Jeschke: <https://biblio.hiu.cas.cz/authorities/267590?locale=en>

Slave Labor and Ghettoization

In the first half of 1943 a further radicalization in policy against mixed marriages in the Protectorate was implemented. Many intermarried Jews were ordered to Prague, where they were declared “full Jews,” and thus subject to forced labor.⁷³ These were primarily the Czech-Jewish couples, whereas the German-Jewish mixed marriages were by large exempt from this action. The Protectorate’s Ministry for Economy and Labor instructed its subordinate offices in March 1943 that Jews “living in German-Jewish mixed marriages and, according to the Police decree of September 1, 1941 on the identification of Jews, are exempt from mandatory identification [...]” are not to be called for labor duty, whereas “Jews living in Czech-Jewish mixed marriages are mandated to be identified based on a special provision” and thus also subject to slave labor.⁷⁴ The fact that Martha was not called up for labor at this time is a good indicator that her marriage was considered German-Jewish rather than Czech-Jewish. By the end of 1943, only 7,484 Jews were left in the Protectorate, according to the statistics in the Jewish Council of Elders’ yearly report. Of these, 88.2% had non-Jewish family members. 6,028 Jews in the Protectorate were living in mixed marriages, 196 more were either married to *Mischlinge* or were unmarried with children counting as *Mischlinge*. Another 1,260 *Mischlinge* were “deemed Jewish” (*Geltungsjuden*), such as Noemi Saraffian, because they were members of the Jewish community. Only 3,470 or 40.9% of the entire group were Jewish by religion at the end of 1943, the majority either Christians or unaffiliated. The number of *Mischlinge* children was only estimated in the report: 13,000 first-degree *Mischlinge* (with two Jewish grandparents) and 34,000 second-degree *Mischlinge* (one Jewish grandparent). The report contained no statistics on how many of the about 6,000 mixed marriages were Czech-Jewish and how many were

⁷³ Gruner, *Holocaust*, 361.

⁷⁴ Jewish Museum in Prague, Collections, SHOAH/DP/9/49/020, Ministry of Economy and Labour (Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit), Labour placement of Jews from mixed marriage (Arbeitseinsatz von Juden; hier: privilegierte Mischehen), Prague 22 March 1943. Document titles are cited as in the database of the Jewish Museum.

German-Jewish.⁷⁵ For comparison: in Vienna at the same time 6,259 Jews were left, of whom 5,094 or 81% were living in mixed marriages and 1,080 were *Mischlinge* “deemed Jewish.”⁷⁶

From Martha Saraffian’s testimony we learn that her husband was the first of the two to be called up for forced labor duty, while she could stay in Podiebrad, where she cared for the children. The exact time could not be determined, but from the context he was most likely called-up in the summer of 1944. In July 1944 the Protectorate’s labor offices summoned intermarried non-Jews and *Mischlinge* for forced labor duty. An internal document of the German State Minister for Bohemia and Moravia from late August 1944 stated: “first degree *Mischlinge* and Aryans living in Jewish mixed marriages are called up for special labor assignment outside of their places of residence. [...] The calling up to the labor assignment is a temporary measure; the right to abode continues.”⁷⁷ This action mirrored similar efforts in the Old Reich of making *Mischlinge* and non-Jewish spouses available for forced labor. As neither were deemed “worthy” of serving in the armed forces – with rare exceptions – they were mostly assigned to Organisation Todt labor deployments.⁷⁸ While the aim was the same throughout the Reich, the actual implementation varied significantly from region to region. In some regions only a fraction was eventually assigned to these deployments. In the Protectorate it was apparently implemented very strictly. Hrand Saraffian was ordered to an unidentified coal town, where he had to clear rubble and other bomb damage caused by Allied aerial bombing. He was part of a labor detachment that consisted only of intermarried men, according to the testimony: “all these men that has Jewish woman. All these Christian men had Jewish women.”

While Hrand was still on labor duty, clearing bomb damages, Martha was herself summoned to Prague in order to report for labor duty. This calling-up, which began in September 1944, was part of a campaign of concentrating all remaining Jews of the Protectorate, including those in German-Jewish mixed marriages, in Prague and forcing them into slave labor.

⁷⁵ Jewish Museum in Prague, Collections, ARCHIVE/312/I/2/a/008/001, Židovská rada starších - zpráva za rok 1943 (Jewish Council of Elders in Prague, *Report on the year 1943*, Prague 1944).

⁷⁶ VEJ 11 (*Deutsches Reich und Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren April 1943–1945*), 30.

⁷⁷ Jewish Museum in Prague, Collections, SHOAH/DP/9/49/022, German State Minister for Bohemia and Moravia, Work placement of Jewish crossbreeds, 29 August 1944.

⁷⁸ Strnad, “The Fortune,” 177.

To Martha Saraffian, who cared for two children, the order came as a shock. She informed her husband, who immediately tried to intervene in Prague:

When I sent a telegram, that, I have to go in the camp, in the labor camp, with my daughter, with my Jewish daughter. And he was so upset that he asked his commander to let him go. And these men gave him a pass to go through and he came at night. And when I told him what happened, he took the next train at 2 o'clock in the morning and went to Prague. The name was Sonnenbergstrasse, where the Gestapo had the headquarter.⁷⁹ And he was protesting. He-- sent me with just the child, that they sent me with the child to the labor camp and when he was already working for them. But he was not received well. He got in, as punishment, in a special transport to Germany in a truck without food, without light.

As a punishment for his protest, Hrand Saraffian was sent to Klettendorf/Klecina in Lower Silesia. Organisation Todt maintained a slave labor camp for Jews in Klettendorf, which had been established in August 1940 and operated until November/December 1944.⁸⁰ This camp was intended for Jews only and many survivor reports, including such in the Fortunoff Archive, stress the very harsh conditions at Klettendorf, likening it to a concentration camp.⁸¹ That an intermarried non-Jew such as Hrand Saraffian was sent to this camp affirms the character of a severe punishment. His attempt to protest had obviously been in vain and Martha Saraffian was still ordered to Prague for labor duty. The first transports of intermarried Jews from the provinces – both men and women – arrived in Prague in Mid-September 1944 and continued in the following weeks and months until almost all of the Protectorate's remaining Jews were concentrated in Prague

⁷⁹ Most likely refers to the Police Camp for Jewish laborers at Sommerbergstraße.

⁸⁰ Bundesarchiv, Haftstättenverzeichnis, Zwangsarbeitslager für Juden Klettendorf, <https://www.bundesarchiv.de/zwangsarbeit/haftstaetten/index.php?action=2.2&tab=7&id=2063>. See also: Raymund Schütz, *Zwangsarbeiterlager für Juden (ZALfJ): Klettendorf*, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/22172389/ZALfJ_Klettendorf.

⁸¹ The Fortunoff Archive has several other testimonies of former slave laborers at Klettendorf, including. HVT-480 (Mayer P.), HVT-1096 (Wolf Z.), and HVT-70 (Joseph M.).

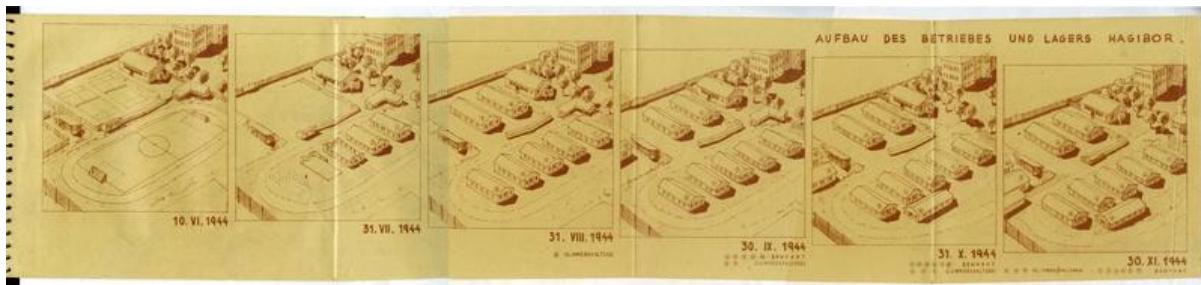
Jewish men and women – almost all of whom were living in mixed marriages – were assembled at the newly erected camp at Hagibor square in Prague X.⁸² The camp's purpose was to serve as a labor-site and to house those who had been summoned from the provinces. Residents of Prague were in many cases allowed to spend the nights in their homes. The name of the locality and the camp was inherited from the Jewish association football club of the same name (*Hagibor* – Hebrew for “the Hero”), which used to have its training grounds there.⁸³ The Jewish Council of Elders in Prague, the mandatory organization for Jews maintained by the Nazis, was ordered to erect the camp at the former training grounds and nearby plots, and to organize the summoning of Jews from the provinces. In their written report on the year 1944 they described in detail both the construction of the camp and the labor assignment for Jews from the provinces. The technical details and the bureaucratic language belie the tragedies behind these events:

Through an order of the Central Office for the Solution of the Jewish Question in Bohemia and Moravia the Jewish Central Labor Office summoned all abled men and women from the provinces to Prague, where they were quartered at camp Hagibor square. This action was undertaken in stages and the first contingent had to report on 17 September 1944. With the exception of persons not fit for transport, everyone who was called up had to appear; the exclusion of the sickly and unable to work was undertaken in Prague by the Central Office for the Solution of the Jewish Question in Bohemia and Moravia. [...] The procedures of the Jewish Central Labor Office in implementing this mission were the following: [...] The arrivals were received at the train stations, their luggage taken and moved to the Hagibor square, a list of the attendees for the mustering was compiled, [...] the allocation to Hagibor square was entered to all registers, [...] On

⁸² Until now, the history of the camp has not been thoroughly examined. The most extensive study is a Czech research article: Ivana Dejmeková, “Hagibor aneb Jak jedno místo v Praze získalo smutnou pověst,” in Olga Fejtová (ed.), *Evropská velkoměsta za druhé světové války: každodennost okupovaného velkoměsta; Praha 1939–1945 v evropském srovnání 1* (Prague: Scriptorium, 2007), 253.

⁸³ Tatjana Lichtenstein, “Heja, Heja, Hagibor!” Jewish Sports, Politics, and Nationalism in Czechoslovakia, 1923–1930,” *Leipziger Beiträge zur jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur* 2 (2004): 191–208.

31 December 1944 camp Hagibor square housed: Men.... 607, Women.... 697,
total.... 1304.⁸⁴



Stages of construction of the Hagibor camp taken from the report of the Jewish Central Labor Office (Source: Jewish Museum in Prague).

One of the main purposes of this camp was the operation of a mica plant (*Glimmerwerke*), which produced raw materials for the electrotechnical industry. Primarily women were forced to cut the mica glimmer into rough pieces that were then brought to Ghetto Theresienstadt, where they were refined in a second stage.⁸⁵ At the end of December 1944, 836 women and 46 men were working in the mica plant at Hagibor square, according to the report. More than half of them – 484 women – had been called-up for labor duty from the provinces. Other Jewish men and women housed at camp Hagibor had to perform slave labor outside the camp at various sites. Martha Saraffian was part of the labor contingent that collected and sorted luggage, which had to be left behind by Jews who were transported from the Protectorate to the extermination camps.

⁸⁴ Jewish Museum in Prague, Collections, ARCHIVE/312/I/2/a/009/001, Židovská rada starších - zpráva za rok 1944 (Jewish Council of the Elders Prague, Central Labor Office, *Report on the year 1944*, Prague 1945).

⁸⁵ Cf. Wolfgang Benz, Theresienstadt: Eine Geschichte von Täuschung und Vernichtung (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013), 71.



The camp consisted of seven living barracks and three labor barracks. Kitchen and administration were outside of the camp at the site of a former Jewish retirement home in Prague XI (Source: Jewish Museum in Prague).

When Martha Saraffian was called up for labor duty, she had to leave her younger daughter Hanna behind in Podiebrad. Her non-Jewish neighbors took the young child in and took good care of her. Nevertheless, the experience of parting from her two-year-old daughter was terrible and traumatic for both mother and daughter, as we learn from the testimony. Her elder daughter Noemi had to come with her mother to Prague, where they were eventually separated from each other. According to Noemi Saraffian's entry in the so-called Ghetto Theresienstadt card file, she was initially brought to a children's home (*Kinderheim*) at Ziegengasse 9 (today: Kozí ulice) and later to a worker's home (*Arbeiterheim*) in Kastulusgasse 20 (today: Haštalská).⁸⁶ The exact dates

⁸⁶ Arolsen Archives, 1.1.42, Ghetto Theresienstadt Card File, 5078445, Noemi Saraffian.

are not completely clear, but it seems she arrived at the children's home on November 9, 1944 and already a day later was transferred to the worker's home. According to the card file, she left Prague on December 23, 1944. It is not clear when exactly Martha Saraffian had been summoned to Prague in the first place. According to the previously cited report, about half of the women were brought to the camp by the end of September, the second half by the end of November. It seems most likely that Martha arrived in early November, but it could well have been the case that she already came two months earlier in September. The report also states that the Council of Elders maintained a youth home (*Jugendheim*) and two daycares for children (*Kindertagesheime*): "The youth home cares for the accommodation, feeding and hygiene of the children, that constantly live there. The daycares are for little children, whose parents are occupied during the day."⁸⁷ Most likely Noemi Saraffian was brought to these homes.

The file card states Noemi's religion as Bohemian Evangelical, rather than Jewish, as in previous documents. In the testimony we learn the background:

I feared for my daughter. So I signed that my children are Christian. And I was not punished, and maybe didn't realize that I have a Jewish child in the-- in the internation camp. But this Jewish child, the pastor fought so so much to get her back and he got her back and he took her in his house. This pastor that was already punished from the Gestapo, helping Jews. And he kept my daughter till the end of the war.

This pastor, who fought for Noemi and took her in, was Josef Jeschke from Podiebrad, who had already previously helped the family.

While Martha Saraffian was interned in camp Hagibor, her husband – who had become severely ill in Klettendorf, but eventually recovered – was transferred to a camp that exclusively housed intermarried non-Jewish men and male *Mischlinge*. This camp was part of the SS-proving ground Böhmen at Bistritz bei Beneschau/Bystřice u Benešova. Its official designation was "Special Camp for Aryans with Jewish relatives and Jewish *Mischlinge*" (*Sonderlager für jüdisch*

⁸⁷ Central Labor Office, *Report on the year 1944*.

*versippte Arier und jüdische Mischlinge)*⁸⁸ and it most likely consisted of two or more smaller detachments in this vast area. Coincidentally, this was also exactly the region where Martha Saraffian's maternal grandmother, who had lived with the Kummermann family in Trautenau, came from. The slave laborers' primary task was erecting and maintaining the SS-proving ground.⁸⁹ The camp existed until April 1945, which is most likely when Hrand Saraffian was liberated and able to return home to Podiebrad.

The previously cited report of the Jewish Central Labor Office makes it sound as if camp Hagibor was an almost "normal" operation, under the control of a Jewish organization, when it was in fact controlled by the Central Office for the Solution of the Jewish Question in Bohemia and Moravia. Sketches of the camp show that it was fenced off and had all the characteristics of a slave labor camp. The labor duty at Hagibor was arduous, the living conditions bad. We also learn from Martha Saraffian's testimony that many of the slave laborers were sick and in poor condition. Morale was extremely low; however, most were aware that only their marriage to a non-Jew spared them from an even worse fate. A fate many, if not most of their parents and relatives had already suffered.

And the-- we were glad that we-- that our husbands didn't divorce us because there were cases where the men divorced when the woman was already in the labor camp. So he divorced her, and she was immediately shipped to Auschwitz and she was killed. And there were oft so much cries and unhappiness because it happens many times that the Czech men divorced the women.

⁸⁸ According to a German register of camps, maintained by the Federal Archives and the EVZ Foundation (hereafter *EVZ register*), it existed from Fall 1943 until April 1945. *EVZ register*, <https://www.bundesarchiv.de/zwangsarbeit/haftstaetten/index.php?action=2.2&tab=7&id=603>. The camp's history has not yet been explored in detail.

⁸⁹ In July 1944, 1000 *Mischlinge* and others with Jewish relatives were called up for labour duty at the proving grounds. Cf. VEJ 4 (*Deutsches Reich und Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren April 1943–1945*), Doc. 271.

The calling up of intermarried Jews for segregated labor duty in camp conditions was only implemented in fall 1944 in the Protectorate and in a very few areas of the Reich, such as the Rhineland.⁹⁰

As the report reveals, the experience in Prague was only the prelude for the Theresienstadt ghetto. In the beginning of January 1945, it was decided that the whole camp would be cleared and transferred to the ghetto of Theresienstadt. On January 31, 1945 the mica works, and all its personnel would be relocated to Theresienstadt.

Then I was-- from the labor camp, I was-- we all were waked at 3 o'clock in the morning always. What they did to us was 3 o'clock in the morning. they ordered to be at 4 o'clock, ready to go and transport to Theresienstadt. [...] We were guided to the train. And there, we stand till 10 o'clock in the morning on a cold winter day in melting snow. Till 10 o'clock they left us to go on the train.

Martha Saraffian was deported to Theresienstadt with Transport AE 1 (*Arbeitseinsatz*, Ger. for labor assignment) on January 31, 1945.⁹¹ Perfidiously, the written order that all the intermarried Jews at Hagibor received claimed that this transport was only a new “labor assignment and not a change in residence or ghettoization.” Hence, everyone transported to Theresienstadt would still officially maintain their formal residence at their locations from where they had been previously ordered to Hagibor.⁹² It seems clear that these instructions only disguised the true character of the transport, even though at this point every remaining Jew in Prague was aware of what was actually going on. Still, it also paid lip service to the regulations regarding Jews in mixed marriages that were still in place at this time, even though the RSHA had effectively decided that all remaining intermarried Jews, except for some elderly, would be

⁹⁰ Strnad mentions the Rhineland and Westphalia as the two cases in the Old Reich. Strnad, “Fortune,” 178.

⁹¹ Arolsen Archives, 1.1.42, Ghetto Theresienstadt Card File, 5078444, Marta Saraffianová.

⁹² Jewish Museum in Prague, Collections, SHOAH/DP/11/50b/011, Instructions for dispatching transports: Summons, undated (January 1945).

deported to Theresienstadt.⁹³ Formally, none of the exemptions had been lifted, although at the Wannsee conference it had already been proposed that eventually all remaining “privileged” Jews in the Reich would be transferred to Theresienstadt.

From the “Old Reich” (Germany proper) only about 1,901 of the still registered 14,500 Jews – just over 13% – were eventually deported to Theresienstadt.⁹⁴ In the Protectorate 3,570 were deported to the ghetto and only 2,803 Jews were exempted for various reasons and allowed to stay in Prague.⁹⁵ Hence about 56% of all remaining Jews – most from mixed marriages and also including children deemed Jewish (*Geltungsjuden*) – were deported. Martha Saraffian’s decision to wrongly give her daughter’s status as Christian saved Noemi Saraffian from ghettoization, as in the Protectorate Jewish children had to be brought along, according to the order.

Two reasons facilitated the implementation of the ghettoization of Jews from the Protectorate and explain the much higher number, when compared with the “Old Reich.” First, whereas in many other parts of the Reich the infrastructure – including the persecution apparatus – had already been severely damaged by the war, the Protectorate had barely been targeted by the aerial bombing campaigns and the terror apparatus of the Nazis was thus still intact.⁹⁶ Second, almost all Jews had already been concentrated in Prague, a large number in Hagibor. This was a significant difference between the Protectorate and other parts of the Reich. It effectively meant that there was no space for decisions by the various local and regional Nazi authorities – some of whom already saw coming the end of their regime and so, as happened in other German and Austrian regions, simply did not implement the order or were more lenient.

Her experiences in the Theresienstadt ghetto, where Martha Saraffian was imprisoned until the liberation in May 1945 and forced to work in the mica plant, constitutes a large part of her testimony, where she describes the terrible conditions and her life in the ghetto in detail.

⁹³ Strnad, “Fortune,” 185–86.

⁹⁴ Strnad, “Fortune,” 188.

⁹⁵ Gruner, *Holocaust*, 368.

⁹⁶ In other regions even the lists of Jews maintained by the Gestapo were lost in the bombings, or the infrastructure was so damaged that transports could no longer be organized.

Many of her family members, including her mother, had been in Theresienstadt at one point, before being further deported to concentration and extermination camps. “Nobody survived from my family. I was the only one.” One of the family members who was eventually murdered was her father’s sister, Martha’s aunt, Ida Freund, who had been transported in November 1942 from Prague to Theresienstadt. On October 28, 1944 she was deported to Auschwitz, where she was murdered.⁹⁷ Approximately 77,000 Jews from the Protectorate were eventually murdered in the Holocaust.⁹⁸ While slave labor in Theresienstadt resembled the work she had been already forced to perform at Hagibor, the living conditions were even worse. Towards the end, Theresienstadt became the destination of death marches from other concentration camps, bringing thousands of ill prisoners to the ghetto, which eventually caused a huge epidemic. In the last months of its existence, and even after it was liberated, many of the ghetto prisoners died of these diseases.

Postwar and Lasting Legacy

Martha and Hrand Saraffian survived the ghetto and the slave labor camps. In May 1945 they were reunited with their two daughters in Podiebrad. Nothing was the same as before. Their family members had been murdered, their health had suffered, their apartment been looted. Martha remembers her husband, who had returned earlier, as a very sick, broken man. Hanna, her younger daughter, who had spent a long time with another family, did not recognize her in the beginning. The Saraffian family managed to get their apartment back, which had been occupied by a Czech physician in the meantime, but all their personal belongings had been stolen.

In August 1946 Martha Saraffian wrote a letter to the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees in Prague and asked for assistance. A copy of the letter is preserved in the Arolsen Archives:

⁹⁷ Holocaust.cz, database of victims, Ida Freundová, <https://www.holocaust.cz/databaze-obeti/obet/85974-ida-freundova>.

⁹⁸ Gerwarth, *Hitler’s Hangman*, 258.

Nothing has really changed for us since the war, other than that we are no longer living with the same fear. Our mental condition is the same, because the war of nerves has not ended for us. Currently a mission for refugees is taking place, which can emigrate to certain countries from German camps. Couldn't something be done for us too? We do not care where we go, ultimately maybe with the help of UNRRA [...] Us, who were really harmed and hurt, we are not being helped. So I want to help myself and all I hope for is that my husband will change his mind and decides to leave illegally and then brings us to him. [...] Life is already cross for me, but I have children and it hurts me so much that after these terrible years they still have to live through this. I may have to part with the place, where I belong, because that will be the only thing causing change. My husband still hopes for help from outside but I know that you have to help yourself, that you cannot rely on nobody else.⁹⁹

Eventually in 1947 the family was able to emigrate to Argentina, but this did not mean the new beginning and lives they were hoping for. It was worst for her husband, Hrand: "He went every Sunday to the port with us and said, I have to see the ship that brought me here. He said *das verfluchte Schiff* [the cursed Ship]." The ship's name was Desirade – French for desire – and arrived in Buenos Aires on July 21, 1947.¹⁰⁰ Hrand Saraffian died of cancer four years after they arrived in Argentina. "It was very hard in Argentina for my children and for myself. And for my husband." Adapting to the new surroundings was difficult and the children lost their father when they were still teenagers. She also remembers experiencing high levels of antisemitism in Argentina.

In 1963 Martha Saraffian emigrated to the United States. Her daughter Noemi had already emigrated three years previously. Her testimony of 1984 ends with a topic that would remain an important issue for her for the rest of her life: the question of restitution and the denial of German insurance companies that they should pay out the insurance for her family.

⁹⁹ Arolsen Archives, 3.2.1/1718000, Hrand Saraffian.

¹⁰⁰ List of passengers of the ship Desirade to Argentina, arrived at Buenos Aires on July 21, 1947, <https://www.hebrewnames.com/arrival DESIRADE 1947-07-21>.

“And I had not much restitution because I had not many papers. I, my parents, my husband, paid for a big insurance in Germany. They had offices in every country. And they paid the insurance fee in US dollars, which was very expensive.” After recounting once again the difficult experience in Argentina the testimony ends; but not, however, Martha Saraffian’s fight for justice.

In the mid-1990s Martha Saraffian and a small group of other Holocaust survivors sued several major European insurance companies in a class action lawsuit in New York City.¹⁰¹ Saraffian maintained that the successor firm of the Victoria insurance company, which had issued policies to her relatives and family in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period, had refused to accept her claims. This lawsuit, the first of its kind, sent shockwaves through many German and European company headquarters, triggered a wave of laws in the United States facilitating Holocaust restitution, and led to the establishment of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims. As a result of international negotiations, in the year 2000 Germany established the Federal Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” (*Stiftung “Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft”*),¹⁰² which compensated former German forced laborers and other victims of the Nazi. Other European countries, such as Austria and the Netherlands, followed suit.

It is not clear if Martha Saraffian herself, who died on December 19, 2006,¹⁰³ ultimately received any compensation. Her effort to receive some sort of justice, however, made a lasting impact.

¹⁰¹ Cornell et al. vs. Assicurazioni Generali et al. Civil Action 97 Civ. 2262, United States District Court, Southern District of New York.

¹⁰² <https://www.stiftung-evz.de/start.html>.

¹⁰³ United States Social Security Applications and Claims, 1936–2007.

Transcript

[00:00:46.25] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Some things you can tell [AUDIO OUT] 30, 31. And has children-- and the children are bap--

[00:00:55.32] INTERVIEWER 1: Baptized.¹

[00:00:56.06] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Baptized, baptized, so they can be Christian. But my elder daughter was in the Jewish Matrik² She got the-- the star,³ too, and she was-- in the internation [meaning: interment] camp for children.

¹ Already caught on tape, Saraffian mentions two key aspects and topics of her testimony: she was married to an (Armenian-Christian) non-Jew and had two daughters. The older daughter (Noemi) was registered as Jewish, the other (Hanna) as Christian. Saraffian's marriage was thus considered "mixed," according to the Nuremberg Race Laws. This and the circumstances deriving thereof are the major and recurring topic throughout her testimony.

² "Matrikel" or "Matriken": German for "register" (from latin *matricula* = list, scroll). The use of the term is generally limited to higher education (university student registers) and religious institutions (birth or baptism, marriage, and death records). In Austria-Hungary, with its close entanglement of state and religion, particularly with the Catholic Church, recognized religious institutions (including Jewish communities, Ger.: *Kultusgemeinden*) were tasked by the state with keeping vital records. Jewish *Matriken* – for births, marriages, and deaths – were thus official documents. Unlike the monarchy, the new Czechoslovakian Republic attempted to separate state and religion in the 1920s, e.g. by introducing civil marriage. In Central European Jewish history yet another use of the term *Matrikel* is known. The Bavarian edict on Jews of 1813 forced all Bavarian Jews to be registered in the *Judenmatrikel* ("list of Jews") and decreed a maximum number of Jewish inhabitants for each Bavarian town. A similar instrument existed in Bohemia until the 19th century. The Familiants Laws enacted in 1726 and in place until 1848 also limited the number of Jewish families in a specific location to a certain number of *Familianten*, which roughly translates into "heads of families." Thus, many Bohemian Jews were forced to emigrate and, in turn, many Central European Jews can trace their family lineage back to Bohemia. Cf. "Familiants Laws" in YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe (hereafter: YIVO Encyclopedia).

³ Refers to the yellow Star of David-shaped patch with the German word *Jude* (Jew) printed on it, which was introduced by the Germans in 1941 through a police decree. From September 1941 onwards, all Jews in the Reich (Germany proper and annexed territories such as Austria or Sudetenland) and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (former Czech core lands of Czechoslovakia) were forced to wear this patch on their clothes, visibly identifying them as Jews (*Reichsgesetzblatt I* 1941, 547; *Verordnungsblatt des Reichsprotektors in Böhmen und Mähren* 1941, 497). Paragraph 3 of the police decree ordering the mandatory identification contained an exemption clause for Jews in "mixed marriages" if they had children raised as non-Jews, and for all Jewish women married to non-Jews (not, however, for Jewish men married to non-Jewish women without children). Children of intermarried couples, deemed *Mischlinge* (Ger. for hybrid or mongrel), sometimes mistakenly called "half Jews," were exempt from wearing the patch, unless they were themselves members of a Jewish community. In such a case they were also forced to wear the badge and called *Sternträger* (Ger. for "star wearer") or *Geltungsjude* (Ger. literally "deemed-Jewish"). As Saraffian had a daughter registered as Jewish, the exemption did not apply to her and she was forced to wear the yellow patch, as was her older Jewish daughter, while the younger Christian daughter was exempt. For the history of Nazi persecution of Jews in former Czechia (Bohemia and Moravia) see Gruner, *The Holocaust*.

[00:01:12.46] INTERVIEWER 2: OK. Now, wait a second. What's this? That's for both children or one?

[00:01:18.96] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: No. For the Jewish child. Says she is Jewish.

[00:01:25.22] INTERVIEWER 2: You will show them when you speak about them.⁴ Are we-- what else do we want to mention? Are you ready? OK. Now we'll begin. Bonnie will ask you most of the questions. I'll be mostly silent. And begin with your name, where you were born, what time. And see through your own-- like if a film would be rolling in front of you, look at it and tell us what you see. Do you understand what I'm saying?

[00:01:55.47] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes.

[00:01:55.96] INTERVIEWER 2: Just--

[00:01:56.15] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Do I have to look in this?

[00:01:58.32] INTERVIEWER 2: Yeah. Yes. OK, why don't we begin.

[00:02:03.26] INTERVIEWER 1: Would you tell us your name, when you were born?

[00:02:06.64] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: My name is Martha Saraffian. My maiden name is Kummermann. I was born in Prague in September 15, 1907. And we moved to the Sudeten.⁵ At

⁴ Saraffian shows several documents and other items over the course of her testimony.

⁵ "Sudeten" – Ger. for the Sudetes (Cz. and Pol. *Sudety*). The Sudetes are a mountain range in the border region of Bohemia and Silesia, today mostly along the Czech-Polish border. After World War I, Austria had to cede the predominantly German-speaking border regions of Bohemia and Moravia to Czechoslovakia despite originally claiming them as part of the new Republic of German-Austria. The terms *Sudeten* and *Sudetenland* (Ger. "Land of the Sudeten-Germans") began to shift their meaning in the interwar period and were used to designate all of the Western and Northern German-speaking regions of Czechoslovakia. Sudeten-Germans (Ger. *Sudetendeutsche*) became the de facto designation of the German-speaking population of Czechoslovakia (sometimes also including those living in the Southern regions bordering Austria), only loosely corresponding with the geographic meaning of the term. Apparently, Saraffian uses the term in this sense, although her family indeed moved to the Sudetes around 1908. In 1930 under 25,000 Jews lived in the region that would later (from Oct. 1938) be known as Sudetenland. For the history of the Holocaust in the Sudetenland see Jörg Osterloh, "Sudetenland", in Gruner and Osterloh, *The Greater German Reich*, 68–98. As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, Czechoslovakia allowed its citizens to freely designate their national (e.g. Czechoslovakian, German) and religious affiliation. For the 1920 census "Jewish" was added to the list of eligible national affiliations (so-called "National-Jews"). Most Czechoslovakian Jews living in the northern border-lands identified themselves as Germans nationally, as only around 30 percent of Jews in the region (Sudetenland), declared themselves as National-Jews in the 1930s (Cf. Osterloh, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung*, 59). For the "identity struggles" among Bohemian Jews see Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews? National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

this time, it was Austria.⁶ It was not Sudeten. We moved there in 1909. And we lived there 30 years before the German-- before the German take over.⁷ Then we-- we-- were-- first, my paren⁸ts were leaving.⁹ And my husband was not Jewish,¹⁰ and--

⁶ Until 1918 the Kingdom of Bohemia was an Austrian crown land within the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy. The term *Austria* was frequently used to designate the entire monarchy, including Hungary. It could also refer just to the Austrian half ("Cisleithania"), which included the Czech-majority lands of Bohemia and Moravia. Austria (after 1867: Austria-Hungary) was a multinational, multi-ethnic, and multilingual empire, ruled by the Habsburg dynasty. It was the first among the major European powers to emancipate Jews (under Emperor Joseph II in the late 18th century) and to grant full equal rights to its Jewish citizens in the 1860s. On the other hand, the Empire was also the site of complex national conflicts and saw the rise of modern antisemitism in the second half of the 19th century. On the Habsburg Empire see Peter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2016); on the regional history of antisemitism see Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988). Since the early 19th century the Bohemian crown land had become the epicenter of a national and linguistic conflict between Austrian Czechs and Germans (in 1910 more than a third identified as Germans, over 60% as Czech). The first strived for a far-reaching autonomy or even independence from the monarchy. With the rise of antisemitism in the second half of the 19th century, Jews found themselves increasingly torn between the national and linguistic camps – at times excluded from both. As a result, from the 1920s onwards Czechoslovakian Jews increasingly began to identify as Jewish nationally, however, with significant regional differences. Most Germans – predominantly living in the peripheral border areas of Bohemia – vehemently opposed Czechoslovakian independence and identified strongly with (German-)Austria. In the 1920s calls for unification with Germany became increasingly loud. Many Sudeten-Germans began to organize in the pro-Nazi Sudeten German Party and its forerunners. For more information on the Jewish history of the Bohemian lands see the article "Bohemia and Moravia" in *YIVO Encyclopedia*. On the construction of identities in the Habsburg lands see Judson and Rozenblit, *Constructing Nationalities*. For an introduction to the history of the Sudeten German Nazi movement, see Osterloh, "Sudetenland."

⁷ The Munich agreement of September 30, 1938, concluded between Nazi Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, forced Czechoslovakia to immediately cede its predominantly German-speaking border areas to Nazi Germany, which began to occupy and annex them in October of the same year. The major, northern part of these annexed territories was incorporated into Germany as "Sudetenland," some smaller western and southern regions were directly annexed to Bavaria and Austria. In 1939, the northern part was designated as the *Reichsgau Sudetenland* (Reich district), analogous to the territorial reforms carried out by the Nazis in Austria, which was also split up into several such Reich districts, all headed by the respective Nazi Party *Gauleiter* (District leader). In Sudetenland, Konrad Henlein (1898–1945), the former head of the Nazi-affiliated Sudeten German Party, was designated *Gauleiter* and *Reichstatthalter* (Reich Governor) in 1939. The annexation of Sudetenland was accompanied by riots and pogroms by local Nazis, which targeted Jewish and Czech individuals and businesses. Cf. Osterloh, "Sudetenland."

⁸ Friedrich Kumerman (1869–1941) and Elivra Kumerman neé Steiner (1881–abt. 1942). Both were native Bohemians. Her father came from Humpoletz/Humpolec and her mother from a small village near Neveklov.

⁹ As Nazi Germany annexed Sudetenland, it extended citizenship to the ethnic Germans of the area, but also quickly introduced the Nuremberg race laws of 1935, which excluded Jews from full citizenship and, in addition, banned marriages between Jews and non-Jews ("mixed marriages"). In a move previously only seen in Burgenland, the easternmost Austrian province, German officials, and local Sudeten-German Nazis forced all Jewish inhabitants of the region to sign a document, declaring that they would "voluntarily" leave the Sudetenland within six days. The majority complied fearing for their

[00:02:59.49] INTERVIEWER 1: Could we just hold a minute and tell us a little bit about your family? Who were the members of your family, a little bit about your early life.

[00:03:12.33] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes. My-- my-- my parents have a factory for linen and cotton and we had big house.¹¹ And my sister died before the concentration camp.¹² And my parents fled in 19-- beginning of 1938 to another town in Czechoslovakia.¹³

lives, and within days crossed into the remaining Czechoslovakian rump state (also called the “Second Czecho-Slovak Republic”). Thus, the Nazis effectively dispelled almost the entire Jewish population of the region within a few weeks. Among the very few that remained in Sudetenland – including Martha Saraffian and her family – were persons married to non-Jews (so called “mixed marriages”).

¹⁰ It is interesting to note, how important the fact of her marriage to a non-Jew was for Martha Saraffian. Indeed, this marriage saved her life. She keeps returning to the subject, although the interviewers are frequently seen to interrupt her. Especially after 1938, marriage to a non-Jewish “Aryan” partner meant that intermarried Jews were exempt from certain acts of persecution and were awarded a precarious degree of protection. Eventually, however, this did not save Martha Saraffian from deportation to a ghetto. For an overview of the measures and acts of persecution against mixed marriages, see Burr Bukey, *Jews and Intermarriage*. For the late stages of this persecution, see Strnad, “The Fortune of Survival.”

¹¹ The family had moved to Trautenau/Trutnov (Ger./Cz.) in Northeastern Bohemia from Prague in 1908, because Martha’s father, Friedrich Kumermann, became the co-owner of a textile company, trading with linen there. The Austrian commercial register of 1908 contains the following entry: “Trautenau, Kumermann & Steinhauer. Production of linen and cotton products. Open trading company since 1. VII. 1908. [Partners] Friedrich Kumermann and Max Steinhauer, both in Trautenau.” (k.k. Handelsministerium, *Zentralblatt für die Eintragungen in das Handelsregister* 7, 12 August 1908, 592). After the war, Kumermann expanded the business and began to produce linen textiles (*Compass Industrielles Jahrbuch Čechoslovakei* 65 (1932), Prague 1932, 1735). Both company and family residence were located at Reichstraße 5 (today Polská 98). In the early 20th century, Trautenau was an almost entirely German-speaking town with around 13,000 inhabitants. A larger Jewish community – entirely Ashkenazi – with a synagogue and other religious infrastructure only existed from the 1860s onwards. In 1910, the town’s Jewish population peaked at 478 persons and then slowly declined in the interwar period. The small Jewish community (at any given point less than five percent of the population) played an important role in the linen industry of the town, which was the strongest industrial and commercial sector of Trautenau. For the Jewish history of the town see Rudolf M. Wlaschek, *Jüdisches Leben in Trautenau/Nordostböhmen: Ein historischer Rückblick* (Dortmund 1991) and the entry for “Trautenau” in Klaus-Dieter Aliche, *Lexikon der jüdischen Gemeinden im deutschen Sprachraum* Vol. 3 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008).

¹² Gretl Kumermann was born on June 28, 1906 in Königliche Weinberge/Vinohrady near Prague, a suburb of Prague. She died in the 1930s. (Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Czechoslovakian Census 1921, Domicile collection sheet (Sběrný arch domovní/Haussammelbogen) and Census sheet (sčítací arch/Zählbogen), Friedrich Kumermann (February 16, 1921).

¹³ Most German-speaking Jews were aware of the rise of Nazism and its consequences in neighbouring Germany, especially since Czechoslovakia had become a refuge or transit country for political refugees and Jews fleeing from Germany after 1933. Many Czech Jews, however, deemed Hitler and the Nazis a purely German phenomenon, which would not affect them in Czechoslovakia. After the annexation of Austria, in March 1938, and the immediate anti-Jewish violence that erupted, especially in the Austrian capital Vienna, the threat of the annexation of the German-speaking border regions turned into a realistic

[00:03:42.78] INTERVIEWER 1: Um, can you tell us a little bit, was this your only sister?

[00:03:47.67] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes. It was my only sister. She died before--

[00:03:51.83] INTERVIEWER 2: Can you describe the home? Was it religious? What kind of customs? What was a day like, or a-- or a holiday, or a--

[00:04:01.20] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: No. My parents were religious and we had a kosher home.¹⁴ And then even-- we were very attached one to the other.¹⁵ We lived one from the other. And it was very hard for me when I-- I married a man that was no Jew. My father didn't talk to me one year.

[00:04:32.17] And when I married,¹⁶ my mother took the suitcase and went away, and I and my father was in the office. Only my sister went with me with the lawyer to the-- what you call it, where we were married.¹⁷ And then it took a long time before my parents got used to-- when

fear, causing many Jews and Czech-speakers living in the periphery to move closer towards the Czech heartland and/or to prepare for emigration.

¹⁴ "kosher home": In the 1930s Friedrich Kummermann was a member of the board of the Jewish Community of Trautenau. According to Aliche, Trautenau's Jewish community grew from the 1860s primarily through the influx of Jews from smaller Bohemian towns. Many of these newcomers were relatively traditional and more observant than those arriving from Prague and other major cities. An Austrian law of 1890 mandated the establishment of an *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* (Ger. incorporated Jewish community) in each district with a certain number of Jews. All Jews in this district were then mandatory members of this one community. It was thus also called an *Einheitsgemeinde* (Ger. unified community), as different streams and sects of Judaism were all legally mandated to form one community. As most major urban communities in the German-speaking lands were dominated by the Reform or Liberal stream of Judaism, this forced unification or integration caused many conflicts with more Orthodox believers. The Trautenau community may initially have been more traditional than some of the larger communities, e.g. in Prague or Vienna. However, according to Aliche, in the interwar period Trautenau's beautiful neo-Renaissance synagogue was usually only full on the high holidays, as most local Jews were not very observant. A rise in antisemitism around 1930s saw a re-emergence of religious observance and Jewish identification among the younger generation of Trautenau's Jewry.

¹⁵ Aliche mentions that the Jewish community in Trautenau was very tight-knitted but enjoyed good and close relations with the town's non-Jewish population. Even after 1918 most Jews in Trautenau continued to identify and register as Germans (rather than Czech or Jewish) and opted for German schooling instead of Czech schools. In a postwar letter by Martha Saraffian, preserved in the Arolsen Archives, we learn that she felt more comfortable writing German than Czech.

¹⁶ "when I married": Martha married on June 30, 1931. Státní Okresní Archiv Trutnov (District State Archive Trutnov), Trutnov citizen registration, Hrand Saraffian, 1929–1939.

¹⁷ Czechoslovakia introduced civil marriage before a public clerk in the 1920s. Although civil marriage had already been previously introduced in the monarchy, including in Bohemia, by Emperor Joseph II in the 18th century, it had been largely revoked in the early 19th century as recognized religions regained authority over marriages for their members. Only persons unaffiliated with any religion could then still get a civil marriage. This was called a "civil marriage out of distress," denoting its exceptional character. Hence, in former Austrian territories such as Bohemia there were hardly any real interfaith marriages before the 1920s. In most of these cases, later deemed "mixed" by the Nazis, one of the spouses had been forced to either leave their religion (becoming unaffiliated) or convert to the other's religion. In other

my first child was born. So they say, we are very happy. But they wanted that she be Jewish and said what we did.¹⁸

[00:05:15.52] INTERVIEWER 1: Can you tell us a little bit about your early life, how you spent your time, what the weekends were like, what your thoughts were about the future for yourself and your family, what you thought you might do when you grow up?

[00:05:35.60] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah. I-- I was-- my father sent-- sent us to France to learn-- to learn French. And I learned millinery, and my daughter was studying-- my sister was studying in French. And we went off to Prague and even to Austria, to Vienna. We had really a nice youth. My father was well off and he wanted that we learn-- I was also in Germany in business school one year.¹⁹

[00:06:20.13] And, uh, then-- a-and I had the millinery diploma I made in small business. In my father's house, he gave me two rooms.²⁰ And I had-- I made-- I had three girls employed and I made these hats. Not-- not-- I didn't must to do it, but I liked it. And then when I met my husband and I married, so I gave up the business and we moved in a nice apartment. We had-- when my daughter was born, we had the dog and bird and the-- we had the house housekeeper. It was really a nice life. We had a car and sometimes we went by car to Vienna. And really, it was a nice life.

[00:07:38.92] INTERVIEWER 1: Did you give up your millinery, for what reason?

cases, some people chose to convert or leave their religion pro forma for marriage and then re-joined. Martha Kummermann and her husband Hrand Saraffian, however, married in a Czechoslovakian civil ceremony and both maintained their respective religious affiliations. For the politics of marriage in Czechoslovakia see Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 2006).

¹⁸ “she be Jewish”: This echoes the remark about the Jewish register in the beginning of the testimony. Their daughter, Noemi Saraffian, born in 1934, was registered as a member of the Jewish community to appease Martha’s parents, who had been adamant about her daughter’s choice of husband. They later chose to register their second daughter as Christian. While this practice of different religious upbringings for children was relatively rare in peripheral areas with small Jewish communities (where most intermarried families showed a tendency towards the Christian majority), it was much more common in larger urban centres, such as Prague or Vienna.

¹⁹ Trautenau was close to the Czechoslovakian border with Lower Silesia, then a part of Prussia (Germany). Silesia had formerly also been part of the Habsburg lands and the Bohemian Crown but was lost to Prussia in 1742. Thus, Trautenau became an Austrian/Prussian, then Czechoslovakian/German border town. After 1945, Lower Silesia was ceded to Poland. Although Saraffian does not mention the place and name of her school it was most likely located in the Lower Silesian border district Landeshut in Schlesien (today only roughly corresponding with the Polish Kamienna Góra County), which was linked with Trautenau through a railway line.

²⁰ “In my father’s house”: Reichstraße 5 (today: Polská street 98).

[00:07:46.56] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Because my husband didn't want-- he earned enough money. He didn't want that I work because I had the child. And I helped sometimes in my father's office, typing, when he needed.

[00:08:05.73] INTERVIEWER 2: How did you meet your husband and what was his business?

[00:08:09.60] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: He was an importer for Persian carpets.²¹ He was an Armenian. He came to Germany, with a transport, children. What--what were left after a massacre. When the Turks massacred the Armenians, he came to-- to Germany. With an-- it's like a self-help organization what brought this children to Germany.²²

[00:08:45.15] He came there with about four sisters and brothers. He never saw them again because they were all placed in another foster home. So he-- he searched, but he didn't get any-- he didn't see any of his family. Only one uncle was in Köln am Rhein and he had the business with stamps. That was the only connection he got.²³ And he was alone and he told me this story.

[00:09:28.45] He brought me these books from Fridtjof Nansen.²⁴ He was helping these Armenian immigrants and said, I had an other book. It was named-- Ein Volk in Not-- uh,

²¹ The Czechoslovakian and Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) registers and compendiums contain no business registered to Hrand Saraffian, though they usually only contain larger businesses. However, there are newspaper articles from the inter- and the postwar period mentioning him as an importer of Persian carpets.

²² Hrand Saraffian was born in Constantinople (today: Istanbul/Turkey) on 17 July 1891. He was thus originally a citizen of the Ottoman Empire. Constantinople was home to a large community of Armenian Christians, perhaps numbering up to 400,000. The years 1894 to 1896 saw a campaign of mass killings (the "Hamidian massacres") with 80,000 to 300,000 Armenians murdered (according to varying estimates) and up to 50,000 orphaned children. It is very likely that Hrand Saraffian and his siblings were among these orphans and brought to Europe in a humanitarian effort, perhaps organized by other Armenians living in the diaspora. According to a post-war ITS document, Hrand Saraffian left Istanbul in 1897 at the age of six and "since then he has not acquired any other citizenship" (Arolsen Archives, 3.2.1./1718000). On the history of the Armenian persecution in the 1890s see Suny, "The Hamidian Massacres."

²³ Many major European cities had small Armenian diaspora communities. Armenians often operated businesses importing "oriental" and Turkish goods. In contemporary German-language sources such Armenians were frequently called Turks or Turkish. Cf. Khachig Tololyan, "Armenian Diaspora", in Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember and Ian Skoggard (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World* (Boston: Springer, 2005), https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-0-387-29904-4_4.

²⁴ Fridtjof Nansen, born in 1861 in Norway, was a scientist, explorer, and humanitarian. Between 1920 and 1930 he served as the first High Commissioner for Refugees of the League of Nations. From 1925 he was engaged in helping Armenian refugees and wrote several books on the matter.

"People in-- in--" what you call it-- "in Need."²⁵ Say-- say, it was like-- like we, Jews.²⁶ They were deported and they were killed, and what was left, went in transport to Europe. And so he-- he was-- he was not a happy person because he had nobody. And I-- I liked him and I was moved by his story, and so we got together.

[00:10:25.27] And uh, my parents didn't want to allow it.²⁷ They sent me to Berlin to forget it. I had a cousin in Berlin.²⁸ He studied rabbi and he should to talk me out of this marriage. But he didn't. He said that must, must decide, I only, and if I want to do it or not. And my-- my parents were very unhappy. And I didn't marry because my grandmother died and my mother said to me, she died because she was so unhappy that I want to marry this man.

[00:11:10.71] But she died, I think, from old age. But I felt very guilty about. From this time, I-- I-- I waited a long time. My father was very sick. He was one year in a hospital in Prague. And I went with him always by-- by ambulance. I was sitting the whole day, it seemed. He didn't talk to me.

[00:11:46.05] So then when he came back home, so I married. He was better and he went in the office again. And so later, I married, and it worked out when my daughter was born. And then when my husband saved my parents money, because he had money that my parents should get from-- from clients, my husband collected it and went night over the custom with the suitcase. And inside, he had the money.²⁹

[00:12:32.11] INTERVIEWER 1: Was this when the Germans were already in Czechoslovakia?

²⁵ Most likely refers to Ingeborg Maria Sick, *Karen Jeppe: Im Kampf um ein Volk in Not* (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1929).

²⁶ The Armenian diaspora is often compared to the Jewish diaspora. Another parallel is the shared experiences of falling victim to a genocide. Perhaps this feeling of connectedness with the experience of her husband, which Saraffian describes here, became even stronger after the Holocaust. See the article "Armenia" in *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/armenia>; also Harutyun Marutyan, "Museums and Monuments: comparative analysis of Armenian and Jewish experiences in memory policies," *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines* no. 3 (2014): 57–79.

²⁷ Besides his different religion, Hrand Saraffian was also considerably older and her parents may have also been worried because of her future husband's statelessness. In case of a binational marriage, the woman usually acquired the husband's citizenship and lost her own. Cf. Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 72 ff.

²⁸ "He studied rabbi": Perhaps her cousin attended the famous Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin, an orthodox rabbinical school founded by Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer in 1873. The school existed until 1938, when the Nazis forced it to shut down. Cf. "Hildesheimer, Esriel," in *YIVO Encyclopedia*.

²⁹ Her parents had already moved to the inner parts of Czechoslovakia in early 1938, presumably after the Austrian "Anschluss." Besides fear of annexation another reason may have been her father's poor health, as we later learn that they had moved to a spa town. Beginning in October 1938 a new border was erected between Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia.

[00:12:35.96] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes. Yes. When it was occupied. Then my parents were very, very thankful to my husband. So the whole thing was straightened out.

[00:12:50.54] INTERVIEWER 1: Your father could no longer collect his own fees, is that--

[00:12:54.80] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: No. He left. He left before-- before I left. He left about, uh, half year, one year before I left, with my mother.³⁰ They left all and went to a brother from my-- my father.³¹ And then my father got sick again so they went in the spa and lived in a hotel.³² And when my husband brought him³³ only they rented the apartment.

[00:13:34.34] And we left after-- after-- I left after the Grynszpan affair, if you heard something from this. Uh, a Jew in Germany named Grynszpan, he killed a German.³⁴ And then it breaks out in Czechoslovakia, this transport. And after-- after we left-- we left, uh, to the spa where my parents were. And--

[00:14:16.00] INTERVIEWER 1: This-- excuse me. This spa that was in Czechoslovakia proper?

[00:14:21.06] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes.

[00:14:22.26] INTERVIEWER 1: In other words, you left the Sudetenland?

[00:14:24.24] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: We left the Sudeten and went in this spa.

³⁰ “left with my mother”: Her father left together with her mother.

³¹ Her father had several brothers. It is unknown to where the Kummermann parents initially went.

³² The parents moved to Podiebrad/Poděbrady (Ger./Cz.), about 50 km outside of Prague. In the interwar period Poděbrady developed into an internationally known spa town.

³³ “brought him”: could also be “brought them” – and refers most likely to the money that Hrand Saraffian collected for Friedrich Kummermann.

³⁴ Herschel or Hermann Grynszpan (1921–abt. 1942) was born in Germany to Polish Jewish parents. In October 1938, his parents were among approximately 17,000 Jews with Polish citizenship deported from Nazi Germany as part of the so called “Polenaktion.” As Poland refused to let them in, most were trapped in the no-mans-lands between four large border crossings – some of them for months, without any shelter, food or care. On November 7, 1938 Herschel Grynszpan, who was living in Paris at the time, shot a German diplomat, Ernst vom Rath, who died two days later. His death served as the pretext for the Nazi regime to initiate the November pogrom, also known as “Kristallnacht” (Ger. Crystal Night) or the “Night of Broken Glass.” The organized eruption of violence saw the destruction and looting of thousands of Jewish businesses, the burning of about 250 synagogues and dozens of murders in the night of the 9th to 10th of November 1938. Pogroms took place in all regions of Nazi Germany, including the recently annexed Sudetenland. Approximately 30,000 Jewish men were arrested in the aftermath and sent to concentration camps. See the article “The ‘Night of Broken Glass’” in *USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia*.

[00:14:27.75] INTERVIEWER 1: Were there-- what-- what was the story in the Sudetenland when-- when you left. What was happening there?

[00:14:34.77] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: When the German came in the first day, they-- they broke in the houses from the Jews. They broke the door from my parents' house. They took out everything they find in-- in the shelves, in the closets, in-- in the drawers, in the offices.³⁵

[00:15:00.19] Everything was on the floor, it was high like this. From the wall, pictures. And from this handles from brass, everything. What they could damage, they did. It was like the same thing like the Russian did after the war in Czechoslovakia³⁶ and in German, the same thing. My husband went to the officer Leut-Leutnant.³⁷

[00:15:43.32] INTERVIEWER 2: That's 1938 or '39 now?

[00:15:46.35] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: '38. And asked them, how it's possible that you do something like this? And he said, that's the martial law. Kriegsrecht.³⁸

[00:16:00.56] INTERVIEWER 2: Martial law.

[00:16:01.80] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes. And so we couldn't do nothing about. And my husband always said, nothing can happen to us because I'm not Jewish.³⁹ But then when the

³⁵ In the first weeks of October 1938, the German Wehrmacht occupied the Sudetenland and other Czechoslovakian border regions near Austria and Bavaria. At the same time, local Nazi sympathizers and members of the national-socialist Sudeten German Party, which was later merged into the Nazi Party, violently attacked Jewish and Czech inhabitants and their property. These annexation riots and violence almost seamlessly transitioned into the November Pogroms ("Crystal Night") just weeks later. In Trautenau, SA-members burnt the synagogue to the ground on the night of November 9, 1938.

³⁶ This seems to refer to the Red Army, which liberated most of Czechoslovakia in 1945. Allied troops, especially Soviet troops, were often accused of atrocities and assaults on the civil populations both during the war and later as occupying powers. Especially in Central Eastern Europe, the Soviet troops, initially often hailed as liberators, were soon seen as occupiers, as the Soviet Union aimed at installing and supporting Communist governments loyal to the USSR, as was the case in Czechoslovakia.

³⁷ "Leutnant": Ger. for lieutenant. Lowest officer rank in the German *Wehrmacht*. Most likely at this point the German army was not directly involved in the pogroms in Trautenau. It may also refer to an officer of the Sudeten German Free Corps, a paramilitary Nazi militia, formed on German orders in September 1938, or any of its successor organization. This group was largely a front for German Nazi organizations such as the SA and SS and carried out terror acts in Czechoslovakia in the weeks leading up to the Munich agreement and annexation. Officially disbanded in mid-October 1938, many members were then absorbed by the Nazi party and its paramilitary organizations.

³⁸ "Kriegsrecht": Ger. for martial law. Neither German nor Czechoslovakian law – nor international martial law – condoned the looting and destroying of Jewish businesses and the violence against civilians. Hence the Nazis disguised the state-planned and orchestrated attacks as "spontaneous eruptions of popular anger." Most of the crimes of the Pogrom night were committed by members of paramilitary Nazi organization disguised as civilians.

³⁹ The status of a privileged "mixed marriage" only evolved from the beginning of 1939. Until then, antisemitic German laws, such as the infamous Nuremberg laws, did not contain exemptions for

Grynszpan appar-- affair came, they-- they we're like animals. They [hit?] an old Jew [?] throwing all over on the place, on the-- on the-- from the town, the big place,⁴⁰ they, throw these Jews around that everybody see it.⁴¹

[00:16:38.45] INTERVIEWER 1: Can you explain that to us? How-- did you see this happen?

[00:16:44.42] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: No, no. I didn't go in the street anymore because they harassed my maid, if she come out with a Jewish child, they will hurt her. So my husband said, you don't go out in the street anymore. And then the Gestapo⁴² came in our house and took my husband till he got-- till he got from Vienna the confirmation that he's not a Jew, because he lived long time in Vienna.⁴³

[00:17:17.69] And-- and then after they got it, they let him out of the prison. And so then he realized the danger and he-- he said, you must go out from here. So we had a car and the driver took me over there, over the custom with my daughter.⁴⁴ And my husband came.

[00:17:46.97] My husband went to Berlin and asked for permission to move our belongings to the Czechoslovakia. And he got the permission.⁴⁵ And then he packed everything. He sold his business and then take him over. And we took an apartment and we lived there.

intermarried Jews. Hrand Saraffian was stateless and of Armenian origin. The Nuremberg “race laws” of 1935 only defined Jews in terms of race, however, not Germans or “Aryans.” The laws instead operated with the vague term “Of German and related blood.” A commentary to these race laws only defined “Jews, Gypsies and Negro-bastards” as non-Aryans, but left it open who was to be considered as “of related blood.” As a non-Jew, Hrand Saraffian was thus considered “of German blood” and therefore their marriage was also treated as a “mixed marriage” between a German and a Jew.

⁴⁰ Most likely refers to the central market square in Trautenau’s historic old town.

⁴¹ In Trautenau the local synagogue was burnt to the ground during the pogrom of 9/10 November 1938.

⁴² “Gestapo”: Ger. abbreviation for *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Secret State Police). The Gestapo’s primary task was the persecution of political opponents of the Nazi Regime. Led by the high-ranking Nazi and Head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, it played a key role in the organization of the Holocaust. Immediately after the annexation of Sudetenland, Gestapo officers and members of the *Einsatzgruppen*, special police deployments, began seeking out and arresting political opponents and Jews. By spring 1939, about 10,000 inhabitants of the Sudetenland, including many Jews, had been arrested and deported to concentration and detainment camps. Cf. Osterloh, “Sudetenland,” 73–5.

⁴³ This Gestapo visit may have been part of the attempt to force the Jewish population out of the Sudetenland and into the Czechoslovakian rump state. The campaign took place in early October 1938. It seems that Hrand Saraffian was initially suspected of being Jewish, but eventually the family was permitted to stay. Nevertheless, after the violent events of “Crystal night” the family decided to follow Martha Saraffian’s parents into Czechoslovakia proper.

⁴⁴ “over the custom”: across the newly established border between now-German Sudetenland and the Czechoslovakian rump state.

⁴⁵ At this point, the Nazi authorities – especially in Sudetenland – were still encouraging the emigration of Jews. To what extent this also extended to “mixed marriages” is unclear. However, according to

[00:18:10.49] INTERVIEWER 2: What town?

[00:18:11.88] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: It was Podiebrad⁴⁶. It was his spa, where my parents were.

[00:18:18.17] INTERVIEWER 2: So you really left what was now Germany? Or occupied Sudetenland, which was Germany.

[00:18:24.80] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes, it was. Then when they occupy,⁴⁷ the time after they-- they called it "Protektorat Böhmen and Mähren".⁴⁸

[00:18:35.72] INTERVIEWER 2: And you went back into Czechoslovakia proper?

[00:18:38.57] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes. And there begun the-- the-- the transport with the Jews because they made the head from Czechoslovakia Heydrich.⁴⁹ His name was Heydrich. And he let kill a whole town from Czechs, men, women, and children. The whole town was killed and damaged because he had such a hatred. They were against-- against the German, or something happened that he let kill all in this town.⁵⁰ And one--

Osterloh, in early 1939 there were practically no Jews left in Sudetenland, as even most intermarried families had left.

⁴⁶ Podiebrad/Poděbrady, today in Czechia, is a town approximately 50 kilometres east of Prague. In the interwar period the town developed into an internationally known spa.

⁴⁷ "when they occupy": this refers to the German occupation of the Czechoslovakian rump state in 1939 (see below).

⁴⁸ The Czechoslovakian rump state continued to exist only until Mid-March 1939, when Slovakia, encouraged by Nazi Germany, declared its independence (effectively turning Slovakia into a German proxy or puppet state). At the same time, Germany invaded Czechia (*Zerschlagung der Rest-Tschechei*, literally "breaking up remaining Czechia"). The remaining Czech rump territory was annexed by Germany and incorporated as the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. As a nominal "protectorate" – and the first territory annexed to the Reich without an ethnic German majority – Nazi Germany granted the Czechs a form of pseudo-autonomy under the authority of a German Reich Protector. While the Czechs could and did enact certain laws and regulations on their own – including several anti-Jewish provisions – major policies and final decisions were dictated by the Reich. However, unlike in the occupied eastern territories (Poland, Ukraine, Russia, and the Baltic states), for the most part, Reich laws applied, which meant that the status of protected "mixed marriages" also existed in the Protectorate (unlike under the General government and later the occupied Soviet Union). Eventually the Protectorate became mostly integrated into Nazi Germany, with a semi-autonomy for ethnic Czechs. Cf. Gruner, *The Holocaust*.

⁴⁹ Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942) was a leading SS member, head of the Reich Security Main Office and Vice Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia from 1939. He is considered one of the main organizers of the Holocaust. Cf. Gerwarth, *Hitler's Hangman* and "Reinhard Heydrich," in *USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia*.

⁵⁰ On 27 May 1942, Czech resistance fighters, affiliated with the Czech government in Exile, ambushed and attacked Heydrich in a suburb of Prague with gunfire and explosives. Heydrich was severely wounded and eventually succumbed to his injuries a week later. Initially, the Czech attackers were able

[00:19:27.98] INTERVIEWER 2: Did the Czech--

[00:19:29.64] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: One Czech killed him in Prague in a church. No, some other place⁵¹ but he hid in a church, but they find him and they kill him, too.⁵² And from this time, the-- the worst transport was named Heydrich Transport.⁵³ And this transport, my mother-- my father died before, cancer, and he-- he could not be in a hospital where everybody was because he was a Jew.⁵⁴ So they gave him in the infection hospital. So when he died, then my mother was caught in transport. And--

[00:20:17.69] INTERVIEWER 1: Can you tell us a little about that, about what happened to your mother?

to flee and hide successfully. In revenge for Heydrich's death, the Germans carried out draconian punitive actions against the Czech and Jewish populations of the Protectorate. On 10 June 1942 German police and SS units massacred the male populations of the villages of Lidice and Ležáky, which had allegedly supported the attackers, and deported the women to concentration camps. The names of these villages became symbols of the German atrocities carried out in Czechia. In addition, the Germans also executed several thousands of Czech political prisoners and enacted martial law for two months. Parallel to the massacres, thousands of Jews from the Protectorate were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto and concentration camps outside the Protectorate. Gerwarth, *Hitler's Hangman*, 10–12.

⁵¹ The attackers had chosen a junction in Libeň, a suburb in Prague, for their attempt on Heydrich's life. As his car was forced to slow down on a curve, they initially opened machine gun fire (unsuccessfully) and then threw an explosive device at the car, which injured Heydrich fatally (he died several days later).

⁵² Heydrich's assassins were hiding in the crypt of the Orthodox Saints Cyril and Methodius Cathedral in Prague, helped by bishop Gorazd of Prague. On 18 June 1942 German SS-units raided the church, eventually killing the assassins. During and after the raid, the Germans also executed several Orthodox priests of the Cathedral, among them bishop Gorazd, who had helped the attackers and was later beatified as a martyr of Christian Orthodoxy.

⁵³ "Heydrich Transport": On 10 June 1942 approximately 1,000 Jews were deported, in "revenge" for Heydrich's death, from Prague to the Majdanek concentration camp near Lublin. This was the only direct transport from Prague to the Lublin camp (Majdanek). At the same time, parallel transports brought other Czech Jews to Theresienstadt, a large ghetto that the Nazis operated inside the Protectorate. Many of those deported to Theresienstadt were then sent on to other camps (including Lublin), sometimes within just a few days. Cf. Longerich, *Holocaust*, 233.

⁵⁴ "because he was a Jew": apparently Martha's father, Friedrich Kummermann, who had been in poor health, died of a natural death. However, the lack of adequate healthcare provided to Jews may have accelerated or caused his death. In general, Jews only received minimum health care, usually in the few Jewish institutions the Nazis still allowed in urban centers. Kummermann died of cancer on May 1, 1941 in the district hospital of Městec Králové/Königsstädtel, leaving behind his wife Elvira. National Archives Czech Republic (Národní archiv), Registers of Jewish religious communities in the Czech regions (Matriky židovských náboženských obcí v českých krajích), Poděbrady, death register 1901–1949, <https://vademecum.nacr.cz/vademecum/permalink?xid=3384d494-f579-4b28-a58f-06eb7ac7bf24&scan=c0edbb9f1f9e6c326e73808c268f67b3>.

[00:20:22.56] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: It was the worst transport. They survived only 10 person from this.⁵⁵ Thousands of people that went to Majdanek⁵⁶. My mother was shipped to Majdanek.⁵⁷ And she-- she-- what I heard from-- from my survivor when he--

[00:20:46.43] INTERVIEWER 1: Can you start a little bit earlier and tell us what exactly happened? Where she was, when it happened, where you were?

[00:20:59.48] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: I was in hospital because I just got my second child. And my mother, five day after my child was born,⁵⁸ my mother went in transport. And she was

⁵⁵ There may have even been fewer survivors of this transport from Prague to Majdanek. According to Eva Schmidt-Hartmann, only one survivor came forward after the war. Cf. Eva Schmidt-Hartmann, "Tschechoslowakei," in Wolfgang Benz (ed.), *Dimensionen des Völkermords: Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1991), 353–379, 362.

⁵⁶ "Majdanek": Lublin Main Camp, also known as Majdanek, was a major German concentration and extermination camp just outside of the Polish city of Lublin. It operated between October 1941 and July 1944, when it was liberated by the Soviet Red Army. According to most current estimates, around 78,000 prisoners were murdered in Majdanek, two thirds of whom were Jews. A large number of sub-camps were associated with Majdanek. Cf. USHMM *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos* (hereafter: USHMM ECG) Vol I Part B, 875.

⁵⁷ Elvira Kummermann was deported on 9 June 1942 with transport AAc Nr 211 from Kolín to the Theresienstadt ghetto. Three days later she was deported from Theresienstadt to Trawniki concentration camp, about 40 km southeast of Lublin. (Holocaust.cz, database of victims, Elvira Kummermannová, <https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/103577-elvira-kummermannova/>).

⁵⁸ "five day after my child was born": her second daughter, Hanna Saraffian, was born on 30 May 1942. The "Heydrich transport" left Prague on 10 June 1942, some of the transports to Theresienstadt already a day earlier. Her mother was deported on 9 June 1942 and most likely called up for the transport a few days prior.

first going to Kolín,⁵⁹ that massive town from where they shipped all the Jews to camps. First to Theresienstadt,⁶⁰ and from there, via-- via Lublin to Majdanek.⁶¹

[00:21:34.00] And my mother was in this transport. It was the worst. And I was told from a survivor, that the Jews had to run in circles. And the SS⁶² men shoot-- the SA⁶³, the young men, they were-- what you call it-- an organization, SA and SS, SS were worse than SA. But they ordered the children, 10 to 15 years old, to shoot the Jews.⁶⁴ They had to run in circles and say, shoot them. Some were wounded, so they shoot them again till they died.

⁵⁹ Kolín is a Czech City and an important railway node approximately 50 km east of Prague. Three transports, starting on 10 June 1942, brought over 2,200 Jews from Kolín and other Czech towns and cities to Theresienstadt. Most were within days deported from Theresienstadt to extermination camps.

⁶⁰ The Theresienstadt ghetto (Cz. Terezín) was established in late 1941 as a ghetto and transit camp for Jews from the Protectorate at the site of an 18th century military fortress and a small civilian settlement. The ghetto later also held German, Austrian, Dutch, Slovak, Danish and Hungarian Jews. Theresienstadt initially served primarily as a transit camp and was also the site of a Gestapo prison adjacent to the ghetto in the “small fortress” (thus Theresienstadt is sometimes also called a concentration camp). Commanded by a small German SS-detachment and primarily guarded by Czech policemen, the ghetto was internally organized through a Jewish “self-administration.” This pro-forma “self-administration” also served the Nazis’ propaganda of portraying Theresienstadt as part of a fictitious “Jewish settlement area” rather than the ghetto and transit camp it was. At the Wannsee Conference on 20 January 1942, when high ranking Nazi officials discussed the “final solution,” Theresienstadt was designated as a ghetto for elderly Jews from Germany and Austria (Cf. “The Wannsee Conference,” in Longerich, *Holocaust*). It thus became the primary reception and transit place for so-called “privileged” and prominent Jews. According to the most recent estimates, approximately 155,000 Jews passed through the ghetto. Of these, about 35,000 died in the ghetto and another 83,000 perished after being deported to other concentration and death camps. Cf. “Terezín” in USHMM ECG Vol. 2 Part A, and Wolfgang Benz, *Theresienstadt: Eine Geschichte von Täuschung und Vernichtung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013).

⁶¹ Saraffian’s mother Elvira Kummermann was most likely transported to Trawniki in the Lublin district, where she was eventually murdered. On the SS camp Trawniki see USHMM ECG Vol.1 Part B, 893.

⁶² The SS (Ger. *Schutzstaffel*, lit. “Protection Squardon”) was a paramilitary suborganization of the Nazi Party. A branch of the SS, the SS-*Totenkopfverbände*, administered most German concentration camps, especially the extermination and death camps. In 1940, these units were integrated into the Waffen-SS, the military branch of the SS. The regular SS (Ger.: *Allgemeine SS*) was closely intertwined with the German Secret Police (Gestapo), as Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, was also Chief of the German Police and, from 1943 onwards, Minister of the Interior. As many Gestapo-Officers were also SS-members, the two organizations are often confounded – both in memories, but sometimes also in literature.

⁶³ The SA (Ger. *Sturmabteilung*, lit. “Storm Detachment,” often called Brownshirts or Storm Troopers in English) was the original paramilitary organization of the Nazi party. It lost influence after 1934, when it was gradually replaced by the SS – although it was never dissolved. While SA-members were often and regularly involved in local atrocities against political opponents and Jews, including during *Kristallnacht*, and at –times also served as auxiliary police forces, generally speaking, the SA, unlike the SS, had no official role in the organization of the Holocaust.

⁶⁴ Children between the ages of 10 and 15 would not have been members of either SA or SS. Instead, German youth aged 10 to 18 were mandatory members of Hitler Youth. Towards the end of the war, the Nazi Party also drafted 17-year-old boys into the Waffen-SS.

[00:22:23.10] But one man, he said to me, I was alive and I resisted. When it was dark, I was under the-- the deads. So I crawled out and I saved my life.⁶⁵ But there were very, very little when I heard from the Red Cross. Said to him there were 10 percent only survivors. Later, I met in Prague this man that told me what happened.

[00:22:54.46] INTERVIEWER 1: Did you see your mother go? Were you at home when she went away?

[00:22:59.47] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: No, I was in the hospital.⁶⁶ I didn't see her. She come-- she came to me the last day. I had the watch. I give her the watch. It was not a golden watch. It was to hang on. And I give her this watch and she gave me her gold watch. And I-- we-- we-- she gave all her jewel to a Czech to-- to hide.

[00:23:33.55] And this-- this Czech gave nothing back to-- to us. And my-- my jewelry, our pastor in this spa,⁶⁷ he-- he put it in-- in three cases in the soil in his-- in his garden, all our jewelry. And I got it back. I never claimed it because I got it back. But this pastor was-- he had so much Jews that he was picked up from the Gestapo-- Gestapo, and got imprisoned. But his wife was from Switzerland and she got him out. But he helped very much the Jews.

[00:24:24.12] INTERVIEWER 1: When-- when your mother came to see you at the hospital the last day, did she know that she was going to be on a transport? Did you know that she was going to be going the next day?

[00:24:34.66] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah. She said to me, we go to transport. Maybe tomorrow, maybe the next day. I didn't see her anymore.

[00:24:46.84] INTERVIEWER 1: What did you think when she told you? What would you feel when she told you what was going to happen?

[00:24:53.04] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: It was a terrible experience. But I said to her, when it's God's will so we can do nothing about. And we couldn't. We couldn't fight because we were--

⁶⁵ This second-hand memory of the survivor of Majdanek may tell of either the events in the area of Lublin or during the rounding-up and arrest of Czech Jews for the transport. In Majdanek camp the prisoners were primarily murdered in a gas chamber. (USHMM ECG).

⁶⁶ This must have taken place in the beginning of June 1942, when Saraffian was in hospital giving birth to her second child, Hanna.

⁶⁷ Dr. Josef Jeschke, born in 1902, was Pastor of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB; also called: *Bohemian Brethren*) in Podiebrad/Poděbrady from 1931 to 1961. After the war he was a university Professor. The ECCB has a small overview of his professional career on their website https://www.evangnet.cz/cce/kazatel/629-josef_jeschke and the Bibliography of the History of the Czech Lands contains a short biographical note and picture of Jeschke: <https://biblio.hiu.cas.cz/authorities/267590?locale=en>.

we were-- the Czechs were the same, anti-Semites, like-- like the German maybe worse.⁶⁸ The Austrians were worse, too, because we had in the camps always Austrian Scharführer⁶⁹ and guides.⁷⁰ They were worse than the German. And I don't know where I stopped.

[00:25:42.56] INTERVIEWER 1: You were-- you were in the hospital having your second baby.

[00:25:45.95] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes. And I was undernourished. I-- I got skorbut⁷¹ because I had not enough food. And I got it all over my body, these blue signs from skorbut⁷². And, uh--

[00:26:02.63] INTERVIEWER 1: Scurvy? Is that scurvy?

[00:26:04.49] INTERVIEWER 2: Mm-hm.

[00:26:06.37] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: What-- what, uh-- what, uh, s-seafarers have when they have only one kind of food, no? So-- and I had no milk. I had only water. So we had to send in small farm for milk. We sent a man every day. My husband bought a bicycle and sent this man every day for milk for my child because we didn't get much. I got only this food cards.⁷³ I got one

⁶⁸ Although Czechia was forcibly occupied by Germany, many Czechs collaborated. The “autonomous” Czech government in the Protectorate enacted its own anti-Jewish laws. Czech policemen were also on guard duty in the Theresienstadt ghetto. The ghetto/camp was guarded by around 170 Czech policemen and up to 28 German SS-members.

⁶⁹ “Scharführer”: low ranking non-commissioned officer in the SS and Waffen-SS. All commanders of Theresienstadt were Austrians (though they were higher-ranking SS-officers): Siegfried Seidl (until July 1943), Anton Burger (until Feb. 1944), Karl Rahm (until May 1945). While the other SS members came from different parts of the Reich there was at least one infamous Austrian SS-Scharführer: Rudolf Haindl, born in 1922 in Vienna, was Deputy Camp Inspector of Theresienstadt. He was arrested in 1947 in Austria, brought to Czechoslovakia and hanged in 1948. Cf. “Terezín” in USHMM ECG Vol. 2.

⁷⁰ “guides”: The German word *Führer* means both “leader” and “guide.” In this case she was referring to the first meaning.

⁷¹ “Skorbut”: Ger. for Scurvy – a disease caused by malnutrition and lack of Vitamin C. Jews were issued much lower ration cards and only rarely were allowed to buy fruit and vegetables and other essential and nutritious foods, such as meat.

⁷² One of the primary symptoms of scurvy is easy skin bruising and patches of purple hematomas. Cf. Luke Maxfield and Jonathan S. Crane, “Vitamin C Deficiency (Scurvy),” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK493187/>.

⁷³ “food cards”: ration cards. German war production meant that food supplies were increasingly rare. All persons under German control, including German citizens, were issued ration cards for grocery shopping. Jews were given considerably lower rations than persons “of German blood.” Jews usually did not receive any rations of meat, fresh fruits and vegetables, and other essential foods. Even basic staples such as fat or salt were issued in insufficient amounts. Ration cards for Jews were marked with a large letter “J” and/or stamped “Jude.” Jews in “privileged mixed marriages” received ration cards for “Aryans.” In Martha Saraffian’s case her daughter was a member of the Jewish community, thus her marriage was not considered privileged and she received Jewish ration cards. The USHMM has sugar

egg in the month and meat-- no meat, no fat, a little bit flour and a little bit sugar. And my husband got more and-- and my children, too. The little one got one pound of, uh, farina for a month.⁷⁴ So we had to--

[00:27:17.50] INTERVIEWER 2: What is special about this card?

[00:27:20.32] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: That-- that was the card with the Jew on it. It was given to Jews, but I couldn't go and buy myself because with this star,⁷⁵ I was not allowed to go in the store. We got these stars, my Jewish daughter and I. And we had to carry all the-- through the end of the war.

[00:27:54.21] INTERVIEWER 2: So half of your family was Jews and half not Jews?

[00:27:59.13] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes.⁷⁶

[00:27:59.90] INTERVIEWER 2: It was different.

[00:28:01.09] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: It was always-- my husband said it was always this sword of Damocles because he always feared that my-- my Jewish daughter will be attacked, too. She-- she was with the star. From the Czech children, they bounce her on the head and told her always. You are Jew. You are a Jew.

[00:28:30.28] And so she couldn't go any more in this school. She was one year older when we left the De-- Sudeten. She was only one year in the school since she couldn't go anymore.⁷⁷ And we lived there till my daughter was two year, three months old. Then my husband was ordered to-- to town.

[00:28:59.16] INTERVIEWER 2: What year is it now?

and coffee ration card stubs issued to a Jewish Czech woman in 1944 in its collection (USHMM, Accession Number 1992.132.6, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn5880>). Martha Saraffian would have received the same or very similar ration cards.

⁷⁴ “the little one”: her non-Jewish daughter Hanna was most likely given better ration cards than the older daughter, Noemi, who was a member of the Jewish community.

⁷⁵ “this star”: refers to the yellow patch. The non-privileged status of her marriage meant that Saraffian was forced to wear the yellow star of David, as was her Jewish daughter, Noemi. Her younger daughter, Hanna, not a member of the Jewish community, did not have to wear the badge.

⁷⁶ Hrand Saraffian was considered “Aryan,” the younger daughter Hanna a first degree “Mischling,” the older Noemi a *Geltungsjüdin* (lit. “deemed Jewish”).

⁷⁷ *Mischlinge* children were permitted to attend German primary schools and middle schools but could only attend high schools and higher education with a rare special permission. Jewish children, including *Mischlinge* deemed Jewish, such as Noemi Saraffian, had to attend segregated Jewish schools or Jewish classes.

[00:29:01.29] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: '39. 9, 10 of 19-- no.

[00:29:08.90] INTERVIEWER 2: Back up.

[00:29:10.33] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: This was already '41.⁷⁸ And my husband was ordered to this town. And when the fire-- firefighters⁷⁹ bombarded this town because it was coal. And they bombarded everything that was coal, oil, electricity or-- or what they could destroy, that-- the German couldn't use it. So my husband was ordered to clean up this, uh, pieces what were flying.⁸⁰ And in the meantime, I got in--

[00:29:59.82] INTERVIEWER 1: How did he get to this place where he did this work?

[00:30:05.47] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: He-- he went by train several hours.⁸¹ No-- no other communication. It's this time because it was already occupied from-- from the Germans. There were only trains. The buses-- what-- what they-- they confiscated buses and private cars, everything, for them. So they were only the way to go by train.

[00:30:33.10] INTERVIEWER 1: Did he go by himself? Did he go with--

[00:30:35.92] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: No, all these men that has Jewish woman. All these Christian men had Jewish women. And then--

[00:30:48.10] INTERVIEWER 2: Were they special transport?

[00:30:50.44] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes. And my husband asked for permission. When I sent a telegram, said, I have to go in the camp, in the labor camp, with my daughter, with my Jewish daughter.⁸² And he-- he was so upset that he asked his com-- commander to let him go. And these men gave him a pass to go through and he came at night.

⁷⁸ "already '41": From the context, these events most likely took place in mid-1944. However, Hrand Saraffian may have also been summoned for labor duty earlier.

⁷⁹ "firefighters": refers to the Allied bombing squadrons. Beginning in the second half of 1941, Allied bombers began to fly missions over the Protectorate, usually on their way to Germany. In October 1941, Prague was bombed by the British Royal Air Force for the first time; however, until 1945 such attacks on Czech cities were rare.

⁸⁰ Most likely in mid-1944, Hrand Saraffian was forced into a labor battalion consisting exclusively of intermarried non-Jews. Such forced labor missions were frequently required of persons living in mixed marriages or of their children, and occurred regularly throughout Germany and the Protectorate.

⁸¹ The exact location of this labor detachment is unclear.

⁸² In general, the Nazi authorities ordered Jews (and others) to assemble for transports, or labor duty in written form. Those ordered to such a transport had little choice but to appear, otherwise they faced heavy repercussions, which may have even been worse than what they feared from the transport. This explains why many, seemingly "voluntarily," showed up and assembled for these transports.

[00:31:24.61] And when I told him what happened, he-- he took the next train at 2 o'clock in the morning and went to Prague. The name was Sonnenbergstrasse, where the Gestapo had the head quarter.⁸³ And he was protesting. He-- sent me with just the child, that they sent me with the child to the labor camp and when he was already working for them. But he-- he was not received well. He got in, as punishment, in a special transport to Germany in a truck without food, without light.

[00:32:20.38] About three, four men got in this punish-- got this punishment.⁸⁴ So they didn't want to-- they was-- they were offered to divorce me so he could be free, but he didn't want. So he was transported to Germany. The name was Klettendorf.⁸⁵ They worked-- he got this on his arm.⁸⁶ It means, Arbeitet, "work for Organisation Todt."⁸⁷

[00:32:56.71] And he was 11 hours in bunkers working and carrying these big pieces of cement to the bunkers. And he got really sick so they gave him one egg a day. And as he recovered, he got in another camp. And from this second camp, it was nearly the end. He came to-- back to Czechoslovakia. It's more camp where all these men that marry Jewish woman were in camp.

[00:33:48.64] INTERVIEWER 1: What was the name of that camp?

⁸³ “Sonnenbergstrasse [...] head quarter”: could not be identified. There was, however, a “Sommerbergstraße” (Historic Czech name Letenská), in northwestern Prague, which is today part of the Milady Horákové highway. The German Order Police (not the Gestapo) maintained a police camp at Sommerbergstraße (C.f. Gruner, *The Holocaust*, 306). The headquarters of the Gestapo in Prague was inside the Petschek Palace, a grand interwar building previously owned by the Jewish banker Dr. Julius Petschek, which was close to the Prague main station (Politických vězňů street, at the time: Bredauer Gasse 18). After Nazi Germany occupied Prague in 1939, the Palace was immediately taken over by the Gestapo and turned into their regional headquarters. Cf.

<https://www.praague.eu/en/object/places/1340/petschek-palace-petschkuv-palac-peckarna?back=1>.

⁸⁴ Presumably, the other persons on this transport were also non-Jewish men married to Jewish women, who had also attempted to intervene on behalf of their families.

⁸⁵ “Klettendorf”: Klettendorf in Lower Silesia (today Wrocław-Kleicina in Poland). As a punishment for his request to release his wife and ten-year-old daughter, and his refusal to divorce his wife, Hrand Saraffian was sent to a harsh labor camp for Jewish men in Klettendorf. According to a German register of camps, maintained by the Federal Archives and the EVZ Foundation (hereafter *EVZ register*) this camp existed from 20 August 1940 until November/December 1944. Cf. *EVZ register*, <https://www.bundesarchiv.de/zwangarbeit/haftstaetten/index.php?action=2.2&tab=7&id=2063>.

⁸⁶ In the video testimony, Saraffian is showing an armband to the camera with the German writing “Arbeitet für O. T.” (“Works for O. T.”).

⁸⁷ “Organisation Todt” was a German paramilitary building and engineering organization, named after the Reich Minister for Armaments and Ammunitions, Fritz Todt, who died in 1942. Responsible for major construction projects such as the Autobahn-network, Organisation Todt (or O.T.) primarily relied on forced laborers, especially prisoners of war.

[00:33:51.43] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Bistritz, Bistrritz-- It was near Beneschau.⁸⁸ And this picture was handmade from one of this men.⁸⁹ And he made postcards from it for Christmas and sent it to my husband after the war. So that's what I kept it long time in the frame.

[00:34:20.44] INTERVIEWER 1: When you were still in Podiebrad, what was happening to you, as far as your belongings were concerned, as far as--

[00:34:28.75] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes. We have-- I was ordered to give up my-- my dog. We had the bird. We gave it before. We gave it to friends. But this dog I have to give up.⁹⁰ And my daughter was very unhappy so we bought another dog and kept our dock by a family and gave up the other dog.

[00:34:56.26] INTERVIEWER 2: Why did you have to give up the dog?

[00:34:58.24] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Because Jews were not allowed to have an animal. So then I was ordered to give up all my-- my belongings, my fur coat, my fur jacket, my fur hat, my

⁸⁸ Hrand Saraffian was most likely transported by train to Bistritz bei Beneschau/Bystřice u Benešova. At Bistritz the Germans maintained a special camp for “Aryans with Jewish relatives and Jewish *Mischlinge*” (*Sonderlager für jüdisch versippte Arier und jüdische Mischlinge*), which was located inside the SS-proving ground Böhmen at Bistritz bei Beneschau. According to the *EVZ register*, it existed from Fall 1943 until April 1945.

⁸⁹ Saraffian shows a post-war postcard to the camera. The front shows a (pencil?) drawing of the camp. The scene depicts a barbed wire fence, large trees and two larger buildings (perhaps a factory) in the background. In the left half of the pictures two persons, perhaps prisoners, can be seen. The caption underneath the drawing is not legible (one of the words may be “*Sonderlager*”). The inside of the card contains Christmas and New Year wishes in Czech (“Veselé Vánoce a šťastný Nový rok”), the name Alois Nikl and the year 1945/1946. Nikl was born on 21 June 1906 in Čáslav (Ger. Tschaslau) in Central Bohemia and, after school, became an apprentice in his family’s bookstore. Later he worked in several bookstores in Prague and elsewhere. On 3 August 1933, Nikl married Růžena Goldschmidová from Kolín. At this time, he operated his own bookstore in Louny/Laun in northwestern Bohemia. After the Nazi occupation of Czechia their marriage was deemed “mixed” and Růžena Niklová declared Jewish. As the couple had no children, she was forced to wear the yellow badge and no longer permitted to work in their bookshop. In 1944 Růžena Niklová was deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto. Alois Nikl was brought on 26 July 1944 to Tworschowitz bei Beneschau/Tvoršovicích u Benešova, a small village near Bistritz, which may have been a subcamp of the Sonderlager Bistritz bei Beneschau. He was liberated on 5 May 1945. (According to the *EVZ Register*, Tvoršovicích was also the site of a work detachment of the Labor Camp Brechan (*Arbeitserziehungslager*). The camps may have been identical.) Cf. *Knihkupecké Osudy Aloise Nikla* [The bookdealer Alois Nikl], 2002, <https://docplayer.cz/109813698-Alois-nikl-n-prvni-fotografie-z.html>.

⁹⁰ Jews were not allowed to own pets. Saraffian shows a conformation document, a typewritten form with additional handwritten remarks, to the camera. The document, dated 28 August 1942, is bilingual: in German and Czech. It identifies her as “Sarafian Sara Marta,” living in Podiebrad 722. The form had the entries “dog,” “cat” and “bird” pre-printed. It confirms that she gave up one dog. The document is stamped with a seal showing a Star of David.

fur-- all-- all what I have from fur, from wool.⁹¹ From being in Europe, we had fur Fußsäcke⁹² you--

[00:35:35.83] INTERVIEWER 1: Slippers?

[00:35:37.18] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah.

[00:35:37.63] INTERVIEWER 2: Stiefel.⁹³

[00:35:37.71] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah, to slip in the feet, or here when we go in the-- in the-- Schlitten⁹⁴ --

[00:35:46.97] INTERVIEWER 1: Uh, skating?

[00:35:48.64] INTERVIEWER 2: Sleigh.

[00:35:49.59] INTERVIEWER 1: Sledding?

[00:35:50.74] INTERVIEWER 2: On the sleigh?

[00:35:52.12] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: It were these horses, no. So we had these fur sacks. And then we had to give up all what was mine. My husband signed it as his belongings because he bought it, but I had to give up everything what was-- what they wanted to have. And that's what I kept from the Jewish organization, with a seal from Czechoslovakia, that I gave it up to the German. And then in the concentration camp, in the labor camp--

[00:36:42.07] INTERVIEWER 2: What year were you--

[00:36:44.11] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: It was already '42.⁹⁵ And my daughter was in the-- in the children's camp.⁹⁶ And once, she ran away and came to me.

⁹¹ She shows another letter-sized and typewritten document to the camera. The document contains a revenue stamp in the lower left corner. While the content is not legible it does seem to show a list of twenty items or categories of items. From a later statement it seems that this is a postwar Czech document that was translated from the German original.

⁹² “Fußsäcke”: Ger. literally feet bags, perhaps to warm one’s feet inside the house.

⁹³ “Stiefel”: Ger. boots.

⁹⁴ “Schlitten”: Ger. sled.

⁹⁵ The dates and years in this part of the testimony are not completely reliable. The document confirming the confiscation of the dog was from summer 1942. However, the following events took place in 1944.

⁹⁶ “my daughter ... was in the children's camp”: According to a document preserved in the Arolsen Archives, Noemi Saraffian was in the following two “children's homes”: “Temporary: Children's Home Ziegengasse 9 S-35-8-11-44” and “Temporary: Worker's Home Kastulusgasse 20 S-26-9-11-44”.

[00:36:57.01] INTERVIEWER 2: Do you remember the names of the camp?

[00:37:00.50] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: The name where my child-- child was Jesle, Jesle.⁹⁷

[00:37:07.45] INTERVIEWER 1: And the name of your camp?

[00:37:09.51] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Hagibor.⁹⁸

[00:37:10.90] INTERVIEWER 1: What-- what happened when you-- how did you find out that you had to go to the camp, and how did that come about? How did you get there?

[00:37:19.87] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: By train at 4 o'clock in the morning because Jews, they're not allowed to go during the day by train. So I had to take the train with my daughter to Prague. And from-- from there, we-- we were picked up from the train and escorted to the camp. And my daughter run away and came to me and they, they, let her talk to me for a few minutes, but we couldn't talk. We both cried. And she was taken away from me again.

[00:37:59.35] And then after time, we-- I was, um, warding sick people in this labor camp. I cared for them. There were many people. One had scarlatina⁹⁹ and one has with lung something. So they needed help. It was in the labor camp.

(Ziegengasse, today Kozí ulice; Kastulusgasse today Haštalská.) Most likely these were special institutions for Jewish children, maintained by the Council of Elders of the Jewish Community – a mandatory organization for Jews organized by the Nazis. Arolsen Archives, 1.1.42, Ghetto Theresienstadt Card File, 5078445, Noemi Saraffian. At a later point in the testimony, Saraffian shows a postcard she wrote to her daughter on 12 November 1944 to the address Prague I, Haštalská 20 – which was the Worker's Home mentioned above.

⁹⁷ "Jesle": Czech for nursery. Most likely refers to the Children's Home in Ziegengasse 9.

⁹⁸ "Hagibor": Martha Saraffian was interned at camp Hagibor, Prague, at the site of a former Jewish sports facility that was turned into a labor camp in late summer 1944 (*Hagibor* is Hebrew for "the Hero" and was the name of an interwar Jewish sports club in Prague). The camp was maintained specifically for intermarried Jews, called in masses to forced labor from September 1944. A post-war Czechoslovakian report (in German) called the camp "KZ Hagibor" – a concentration camp – and describes it as follows: "Hagibor concentration camp was erected in August 1944 to concentrate Jews, who until then had lived in the countryside, that is outside of Prague. These were mostly Jews from so called mixed marriages, as the others had been deported earlier. These Jews were brought at January 26, 1945 to the Theresienstadt ghetto, so that camp Hagibor was empty. Afterwards *Mischlinge* and husbands of Jewish women were concentrated there, in as much as this had not already been earlier the case, or when after the January offensive of the Soviet Army they had been evacuated from the camps Kleinstein and Klettendorf." Union of Antifascist Fighters Prague (Svaz protifašistických bojovníků) to International Tracing Service Bad Arolsen, KZ Hagibor, March 4, 1961. Arolsen Archives, 1.1.47, 1658000, *Camp list of the camp HAGIBOR near Prague/CSR*. Today Hagibor – still carrying the same name – is a social welfare facility of the Jewish community of Prague near the Želivského metro station.

⁹⁹ "Scarlatina": Latin (and antiquated German) for scarlet fever.

[00:38:33.34] INTERVIEWER 1: This was a certain building in the labor camp where the sick people were housed?

[00:38:41.68] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah, but this was not where I worked. It was run where sick people was there. There was one lady with typhus and these sicknesses in separate building. Where I worked there, not so sick. But it was also a woman with scarlatina. And I didn't know it so I didn't-- I didn't fear. I helped her.

[00:39:11.29] INTERVIEWER 2: You didn't know how infectious it was.

[00:39:13.67] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah. I didn't know what he had. I heard it after. But-- so we-- we tried to help. And the-- we were glad that we-- that our husbands didn't divorce us because there were cases where the men divorced when the woman was already in the labor camp.¹⁰⁰ So he divorced her, and she was immediately shipped to Auschwitz and she was killed. And there were oft so much cries and unhappiness because it happens many times that the Czech men divorced the women.¹⁰¹

[00:40:00.68] INTERVIEWER 2: The Jewish women?

[00:40:02.44] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: The Jewish women.

[00:40:03.43] INTERVIEWER 2: Your camp was for women, Jewish women who were married to non-Jews.

[00:40:09.38] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes, yes.

[00:40:13.22] INTERVIEWER 1: Where was your small-- where was your youngest daughter?¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ “we were glad that we-- that our husbands didn't divorce us”: The precarious protection of a “mixed marriage” only existed as long as the marriage lasted. The authorities exerted all kinds of pressure (threats, discrimination in the labor market, etc.) on the non-Jewish partner in order to convince them to divorce their partner. As camp Hagibor was only for Jews in “mixed marriages” a divorce meant immediate deportation to a concentration camp.

¹⁰¹ No statistics on the divorce rate of “mixed marriages” exist for either the Protectorate or the Reich. According to Burr Bukey “the divorce rate of mixed marriages was already disproportionately high in Germany” prior to the Nazi takeover (Burr Bukey, *Jews and Intermarriage*, 82). Other estimates range between 5 to 25 percent, depending on the region.

¹⁰² “youngest daughter”: Hanna Saraffian, who was not registered as Jewish.

[00:40:17.18] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: She was by a family in the same building where we lived.¹⁰³ They took her during the war. And when we came back,¹⁰⁴ so we-- she didn't recognize me. It took time before she again got attached to me. But she recognized my husband. He came back earlier, but he was very sick. He couldn't walk. He was so sick, and bones and skin only.

[00:40:52.52] INTERVIEWER 1: How did that come about, that she was taken care of by another family? And how old was she at the time?

[00:40:59.54] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: She was two years and three months.¹⁰⁵ And we asked these people if she-- if they would take care. And they did. We-- we left money for-- in advance for the-- for the child so she can be taken good care of. And they did it. They had their own child and she-- she was happy there. But then the night before I left, I heard her crying because it was above me, this apartment. I heard her crying many hours.

[00:41:42.11] INTERVIEWER 1: What was your feeling about that?

[00:41:44.00] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: It was terrible because she was hurt and she was running and we had such an Onyx Statue. And it was-- it has four corners and she fell and hit her head on the corner and she was bleeding. And so in this, I left her when she was so-- this pain, and she was crying the whole night.

[00:42:15.88] So they promised me to take her to a doctor the next day. Then I was-- from the labor camp, I was-- we all were waked at 3 o'clock in the morning always. What they did to us was 3 o'clock in the morning. they ordered to be at 4 o'clock, ready to go and transport to Theresienstadt.¹⁰⁶ We were guided to-- to the train. It was--

[00:42:56.12] INTERVIEWER 1: What year was this? What year was this?

[00:43:00.13] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: It was '40-- the end of '43.¹⁰⁷ We were guided to the train. And there, we stand till 10 o'clock in the morning on a cold winter day in melting snow. Till 10 o'clock they left us to go on the train.

¹⁰³ "where we lived": the town of Podiebrad/Poděbrady, perhaps then house Nr. 722 located in Reichstraße.

¹⁰⁴ "when we came back": after being freed from the concentration camp and the labor camp.

¹⁰⁵ "She was two years and three months": Hanna Saraffian was born on 30 May 1942. This would place the events around September 1944.

¹⁰⁶ Here she refers to the dissolution of the labor camp "Hagibor" at the end of January 1945, when the remaining inmates were transported to the Theresienstadt ghetto.

¹⁰⁷ According to a Czech postwar prisoner card, Saraffian was deported to Theresienstadt with Transport AE (*Arbeitseinsatz*) 1 on January 31, 1945 (Arolsen Archives, 1.1.42, Ghetto Theresienstadt Card File, 5078444, Marta Saraffianová). At a later point in her testimony Martha Saraffian shows a prisoner card to the camera, most likely one stemming from the ghetto bureaucracy.

[00:43:22.91] INTERVIEWER 1: How many of you were there?

[00:43:24.54] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: There was 1,000 women in this transport. We were told not to move, not to go to the window. The-- the Austrian Scharführer¹⁰⁸ were always with a gun in their hand, going up and down and up and down. We were always guarded. And we arrived in the early evening in Theresienstadt. This was a fortress from 19-- from 1800.¹⁰⁹

[00:44:00.51] It was built for military use. Was a whole small town but with two big fortresses.¹¹⁰ One was the worst.¹¹¹ That would be the people that came there so they are beaten to death. I had-- I had two friends from our town that were beaten to death there because they didn't want to say where they left the money.

[00:44:37.11] And I was ordered to-- when we came into Theresienstadt, we came in a long hall. It was like a catacomb, no windows, only long tables. And on the tables, we have to wait for this card.¹¹² We had no more name. We got a number. This-- my number was 732 and my-- the transport number was R. And the carts name was AE1. That means labor transport number 1.

[00:45:27.53] And I was assigned to work in-- in the barrack for we have to cut stones, mica stones, big stones that came from Sweden. We had to cut it eight hours to raise a knife for small

¹⁰⁸ "Scharführer": low ranking non-commissioned officer in the SS and Waffen-SS. Saraffian previously referred to Austrian SS-members on guard in Theresienstadt. However, it is likely that the transport itself was guarded by another SS-detachment and/or Czech gendarmerie.

¹⁰⁹ Theresienstadt/Terezín was built in the 1780s as a huge military fortress town. Its name derives from Maria Theresa of Austria, who ruled the Austrian hereditary lands until her death in 1780. Originally intended as a purely military installation, Theresienstadt evolved into a garrison town with a small civilian population. In the 1940s the Nazis evacuated the Czech civilians and turned the entire town into a ghetto and concentration camp.

¹¹⁰ Theresienstadt consisted of the Small Fortress, which was used by the Germans as a Gestapo prison, and the Main Fortress, which was the site of the ghetto.

¹¹¹ "one was the worst": perhaps refers to the Gestapo Prison in the Small Fortress.

¹¹² In the testimony Martha Saraffian reaches for a card, most likely a prisoner card, and shows it to the camera. The card is not very easy to read, but it looks as if it stems from the camp bureaucracy. In the top right corner, it contains the transport number (AE I) and the number 732. It also contains her name and family name, as well as her birthdate. The lower half contains fields for further remarks. It has one entry that is not legible.

pieces. This is already broken.¹¹³ It was isolation¹¹⁴-- isolation for the airplanes V1¹¹⁵ run for the German fi-fire-f-fighters.

[00:46:08.56] INTERVIEWER 1: Ins-- uh, do you mean insulation?

[00:46:11.61] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Insulation, yeah, for the firefighter planes. And so we had to make five kilos in eight hours. And who-- who didn't make it didn't get their bread. We had 350 gram. That's about 3 and 1/2 deca¹¹⁶ for three days. And who didn't make this five kilos didn't get the bread.

[00:46:42.97] INTERVIEWER 2: That's about 12 ounces.¹¹⁷

[00:46:45.11] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah, I still not learn.

[00:46:46.92] INTERVIEWER 2: 4 ounces a day. Why did you keep-- how did you pick up this piece of mica, and what did you think while you picked it up and wanted to keep it?¹¹⁸

¹¹³ In the testimony she shows a piece of mica glimmer. In the ghetto, Jewish prisoners were forced to work in a mica factory (*Glimmerwerke*) from September 1944 onwards. Raw material was sourced via companies from Berlin and Hamburg. The raw material was first split in rough pieces and refined in a further step. The final product was sold to the Reich Center for Electrotechnical Products (RETE). (C.f. Wolfgang Benz, *Theresienstadt: Eine Geschichte von Täuschung und Vernichtung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013), 71). Initially only the second step, the refining process, was conducted at Theresienstadt, while the first step, the raw splitting, took place in Prague and was conducted by Jews from "mixed" marriages, who were deported to the ghetto in February 1945, where they continued their work. According to Gruner, this glimmer plant in Prague had been located at Hagibor camp (Cf. Gruner, *The Holocaust*, 374). The USHMM has similar mica pieces in its collections: USHMM, Accession Number: 2016.552.4, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn616259>; see also the subchapter on "Mica from the Theresienstadt Glimmerwerke" in Robert M. Ehrenreich, Jane Klinger, "War in Context: Let the Artifacts Speak," in Wolfgang Muchitsch (ed.), *Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014), 145–154, 151–153.

¹¹⁴ "isolation": Ger. for insulation.

¹¹⁵ "V1": abbreviation for *Vergeltungswaffe* 1, Ger. retaliation weapon 1 (also "V-weapons"). A cruise missile developed for the German Luftwaffe. The weapon was assembled by forced laborers, including concentration camp prisoners. Beginning in summer 1944, production was located at the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp in Dora. Approximately 6,000 prisoners were involved in the production, according to historian Jens-Christian Wagner. It is not clear if mica from Theresienstadt was indeed intended for use in the production of the V1. C.f. "Mittelbau Main Camp (aka Dora)", USHMM ECG, Vol I Part B, 966.

¹¹⁶ "3 and 1/2 deca": most likely an error: 350g are 35 dag or approximately 12.35 oz. It seems, Saraffian is not referring to the raw material but to the food/bread rations they received.

¹¹⁷ 5 kg is 176.37 oz.

¹¹⁸ These questions are echoed by Robert M. Ehrenreich and Jane Klinger in their article on Mica pieces, which are now in the collection of the USHMM and belonged to Emma Jonas, a Theresienstadt survivor who took them with her: "Why would she have done this, when her life in Theresienstadt was so harsh and painful? Did she consider the mica to be a talisman that had protected her from death? Did she want to keep it as a symbol of her strength and ability to survive even the most dire of circumstances?"

[00:47:01.37] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: I had more because then-- when we ha-- one time, we had no-- not mica to cut. So with these few pieces what were left, I put it in my-- in my-- in this book.¹¹⁹

[00:47:20.09] INTERVIEWER 2: Why?

[00:47:20.93] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Because it came-- the shipment from Sweden.

[00:47:25.71] INTERVIEWER 2: No. Why did you put it-- why did you keep it? Why did you put it in your card?

[00:47:30.47] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: I wanted to show it. If I-- if I would leave, I wanted to show it to my husband. And so I kept it. I had more things, but it got lost in this long time. I had already Ghettogeld¹²⁰ to the Gestapo, when we came in, they took from-- we were ordered in a big room, I had the nerv-- nervous shock. And the doctor kept me till the last people-- we were 1,000 women. And he kept me with the last sick, which went on stretchers inside. So I was one of the last.

[00:48:19.67] They took from us away our pocket books, our jewelry, our watch, everything we had, money. But we had-- they took-- took-- grabbed it back from us and hurled it in a corner. It was like a big-- like a big hill from so many pocket books. And then we were sent to a small room, about 25, 50 women. I don't know how many now.

[00:48:55.74] And we were ordered to take off our clothes and with flashlights, men looked if we have lice. Then we were ordered to a shower place. We got a hot shower. It was already night and it was very cold. They gave us a hot-- hot shower and a sheet. And we had to go through an open yard to another big building. And then there are benches. And then there we were sitting till 3 o'clock in the morning till they give our clothes back.

[00:49:41.23] Then it was some little houses there and we got in one room, about four women. And there were mattresses on the floor, dirty, bloody, and water was running from the wall. But then the next day, we came in a bigger place, where the mattresses were one on top of the

Did it simply appeal to her aesthetic sense? It would have been easy to have lost or discarded it over that time, not to mention that mica is a highly friable material that easily breaks apart. Mrs. Jonas must have deliberately taken care of the piece for it to have survived those sixteen years in transit. A display containing Mrs. Jonas' story, her poetry, and the mica would thus form a very powerful exhibit that would make the viewer think about Mrs. Jonas as a person – the choices she made, the actions she took, and how she was able to survive the Holocaust." (Ehrenreich and Klinger, "War in Context," 153).

¹¹⁹ "this book": the prisoner card.

¹²⁰ "Ghettogeld": currency issued by the Ghetto authority, only valid inside the Theresienstadt ghetto.

other,¹²¹ and it was full of lice. We couldn't sleep. It was so terrible. It was falling at-- at us. It was a terrible place.

[00:50:20.05] INTERVIEWER 1: You said the mattresses were bloody?

[00:50:22.38] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes from people killed or sick, I don't know. It was left for us because the Jews were transported already to Auschwitz to-- to Majdanek to Birkenau to-- or at Dachau-- to all these places¹²² where they had-- I had many family in-- in-- in the Theresienstadt.¹²³ One family with the children already had tuberculosis when they were shipped to Birkenau, and there, they died.¹²⁴

[00:50:56.51] And the others were shipped to-- I heard it from survivors-- they were shipped to Dachau and some to Auschwitz. Nobody survived from my family. I was the only one. A few cousins left before the war, one in Israel and, uh, and other one left. It was illegal on a ship to Israel. It was kept in Mauritius, in the island Mauritius, from the English. And that was all what my-- was left for my family. One cousin came back to Prague, but he was so sick that he didn't survive longer than two years.¹²⁵

[00:51:52.92] INTERVIEWER 1: What happened-- when you were sent to Theresienstadt, what happened to your older daughter who was in the children's camp?

[00:52:00.21] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: When I came to Theresienstadt, we had to sign that we have children and their religion. And I was already in, so I didn't fear for my head. I feared for

¹²¹ "on top of the other": perhaps this refers to bunk beds. The Jewish Czech painter and Theresienstadt prisoner, František Mořic Nágl, who was later murdered in Auschwitz, created in 1942 a now famous painting showing the living quarters in the ghetto. Wikicommons has a reproduction of the painting: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Frantisek_Moric_Nagl-Theresienstadt.jpg.

¹²² Prior to Saraffian's arrival in early 1945, the ghetto had almost been emptied. In October 1944 alone over 18,000 Jews from Theresienstadt were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and the ghetto's population dropped dramatically. It was then filled again, partly with Slovak Jews initially intended to be murdered in Auschwitz, and, from January 1945, with Jews living in "mixed marriages." According to the USHMM ECG the first of these transports arrived on 31 January 1945 from Prague. Indeed, this was the transport that Saraffian was on. While the Nazis intended to bring all German and Austrian Jews from "mixed marriages" to Theresienstadt, this no longer happened, primarily due to the Allies rapid advance into German territory. At the end of April approximately 5,736 intermarried Jews had been brought to Theresienstadt. USHMM ECG Vol 2. Part A.

¹²³ We know that most Saraffian's mother had passed through Theresienstadt in June 1942. Most Czech Jews and many German and Austrian Jews passed through or died at Theresienstadt during the Holocaust, as it was the main transit camp for these countries.

¹²⁴ Holocaust.cz's victim database contains 11 persons with the family surname "Kummermann" who had been in Theresienstadt and were murdered in Auschwitz, including children.

¹²⁵ Unfortunately none of the surviving family members could be identified.

my daughter. So I signed that my children are Christian. And I was not punished, and maybe didn't realize that I have a Jewish child in the-- in the internation camp.¹²⁶

[00:52:35.20] But this Jewish child, the pastor fought so so much to get her back and he got her back and he took her in his house. This pastor¹²⁷ that was already punished from the Gestapo, helping Jews. And he kept my daughter till the end of the war.

[00:52:58.08] INTERVIEWER 2: Do you remember his name?

[00:52:59.82] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah. He was the doctor-- professor doctor Josef Jeschke. And he died a couple of years ago. I have his picture. It was sent to me from his children. I have the picture from his wife when she died before him. And he kept always writing me and I was writing him. He was really an outstanding man.

[00:53:28.06] And I'm-- I said many times to him, he gives so-- so good speeches in the church. I sent my children in the Sunday school with my husband. And he-- I-- sometimes, when we visit there in the spa,¹²⁸ I went to hear his speeches. It was so outstanding that I once told him if I would not be a Jew, and a Jew that really-- can't change even in-- in big need, I wouldn't be able to change my religion. If I would be able, I would change to your religion. It was-- he was Protestant.

[00:54:21.53] But he was really an outstanding man and helping very much. Then when we-- after the war, he was really, very, very good to us, to my husband and to my children and to me. Give us a big help, moral mentor. And uh, in Theresienstadt, we-- we were-- I was working on this mica. We had to go three days during the day and three days at night in these barracks to Bauschowitz [Bohusovice].¹²⁹ It was about a half hour walk to-- to these barracks.

[00:55:16.19] That were made so that people cannot see the exploitation of Jews.¹³⁰ We worked there. This was not a good work, a good job, because the lights over us and the sunlight

¹²⁶ According to an ITS/Arolsen Archives document, Noemi Saraffian was indeed registered as "B. Br." as her religious affiliation. The abbreviation stands for *Böhmische Brüder* or Bohemian Bretheren, the Evangelical Church of Czechia. This may have saved her from being deported to Theresienstadt with her mother.

¹²⁷ "this pastor": Josef Jeschke, the Evangelical Pastor of Podiebrad/Poděbrady.

¹²⁸ "in the spa": in Podiebrad/Poděbrady.

¹²⁹ Bauschowitz/Bohušovice was about two kilometers south of the ghetto, and the site of the nearest train station, most likely where the raw material for the forced labor arrived. It was also the main entry point for prisoners arriving at the ghetto on transports.

¹³⁰ While Theresienstadt was cleared of Czech civilians, the nearby town of Bohušovice was always populated. When prisoners walked or were transported from and to the train station, located south of the settlement, they had to cross through the town. Hence, the local bystanders must have been aware of the happenings in and around Theresienstadt, even though they may not have been able to see the actual slave labor.

and this-- this stone is shining. And when you cut it, it's like-- like, uh, little silver stones. We were all full of this. We breathe it in. And this was the danger for the lungs. That's why we got this job. If it would be a good job, they wouldn't have given it to us. And it was a very sharp knife. It was very-- we often cut our fingers.

[00:56:15.54] INTERVIEWER 1: You-- you had to walk from Theresienstadt to Bohusovice.

[00:56:20.01] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yes.

[00:56:20.76] INTERVIEWER 1: What were your thoughts as you were--

[00:56:23.63] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: We went always-- we passed the-- the house where there-- this barrack where the deaths, where what died there, or not say, killed there. They killed there. They were in this mor-- mor-- mor--

[00:56:51.38] INTERVIEWER 1: Mhm, morgue.

[00:56:53.24] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: And they took them like this on the truck. And I pass every day and I was always crying because I was thinking maybe my mother is in between. I didn't know that she was shipped to Majdanek. So a lady said to me, if you cry every day, you wouldn't see your children anymore. So soon, I stopped crying. And I worked.

[00:57:21.86] And I-- I had my shoes so-- so soaked from this wet snow that I give my bread to a Hollandaise woman for shoes.¹³¹ She had a pair of shoes that she didn't need, so she gave it to me for bread. And this bread, I had still from the labor camp. And they didn't take it from me, was like this. And she was so glad she got this bread, so I was glad I had dry shoes.

[00:57:58.64] INTERVIEWER 2: In that labor camp, what kind of labor was it? Before Theresienstadt?

[00:58:05.11] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: We-- we went, always after the transport, to packing. That's what we did before the labor camp and from the camp, too, to pack these belongings from the transports in baskets. The German took everything to Germany.

[00:58:26.55] INTERVIEWER 1: Uh, whose belongings were these?

[00:58:28.88] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: From the Jews. But they-- everybody took something with him, no. So they kept everything.¹³²

¹³¹ Saraffian arrived in the middle of winter 1945 and had to work throughout the winter and spring.

¹³² Part of the forced labor in camp Hagibor in Prague was packing in baskets for the use of the Germans the belongings of Jews who were deported to ghettos and concentration camps. The Czechoslovak deportees were assembled in Kolín – outside Prague – with their luggage, which was taken from them,

[00:58:36.88] INTERVIEWER 2: So these--

[00:58:37.76] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: They got-- they got these, um, these dresses.¹³³

[00:58:43.24] INTERVIEWER 1: Mhm.

[00:58:44.52] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: With, uh, Sträflingskleidung.¹³⁴

[00:58:48.33] INTERVIEWER 1: Mhm. The stripes, the prison uniform.

[00:58:52.68] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Not we. we were treated as mixed marriages. We didn't get this. We could use our clothes. But not the Jews.¹³⁵

[00:59:05.21] INTERVIEWER 2: The-- the clothing, or the belongings, came back from Auschwitz from Majdanek to your camp.

[00:59:16.24] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: The-- the-- the people that survived came back to Theresienstadt.

[00:59:23.15] INTERVIEWER 2: No, I'm asking you about--

[00:59:25.09] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: No, no. Not these clothes. The clothing from the Czechoslovak Jews. Only from the Czechoslovak Jews. There were many, you know, other than Jews from Czechoslovakia, but not went out before went into the concentration camp. Because many from these small towns didn't know what happened.¹³⁶

[00:59:50.38] They were picked up and they didn't know what happened to them. I didn't know. My husband always said that I'm indolent. I don't read newspapers. I don't hear the radio. So I didn't know what happened. It was the spa and I had my-- my child. I had enough to do.¹³⁷ They didn't allowed me a maid and we took an apartment when we--

before being deported to the camps. Their belongings were then brought by the intermarried Jews interned in Hagibor back to the camp, where it was sorted, packed, and shipped to Germany.

¹³³ Refers to the prison clothes the deportees received in the concentration camps.

¹³⁴ "Sträflingskleidung": prisoner uniforms.

¹³⁵ In Hagibor and the ghetto the slave laborers and prisoners wore civilian clothes in order to maintain the façade of a "normal" labor deployment.

¹³⁶ The deportees brought suitcases with them to the assembly places. These suitcases were taken from them, sorted by forced laborers and then brought to Germany.

¹³⁷ As a Jew living in a "mixed marriage," Saraffian was awarded a degree of precarious normality, at least until the end of 1941, when she was forced to wear the yellow star, and later in 1942, when many of her personal belongings were confiscated, as we previously learnt.

[01:00:20.49] INTERVIEWER 2: The clothes that you worked with were from the homes of the Jews or from the luggage of-- what?

[01:00:29.68] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: Yeah. From--

[01:00:30.53] INTERVIEWER 2: From what?

[01:00:31.46] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: From the luggage that the Jews had.

[01:00:34.23] INTERVIEWER 2: Yes.

[01:00:34.58] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: From the coats and everybody had, uh, sheets and then the towels, and all these things. All these things, they took away, their personal things and everything that they took with them. Many didn't know that they go in a transport. They were assembled in this town, in Kolín, and then they were told where they are going. And everything was taken away from them.

[01:01:08.83] INTERVIEWER 2: And shipped to your camp?

[01:01:11.21] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: No. We had to go by train. It was not far. This town was Nymburk¹³⁸. There were two towns, Kolín. They were assembled in Kolín and then shipped to Nymburk. And from there, they were going to the concentration camp. And we went from Prague about an hour by train to Nymburk to pack these things from these Jews from Czechoslovakia.

[01:01:45.83] INTERVIEWER 2: What did you--

[01:01:46.46] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: After every transport.

[01:01:48.84] INTERVIEWER 2: Arriving to the place of transport, what did you see and what did you think? What did you see there? It was crowded--

[01:01:57.55] MARTHA SARAFFIAN: I was very upset because I knew my mother went the same way. And all my family, my mother's sister that I-- I loved very much, and her children, and my father's family. There were five brothers left, all died in concentration camps. And my oldest cousins, one of us and--

[00:00:00.00] [TONE]

¹³⁸ Nymburk: Ger. Nimburg, about 45 km east of Prague and approximately 20 km northwest of Kolín. Nymburk was and is an important railway hub. It is also just a few kilometers north of Poděbrad/Poděbrady

[00:00:31.52] MARTHA: But we really got used to it. We had no choice.¹³⁹

[00:00:35.19] INTERVIEWER 1: And they were what-- were-- they were sent in what way, packages or what?

[00:00:40.36] MARTHA: No. They were flying over there, and we had to park it in basket-- big baskets.

[00:00:47.87] INTERVIEWER 1: Yes.

[00:00:49.44] MARTHA: And these baskets were shipped to-- to Germany. The last one was shipped to Theresienstadt. And when-- when the Red Cross came to Theresienstadt,¹⁴⁰ we were ordered to put down the windows, curtains. We had to clean up everything.

[00:01:12.60] And, uh, they gave us, from this last transport,¹⁴¹ these things what they had-- sheets and so to cover the mattresses. And we had to make it-- everything-- as nice as it was possible. We had to go on our knees to clean the floor.

[00:01:36.33] And when the Red Cross was leaving, so we had to write cards. They wake us up at 3:00 in the morning always to write home¹⁴² that we got from the Red Cross sardines and sugar and jam. And once, they-- they waked us up to write the cards that we were-- were then-- we were by a concert. It's always 3:00 in the mornings, they waked us up.

[00:02:07.94] INTERVIEWER 1: Do you remember the Red Cross people coming? Were you close, physically, to one of them? Could you speak to them?

[00:02:15.03] MARTHA: No. No.

¹³⁹ “got used to it”: the labor duty in Hagibor – bringing the left-behind luggage from the transports to the camp and sorting them.

¹⁴⁰ Red Cross visits to Theresienstadt: On June 23, 1944, a delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross came to the Theresienstadt ghetto on a half-day “inspection.” In preparation for this visit, the camp commander ordered the “beautification” of the ghetto and deported thousands of prisoners to other camps in order to maintain the propaganda image of the ghetto as an autonomous and prosperous “Jewish town.” The delegation largely believed this propaganda and did not question the staging, thus becoming complicit in the Nazi propaganda. Saraffian is referring to two visits in early April 1945. On April 6, 1945 another Red Cross delegation visited Theresienstadt, most likely in preparation for the release of Danish prisoners on April 15, 1945, which was facilitated by the Swedish Red Cross. The delegation’s report cynically characterized Theresienstadt as “a small Jewish state.” Cf. Benz, *Theresienstadt*, 199.

¹⁴¹ “this last transport”: refers to one of the previous transports from the Protectorate to the camps.

¹⁴² “to write home”: most likely those prisoners with non-Jewish relatives were forced to write propaganda cards to their relatives.

[00:02:16.39] INTERVIEWER 1: What did you see? How did they--

[00:02:17.84] MARTHA: On the end-- on the end only, when the Swedish Red Cross was coming to pick up the Danish Jews.¹⁴³ The king of Denmark ordered the-- because Sweden was neutral, so all these officers with big buses came for the Danish Jews. And the Danish Jews were protected from the king. They got packages and, from the Red Cross, always food.

[00:02:54.25] And I saw it the last, when the German there on the end, they-- they're-- they're Sweden. So that was the only things that I saw, the Sweden Red Cross, never from Switzerland¹⁴⁴-- never. And we were not allowed to go, even when there was a bombardment from the American and we there.

[00:03:23.81] We ran out from the barrack. The Scharführer was yelling, you are happy that our friends are coming. And he-- he-- he ordered us in. We couldn't stay outside. We saw the fire because it was not too far from us where the bombs were falling.

[00:03:48.03] INTERVIEWER 2: Could-- could you hear from your family? Did you know what was happening to your children and your husband?

[00:03:54.30] MARTHA: Yes, I got, uh, sent, once they allowed the-- the people-- the mixed people¹⁴⁵, who get once a month a card from the family. Well, I could write once a month a card but it had to be 30 words. If it was one word more, they break the card and throw it away.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ "Danish Jews": as mentioned above, the Danish government successfully negotiated the release of Danish Jews from the Theresienstadt ghetto in early April 1945. Altogether, there were about 466 Danish prisoners in Theresienstadt among around 141,000 Jews in total. Benz, *Theresienstadt*, 205.

¹⁴⁴ "from Switzerland": the International Committee of the Red Cross was based in Geneva, Switzerland. The first Red Cross delegation to Theresienstadt in June 1944 was headed by the Swiss physician Maurice Rossel, then 27 years old. Only the head of the delegation was an ICRC official, while the other members were two Danes and a German Red Cross Official. The second ICRC delegation in April 1945 was headed by two Swiss ICRC delegates, Paul Dunant and Otto Lehner – so Saraffian could have seen Swiss Red Cross delegates, although she does not recollect it. It seems that Saraffian primarily remembers the evacuation mission of the Swedish Red Cross just a few days later.

¹⁴⁵ "mixed people": Jews in "mixed marriages."

¹⁴⁶ Saraffian shows a card to her daughter to the camera. The card is dated "Prague, 12 November 1944" – it was thus most likely written and sent from camp Hagibor. She later translates it into English. The German text on the card reads: "Meine liebe Noemi! Warum schreibst du mir nicht? Schreibe gleich ob du gesund. Habe immer Sorge um Euch alle. Schreibt Dir Vati [?] Du ihm auch, auch Hanni [?] Hast du Päckchen. Bitte vergiss nicht deine Mutti." Every word after the introduction is numbered. Some words are omitted due to the limit of 31 words. Later in the testimony the front of the card is revealed. One of the interviewers or the camera operator is holding the card before the camera. It was sent by Martha Saraffian, address: Prague X, Schwerinstraße 1201 Arbeitslager (Hagibor camp), to Noemi Saraffian in Prague I, Haštalská 20 – the site of the worker's home. The date of the postal stamp is not legible.

[00:04:19.20] INTERVIEWER 1: Can you read the card?

[00:04:21.47] MARTHA: It is [INAUDIBLE].

[00:04:24.58] INTERVIEWER 1: Read it.

[00:04:26.19] MARTHA: "My dear Noemi. it's in German. We were ordered, all, to write in German.¹⁴⁷ "Why do-- why do not write to me? Please write me if you are in good health. I am so worrying for all of you. Is-- is, uh, Father writing to you? And do you hear from-- from your sister? Did you send a package? Did you get a package? Please don't forget me."

[00:05:12.51] This was a card from my daughter she sent to my husband.¹⁴⁸ It was on the end. It was already censored. She say-- she wrote, "Dear Papa, many thanks for your card. I was by the dentist. We both, my sister and I, we both are in good health. I sent you a package, what you asked me for. Kisses, Noemi."

[00:06:02.41] Then I-- then, she wrote him a card.¹⁴⁹ This is a card where it's always censored. This-- she sent him a card where she wrote what¹⁵⁰-- what we all sent him. But the package came back. And it was no more allowed to send packages. So he didn't get what he asked for. It was in the third camp where he was.

[00:06:51.43] INTERVIEWER 2: Can you--

[00:06:51.73] INTERVIEWER 1: Can you show the-- the card? The stamp is Hitler's picture, isn't it?

[00:06:56.50] MARTHA: Yes.

[00:06:57.67] INTERVIEWER 1: Can you show it to the camera? Right. This is a correspondence from your girl to you or from you to your daughter?

¹⁴⁷ German was Saraffian's native language and the language her husband spoke. It was also her daughter Noemi's mother tongue.

¹⁴⁸ The second card is not shown to the camera.

¹⁴⁹ The camera zooms to Saraffian's hands. She is holding a couple of cards. They all appear to be handwritten and in a standardized postcard format.

¹⁵⁰ The card is addressed by Hanna, her younger daughter, to her mother, Martha Saraffian, and dated January 17, 1945. Hanna was not even three years of age at the time, and the card was most likely written by her guardian Jeschke or his wife. The German text reads "Liebste Mutti! Bin froh, daß du nicht traurig bist. Küche-Zimmer wohnt Dr. [Czerny?] mit Frau. Wir spazieren mit Bábinka [Cz. Granny], Tante Bindersok [?] schreibt. Bin 15 ½ kg schwer, beide gesund [...] in Ordnung. Viele Küsse Hannie." – "Dearest Mommy! I am glad, you are not sad. Dr [Czerny?] and wife live in the kitchen-room. We go for walks with Bábinka [Cz. Granny], aunt Bindersok [?] writes. I weigh 15 ½ kg, both healthy [...] in order. Many kisses, Hannie." It is stamped in red "zensiert" (censored).

[00:07:06.79] MARTHA: This from my husband.¹⁵¹ It comes from, it was a Sonderlager. A special la-- camp for this Jewish man-- this Christian man.

[00:07:23.35] INTERVIEWER 2: Can you tell us a little about the conditions at Theresienstadt where you lived? And were you segregated? Were certain kinds of people kept together, separated in Theresienstadt?

[00:07:38.46] MARTHA: We were always in barracks.¹⁵² I cannot remember how many barracks there were. But we had to go to work and then-- when we didn't have the Glimmer work, this, uh--

[00:08:00.23] INTERVIEWER 2: Mica.

[00:08:00.77] MARTHA: Mica. We-- we were-- we got a bucket and a broom, and we marched, a thousand woman in Theresienstadt, to clean the town. The hospital there, the old, sick people, were lying, and everything had to be washed. And on our knees, we had to wash it and to-- to broom the streets and like this, when we had no-- no stones to cut this mica. [INAUDIBLE] handk erchief. Thank you. I have here.

[00:08:49.16] INTERVIEWER 2: Uh, how, uh,¹⁵³ um, did you have your own mattress? Did you have your--

[00:08:54.67] MARTHA: No, no. We had no mattresses there. And we had to--

[00:09:01.23] INTERVIEWER 1: [INAUDIBLE].

[00:09:06.95] MARTHA: We had to clean, every day, our place before we went to work. We had to wash the small place where we go to the bath.

[00:09:18.76] INTERVIEWER 2: I mean, did you have, uh, your own bunk to yourself, or did you have to share bunks with other people? A bunk bed-- did you have your own bunk bed?

¹⁵¹ The card is from Hrand Saraffian – at that time in “Sonderlager/B, Tr. Üb. Pl. Böhmen Bistritz/Beneschau [Special Camp B, military training grounds Bohemia]” – addressed to Martha [Martl] Saraffian in Theresienstadt. It is stamped March 21, 1945. Immediately afterwards she holds another card to the camera, apparently written by a child and addressed to Martha Saraffian in Prague XI, Schwerinstraße, today Vinohradská, the location of Hagibor camp.

¹⁵² “barracks”: could either refer to the fact that Theresienstadt had been a military fortress, or to the fact that over the course of its existence a number of wooden barracks were erected in the ghetto, in addition to the solid buildings.

¹⁵³ One of the interviewers or the camera operator is holding a card to the camera – it is the one previously translated by Saraffian. It was sent by Martha Saraffian, address: Prague X, Schwerinstraße 1201 Arbeitslager (Hagibor camp), to her daughter Noemi Saraffian in Prague I, Haštalská 20 – the site of the worker’s home. The date is not legible.

[00:09:29.91] MARTHA: Bed?

[00:09:30.98] INTERVIEWER 2: Yes. One to--

[00:09:31.69] MARTHA: Yes, yes, yes.

[00:09:32.14] INTERVIEWER 2: One to a-- one. One person to a bunk.

[00:09:34.87] MARTHA: Yes. We were-- we were four in a little space.

[00:09:41.38] INTERVIEWER 2: Four in a little space.

[00:09:42.79] MARTHA: Four in a little space, yes.

[00:09:44.80] INTERVIEWER 2: What happened to some of the women there? What-- what, uh--

[00:09:49.41] MARTHA: One after about me, she got, um, at the end, she got typhus. Because when the transport came back¹⁵⁴-- when the transport came back, so she ran to-- to the gate where these people from Auschwitz were interned.

[00:10:19.95] And she saw her sister. And she kissed her through the gate. And she infected herself with typhus.¹⁵⁵ We were all-- we-- we all had, uh, injection-- typhus injection. Because they were afraid that we-- that we have an epidemic in Theresienstadt, and we couldn't work on these stones.

[00:10:47.71] INTERVIEWER 1: Vaccines, you mean?

[00:10:48.81] MARTHA: Yes. And, uh, it was a bad experience, too. We were-- we all got diarrhea from it. And once we were-- the only one we got meat, it was from a sick horse. And we got this meat, [? is ?] cooked as goulash, and we were all sick. We were, the whole night, sitting on the latrine, one next, there was a woman, and everything.

[00:11:18.06] INTERVIEWER 2: All together.

¹⁵⁴ "transport came back": from April 20, 1945 the Theresienstadt ghetto was the destination of so-called "evacuation transports" – or death marches – from concentration camps further to the east. About 15,000 prisoners from Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald and their sub-camps were brought to the ghetto.

¹⁵⁵ Many of the prisoners who were brought to Theresienstadt on these death marches were suffering from infectious diseases and were generally in a dire state.

[00:11:19.22] MARTHA: All together. It was-- it was not enough latrines. One took the other away to get this--

[00:11:27.27] INTERVIEWER 2: Pushed the other person away?

[00:11:29.31] MARTHA: Yes. It was a terrible night from this poisoned meat. And, uh, this, uh-- this Austrian Scharführer what gave us this-- what allowed to give us this meat, he was punished and taken away from the camp.¹⁵⁶

[00:11:49.17] INTERVIEWER 2: Were there some other ways that you were kept busy in camp when there was no mica to cut?

[00:11:54.83] MARTHA: Only to clean-- to clean, to wash, or to clean the hospital, the floors, and whatever was to-- to do.

[00:12:07.26] INTERVIEWER 2: You were also given buckets of water for some other purpose, I believe?

[00:12:11.88] MARTHA: Uh, yes. When we-- when we want to wash us, we had to go for water.

[00:12:21.66] INTERVIEWER 2: Uh, what-- was there something about--

[00:12:25.22] MARTHA: We had the shower. We were allowed, sometimes, to shower. We had to pay two korunas for it. We got ghetto Geld-- money-- ghetto money. And I-- I gave this ghetto money to my daughter last year.

[00:12:46.66] INTERVIEWER 2: Was there something about fires?

[00:12:49.81] MARTHA: Yes. We had-- we had a fire in Theresienstadt. And-- and-- a woman said to the Scharführer¹⁵⁷-- no, he put-- he put us in the-- in the barracks, burning paper. And he said, you need some job. So now, you can, uh-- you can, uh, be the firefighter.¹⁵⁸ And a woman said to him, we should local-- localize the fire from this side. And he took her [? buck ?] with water and put it over her head. So--

¹⁵⁶ The guard could not be identified.

¹⁵⁷ It is unclear if this was the same *Scharführer* as the one previously mentioned. However, Rudolf Haindl, an infamous SS-Scharführer at the Theresienstadt was Austrian and according to survivor reports, he purposely started many fires in the Ghetto. On February 28, 1945, he allegedly started twelve fires at various locations throughout the Ghetto.

¹⁵⁸ The ghetto had its own fire brigade. USHMM has a picture of Leo Holzer, the chief of the fire brigade, in its collections (USHMM Photograph Number: 45744).

[00:13:40.93] INTERVIEWER 1: He made you set the fire?

[00:13:43.81] MARTHA: Yes. He--

[00:13:44.05] INTERVIEWER 1: Told to set the fire.

[00:13:45.16] MARTHA: He set the fire to make us work. And, uh, she allowed herself to tell him something. It was a German Gestapo. His name was, I think, Hahn,¹⁵⁹ if I remember well. And so she was punished in the wintertime with the cold water on her head.

[00:14:10.40] INTERVIEWER 1: Did people go crazy there?

[00:14:12.47] MARTHA: Yes. Many people.

[00:14:13.13] INTERVIEWER 1: Do you remember--

[00:14:14.51] MARTHA: Yes, there were--

[00:14:15.29] INTERVIEWER 1: What do-- what do you remember?

[00:14:16.43] MARTHA: There were one building where the-- the-- when you passed by, they were yelling, yelling, crying. It was terrible to pass by. And in my transport, it was a 17-year-old girl what got crazy.

[00:14:32.39] Her mother was a Christian. She was left behind. And her father was already dead. And she-- she was Jewish. And she was-- she got crazy there. She was in my transport because--

[00:14:49.70] INTERVIEWER 1: What happened?

[00:14:50.01] MARTHA: --she were mixed. I never saw her again. Maybe was in this house where all these crazy people were yelling.

[00:15:00.53] INTERVIEWER 2: What happened then in Theresienstadt? What happened as the war was coming to an end?

[00:15:08.14] MARTHA: Some-- it were some-- some, uh, things. I saw once, the Gestapo put the fist through a man's mouth because he said something. And his teeth flow out. One men was with a little knife picked. He was full of scars here. So some things like this.

¹⁵⁹ "Hahn": may refer to SS-Obersturmführer Karl Rahm, the final commander of the ghetto.

[00:15:36.54] But they-- that were Jewish what were left from the other transport, not from-- from our. But there were also Jews from what has Christian woman-- women.¹⁶⁰ And many were divorced, too, when they were in the camp. The woman divorced them.

[00:16:00.55] INTERVIEWER 1: Divorced the men.

[00:16:01.34] MARTHA: Yes. And the men was-- were shipped away.

[00:16:05.10] INTERVIEWER 1: To [INAUDIBLE].

[00:16:05.66] MARTHA: To Auschwitz, yes. The same like the women-- the same thing.

[00:16:10.64] INTERVIEWER 1: You mentioned before that you could only write 31 words.

[00:16:16.82] MARTHA: 30 words.

[00:16:17.78] INTERVIEWER 1: 30. Are these-- is this a postcard--

[00:16:20.30] MARTHA: Yes.

[00:16:20.61] INTERVIEWER 1: --with a number on each?

[00:16:21.79] MARTHA: Yes, that I wrote.

[00:16:24.06] INTERVIEWER 1: And you put a number on each word.

[00:16:26.01] MARTHA: Yes. Because if it was one word more, they break it and it never--

[00:16:31.05] INTERVIEWER 1: So you cross out the 31st word here. You see this? "Deine"-- you cross it out.

[00:16:38.65] MARTHA: Yes. Yes.

[00:16:38.96] INTERVIEWER 1: So it should be only 30 words.

[00:16:40.07] MARTHA: Yes.

¹⁶⁰ Earlier in the testimony, Saraffian recalled calling herself lucky that her husband did not divorce her. When she was at the labour camp for intermarried Jewish women in Prague, she recalls many non-Jewish men divorcing their Jewish wives. At this point their precarious “protected” status, granted by the “mixed marriage,” ceased to exist and these women were immediately deported. As Saraffian mentions here, it was the same with Jewish men.

[00:16:46.04] INTERVIEWER 1: The last sentence is "bitte vergiss mich nicht"-- don't forget me.

[00:16:50.72] MARTHA: Yes.

[00:16:51.26] INTERVIEWER 1: And you couldn't say, "deine"-- your mother. You have to say just "Mutti."

[00:16:55.18] MARTHA: Yes.

[00:17:00.21] INTERVIEWER 2: Uh, what happened, uh, later on, as the Americans started to bomb and as the war was coming to a close?¹⁶¹ What happened to you?

[00:17:15.33] MARTHA: I-- I had the-- I met a man-- man what was in the Sudeten, our neighbor.¹⁶² And he had the Christian wife. And uh, when the quarantine was over Theresienstadt because of these infected people from Auschwitz, he said to me, if I have the courage, to go at night with him over the wall and walk home. It-- and I said, I would like to.

[00:17:53.79] Because some people left, and were taken by the troopers¹⁶³ back in the camp. And I was afraid because of the typhus that we had the long quarantine.¹⁶⁴ And so-- and he, too. He had two sons in-- in-- in one camp. He didn't know where.

[00:18:18.63] And so we-- we went one night when all was quiet. It was not quiet because the shooting was from Czech and Germans outside.¹⁶⁵ We could hear it. But, uh, he said to me, I help you over my shoulders, and you jump down. And I did. And he came after me.

¹⁶¹ Paul Dunant, one of the ICRC officials mentioned above, successfully negotiated the handing over of the ghetto to the Red Cross. On 30 April 1945 he visited the camp again and on 5 May 1945 it was officially handed over. Three days later, on 8 May 1945, Soviet troops liberated Theresienstadt. According to Benz, the authority of the SS over the camp had already been broken prior to the handing over to the Red Cross and the situation on the ground was chaotic (Benz, *Theresienstadt*, 200).

¹⁶² Perhaps this man was also from Trautenau/Trutnov. He could not be identified.

¹⁶³ "Troopers": perhaps the Czech policemen guarding the perimeter of the camp.

¹⁶⁴ One part of the ghetto – the Hamburger Kaserne – was turned into a quarantine station for typhus patients, guarded by Czech police and the ghetto police. Around 5,000 young Polish Jews were locked inside. Soviet troops accidentally opened this quarantine station, leading many of the infected to flee and posing a risk to the other inmates and the population of the surrounding villages. Benz, *Theresienstadt*, 201ff.

¹⁶⁵ This most likely took place in the first or second week of May 1945.

[00:18:43.03] But we had to crawl on hand and feet because that they were shooting the German with-- the last German with the Czech were shooting.¹⁶⁶ And they-- on this side, where they're shooting, there were no troopers. So we-- we were not seen.

[00:19:06.36] It took about an hour to this-- to the next town.¹⁶⁷ And these men had, from-- from a business fam-- families there that he knew, and they let us slept over and gave us food. And the next day, we walked away again. And uh, some trucks took us-- French trucks and one Czech truck-- took us further home.¹⁶⁸ They were not trains. It was all [? bombed. ?]

[00:19:42.96] INTERVIEWER 1: You had crossed the lines into the Allied territory? There were French soldiers already?

[00:19:49.04] MARTHA: No. The French were with-- with the Czechs, not with the German--

[00:19:54.30] INTERVIEWER 1: Yes.

[00:19:54.45] MARTHA: --at this time. They saved themselves from the German.¹⁶⁹ So they took us. I-- we both-- we spo-- could speak French.¹⁷⁰ So we communicated with them. And when they had to go another way, they let us out from the truck, and we walked again until we find another truck what took us a little bit further.

[00:20:22.63] And then, when we came nearer to-- to our hometowns, there were already train. So we took the train. He-- he had another way, and I had another way. So, we, after two days, we were finally home. I find my husband very sick and my children, thanks God, I find them all. But, uh, my-- my smaller daughter didn't recognize me.

[00:20:57.51] INTERVIEWER 1: What did she do?

[00:20:58.82] MARTHA: What?

[00:20:59.27] INTERVIEWER 1: What did she do when you came? What did the child do-- do when you came?

¹⁶⁶ This may refer to Czech resistance fighters rising up against the last Germans.

¹⁶⁷ The next large town, approximately one hour by foot north of Theresienstadt, is Leitmeritz/Litoměřice. It could have been also a number of smaller villages and towns south of Theresienstadt in the direction of Prague.

¹⁶⁸ Podiebrad/Poděbrady lies about 80km as the crow flies to the south-east of Terezin.

¹⁶⁹ The French soldiers were most likely French prisoners of war, who were either released or had liberated themselves.

¹⁷⁰ Early in the testimony she mentioned that she had spent time in France in her youth.

[00:21:06.48] MARTHA: The elder one was very happy.

[00:21:08.46] INTERVIEWER 1: No, the child-- the younger one.

[00:21:09.67] MARTHA: The-- the younger didn't recognize me. And my husband was very sick. We didn't-- he-- we were thinking he has typhus because he has so high fever. But he got some antibiotics.

[00:21:29.01] And he was, then, OK. But he never recovered, uh, for-- his mind never recovered from this ordeal. He was not, when we were-- in 1947, when we-- when we went to South America, he was very unhappy. He never could attach to a new life.

[00:22:06.31] INTERVIEWER 2: When you came back home, your youngest child was still with the other family?

[00:22:13.47] MARTHA: No. They give it to me back. She was till the end, yes. And the-- the older was by, in the pastor's house.

[00:22:23.74] INTERVIEWER 2: So when you came back--

[00:22:24.96] MARTHA: They gave her back to me, yes.

[00:22:26.64] INTERVIEWER 2: You went to collect your children?

[00:22:29.40] MARTHA: Yes. I-- we had-- our apartment had, uh, a Czech physician.¹⁷¹ And when we came back, he moved out. He gave us our-- apartment back. But it was-- most was robbed. We had a few furniture inside. But all the other thing were taken away.

[00:22:57.72] INTERVIEWER 2: So when you went to collect your younger daughter at this family's, what was your reaction when you came there?

[00:23:07.83] MARTHA: I was not in good shape, either. I was limping from this humidity. I-- I had, uh, sciatica. I was in very much pain and was limping. But they give me some electric-- electric bus. And I couldn't stand it. My nerves couldn't take this.

[00:23:38.72] INTERVIEWER 2: Hm-mm. Hm-mm.

[00:23:39.77] MARTHA: And there-- maybe I've forget something to tell.

[00:23:48.64] INTERVIEWER 2: What happened to that man who you escaped with?

¹⁷¹ It seems the apartment in Podiebrad/Poděbrady had been "Aryanized" while both Martha and Hrand Saraffian had in the camps.

[00:23:51.88] MARTHA: Yeah, he went from one camp to the other looking for his children. And when he was told-- the children were about 10 and 12 years old and were Jewish. The mother was Christian, and the children were Jewish.

[00:24:11.99] Because he was from a-- not Orthodox but a believing family-- and, uh, when he hear that the children were killed, so he shot himself. They had the word-- the German had the word-- killed when flying-- when they fled. They were killed. But it was not true. They always said, um--

[00:24:45.20] INTERVIEWER 1: Trying to escape.

[00:24:47.21] MARTHA: Yes. They always said, uh, erschossen-- auf der Flucht erschossen. You understand? So it--

[00:24:58.00] INTERVIEWER 1: Shot while trying to escape.

[00:24:59.60] MARTHA: Yes. But he couldn't get over. And, uh, he wrote me. And his last letter, what he wrote me, uh, said I should not answer him. He will not be alive anymore. And then his wife sent me a card, said he shot himself. That was the end for-- for many from these people what couldn't get over not to find their children anymore.

[00:25:32.91] This-- this woman what had typhus what was sleeping on top of me, she was so happy to see her three-year-old child and husband, and she died in the quarantine with infected typhus from her sister because she kissed her sister. There were so many tragedies on the end, where they could be free. They had to die, anyway.

[00:26:04.17] INTERVIEWER 2: You going to end there? Um, do you want to-- that's it? Do you want to end up now?

[00:26:11.52] INTERVIEWER 1: I think, yes.

[00:26:12.18] INTERVIEWER 2: OK. Thank you very, very much--

[00:26:14.57] MARTHA: You're welcome.

[00:26:15.35] INTERVIEWER 1: --Martha.

[00:26:24.69] MARTHA: I have so many cards. I take only some of them.

[00:26:42.19] INTERVIEWER 1: Is your husband alive?

[00:26:45.00] MARTHA: My husband? No. He died four years after when we went Argentina.¹⁷² He-- he went every Sunday to the port with us and said, I have to see the ship that brought me here. He said-- said the-- das verfluchte Schiff.

[00:27:10.04] INTERVIEWER 1: The cursed ship.

[00:27:11.42] MARTHA: The cursed ship that brought me over here. He couldn't get over. He died four years later on cancer.

[00:27:18.51] INTERVIEWER 1: Of cancer.

[00:27:21.05] MARTHA: So I am 33 years widow with two children. And I had not much restitution because I had not many papers. I-- my parents, my husband, paid a big insurance in Germany. They had, in every country, um, offices. And they paid the insurance in US dollars what-- what was very expensive for Czech koruns.¹⁷³

[00:27:52.94] And I got nothing for it-- nothing. And they confirmed it, that it's true, that I should get it. But I got nothing-- nothing. I-- I had the help from my parents in-- in the Sudeten. It's now Czechoslovakia. Now, the-- the Czech has the-- the help, but I-- but I have nothing.¹⁷⁴

[00:28:16.26] And even the, um, government here, gave from the gold what our president left here that he took. When he left Czechoslovakia, President Beles took gold with him. And this was given to Czech people that lost their houses in Czechoslovakia.

[00:28:40.25] But they had to be in 1948 and 1949 and citiz-- American citizens. And I wasn't. I was in-- in Argentina in '48. I came there in '47. And I came to America [? '63. ?] So my claim was not-- not, uh, allowed. They-- they wanted to give me a hearing, but the lawyer

¹⁷² The family arrived in Buenos Aires on July 21, 1947 with the ship Desirade (List of passengers of the ship Desirade to Argentina, arrived at Buenos Aires on July 21, 1947, https://www.hebrewnames.com/arrival_DESIRADE_1947-07-21). The family had received emigration assistance from the International Refugee Organization (IRO). Arolsen Archives, 3.2.1/1718000, Hrand Saraffian.

¹⁷³ In the mid-1990s Martha Saraffian and a small group of other Holocaust survivors sued several major European insurance companies in a class action lawsuit in New York City (Cornell et al. vs. Assicurazioni Generali et al. Civil Action 97 Civ. 2262, United States District Court, Southern District of New York.) Saraffian maintained that the successor firm of the Victoria insurance company, which had issued policies to her relatives and family in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period, had refused to accept her claims. This lawsuit, the first of its kind, sent shockwaves through many German and European company headquarters, triggered a wave of laws in the United States facilitating Holocaust restitution, and led to the establishment of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims.

¹⁷⁴ After liberation, the Saraffian family was still stateless. Although Martha Saraffian was living in her native land she was now technically a "Displaced Person."

told me I had not to spend a penny for it because it wouldn't help. It was only for the people that were here, American citizens, till '49.

[00:29:23.66] So I fell, always, on the dry side, never on the buttered side. And it was very hard in Argentina for my children and for myself. And my husband, uh, was really-- my children had not use because even my younger daughter was eight a half years old when we came to Argent-- five years old when we came to Argentina.

[00:29:53.53] She was eight a half years old when my husband died. And the older one was 15 a half. So they had not use. And boys had to work from 14 years. And, uh, I-- I worked 16 hours a day because I had to make a living.

[00:30:14.50] INTERVIEWER 1: While in Argentina, did you meet or get-- come in contact with Germans, with Nazis there?¹⁷⁵

[00:30:22.69] MARTHA: No. I had, um, a cousin, rabbi, in-- in-- in London. And he got to me through the international committee-- intergovernmen-- intergovernmental committee the free trip and this ship--

[00:30:40.64] INTERVIEWER 1: I understand that. But I was asking, while you were living in Argentina, and while you were living in Argentina for so many years, whether you spotted, whether you knew that there were also Nazis in Argentina?

[00:30:53.11] MARTHA: Yes, yes-- many, many.

[00:30:55.08] INTERVIEWER 1: Did you meet any of them? Did you--

[00:30:58.23] MARTHA: No. They were Argentina Nazis,¹⁷⁶ no? In front of where I lived was a dentist. His son was a very big Nazi. But the-- the German Nazi, I never met there.

[00:31:12.94] But around-- around the town in the boroughs, there were German. And, uh, one case was there were small synagogues with, uh, little gardens. And a child from-- from a rabbi was-- was bicycle around the-- the synagogue, and a German shoot him.

¹⁷⁵ Adolf Eichmann was perhaps the most notorious Nazi who managed to escape to Argentina. According to Gerlad Steinacher, Argentina was “the most popular refuge for Nazi criminals.” Gerald Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run: How Hitler’s Henchmen Fled Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 211.

¹⁷⁶ When Juan Perón became president in 1946, many in the Jewish community were worried because of his Nazi sympathies. There were several waves of antisemitic incidents in Argentina, especially in the 1970s. Cf. the article “Argentina” in the Jewish Virtual Library’s *Virtual Jewish History Tour*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/argentina-virtual-jewish-history-tour>.

[00:31:40.56] From this, I knew, and I knew from-- from the-- the-- this, uh, DAIA¹⁷⁷ it-- it was a Jewish organization, so they had a-- a home for children what has no parents-- Jewish children. And they, these Nazis, a couple of them at night, break in and cut this-- the children in their faces with the razor blades. It's true. It's not a story. It's really true.

[00:32:15.64] INTERVIEWER 1: And that happened--

[00:32:16.60] MARTHA: And that happens in Argentina. Always in-- that in Argentina, come nothing out in big letters in the newspapers. It was only, in the Jewish paper. But uh, all over, uh, anti-Semites-- all over, wherever you go.

[00:32:35.98] We should go to Chile, but we didn't get the money. So we-- we had to stay in Argentina. My husband didn't want this. He said, because on-- on the custom, when we came in, they already said, these are all Jews. So my husband said, in such a country, I don't want to live. He was unhappy there.

[00:33:02.11] INTERVIEWER 1: Thank you.

[00:33:03.61] MARTHA: You are very welcome.

¹⁷⁷ DAIA – Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (Delegation of Israelite Argentine Associations). The headquarters of DAIA (better known as the AMIA-building) was the site of a terror attack on July 18, 1994, which killed 85 people.