

**HOLOCAUST HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Interview with: Judith Isaacson

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A: Would you like me to give my name?

Q: Please.

A: All right, well, full name is Judith Magyar Isaacson. Magyar is pronounced in Hungarian 'mud-yar' and it means 'Hungarian', because my family was very patriotic and they changed the family name, Klein, to Magyar, which we'll go back to later. So I was born in Kaposvár, Hungary, that's southwest Hungary, a very assimilated area, on July 3, 1925, so I'm sixty two years old. And I was taken to Auschwitz at age nineteen. I was liberated, this was July, just two days after my nineteenth birthday, I was liberated next April and I got married that year. I came to the United States the following year. That's an introduction.

Q: Now could you start to tell us a story of what life was like in your hometown before the war, when you were small?

A: Right, well let's say, first of all that my family had lived in Hungary God knows how long, some of them maybe a thousand years, because some Jews came in with the

Khazars, so-called, and we all prided ourselves on that. We said we came in with the occupying Magors before the year 1000. But for a fact, the parents of my great-grandmother are buried in the cemetery of my hometown. So when Ilona and I went back, we found two tall tombstones. They were well-off people and well established citizens.

Q: Ilona is your daughter?

A: Ilona is my daughter, right. And we so have a picture of Ilona with her great-great-great-grandparents' tomb. And the family felt very assimilated and very much at home in that town. We considered ourselves Israelites, that is, Hungarians of Jewish religion, no different from other Hungarians. And my grandfather and the rabbi of my town were anti-Zionists, believe it or not. Sounds ridiculous now, doesn't it, but they were such patriots. Not only my name was so Hungarian, Magyar, but my best friends, who were gassed in Auschwitz, their name was Pogány, which means 'pagan'. Another very good friend was Evi Kárpáti, who was probably raped and killed on a warship in the Baltic. Her name was Kárpáti, which means 'of the Carpathian mountains'. So it was typically a very assimilated group. Although, when you think of it, there were social and commercial limitations on Jews. So, but Jews did not expect to serve in the armed forces as officers except in reserve capacity. It was just assumed.

Q: You mean, this was historically?

A: Yes, historically. I don't think they ever have, except as reserve officers. My father was a reserve officer. So were my uncles, they served in the First World War and very proud of it. And it just wasn't considered, the only very serious limitation that affected me was the *numerus clausus*, you've probably heard about this? After 1919, the counter-revolution against the communists in Hungary, there was a law that kept the Jewish population at the university to six percent, which was the percentage of Jews to

the general population. Of course, you know Jews, they wanted to be smart, they wanted to go to university. And it wasn't enough to have excellent grades or to be (*unintelligible word*); you had to have connections and so forth. So that worried me all through school, whether I'll make it to the university. Otherwise, my life was very happy. And my personal life was mostly spent at school, where I was successful, and my friends were mostly Catholic and Protestant there, although social group was Jewish. But the classmates with, who I was most friendly with, were not Jewish. And we visited each other at our homes, and I was very popular among my friends. Up to the age thirteen, age thirteen, my life was just a typical Hungarian little girl. But at that point, I write about it in this book that I just finished, 1938, Hitler occupied Austria. And, of course, that's next door, so you hear about what's going on. Jewish women are mopping up the main streets, and all these horrors happening. As a little girl, listening to the radio, I just couldn't imagine my mother, in her elegant black coat, mopping a street or things like that.

Q: Did your family talk about the news that you heard?

A: Oh, yes. We listened to BBC in secret. It wasn't permitted, but my father always listened every day to Radio London. Oh, yes, we talked about it. Not before the maid, we closed the door. But just about that, that was March 13, and I was to appear March 15 at our *gymnasium*, which was a private school in town, as a representative of all four lower classes, the only lower class person who appeared at the festival, to recite an extremely patriotic Hungarian poem: "Hungarian girls, what, say, what day is today..." and so forth. Very patriotic. And during my recital, and I was a little girl of thirteen, there were hisses and Nazi calls against me, and that was the first moment that I had to use some courage. I went on anyway and finished the recital.

Q: What would be a Nazi call?

A: Dirty Jew, get rid of the kike, well it was *Zsidó*, which is like kike, sort of. It's Jew, but in Hungarian it doesn't sound so nice because we called ourselves Israelites.

Q: That was the first time anyone had ever said that to you personally?

A: Right, right, although I am sure other people heard it. But I lived a very protected life at school, so it was the first time. And then from then on, life around me deteriorated. We had Jewish laws I think in 1939, probably the first of Jew law, there were a sequence of Jewish laws that curtailed particularly Jewish men's activities in business, in jobs, in salaries, name it.

Q: Was your father's business affected?

A: Yes, my father was manager of this import, wholesale grocery import company that was owned by the parents of my best friend. So it was all very cozy. And he could keep his job, supposedly at a lesser salary, but I think he probably got his full salary anyway, and I don't know how that was managed. So he was not affected until he was called into the army, which happened off and on all through those years. And soon, it was not the army he was actually serving but Jewish labor forces. But first he served as an officer of the Jewish labor forces, and I do have a picture which I'll probably be including in a book. Very interesting. Here is a Jew, oh, in maybe 1941, still wearing a Hungarian officer's uniform. But then later they wore a yellow band with it, and then later he had to give up his uniform and was a common laborer. They worked to dig ditches for the army and to help the German-Hungarian units on the Eastern front mainly. But eventually, these Jewish forces were taken to Germany, and the Hungarian government resisted that as long as they could. They protected the men. And even when we were taken by cattle car on July 5, 1944, it so happened there was one man, home on furlough from the army, from this Jewish labor force, who wanted to go with his family. And the Hungarian police pulled him off the train by force, because they knew

where those trains were going and they didn't want him to go, they wanted to protect him. But eventually, when Horthy's government succumbed and the Hungarian Nazis, called *Nyilas*, took over, then most of the men were also taken to concentration camps in Germany.

And while I'm talking about my father, he was taken to Buchenwald, but he died April, at the end of the war, of starvation in Mühldorf Lager, which is in a book by Sandor Sasdi. It's a well-known book in Hungary called, White Bread, Fatyeh Kenje, and he mentions my father by name, that he had one towel, and very few people had towels. And somebody broke an arm and he gave his towel to this man, which was just an act of generosity typical of him. Also it mentioned in the book that he, the last night before he died, he recited poetry to amuse and entertain his fellow prisoners in the infirmary.

Q: Buchenwald had been liberated?

A: This was not Buchenwald; it was Mühldorf Lager. It's small, you don't hear much about it. And I guess he was a short while to Buchenwald, too, before that.

Q: How did you get that information about him?

A: Well, this Sandor Sásdi, who became a very good friend of his in the camp, survived. And he found out from my hometown what happened to his family. My aunt's husband survived. That was the only person in a large family who was there. He had our address. And so Sásdi wrote us a long letter about him and sent us the book. Then when John, my oldest son, and I returned in 1978 to Hungary, I was able to meet Sásdi, and he came to our hotel with a purple rose he grew. And he and John and I talked for two hours and we all cried. It was terrible. I don't know if he still lives. I should find out. A very, very nice guy. So there, now, let's go back to something else.

Q: Well, I was wondering the time frame for your father being taken to the camps, and for you and the rest of the family.

A: Right, my father and my four young uncles were, my father, well, he was in his late thirties and early forties all through that period. He died at forty four. Now he seems younger than he did then, but this all happened in his late thirties and early forties. And my uncles were mostly in their thirties, four uncles who were like brothers to me, very, very close. They were always called to the labor camps and then released, because they couldn't really feed that many people at once, I suppose, so they were furloughed, they were released, they were called again. It was this constant, tremendous anxiety.

Q: So the women stayed at home?

A: The women stayed home and the men served, well, all in the army and the Jewish men served in the labor force. That was still under the army, under the Hungarian army, so the Germans didn't have too much authority over them, but more and more, as the war progressed. So the time frame for that was, for my age, throughout my teens, around me the world got more and more threatening. And the men suffered, and the women worried. But at school, as if nothing happened. In the meantime, I participated in poetry recital contests and was very excited about whether I'd win first prize or not. And I learned to play tennis, I skated, I went to dances, you name it. Just pretty much the way kids live here. Ivory tower.

Q: Can you describe the community, you know, what it looked like, what kind of people lived there, some of the trades?

A: Right, (*unintelligible word*), it was a county seat for one thing so that, and the commercial center of the county of Somogy, so that there was a certain amount of commerce. The main street had very nice shops, mostly owned by Jews, so once the

Jews went out of business it was pretty much closed. And today it's not what it used to be either. As to industry, there wasn't that much of it. The largest manufacturing company was a sugar beet processing plant, which I remember still the smell for a week or so every year when they processed those sugar beets. There were otherwise small industries, and farmers would bring in the products, and the farmers of course spent their money. I think it was more a commercial center. But I must say, I spent such a protected life, and I protected myself I think, against all this by being tremendously absent-minded, by writing poetry, by reading, and really just trying to be living a life quite separate from the town. Socially, the Jews were segregated from the Gentiles, but no more than here.

When I came here and we were not invited to join the yacht club at Taylor Pond, it was pretty shocking to me because I thought that it didn't happen in America. But it was the same thing. At your age, my kids were your age, and they were very good friends with these teenagers who sailed their boats. And we were not invited. Later, we owned a lot, and later on they asked us to please join, but we did not. By that time it was a little late. But it was similar, that is, I had very good friends at school, but dancing parties were separate. But I had, you know, up to age sixteen or seventeen, so that was just two years before I was taken to Auschwitz I think, we still had parties at our home with elegant little delicate sandwiches and fancy pastries for young kids as if nothing happened.

Q: So all during that time, when your father would be going back and forth to the labor work?

A: Life went on.

Q: What was your mother doing?

A: Well, when my father was away my mother, you know her, very bright woman. And

my father always, there were times when he would bring books home and have my mother help with the bookkeeping. Well, he was sort of chief accountant for the store and it was important to understand the tax laws and all that. And he always made sure she understood that, because he said, If anything happens to me, I want you to know something about this. So whenever he was called, my mother did this and we had the same salary. We were not well-to-do people, but we lived very comfortably, sort of an elegant, small but elegant little home with a maid, as most people had in the middle class. And that went on despite all of this until Germany occupied Hungary. This was in April 1944. Up to that point our life hasn't changed that much. We're still in the same apartment, living much the same life.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: No. My mother says that's what saved our lives.

Q: How is that?

A: Well, I was born just nine months after they were married. So it's obvious that I had to be the first child. And had they had another child, which would have been younger than me probably by three years so she said, in Auschwitz, at separation, she would have gone with the younger. Then they would have both gone to gas, and I would have gone with the strong young girls. Because, I have to tell you how at selection we stayed together and we both were saved from a worse fate. So I don't think either of us would have survived.

Q: Well maybe it's time to move on to that.

A: Well, shall I go back to that selection now?

Q: Well, before you do, I was just wondering, did your father go to the camp before you and your mother went to Auschwitz?

A: Yes, my father was at a labor camp but in Hungary, Salánk it was, the name just come, it was, and we said, Salánk-palánk we used to say just to make us remember that. Yes it was at Salánk.

Q: So then you got your notice to leave, you and your mother?

A: All the Jews in my town were, well, we lived still in an apartment in April. From April to the first of July there wasn't a day that we didn't have an order. First of all you had to wear the yellow star, you couldn't travel. Then you had to give up your apartment and you moved to what would be the ghetto. You have to give in your jewelry, you have to give in your bicycle and your radios and your food, and so forth and so on. I had this, I mentioned to you this former teacher of mine who later became the head librarian for the county after the war. And for my book, he did a research in the local newspaper and clipped all the articles on these Jewish orders that occurred during the ghetto and mimeographed, no, not mimeographed, put on, now what is it, tapes. So I have it and I can go to the Bates Library and just read all these clippings. It's amazing how many regulations there were, so that our lives got more and more constricted.

Q: And who issued those orders?

A: Well, they delegated. Hitler personally, I imagine, made sure that once Horthy, the governor of Hungary, resigned, forced to resign, they had a puppet Nazi, I can't remember his name, who was head of the Hungarian government. And then he delegated to the local, probably the county, I don't know how that went. But they delegated to the Jewish Council. They named maybe six, or to ten, something like that,

Jewish men of our town to be in charge. And they simply told them what to do, and the newspaper reported it, and so it went.

Q: And one of the things you had to do was to give up your jewelry?

A: Yes.

Q: You mentioned that you saved something?

A: That's right. Well, I stood in line a whole day to give our family jewelry to them, which of course then was shipped to Germany. It was very funny, you know, you got a receipt for it. And the silver. And a whole day you stood in line in this huge yard, and they gave you a receipt. Worthless, and we knew it was worthless. But we hid some, of course. What we did, we thought, well, a few items we will just try to hide and take with us in case there is a transport. And we hid it in, this was summertime and the stoves were not operating, we put it in the stove under some coals. But most of it that we saved, most we gave in, then some we saved and hid under rose bushes. We dug up my grandmother's favorite rose bush, dug under it, we put in a tin box and we put some jewelry. But none of that was found after the war because everybody hid under the rosebushes. And those who took over the homes, you know, they dug up all the bushes and flower gardens and they went treasure-hunting and they found it. But the few items that we thought we will take with us if there was a transport, that we were just waiting, the last night I was out in the yard thinking about it. And I thought, well what if they take it from us? This was then mostly emotionally precious, that's what we say, What if they take it? And what if they take photographs that I meant to take with me? It was already in my rucksack, some photographs, my diploma from the *gymnasium*, which later helped me go to college, all that. And I thought, no, it's dangerous to take because if there should be a forced march and we have to abandon that, you know, it just get, perhaps take away our courage and that. So I told the family I could hide it better. And

my grandfather was worried about it and wanted to know where, my grandfather was eighty three. Well I had hid some, I was great at hiding, that was my favorite sport in the ghetto, I hid foodstuffs mostly. The fat, we wanted to hide goose fat in a big urn so that we wouldn't starve in the winter in case there is no transport. I went down in a cellar and I dug out personally the brick wall in the cellar. I dug through there a big hole, I put in the urn of fat, and I closed it with the bricks. But that was movable, so whenever we wanted fat we could take out the bricks and get some. And so I said I could hide the jewelry there, and we wouldn't have to worry about what happens on the transport. So that's what I did. That was the night before we were taken. My Aunt Magda came and held a candle at night and I took out the bricks and I put in this, this was my grandmother's engagement gift. It was a watch, a locket, you know, with pictures in it. And some, the ring, these stones were from her ring.

Q: Your grandmother's.

A: My grandmother's. And a few items of silver and whatever, very few things that we had, my mother's engagement ring and some things my aunt had, the three of them. Well, we hid it there, and some family pictures which is what I have for my book. There is a, there is for all my family and my friends, there are a few photographs, a letter from everyone, and my diploma and birth certificate. And that I hid there, and that remained after the war, including the fat. So when my Aunt Magda returned after the war, because I did not go back for thirty three years, but she went back after the war, she found it all and she sold the fat for a winter coat. It was a little bit moldy, but it was okay.

Q: You mentioned the ghetto. Can you tell us about that time?

A: Well that's, I can't remember the exact date, although I have it from the, yeah, when we were moved, but perhaps late May, probably June, I would guess early June

we were moved. We predicted that might happen. And besides, before everyone had to move to the ghetto we had to give up our apartment, and so we moved in with my grandparents. This grandfather used to be a baker, he had his own bakery. And it was fairly large house, he had six kids, and with plenty of room. And we moved there, my mother and I and my aunt, from our separate apartments. But then later, when it became the ghetto, we were very fortunate because otherwise people might have been placed anywhere and we were already there. So the family stayed together, and one other couple moved in, and that was about it. The ghetto was mainly this one street, Berzsenyi Street, where the Jewish synagogue was and most Jews used to live. And there were two other streets, the Varizsa and Kanizsa. Oh, it doesn't come to me, I thought I'd never forget the names of it. Anyway, Kanizsa and Varizsa, Kanizsa, parts of those streets. At the end of it was barbed wire fence so that you couldn't, or whatever fence, I don't know, we couldn't go out anyway. Once you were closed in, that was it.

The only time that I was able to go out of the ghetto was to attend my grandfather's funeral. Now the other grandfather, and I don't (*unintelligible phrase*), I loved them both, and my father's father was the principal of the Jewish prep school, not prep school, Jewish parochial school. He was a very well respected gentleman, and he loved German literature, he taught me German literature. He died when I was fourteen, and I was already well versed in Goethe and Schiller and Heine in particular. The other grandfather, the ba-, he died and we always said how fortunate, because this was the one I mentioned who was such a patriot and it would have hurt him tremendously to survive, to know what happened. He died in '39 I believe, or was it the end '38? Anyway, I was very young yet. But the other grandfather survived to age eighty three and he was with us in the ghetto. But I really think he wanted to depart, so he just fell into a coma, one day he just, and we always felt that he wanted to. Once he betrayed the fact that he knew what date it was, because he said, It's our anniversary. And we thought he wasn't aware of anything. He just didn't want to be aware. He died in the ghetto.

That was a terrible, terrible thing, that's one of my most nightmarish memories. While we were packing, night after night, packing our rucksacks and trying to decide, is it more important to take another bar of chocolate or take some soap? do you, should you carry heavy shoes or is it too much and forget about it? My grandmother decided not to take any winter clothes. She didn't think she'd live that long. Those decisions, you make all night long around the bed of a dying old man. That's the only trauma I preserved until very recently, and even now, whenever I pack a suitcase or anything, it comes back to me. And I hate to pack. And it's a problem. I have a, I just found an old comrade and she said she has no problem packing. So for a week she brought a little suitcase like that. I said, you have no problem? You have a problem, too. She has the opposite problem. I take too much because I can't decide what to take. I hate to pick and choose because that reminds me. She doesn't take anything. That's a real problem. Anyway, that was the worst of the ghetto experience is this constant packing, not knowing when you'd be taken, not knowing how much you can carry, what to face, and where you'll go. And in the meantime, he's dying.

Then he died and we were allowed to go to the funeral, which was tremendous exception. If the rabbi wasn't, nobody else was allowed to go. Only the immediate family went to the funeral, my grandmother, my mother, my aunt, and myself walked all the way there. And nobody was there but two Catholic women, the washerwoman, our old washerwoman who had known the family for so long and her sister.

Q: Did you have to actually put him in the ground?

A: I don't remember. No, no, there was one man there assigned to do that, who put him in the ground, I guess. We didn't do that. And my uncle Imre, the youngest of the four sons, escaped from a labor camp, risking his life to come to the funeral. He sent a message with someone on furlough. And he hid in the men's toilet in a car, in a train, and he came, he just made it. And he was there and said the Kaddish at the grave, and then he had to go back. And he warned at the funeral to avoid a girls' transport, he

reminded me again, a girls' transport was our worst fear and once more he reminded me to be sure not to get on a girls' transport.

Q: Why was that so bad?

A: Well, we never heard about gas chambers. I didn't hear about gas chambers for nine months after the war ended. And we couldn't imagine concentration camps the way they really were. We only thought Dachau, you know, for political prisoners. We didn't know about that. But we did know that Jewish girls were taken to the Russian front and mass-raped and buried alive when they were pregnant. There were eye-witnesses from my home town. My uncles and my French professor had seen that and they told me about it. And that was the fear. And they had, before all these families were taken, Jewish girls' transports were taken from various towns. Later on, and I found out about it later, Budapest was not taken, but girls from Budapest were, there were still Jewish girls' transports taken. And this was what I was most afraid of all through the war. This is what saved my life, because I avoided that, and therefore now, which is another story. This was the last selection in Auschwitz, so I'll let that go for now.

Q: How could you avoid a transport?

A: I didn't know how I could avoid it. But I did avoid it in Auschwitz. You want to know how I avoided it? Well, this was after three weeks in Auschwitz. And that's something I probably have to talk about later. But by that time you get, I went through those three weeks in Lager B-3, which was so terrible that the other inmates in Auschwitz called it Mexico, because it was the poorest of the poor, that it was worse than any other area in Auschwitz, so you can imagine. And we didn't really expect to survive there. As a matter of fact, when I returned there with John in 1978, the guide told us no one survived there for more than three weeks. And I was there three weeks.

So, we didn't, by that time you didn't really expect to live, necessarily, or it was unlikely, put it that way.

And there was this huge selection going on. We had gone through selections, but this time they made us all undress, thousands of women undress, naked. We were all shaved. No pubic hair, no hair, bald and naked. Thousands going in single file with your heads up and holding whatever rags you had like this, so that I looked around and I thought, My God, you know, it can't be real. And it was just really like a nightmare, but worse than A Brave New World, which I had read recently before I was taken. And I thought, if I ever survive I've got to go to Hollywood and try to help someone make a picture to recreate this scene, because nobody will be able to imagine it. (*Unintelligible phrase*). Auschwitz was not like now, it's grass. But then it was just mud, or dry mud, whatever, depending on the weather. And nothing living. Just these crowds and crowds of people. And all you could see was these naked women marching and curving around, spiraling, in single file. Very, very threatening, very unreal.

Q: Was it very silent?

A: Yes, of course we had to be silent, yes, good question, absolutely, absolutely silent. So it went on, I don't know, hours it seemed. And finally our turn came. We were separated by then from anybody who we knew except my mother, my aunt, and I. We always held onto each other, not to be torn apart. So the three of us got in line and got closer and closer to where the selection was going on. And there stood what I now believe must have been Mengele. All I knew that it was an SS officer with a pistol in his hand, and next to him an SS guard, a woman guard. And then the dogs, they always used to catch people, should they be running. Well, the three of them were standing there and this single file coming by, and then he separated, he sent people either going straight, or right, or left.

And so ahead of time I watched, and I could see that the majority went straight ahead. The very weak and sick or old, fairly old, well the oldest were about forty

because everyone by then had been gassed over forty or under sixteen. But of those who seemed old and weak and sick were sent left, and I could tell there wasn't much hope for them. And the tall, strong, and often good-looking young girls were sent right. And you know, when you see a line of handsome young girls, all naked, going to the right and you've been warned not to go on a girls' transport, of course you try to avoid it. But the first thing was, my mother went first, I went, was brought after her, and Aunt Magda came after that. My mother, we worried about it, that she would be sent with the sick because she was among the oldest there and she was in bad shape by then. But maybe I caught his eye or whatever. He just sent my mother straight ahead. And I was next, and he sent me right with the young girls. And, you know, I had these two instinctive feelings. That first of all, by then I just wanted to stay with my mother because that's all we tried to do for three weeks, just stay together all the time. It seemed like it didn't matter, die or not, just stay together. The other was, two, were the girls' transport, you see. So I just went after her, and just went, and these German women, SS woman called out to me, and they always talked as if they meant well, you know, like a teacher, says, Oh, don't go there, you know, he'll shoot you. And I said, I don't care. And I really didn't at that point. I said, my grandfather taught me German so I was able to talk German to her, I didn't care. I just thought, well it's better to be shot now than be separated, go with a girls' transport, get raped and buried alive. I mean, that was just much more of a nightmare. So I just walked then after her, naked, and I expected him to shoot me in the back. And I just still feel, you know, remember that feeling to expect that bullet to come. And it didn't.

So I looked back. And at that moment my Aunt Magda, who was only twenty seven, she was much younger than my mother and very pretty, very pretty, very nice figure and all, and she came running after me and she called out, She is my mother, too, which wasn't true. She's a sister, but we pretended always to be a very close family. She says, She's my mother, too. She came after us and he didn't shoot her either. And so this is how we survived it. Of those who went with the young girls' transport, I don't know any who survived. That's pretty much it then. Most of them got

pregnant and they say one, when, if they got on the ships in the Baltic Sea, they just dumped them in the ocean when they were pregnant. If they were on the Russian front, then they dug their graves. That's, I don't, you know, I haven't seen this, but that's what I've been told. But what I do know is none of them came back. That I know. But my best friends, Icu and Eva Pogány and Zsuzsi Schwartzberg, who were my very closest friends and the daughters of my parents' best friends, they caught scarlet fever in Auschwitz. It was rampant in Auschwitz because, in those conditions you know, some kind of epidemic happens, that's it.

Q: Did you see them in Auschwitz?

A: No, I didn't. I met them in Auschwitz. I met Icu Pogány. We got separated, but by chance I met her. That's a whole other incident; I'll tell that later. But the fact was, I was told later on, when I went back to Hungary in 1977, I met someone who saw them being put naked and got covered with a rash on a wagon. I've heard about it from letters, but this person actually seen it. And Zsuzsi's mother was with them. And Zsuzsi's mother insisted to go along, of course, because they said they're going to the hospital. And so that was the end, that was the last anyone seen of them. Ilona was twenty, and Zsuzsi was eighteen, and Eva was seventeen. I have pictures of them. That's all I have.

Q: Is your daughter Ilona named after -?

A: Yes. And, you know, that's quite interesting because when Ilona was a little girl, I told her she was named after my best friend. I also told her she was named after a Hungarian poem that is about the name Ilona, and it's very beautiful, lilting, (*recites Hungarian*), a very pretty poem. Well, you remember there was an article on the children of the Holocaust in the *New York Times* magazine in the seventies I think, a leading article. Well, John picked up the phone, read the article, picked up the phone

and called Ilona and said, How did that strike you? Because they were born so soon after the war, they heard so much so young, that they were more affected than Mark, who was born so much later. So he didn't call Mark, he called Ilona. He said, Did it strike you as just about what we went through? And Ilona said yes. And he said, Do you realize we two were named after the dead? Because John was named for my father, Jenő, which is John in Hungarian. He was called John Magyar Isaacson, so the Magyar is after my father exactly. And Ilona said, No, she says, I wasn't named after the dead, I was named after a poem. And John says, Oh, no, you were named after Mummy's best friend. She said, No, I never heard that. And so they told me about it and I said, That's strange, I thought I told her when she was a little girl. Well, next year her former best friend and classmate, Sandra Murphy, whom I haven't seen in years, came by to show off her little kids. Came to my house, showed the little kids, and we talked and she says, You know what I remember, when we were little children, you were telling us about your experiences in the Holocaust? I said I did. What do you remember? She says, the first thing she said was, I remember that you named Ilona after your best friend. So if she knew, Ilona knew. She repressed it, she didn't want to know. No, but she was not named only after her, she was also named after my aunt, whom I call Icu, she was Ilona's, this was my father's only sister. And on arrival at Auschwitz, she wanted to go with her mother. She had no children, and her mother and she was always very close. She was younger than my mother, but she did not try to stay with the younger people. She went with her mother and she was gassed that night. But I was closer to my friend and also felt it more tragic that such a young girl should die. So I always told Ilona it was after my friend. But I couldn't bear to call her Icu. My best friend we called Icu.

Q: Was that a nickname?

A: Yes, that's one of the nicknames for Ilona. So we called Ilona 'Ilie', a little different.

Q: How did you handle all those feelings in the concentration camp, you know, knowing that you were about to be shot?

A: Pretty well.

Q: What does one do?

A: One gets used to it. One gets very used to it. It's amazing. And Ilona couldn't understand that, you know. When we went back to Hungary together, that's what she said, she says, I would not be so brave. I couldn't do all that. I said, Of course you could. I was not a brave girl. But just, you know, one, what can you do? Unless, if you are at all mentally healthy, you do not succumb to it, very few succumbed to it. So that on the way back from Hungary, we were flying over the Atlantic, and all of a sudden there is this tremendous fire in the cockpit, just flashing through the cockpit. And the pilot, who was being very chatty before that, just didn't say a word, didn't tell us what happened. So both Ilona and I thought this was the end, and we just sat just as calm and as quiet as can be. We figured, well, if you die, you die. And then it turned out a lightning had hit the cockpit and the pilot was too busy switching the right switches to tell us about it until, oh, what seemed like a long time. Maybe it was just a minute or two, but it seemed to us a long time. So I said to Ilona, Well, how did you feel, were you calm? She said, Yes. I said, You see? That's how you feel. If it comes, it comes. You are nervous if you feel you can do something about it, if you feel, now, what should I do? But usually there was not much time to make decisions. You just acted, like I told you about this, and there was no reason to, well, I very rarely felt really what you'd call nervous.

At one point, I mentioned this to you, that once I met Icu. In the book I call her Ilona because it's always Ilona, but it really was to me Icu. I was then standing, we were sitting in the shade of a barracks and terribly, terribly thirsty. Summertime in Auschwitz, with a bare head, it's unbelievable. And we had no water to drink. They

didn't give us water. Minimalist food was bad enough, but the water was what was most lacking, and my mother fainted away quite often. We just didn't think we could survive. And the dirt and the slime, and the terrible latrines, the smell, the whole thing. One didn't think one could survive. Anyway, there was a puddle, a sort of kidney-shaped puddle very close to a barrack. So I told, my mother was sleeping, and I told Magda I'll just go over and look. And I looked at the puddle and I thought, well, I'll just take a little drink. And it's a chance, it's probably polluted, but I just had to. So I bent down to drink it, and Icu was just coming up. She found me and she says, You're not going to drink that. I said, Well, you know, what's the difference, we're going to die anyway. Oh, she said, that will be the most awful death of all. We could do something better. So we talked about it very calmly. I was nineteen, she was twenty, and we very calmly discussed suicide. What could we do? So we decided we could touch the barbed wire fence, which was electric, and she said that would be a much cleaner way out. But we said, she'll have to bring her sister and the Schwartzenbergs, her friend and her mother, and I'd have to bring my mother and my aunt. So we said, Well, we'll do it tomorrow. But she never showed up. Maybe that's when she got the scarlet fever. So anyway, that too, I mean in retrospect, it's a horrible decision to make but it wasn't horrible because it was just between two evils. It didn't matter that much. It wasn't a matter of, you know, how do I escape this?

Q: Were you still prepared to do it the next day?

A: No. Then I don't know what happened. I wish I could remember. Maybe it rained. Maybe something came up and I just, no, after a while you get used to it. Then later I met two women from Transylvania, which is the eastern part of Hungary, who happened to find out I come from Kaposvár. They knew my boyfriend and all that, and so they talked to me. And they had been there three weeks, almost three weeks at the time. And they talked about the necessity to drink the soup they gave. You get no water but you get your soup. I said, Yes, we get the soup but we can't drink it. The soup was

made of actually leaves and twigs. They boiled up the leaves of trees and sterilized it by boiling, and that's what we got every day. And dry bread which you couldn't swallow without some liquid. So we threw away the bread and we just spilled the soup, we didn't eat it. And they said, If you want to survive, you've got to drink the soup. And then you'll be able to eat some of the bread. So we started doing that, and I think maybe that happened. Anyway, after that we hoped to, they said they could survive three weeks, so I thought, well, maybe there is a chance.

Q: Were you at any time experiencing feelings of what we call depression?

A: No.

Q: Even when you were talking about these suicide?

A: No, I cannot say it was depression. It was confusion. The first few days in Auschwitz, it was like being drugged, I would call it. Half the time, I didn't know where I was. I couldn't recognize my mother or my aunt because they were bald. It was just like half-asleep. Just too much to bear, I guess. But I wouldn't call it depression. It was more like, maybe there is a natural drug in the body that comes to play. It was like being drugged. I don't get depressed easily, I don't know. Others might have, that I don't know. We didn't. And my mother is a complete op-, oh, my Aunt Magda was depressed, yes. Do you know why she was depressed? Someone told her about the gas chambers, so she knew she lost her mother. But she didn't tell us. All those nine months, she didn't tell us. But she was depressed and we would scold her. She would just sit and moan and mope. And my mother, to this day, is a total optimist. So she always kept her spirits up.

Q: How did you do that? Did you do that for each other somehow?

A: Yes. I have a former comrade who is a psychiatrist in Geneva, Maria Feder, a quite well known geriatric psychiatrist today. And I visited her in Geneva, and she said some day she'll do a study, but it's her feeling that people who had relatives did much better. And she also survived with a mother and I believe with an aunt. Anyway, a threesome, which is rare. It was rare enough to have two people, but three people together was very rare. And she feels that those of us who were fortunate enough to be three had a much better chance. And certainly we did for each other in sickness and we got, one stole food, well we shared it. And we kept each other's spirits up.

My Aunt Magda, later when we were in a munitions factory, for instance, lost a finger in the factory. It was an accident. A stamping machine cut off her finger. And when we got back to the Lager, and she was just bleeding away and the thing was absolutely messy and dirty, my mother went up to the SS Commandant and she said, My daughter, which she always said, that she was another daughter, she looked very young anyway, she said, My daughter lost a finger. She is a victim of the German war effort, she says. And the SS just looked at her. Here was this beggar woman. I guess it amused him or something. He let my aunt go to the local doctor and have it cut and cleaned and bandaged. The SS officer in charge, you know, a woman guard, took her and my mother said, I'm going along. And he didn't bother her. She went along. And it was cleaned up for her. Now, you know, if we hadn't, my aunt was sometimes depressed, it might have taken her life, it might have been gangrene. But this is how, you know, somebody was able to do something for the other. We did it all the time. And my mother was never afraid of anybody anyway. She spoke, and you know what's amazing in circumstances like that, these German SS who looked at us as animals, and we looked like beggars certainly, in rags, no hair, either barefoot or horrible shoes or whatever, all of a sudden someone like this comes out with a lucid German sentence. They were so taken by surprise that they acted quite human. At times. Not always. We were very fortunate. That camp in Lichtenau was one of the best.

Q: Is that where you went to when you went to the middle line?

A: Right, from there we were taken to Lichtenau.

Q: How long were you there?

A: We were there, we arrived early in August and we were there until Aachen, nearby, and Lichtenau were liberated, which was probably early April.

Q: Okay, and you were there in August of 1944?

A: Forty four, about early April, or until maybe early March of 1945.

Q: And you were in Auschwitz from -?

A: From August 8, 1944 until the end of August, for three weeks. And that's quite interesting. I wasn't, I am not tattooed, I wasn't tattooed. And if I had been, I would not have removed it, but I hadn't been tattooed. And when I started to write my book, then I started to read books about all this, see, I needed to do some research. Before that I pretty much avoided it because it gave me nightmares. But once I started to write, I had to do it, and I found that my memories conflicted with the usual report of how things were done in Auschwitz. That's the reason I went back there. And John insisted to come with me. He said, if he doesn't come with me, he'll go on his own, but he's got to see the place he's heard about.

So we went back and we found out that our transport was either the last or among the last to ever arrive from Hungary to Auschwitz, because the rails were bombed. The Germans, not Germans, the Russians bombed the rails to stop the German trains of course. Well, they were so rushed to take care of these huge hordes of people coming in that they couldn't do things the way they used to. For instance, they didn't get around to the tattooing. The other thing that was so very different that I remembered clearly and nobody ever mentioned it in books: on arrival, I noticed that

they threw down the dead right by the railroad tracks. We jumped off the train, but the dead were thrown by the railroad tracks. But they also took some of the old people, and sick, and the one person in our wagon who went crazy during that trip, they threw them with the dead in the path. And I escaped my family for just a minute because I had seen this, to see, you know, what was going on. And I saw this huge pile, about as tall as this room, of dead and dying and sick and crazy, all in a pile like this. And I recognized my former professor of French and German literature there, who went crazy in another camp. You could tell she was gone. She was not, she was a neurotic person. See, people who were at all neurotic before, not at all, people who were quite neurotic before went crazy, but people who were fairly normal didn't. Anyway, so I knew that they had to do something with them in that pile and I didn't know whether it will be, I imagined -

(Break in taping.)

When I went back to Auschwitz with John in '78, I asked about this. I said, You know, I remember this pile of people who I thought were afterwards probably burned on the spot. But I couldn't imagine anybody moving all these dead, and leaving away from there. But what happened to them? Did they gas them in the end, or did they take them to the crematoria? Because when that happened I didn't know about the crematoria, I just thought they probably burned them up. Sure enough, they burned them right there on the spot after we left the railroad track, because the gas chambers and the crematoria were too busy. They processed thousands every night. And so those who were not well enough to walk and so forth, they just put them with the dead and they burned them up right there. So that's, but that, but my grandmothers were not there. They wanted to throw my grandmother Vago, who was I think seventy six and didn't look so well, and they wanted, these striped prisoners who did that job wanted to throw her to the pile. And she said, in a very prim and pleasant way, in her German, says, Will you please put me down, and help me down. Something like that. And so

they did, he did, he just put her down and didn't throw her to the pile.

Q: You've given several examples of how, when you spoke up, people responded.

A: Yes, that was one of those, right.

Q: Do you know of other examples that you saw when, where people spoke up -?

A: Yes, right.

Q: Where they were punished?

A: When punished. No, but I -

Q: Or other examples where they were responded to?

A: Yes, a very good example. Right after that arrival, there was the first selection on arrival, and first we were told we were going to the showers and therefore men and women must separate. Well, that's logical if you go to the showers, so nobody thought anything of it. Husbands and wives didn't even say goodbye, or sons and mothers. They just separated, men and women. And then after that, we went with all the women and we could look ahead. I ran ahead even, to see what was going on. And it seemed that they took the old people and the children and young mothers with their babies and they led them left. And the people who were strong and between sort of ages of sixteen to forty to the right. And then I heard the SS woman explain that anybody under sixteen or over forty will not have to go to work, and they'll have better accommodations and no work, and you can visit them. And so people, some people parted quite willingly. I mean, we willingly parted from my grandmothers, we just never thought anything of it. But mothers wanted to go with their children and they let them. All the young mothers

went right along with their kids. And that's the last that anyone saw of anybody under sixteen or over forty.

Well when our turn came, my grandmother Klein went with Aunt Icu, Ilona, and they just held hands. They were very short and very prim, well-dressed ladies with nice (*unintelligible word*), even after three days in the wagon they still looked sort of prim. And they went arm-in-arm and were marched off to the left. And then my mother and I were next, and they wanted to send my mother left, and they thought of sending her anyway. The SS asked her the obvious, How old are you? And she thought very quickly, and she was forty three and she said thirty eight, because she figured not thirty nine, not too close to forty. So she said thirty eight. And she looked pretty youthful. To this day, she looks young for her age. And so he let her go with me. Then my Aunt Magda came next with her mother and she wanted to go with her mother, but they wouldn't let her because she was so young and strong. So they separated her, threw her on the ground, and my grandmother Vaga said, That's all right, you go with the young ones, and she went off with my other grandmother. So that time, again, my mother spoke up, I mean spoke, of course she was asked a question, but she answered it so nicely and intelligently and quickly. And it worked.

Do I remember when people were punished for speaking? I don't. I think it was more likely to happen to men. I think the men's camp, there were more atrocities than in the women's camp. And in Auschwitz, we hardly spoke. I never spoke to an SS except that one time, because we were overseen by other prisoners, the *kapos*. They were just other prisoners. And then later, in Lichtenau, that was one of the best camps that anyone had been to. We were very fortunate. And probably the majority of us survived there, which was very unusual.

Q: What were the conditions like there?

A: Well, what happened, and I found out more about it on my return trip there which was also very interesting. Apparently what happened was that the Germans lost an

awful lot of soldiers after Stalingrad I think it was, in the Russian front. They had to replace soldiers by very young soldiers, and they put the women in the army and so forth. They didn't have enough people for work, for producing weapons. And already they used tremendous amount of labor from all over Europe, but they had not used concentration camp people. But they needed us, so they asked Auschwitz to send a thousand women to Lichtenau to fill in spots because they needed workers. And that saved us.

It turns out, as I found out this September on my return trip to Lichtenau, that I worked in one of the largest munitions factories of Europe at the time, which we didn't know. Eight thousand slave laborers worked there. And it was owned by Dynamit Nobel, the Nobel family. The reason I found out about all this is that Dynamit Nobel, after all these decades, paid us \$1,080 for the labor of those months. Imagine! I got the check last summer, \$1,080. And that's due to mostly Ben Ferencz, a very well-known author and just a wonderful person, who had been after these German factories all these decades to pay some restitution to the people who did forced labor for them. And Dynamit Nobel was one of the last to pay up. But once that became known, then I was told about it by a former comrade from Budapest, Eva Jambor. She probably will not be interviewed, unfortunately, because this is American interviewing.

Anyway, what I was going to say, that the town of Lichtenau now found out what happened there. They did not know all these years. The old people didn't tell the young people that it used to be this huge munitions underground factory and slave labor and all. But the chemicals seeped through the ground and hit their water supply. So all of a sudden, you know, they wondered what was going on. And Dieter Vaupel, a high school teacher, decided to write his Ph.D. thesis about us, one thousand slave workers there. And I have the book. I didn't bring it with me, but I have the book, in German, just about our little group. And Jurgen Jessen and Giselle Hoffert and Dieter Vaupel pressured their mayor and their county government and the German government to do something for the survivors. They erected a monument in our honor where the Lager used to be. And finally, last September, they staged a reunion, they call it (*name*), for

the survivors, and I got a formal invitation to come to the reunion, all expenses paid, including air travel, by German authorities. The Germans don't say it never happened. They know it happened.

Q: And how many of you went?

A: We had two Americans of the Jews, of these one thousand Jews we had two American, about ten or twelve from Israel, and thirty from Hungary. That's all who came this time. And then they had some other slave laborers who had not been in concentration camps but did some slave labor in that factory, two from Poland and a small group from France and from Holland, who used to work side by side with us. And sometimes they were very helpful. They gave us, in secret and at the risk of their lives, sometimes a piece of soap or a comb or a little bread or whatever. They were very nice.

Q: How was your health maintained when you were -?

A: That I still don't understand because we had in, well for three weeks hardly any food. And in Lichtenau the nutrition was the bare minimum, a piece of bread, like this, soup, once in a while a little piece of meat, but mostly just potatoes and turnips, and once in a while carrots in it. And usually it was mostly liquid. And a little piece of margarine or a little bit of cottage cheese. That was it for a day of hard work and a lot of walking to the factory back and forth. And we hardly, as I recall we didn't have too many problems. Of course, those who did died. And now I know from Dieter Vaupel's book that there were deaths, but we weren't told. They just buried them, that was it.

And some, two hundred were sent back to Auschwitz in October, and we volunteered for it. My mother, my aunt, and I volunteered. They announced in October that two hundred people would be sent to easier work. We did not know about the gas chambers. Magda heard something about gas chamber for the old, but not for others.

And Magda had lost a finger, you see, so she wasn't working in a factory, she was a Lager *arbeiter*, which means she swept the grounds or something by the camp. My mother was in poor shape. She was among the oldest because she cheated on her age, and she managed so far but one never knew how long she could keep it up.

I had been given a very wholesome job. I was very strong and tall in those days. I'm still tall but I'm not as strong. And I was given the position of 'horse'. I was called *Pferd*, the horse. I was pulling the wagons full of shells, very heavy. And I had to bend forward. Maybe that's why I have trouble with my lower back. I never thought of that, but it's possible. I was pulling the wagons always, like this. But it was outdoor work. But we were always scared that I particularly, or my mother possibly, could be assigned to filling the shells with the chemicals. These were the chemicals that later seeped into the water supply. Those chemicals made the Jewish girls who worked there totally yellow, including the eyeballs. And just looking at them, one got scared how that affected their health. And it did affect their health. So my mother was worried about my becoming one of what we called 'the yellows'. And I was worried that my mother might not be able to work anyway. And my mother was always the optimist. I was afraid that I might go to Auschwitz or whatever, and Magda was afraid. My mother said, Oh, no, they sound very honest and sincere about it. And the *commandant* has been nice to us, he wouldn't lie. He was a nice guy, but he had to lie. And she said, Maybe we'll meet the men, we'll find out what happened to them. We'd had no news. Probably it will be easier work. This is too much.

So we signed up, and the *kapo* saw us. She said, These people are wonderful workers, they mustn't go. You know, they pretended that this was sort of a favor to the sick, and the well people couldn't go. But her voice sounded false to me, the way she said it, you know, These people, you mustn't, mustn't, but in a high-pitched voice. And I thought, That's not what she means. It's probably better for us to be out. So we were pulled out. And some of her other favorites were also pulled out. So we always suspected afterwards that she did us a favor. And the two hundred were sent off. But until Dieter Vaupel wrote his book, which I only got in my hands this past year, I never

knew what happened to these people. But in the book he has the documentation, Auschwitz had the documentation and a list of all those names of those that went back to Auschwitz, their names, their birth dates, everything. And they have it, it's in a museum.

Q: When you say you were a 'favorite', do you know, was there an emotional connection, or was it because you were just such a good worker?

A: No, that connection was a strange one. Very soon after arrival, and when we didn't know what was going on, what kind of a person the *commandant* was, we had just come from Auschwitz practically. And we had what's called *zahl appell*. *Zahl appell* was, we stood in rows of five to be counted. That used to go on and on and on when they made a mistake in counting. In Auschwitz, half the time we were standing to *zahl appell*. In Lichtenau, it still went on quite a while. Well, we were standing *zahl appell*, and I was standing fairly back, and the *commandant* was standing there with the *kapo*, Manci Pal. Willi Schaffer was the *commandant*. Manci Pal was the *kapo*. They looked like two very handsome young people, both blonde and healthy looking and so forth.

And all of a sudden the *commandant* turns to Pal and says, Find me '*ein sauberes madchen*', a clean girl. So, you know, we wondered what does he, a young German officer, want a clean girl for? We didn't know that normally Jewish women were not, that is, that the Germans were not allowed to sleep with Jewish women workers. They were allowed, the soldiers at the front, they were allowed to do that, and then they killed them. But workers, no. But we didn't know that. Neither did, Manci didn't know that either, no, the *kapo* didn't know. So Manci always picked her, she had two sisters with her and she had friends from her hometown. For good jobs, she always picked them, you see. So I wondered, does Manci know, is this good or bad? Manci did not pick her friends, you know. She looked at them and I could see, no, she wasn't going to pick them, she was going to pick a stranger. And she picked me. Out of one thousand women, she picked me out. You know, my heart just stopped. I mean, I was so sure

that he wanted me for rape. I couldn't imagine anything else. So he looked me up and down, and I wore an, by that time I had a nice little blue kerchief. I always, I blame that kerchief because a nice clean little kerchief that I found, a rag, that was noticeable in a crowd, I suppose.

So anyway, he said, Okay, follow me. And so we walked through that village just alone. I hadn't been alone for about four weeks by then, and was always with thousands of people and guards and dogs. And here I was following that one man, he with his SS uniform, not talking to me, just walking, and me behind. You know, all this time that he's going to, and what to do, how to avoid it, how to protect myself, what to say. I tried to make up little speeches in German. What would my grandfather have said? Or how to, shall I say I have syphilis and maybe, but then what if he examines me? I didn't know what it was like or, you know, the whole thing. It was just, it was one of those real nightmares went on. And he lived quite a way from camp, so we went right through this village and the people just looked around as if it meant nothing. And I wondered, what do these people think when they see this lonely little beggar girl following this strong SS? They didn't care. We walked by this beautiful tree, what is it called, it has these orange fruit, a flowering, no, I can't think of the name now. It was a beautiful tree full of these orange berries. And I looked at that tree and I thought, either I'll die or I'll never be able to think of anything being beautiful after this experience. I sort of said goodbye to life as it used to be.

But he didn't want me for that. He had a mistress. And the mistress said, Do you know how to wash floors? And that's why he wanted a clean girl, to wash the floors. So I scrubbed. I didn't know how to wash floors. I said, Well, if you would show me, please, how you do it. And I tried very hard and I did a beautiful job on the floors. And she gave me food. I ate some leftover potatoes. She gave me aspirin for my mother. This was the *commandant's* mistress. And she went to the refrigerator, icebox, and she gave me a piece of lemon pie to take home. I mean, this was amazing. So in the meantime, my poor mother and Magda and the *kapo* were marching up and down the camp, wondering what's happening to me. And Mancini was very scared, too, because

she was just a nice young person. She didn't mean to hurt anybody. She had to pick someone and she felt of course badly looking at my poor mother. And I show up, happy and proud, you know, with my lemon pie.

So I made a big mistake. I told Manci about this all, I let her taste the pie. And who went next day? One of her friends. I lost the job. But she felt badly about it, that's why she knew us. So that's where the whole relationship started. And later, my mother was quite good in crafts and very artistic, and she had a black plastic or rubber apron in camp to do the work. And she cut off a little strip of it at the end, borrowed some scissors there, and she made a beautiful black rose. And she gave it to the *kapo*, over my objections because I hated her after that. She says, Oh, it's better to be friends. So she liked my mother because of the black rose. And she knew Magda because she was a camp worker. So she sort of knew all of us. And she was always very polite to my mother, always called her *Gnadige*, which is, you know, 'Mrs. Magyar', which is very polite, very pleasant. So she pulled us out. All these things.

Q: And you were there, you were liberated there?

A: No, no. When the Americans approached, I spoke French quite well in those days and some of my contacts were Frenchmen and Belgians. And then the Dutch men would say it in German, they would, as they walked by us they would often tell me or others who spoke languages what the radio announced, because we had no radio. So we knew they were coming close and we thought we'd be liberated. And then we could hear the guns nearby. So one day we woke up and the guns were just, you know, so near that we thought, today we'll be liberated.

Well, at that point the Germans show up with shovels and rakes and they said, We got to, it's springtime, we've got to build gardens. That was just to keep us, we couldn't go to factory anymore, to keep us busy, to fool us. So we all got busy digging next to the barracks, making a garden. They had no seeds or anything, we just dug. Then they said, We're going to give you some clean clothes. Up to that point, we didn't

wear these prisoners' clothes. We wore regular clothes. And in Auschwitz they put a big, oh, that was different, too, in Auschwitz, because they didn't have any prisoners' clothes. They put this big red painted cross on our back, they painted a red cross so if you escaped you could be identified. But this time we didn't have those crosses, and they didn't want us to go on a forced march or something without it. And they had those striped clothes, so they passed out striped clothes. And we were afraid they wouldn't have enough. We were in such rags. Believe it or not, we wanted those striped dresses, because it was better than the rags.

So there was some tumult and people got, the lines weren't neat and so forth. One of the SS officers, who was a nice old man, always very kind to us, even helped Magda and gave food occasionally, he lost his head or something. He wanted to calm us down. He shot into the crowd. He shot one of my former classmates in the stomach, and he shot another girl. Those were the conditions. Well, we were taken to the railroad station. We all got on the train and we didn't know where the train was going. We could tell it was going away, of course, not west but east.

We went for a while, and then we stopped at Weimar. Well, we have studied so much about Goethe at Weimar. And when I looked out that, a little hole in that cattle car and I thought, I am in Weimar in these conditions, crowded into cattle cars, no food, no toilet facilities, a pail, and locked in. And they left us locked in at Weimar for days. Weimar of course, well I didn't know then, but Buchenwald was built right next to Weimar, just as Auschwitz was built next to Cracow. They always built these most horrible places near the cultural centers. That was Hitler's idea to demean the intelligentsia. And they wanted to take us to Buchenwald, it seems. Now, I just found out this September that all Lichtenau camp was *aussercommando*, a branch of Buchenwald. I never knew that. So that they planned to take us back to the 'mother' camp or whatever, to Buchenwald. But in the meantime, Buchenwald got liberated. And we were sitting there, locked up, and thinking we'll be abandoned and die while they waited, whether they can take us to Buchenwald or not. And they couldn't.

Now I, my husband, whom you know, says that all happened so we could meet in

Leipzig, of course. So the train went on to Leipzig. And that's where we were eventually liberated. We were taken to Leipzig and one camp, Tekla I think it was, and there we were bombed out. Some of the people died, including, well, they bombed, the people who worked with the *kapo* and like the woman who took my job of cleaning before, and Magda because she was Lager *arbeiter*, all the aristocracy had their own, still their own place to sleep, they put them separate. But when the bombing started Magda ran out of there and ran to be with us again. And that particular Lager got bombed. A lot of people died there. So that's how Magda escaped. And among the dead was this girl who Mancini, the *kapo*, favored, gave her my job. When I looked at her, all burned and dead, I thought, My God, that might have happened to me. And I was so angry that she took away my job. You never know. I learned so young that you never know what's good for what. But from that camp, because we got bombed out, they didn't have room enough any more. So they took us to a huge prisoner-of-war camp where there were mostly men prisoner-of-war, French, Belgian, Czech, from all over Europe.

Q: What was the date? What was the time frame here?

A: This was still April, April, 1945. This was in the middle of the saturation bombing of Leipzig. And every night we would stand out in that compound and watch. From far you could hear the bombers go, you could hear tremendous noise. They would sort of stop, and you'd heard this huge noise like a volcanic eruption, and the flames go up. And the bombers got closer and the flames, just like curtains and curtains of flames coming closer and closer. And we had no way to escape. The Germans hid in the bomb shelters, but we were closed in by electric barbed wire fence. There was no way to run, nothing we could do. So when the planes would come close, we'd go in the barracks and lay down on the ground, on our stomachs, and wait to die, absolutely. The first time that happened I thought, this is the end. And, I mean, you're just calm because what else can you do? There's no way to prevent it. So you die, you die, this

is it. And they did not bomb our camp. They knew that it was a prisoner-of-war camp and they flew right over it and then bombed somewhere. And this went on and on, night after night. But, you know, the first night was the most scary because we thought they would bomb. And Leipzig was just a ghost city. It is unbelievable to see Leipzig those days. There was, seemed that there wasn't a building standing. No windows, just look through miles of lacy building. And we were glad that happened to the Germans. And then I felt terrible because I thought, what about the children, how can I be happy about that? It's an awful feeling, that you felt you're no longer the human being you used to be.

Well, the bombing went on and the Americans were coming closer. Again, we could hear the guns coming nearer. So then they had another *zahl appell*. We stood up and the *Commandant* and the *kapo* translated. And they told us there would be a forced march, that they now didn't have any more trains for us, but we'd have to leave Leipzig and go east and there'll be a forced march and anyone who couldn't keep up would be shot along the way. And on the other hand, they said, nobody well is allowed to stay. Anybody who can walk must come, but you realize that you'll have to walk fast. Then we surrounded Manci and asked questions and she said, Oh, don't go to the infirmary. That's dangerous, you know, just anybody who can walk at all must go.

So I went back and across the fence I asked one of these Frenchmen, What's going on? And he said, The Germans brought in a lot of gasoline into the camp, and they plan to burn it all up after the transports leave, so don't stay in the infirmary because you'll be burned up. So then Magda and I discussed what to do while my mother wasn't listening, and we said, Well, if we go with the forced march there is no chance that my mother could keep up at all. And so we said, What will we do if they shoot her and she's lying by the roadside, will we be able to leave her? And we said, No, we couldn't do that, so we'll be shot too. So we thought, that's almost a hundred percent dying. But the burning up, who knows? Maybe it's just rumors, maybe it's true. Maybe, you know, it seemed safer.

So we went and stayed in the infirmary, but Magda and I were well so we had to

hide. So we got into my mother's bed and hid under the blankets. We were so skinny that you couldn't see. She picked up her knees a little bit. To our shock, by that time we were about seven hundred-odd women still, and of the seven hundred only six others dared to stay in the infirmary. And they were very, very sick, like the girl I told you about who had been shot in the stomach. So the six very sick ones, my mother who was in poor shape, and Magda and I. That's nine of us stayed in there. And we didn't know what's going to happen. An SS woman came back to check it out. And she went to my mother, we were hiding, and said, Don't worry, you'll see your daughters tomorrow. And my mother said, I know I will, kicking us under the blankets. But then, of course, we worried about what happens in the night, will we be burned or not burned?

Well, morning came and we were still alive. An SS woman came in, one whom we didn't know. She said, Get up, we're going to another camp. Now in retrospect I think, because this happened I am told lots of times, those days the SS tried to do favors so that their own skins would be saved. That's probably what she had in mind. It didn't work out that way for her, but that's probably what she had in mind. She says, Let's march. Well, we march across, so we march across this absolutely open field, there was no one in sight, and here she was with a pistol and we were the nine of us and only Magda and I were at all in health. And I said, Magda, maybe we could overpower her and shoot her. Well, we didn't know how to pull the trigger, how to handle a gun. The others were all sick. We carried that Magda who had been shot in the stomach. And Magda said, It just won't work. She knows how to handle a gun. How can you do it?

So we went, went to the next camp. And this was not a concentration camp. This was much better. This was Polish women who had been taken to do forced labor, but much better conditions, better fed, better dressed and so forth. So it seemed like a very lucky break. And the trains were right in front of these big barracks, ready to go, and they were passenger trains. So that was pretty fancy because that's not how we'd been in traveling. We had been traveling seventy in the place of horses. That sounded pretty good. But then we went into this room, tremendous, all excited Poles talking and

gesticulating and our little group in a corner, and I was the best, you know the best and strongest, I mean the best health and strength. So I said, Well, I'll walk around and see if I can find out what happened, what's happening. And I noticed that in the far corner there were some of the *kapos*, the head Poles, talking to an SS officer in a very friendly manner. So I went and listened to their German conversation. And I had a feeling, I sort of understood some. I didn't dare go too close, but I understood that they were making some kind of deal. When the SS left, they switched to French. Now Polish, the well-educated speak French, and they were well-educated women. That's why they spoke German and became *kapos*. But I understood French well. And I looked like a beggar women. They didn't expect me to understand what they were talking about. So I went quite close and understood the whole conversation. They had made a deal with the SS to stay behind and be liberated.

So I went up and I said, I understand, you know, this is the deal. And there is nine of us and I'm not going to tell the other Polish women what's going on if you allow us to stay. So they allowed us to stay to be liberated. And we stayed there. And I never forget the moment I saw that train leave, that passenger train mind you, and not concentration camp people any more. See, this is what the German woman had in mind for us. And she meant to meet us on the train and later tell the Americans how she saved us. But we were not on the train. But when I saw that train and I thought, was this the right decision to stay, because who knows? We might have been better off just to go with them. But, you know, the die had been cast. We stayed.

And a Polish *kapo*, a very handsome blonde woman, she said, Now, you stay, but you must not come near us because you're Jewish and the SS may return. So you go down in the basement. And she showed us where, in one small room about this size, smaller, a little basement room, low ceiling, and says, You lie down, here are blankets, cover up and see what happens. During the night they brought down to the next room, down in the basement, one or two, I'm not sure, I think it was one. I remember one, but I've been told it was two Czech soldiers dying, burned. They had escaped from that (*unintelligible word*) Lager that was actually burned down. So we

had been saved from them, and they died, I mean he died, the one I remember, during the night. So we knew that they had meant to kill those concentration camp people and that we'd been saved just by luck.

And then maybe an hour or two later comes an SS officer with a gun, he comes into a room with the *kapo* and says, Who are these people? And she said, They are sick, they are Polish sick who couldn't go on the transport. He says, Well, are they Polish? I want to hear them talk Polish. And of course we couldn't do that. And she said, Well, they're too sick to talk. So he started kicking us and rolling around with the boots and said, Talk, speak, speak! And we were scared because some of these people were feverish and they might have come out in something Hungarian. But everybody was absolutely mum, pretended to be dying which we felt like. And finally, he left. And that's the last we seen of the SS.

Then we were abandoned. There were no Germans, no Americans. And here we were, you know, in this huge camp. And we found the food the SS used, that they didn't take with them. Wonderful, rich pork, now it comes to me in Hungarian (*Hungarian name*) pork, canned, conserved canned pork, rich as can be, very fancy food. And we knew we shouldn't be eating that, but we said, They might come back and kill us, and by God, we want to eat before we die. So we ate and we ate and we got terribly sick. We threw up and, oh, it was just awful. My mother had to throw away her dress. We were just terribly sick. We just about got over that attack when somebody came running and says, There is a soldier coming up the road on a motorbike, and, you know, come see. We didn't know from far whether it would be a German or an American. So we just watched to see. It was an American, an American telegraph operator, and he was in advance to fix up the telephone lines. And we surrounded him and we hugged and we kissed. And then he left, did his work, and maybe a day or two later we were, the American Army came in and we were taken to a hotel. And that was liberation. It wasn't simple.

Q: That was quite a year for you.

A: Oh, amazing. You can see why I had to write it eventually.

Q: You said that your husband believed that you had to go to Leipzig to meet.

A: Yes, that's what he always says, right.

Q: How did that happen, the meeting?

A: Oh, well, we were moved to this hotel, one hotel that hadn't been bombed, with the Polish women. And we got marvelous food from the Americans. But they brought it all in together and the Poles divided it. We were a minority, and every day they gave us less and less. But there was a very lucrative black market going on in Leipzig, and they stole the food and sold it for whatever, jewelry or whatever they could get. So there was a day when Magda went to get the rations. And all we had, each of us, is one slice of salami so thin that you could see through it. We took it to the window and you could see the building. And Magda was really mad and she said, This is enough, we've got to do something about it. Magda got over the depression. As soon as we were liberated, she was herself again. She is a very active, wonderful, brilliant woman and somehow, during the camps, she was scared but she got, so, We've got to do something. I said, Okay, we go to the American military police, the military government, there was a building, MP or MT, whatever it was called. Okay, we took our salami and we went and we stand in this tremendously queuing line, all displaced people in terrible clothes. We didn't have such terrible clothes any more because Magda and I went on a rampage and we stole, which I still have and I forgot to bring with me, coverall, German factory coverall, baggy and so forth, but it was clean and not striped. So that's what we wore.

And we were standing in line and then a couple of American off-, what I thought were officers, step up to us. And this was Ike and his, actually it was his chauffeur for the Army, but he was very elegantly dressed and we thought it was something of a

general, because they were both serving in the Office of Strategic Services and they were allowed to wear very elegant clothes and so forth so they looked like big-, he looked, so this other man, Fred, looked like a real big shot. And he asked, he says, What nationality are you ladies? I said Hungarian, but then I corrected it, this was all in German now, we spoke German, I corrected it to say, Hungarian Jews because realizing that the Hungarians were on the German side and we were not Hungarian Nazis.

Turned out that I resembled Ike's cousin whom you know, Natalie Wolf. I resembled her more those days, so much that when I moved here, people took me for Natalie. And so Ike had told Fred that I resembled his cousin. And Fred, who didn't always tell the truth the way Ike did, thought Ike wanted to meet me and this was just something he said. But actually, anyway he said, Oh well, let's meet them. And Fred was not only chauffeur but also interpreter for Ike. He spoke all the languages of Europe except Hungarian, all the Slavic, and Germanic, and French. So we talked for a few minutes and that was that. And he left and we never expected to see them again.

We went with our salami to the officer in charge and he sounded sort of, he sounded, he didn't sound nice at all. He says, Oh, you know, you probably caused your own problems. Couldn't care less. My mother said, When can we go back to Hungary? I don't know. He just shook us off, and we were pretty upset about it. Went back, well, very soon afterwards I was walking in the street and I was used to Americans tossing me cigarettes and candy or whatever they had, mostly cigarettes or Hershey bars, and never asking even a kiss in return. Just very generous, because we wore an emblem that said 'concentration camp', 'former concentration camp prisoner'. I was used to that. But this time I met an American soldier who was pushing a bicycle, and said, Do you want my bicycle? Well, that was a bit too much and I said, No, thank you. Again, the prim young girl, you know. He said, Don't worry, I don't want anything in return, the war is still going on. Which shocked me because I didn't know, I thought the war was over. But he was called in again, in to his unit to go on fighting. So he said, I have to abandon it, I'll give it to a German girl if you don't take it. I says, I'll take it, and he

disappeared out of my life, leaving me the bicycle.

Now I had heard that there was a Hungarian Jewish women's camp in Markleberg, by the grapevine, where people did not cheat on the food and so therefore there was enough to eat. And so I told my mother, I've got a bicycle, I go to Markleberg. Because she was worried about me taking off all by myself. But off I went. This was, I don't know, maybe fifteen kilometers or something, a suburb of Leipzig. So off I went, feeling wonderfully adventurous, all by myself, you know. First time in a year, on a bicycle. I go to Markleberg and I found a camp. And sure enough, there were wonderful accommodations. A former SS camp, very nice barracks, and excellent food. Not only they didn't cheat on the rations, but they swapped their cigarettes and candy and all that for wholesome food with farmers. They had spinach and eggs and milk, these things we hadn't seen in at least a year, no, not at least a year, about a year. So I was thrilled.

And I went back on my bicycle and said, We got to move. But people were sick and badly off and we had to get them over there. We put one on, the sick one on the bicycle and pushed her, and finally made it. A very arduous trip with all these sick people. But we made it and we got ourselves set up in a room. And my mother and Magda got very busy fixing it up. My mother picked flowers and Magda, who always liked everything neat, cleaned it up. And we had lots of blankets, we had each rugs in front of the beds so it, looking as well as we could, felt pretty good. Now, let's go for a walk. So we went off for a walk and this, because it was an SS camp, was in the most elegant section of an elegant suburb (*unintelligible word*), beautiful, beautiful homes. So we just wandered around very close to camp, maybe a block or so away.

Comes a jeep and stops in front of us, and it's the same two officers, Ike and Fred. And they, he says, My God, you know, they look familiar. And they, said, Haven't we met you ladies before? Yes, we met in Leipzig. How did you get here, how did you get here, and so forth. And Ike jumped off the jeep. Ike was then a captain, by the way, which didn't mean anything to me. He didn't look it. He wore very sloppy army clothes. But he jumped off the jeep and he went to the back and they had this black, grimy,

messy funnel. And in the funnel were three oranges. And he took that funnel and he offered us the oranges, you know, like fruit at a party in a silver bowl. He was so cute about it. And of course that's the first time I'd seen oranges in I don't know how long, because they were imported in Hungary. So even during the war we didn't see them in, I don't know, two years, three years. Anyway, it was a miracle.

And Fred said, Well, where do you ladies live? And my mother said, In a Lager. He said, How come, why don't you have one of these nice homes, didn't you have a nice home before? And my mother couldn't agree more. She says, of course. And we thought he was some kind of big shot, and so we thought, my mother thought, you know, he'll arrange something to put us in a home or get us home to Hungary, even better. And we invited them to, my mother invited them to come and visit. So from then on, Ike visited every day. This was May, I think May 16th. Ike has it in his diary, 'met Hungarian girl'.

Sixteen, May 16, and Ike went on trips to, he was the first Allied person to go beyond the line that later became the Iron Curtain to see what the Russians were up to. So he and Fred went with false papers to Czechoslovakia and to Poland to find out, you know, if the Russians are planning to have another war against the Americans, or what was going on. And they were away on one of these trips end of June, middle of June, and a transport was being organized for us. The Americans said, The Russians are going to take over Leipzig, you know, Leipzig is now Russian zone. That was the Yalta agreement I think, the Russians were to take over Leipzig. And we're going to get you home before they come. So they brought in the trains to put us on the train to go back to Hungary.

Q: Who did that?

A: The Americans. The Americans. And I had already fallen in love with Ike enough to at least want to see him once more. And you know, I just didn't know what to do. I was so worried. It seemed impossible not to go, and yet I didn't want to go. And I took

sick. That night I was very sick. I had such high fever that I was, what do you call it, you know, not aware of, when the fever gets so high that you -?.

Q: Delirious?

A: Delirious, right, I became delirious and my mother called a doctor, found a German woman doctor to come to take a look at me the morning when the transport was to go. And she said, well she can't really examine, she doesn't have X-rays or anything, but it may be pneumonia or it may become pneumonia and it will be dangerous to move me. So we stayed, the three of us. The rest of the transport went. I didn't know anything about it. I was in another world. But my poor mother said, Now the Russians will come, and here I'm alone with two lovely looking young women in a camp. And even she was in danger. All women were in danger. That's what we heard, that the Russians came in and raped whomever. They say they got drunk and raped. I heard about that in Hungary, they actually did it.

So she didn't know what to do and she went, she left me with Magda and went on the street, just walking up and down, trying to think how to escape this situation, all alone in a huge camp (*unintelligible phrase*). So she saw this nice-looking German woman going marketing with a little basket on her arm. She thought to herself, well, she doesn't look different than the way I used to look. Nice, neat, German *hausfrau* going marketing. So she went up to her and explained the situation, that she was alone here and afraid of the Russians. And that woman put us up. So they carried me over to her house and put me to bed there, and I had doctors. And the next thing I knew, when I woke up out of the delirium, Ike had come back from the trip. This was I think July 1st. The Russians were coming and Ike and Fred moved us to what still was an American zone.

Two days later, July 3, 1945, we got engaged. And neither Ike nor I knew for sure that was the right thing to do, but it seemed that either we had to go back to Hungary or we had to get engaged. This was once more that quick decision one just

had to make. We didn't know each other that well, but it worked out well, as you know.

And then Ike arranged a trip back to Hungary, one of these trips, in October to find out, well, they did anyway go behind the Russian zone and wanted to find out for the Army and for the High Command what was going on in Hungary, but he also hoped to bring my father out. We had no idea he had died. And my father was young and strong and we thought if we survived, he probably did, too. So he took papers to bring my, false papers they always had for themselves, for my father, to bring him out and so forth. Magda had gone back to Hungary in the meantime because she was married, she had, wasn't waiting around, she wanted to go back to her husband. But my mother wrote a letter to my father saying that she will certainly wait until I got married. And he should decide whether he wanted to emigrate to America, or whether he wanted her to come home after the wedding. But we were quite sure he would want to emigrate, because his favorite brother was a professor in America. He had emigrated when I was a year old and knew him very well. He was a professor of German until he lost the job because no one wanted to study German, but that's another story. So we already had affidavits from him before. And we knew that we would be welcome, and of course I would be his only child in America.

But father had died, and Magda's husband had died. Four brothers had died. Parents died. Cousins. Friends. You know how many died? Of the five thousand who were taken on the transport from my home town, two hundred fifty returned. Five percent, that's all. So you can imagine Magda's state of mind when she went home expecting all these people and they were gone. When Ike and Fred arrived there and saw, they just felt that there was no life for her there, although she had already two marriage proposals. That's people for you, you know, after the war everyone tried to forget the pain and tried to start new lives. People got married, had kids and so forth. Amazing how some people can live. But when Ike offered to bring her out, she thought that would be a lot safer and better, and she wasn't crazy about those men, I mean she just lost her husband. And Magda had, Ike hid Magda in the jeep under the khaki blanket, and at the risk of his own life and Fred's of being taken to Siberia or God knows

what, they stole her out. That's how Magda came out of Hungary. And eventually Magda met another survivor who had lost his wife. They got married in America and lived in Illinois, and now they live near my mother in Florida. They have a son and they have two grandchildren, fairly normal life.

(Break in taping.)

Okay, you wanted to know about going back to Hungary. After I started writing the book, I felt that I had to refresh my memories, mostly confirm my memories, and just felt that I had to go back, first of all to Kaposvár. And Ilona volunteered, my daughter Ilona, to come with me, which was wonderful. Ike would have come, but Ike has very few vacations and I didn't want to spoil it, so I didn't want to cry on his shoulder for two weeks. Ilona had the whole summer off. She was teaching at Smith College then. And Bob very kindly allowed her to come for the couple of weeks or whatever. So off we went. I already mentioned that, coming back, that lightning hit the plane. But we went back to Hungary and I found, that's when I found out that five percent only survived, and a lot of details about people whom I used to love and what happened to everyone. Quite a trip. I don't want to go into that.

Next year, I decided that I had to go back to Auschwitz because there, too, there were contradictions. And John came with me with his wife. So after our visit we went to Hungary with John, and I wanted to mention that I have just one important memorabilia, and John found this. When John and I went to the old synagogue, he walked around outside the building, and there was broken glass because the synagogue had been demolished by probably Nazi mobs. Everything was broken, and the benches uprooted. But outside, in the dirt and a lot of broken glass, he found this old, old prayer book that we must have used. And apparently they threw it out and did not notice it to collect. It's been outdoors, well, I suppose from 1944 to 1978. That's what it looked like.

Q: And the building has just remained as -?

A: The building was there, and there was a big sign saying it's dangerous to enter. And I said to John, It was dangerous to belong! We didn't enter, but we went where we were not supposed to, close by, and looked through the window to see it all again. So I don't know, I think it might not be standing any more. They were supposed to pull it down. Some of the Jewish synagogues been converted to museums and public buildings. Not Jewish museums, mind you, just museums. But this one, they thought they were going to pull it down. It was a beautiful building. I have pictures of it.

So that's about the important part. The other memorabilia that I don't want to forget to mention is, because this is for Yale University and I have very warm feelings, I think it's wonderful that they have these interviews in oral history for the archives. And Yale University is partially responsible, I know, for *The Yale Review*, and they were the only ones so far to print part of my book. That was the Spring 1984 issue and you can take it. Also, you know Mark and Karen, and they met at Yale of course when they were students there. That's my youngest son and his wonderful wife who gave me all these grandkids.

Q: How many grandchildren?

A: Well, now I thought maybe I'll never have grandchildren. That made me very, very upset. Seed of Sarah is the book, hope that will be the title of the book, because an SS officer once told me, Hitler named all Jewish women Sarah and all men Abraham, you might know that, and he said that when the war was over, we women would be taken to a desert island and never see any men. And he said, There will be no men, no sex, no seed of Sarah. And that was just the most cruel thing you can say to a twenty-year-old girl. So I've always hoped to have kids and grandchildren and descendants, who I hope some day will be able to listen to this story. But my kids were not producing for a long time and I wondered if I'll ever have any grandchild. We had a 'granddog', that's all we had. Then Peter was born. He's now five and a half. This was Mark's youngest child.

And since Peter was born five and a half years ago, we had six others. So now we have seven grandchildren. Little Noah is the youngest. So we have Peter and Kaitlin, in order of age, Max, Sarah Tess, Amanda - should we count them, I don't want to leave out any - Anna, and Noah. I think I have them all. All Isaacsons, except Kaitlin and Amanda Bell.

Q: The seed is fruitful.

A: That's right, and I'm grateful

Q: You wanted to tell us about your professional life.

A: Yes. I thought I should mention, because I mentioned the *numerus clausus* and how, in the end, I was promised to be taken to the university because I was a poet at sixteen. My poetry found its way to Kodaly's hands. Bartok and Kodaly were then equal. Now Bartok is supposed to be greater, but we thought of them as absolute the gods of music in Hungary. And he read my poetry and was willing to give me an interview, and promised to talk to the president of the university so that I would be taken, which was amazing. And so, had it been six percent in 1943 I would have been taken, I believe. But that year they changed it. It was no longer six percent; they only took ten Jews out of the whole country. And guess what? They were all men, of course. So I was discriminated against as a woman as well as a Jew, which is not unusual.

So that once I was hoping, even in Auschwitz and later I always planned to go to the Sorbonne to study. That was my dream, to study comparative literature or French literature, and then Hungarian literature back in Hungary. But I got married so soon after, I had a family, I gave up the whole idea. When Mark, the youngest, went to school there was a math program on TV for talented high school students. And I started to take that program and I did the exercises. I passed the exams. I sent them in to

Augusta. And I did well, I did very well. I was one of the few who could solve the more complicated puzzles. So that gave me courage, and Ike said, Why don't you go to Bates? And Dean Lindholm took me. I had that diploma I had hidden, you know, and that helped me because it was all A's in some fancy subjects, lots of languages and philosophy and all that.

So I managed to get in and got even some credits. I graduated in 1965, at age forty. And a year before that, while I was still a junior, I was accepted in a master's program at Bowdoin for summer, and I earned that master's in mathematics. And while I was attending summers, I was teaching math at Lewiston High School and I became chairman of the math department there, and I counseled a lot of kids on the side. I went then, I didn't like the public school, I never went to public school and I found it very difficult to function there. So I decided to go back for my Ph.D., and I got an all-tuition-paid scholarship to the University of New Hampshire in abstract mathematics, at age, what was it, forty three or so. I started that, and I commuted to University of New Hampshire. In the meantime, they asked me at Bates to offer a course in calculus, which I did do. And I had a (*unintelligible word*). I commuted to New Hampshire and I did that, and I got in a car accident. I was very tired. And I gave up the Ph.D. program for the time being, thinking I'll go back to it next year and not teach, because it was too much.

But they invited me to become dean at Bates. The dean of women resigned, or left, and they asked me to be the dean of women, and I thought I'll last a year at best because I had very liberal ideas. But I lasted eight years at Bates. I was dean, first dean of women, and then associate dean of the college. Then ended up, last two years, dean of students responsible for all the student body at Bates. And I did that until the year I started to write the book, until I went back to Hungary with Ilona which was '77.

And now I am no longer affiliated with Bates, but I am affiliated with Bowdoin College, where I had earned my master's, because I am now on the board of governors and I chair the academic affairs committee. For someone who couldn't make the

university, I tell you, it's quite something, it's very special. They've been very, very kind, both colleges, been very, very kind, made a lot of exceptions for me because I don't have quite the credentials. The college psychiatrist at Bates met me and asked about my background when I first started, and he said, My gosh, he says, you haven't come up the usual rungs of the ladder. I said, no, I haven't. He said, Have you ever lived in a dormitory? I said, well, in Auschwitz. But, you know, despite of it all, I did some worthwhile things. And it helps. You can't brood over the past.

Q: What do you think your children think of your life? And how has this affected them?

A: My children have been affected by the Holocaust. As I mentioned, you know, they tried to suppress it to some extent. But they're very wholesome and very successful people. They all went to excellent schools and made very fine careers, and have wonderful marriages and kids. So, thank God, you know, it didn't harm them, it seems. But I know it affected them. They had nightmares. Not Mark, but John and Ilona had nightmares. I think they've all been, well, they've all been extremely supportive of my writing my memoirs. And Ilona and her husband Bob have been tremendously helpful because, as English professors of course, they taught me how to write, in essence, they had so many good ideas and ways to teach me how to edit my own work. So now I can pretty much do it on my own. But I still send it out to Ilona and she goes through it very, even if she changes three words, she will do that. She's very careful. They're wonderful, all the kids are just wonderful, extremely supportive. John tried to sell my book, and Mark and Karen have been very helpful.

I think they take it for granted that I overcame it. You know, they don't realize that it wasn't that easy for me to suppress all this and succeed. I'm just Mummy. As I said, they always thought I had no accent, I just talked like Mummy. So I just perform like Mummy. I can make wonderful dinners, bake and cook. I learned all that after the war. But then, kids take you for granted, don't you think? They do.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to say?

A: I don't think, you were wonderful, that's all I want to say. You've been wonderful interviewers, and I knew that you would be of course, and that's very helpful.

Q: That is wonderful to hear.

A: But I felt at home with you, and it was easy just to chat.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome. That's all. And I hope this will be available to scholars a hundred years from now. That's what it's all about. Thank you.

Revised transcription by Nicci Leamon, June 12, 2001.