

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Alice Cahana
December 4, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Alice Cahana, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on December 4, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Research Institute's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

ALICE LOK CAHANA

December 4, 1990

01:00:43

Q: We're on? Ok. Will you tell me your full name please?

A: I'm Alice Lok Cahana.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Budapest, Hungary. And we lived in Sárvár. That's not far from the Austrian border.

Q: What year were you born?

A: 1929, February 7th.

Q: Would you tell me about your family and your very early childhood in Sárvár?

A: It was a very community-oriented family. My grandfather was a very interesting, self-made industrialist; and he...the community really loved him, and he was elected every year to be the community leader. And it was a very caring family. The rabbi used to come in, lunch time, and...and discuss with him the public affairs; and Grandfather was always available. He was, for me, a very, very beautiful man. He used to tell me stories, and ask me to write stories. So I had...I just really, really loved him. And when Grandmother died in 1939, I felt such a special compassion. I must take somehow care of Grandfather. And always asked him, "Let me do something for you for Shabbat. Let me do...." And he says, "I'm all

dressed." When I looked down and I said, "But I think your shoe needs some shining." And he said, "No, you are too big for that. I, I couldn't permit you." And I said, "Please, Grandfather! I just...let me do just something for you." Grandfather was so very special for me. And a very compassionate, wonderful man who took care of the community. Who took care of the orphans of our city. Anybody who would get married and didn't had family, Grandfather was taking care of them. So it was an open house for the community, in a way.

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Q: What about your parents? What were they like?

A: Father was a very elegant, very kind, wonderful man. Mother had a great big responsibility to take care of the four children, because Father was travelling a lot to business. Actually every week, went up to Budapest. He had an office there. And so Mother had a hard responsibility to raising the children; and she was, I think, very stern, very demanding. We had to know always who we are, and there were a lot of restrictions. And, you know, when you're young and...and separate so tragically as we separated, you really don't have a good picture at all. You don't...you have a very distorted picture, of your mother particularly. Uh, you didn't came to terms about how you was accepted, or...or...so that it's very hard for me to give any kind of picture of Mother. I just remember one of my rebellious natures about her. On Mother's Day, the school was asked always to...children were in the school asked to perform; and I remember the last Mother's Day, I got a poem about a very soft, gentle, loving mother. And I felt, "It's a mockery. This is not my mother, and I will not read this poem!" And I chose a poem about the trees that are cut so suddenly down, and it's a very beautiful poem. Until today I remember, because I didn't told my teacher. I didn't told anybody that I

will change the script, and I will just say this poem about the trees that are cut down so terribly harshly, and what is their sin. Almost like I would speak about our community that was taken away so suddenly. So the trees almost replaced this community.

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But, of course, we did not know anything nearer to it before, what will happen to our community.

But the poem was so interestingly prophetic about this forest that it will be erad...eradicated; and the trees will all gone and the...and the birds will not sing anymore, and what is the sin of this forest? So you can imagine the surprise of my mother, the surprise of my teacher, when I'm coming and talking about the forest. So you... you see, I wasn't clear, really, about the mother. If I could fashion her that time, probably I would made her extremely tender, extremely soft; but later I knew how important it was that she was firm and stern, because Auschwitz was so horrible. And it was almost her sternness, her demands were almost an education in survival, in a way. I don't know how to tell you that. But in very early stage of...of the tragic upheaval in Hungary, a drunk man came into our house and says, "You know, you will all be taken out, and you will be all...all be burning up, and so...." He said some horrible words. And I got so frightened, I pretended that I faint. I just was...it was...just fell down. And Mother--instead of taking care of this man, taking him out from household--she came over first and slapped my face, and said, "In our house, we don't faint." Well, that was good education in Auschwitz, because in Auschwitz we didn't fainted either. And so maybe in that respect, if I...I should apologize to my wonderful mother who really gave me a little survival instincts.

01:08:31

Q: Tell me about your.... Here's a kleenex. Tell me about your brothers and sister.

A: I had an older sister, who was two and a half year older than I was. Her name was (clearing throat) Edith. Edith was brilliant. She was very, very intelligent. Edith wrote poetry, and Edith helped already in the office; and she was very self-sufficient. I was meek and shy and afraid. Edith was brave and not afraid. And she was always my shield, my strength. And Edith already earned a salary in the office, and her first purchase was a bicycle. And she was so proud of her purchase; and the first thing that the Germans, when they came in, took away were the bicycles and the radios. And it was very, very hurting. It was so tangible; because we...we just were not prepared for anything so brutal. That somebody comes into your house and takes out items, and says, "That you cannot have. That's not yours anymore, no matter how precious that is for you." And in the beginning it was really just items, but later it was life, [you know? (ph)] We didn't know it in the beginning. So for the whole tragedy, there wasn't much preparation in Hungary. If there was any voices from the outside, our town was pretty much shielded. Our family was even more protected. Our children...we did not know that anything horrible can happen to us. For me, it felt that our family lived in this town forever. Everybody knew us. Everybody knew who we are. We knew where our place was. So there was an order that I never felt could be broken. Summers we would go to summer vacations, to the Balaton [a resort area and lake in western Hungary, 55 miles southwest of Budapest]; and in...it was an industrious family. It was a productive family. Even if we were wealthy, it wasn't...that was not important. Everybody kind of had to do a task or that task, and be helpful in the household or whatever.

01:11:46

Q: Your brother, too? You had a brother...

A: And we had two...I had two little brothers. So, because Mother had this task, I have decided I will be the the mother of my little brother; the younger one. The older one was too close to me, and I didn't have any jurisdiction. But the little one, I could be the mother; and I adored that little boy. His name...my older brother's name is Öcsi, and the younger was Imi. And Imi was three and a half year old when we went to the (cough)...to Auschwitz, and he was so adorable. I used to pretend that I'd play house, and...and he's really my...my baby. And I will shield him, and I will play mother all the time; and be that mother that I wanted my mother really should be: very tender, very loving, very caring. (Clearing throat) All four of us one day found ourself in a calamity we could not imagine. I was reading a book--Stefan Zweig's book, The...The Restless Heart-- and I thought, "Oh, they say that they will take us to a journey. I will save this book. It's a wonderful romance. I will read it on the journey." Because when you travel, you take a book and you read. Not knowing where they take us, how they take us; and that uh they really will reduce us, slowly, to animals. And everything came in degrees; steps, you know. And you always said, "No. Really, it's not happening. It can't happen in the 20th century." First telling you that you have to leave your house. What does it mean? You are going, and they say the word, a very strange word. It was nothing in Hungary. They're taking you to a ghetto.

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Q: Uh let's go back just a little bit, alright? Uh, because I want to know really how it happened. When did things...before the ghetto, when did things begin to change? What was it like

when the war broke out?

A: Right. But it came gradually. Degrees, you see. And to a smaller town it came slower than to a bigger town, where you had radios all the time. And...and we knew the war. We knew that there were refugees. Uh, poor people always came. Almost every day we had some visitor who sat at our table and told stories what's happening. Sometimes we didn't believe them. Sometimes we felt they're just telling us story to get, maybe, the meal or something else. Then...and now we couldn't have help any more in the house. And we...we got a Jewish girl, who was a refugee from Czechoslovakia; and she used to tell me stories that she had to go flee in the middle of the night, and she couldn't find her boots. And she just found one boot and she went with one boot, crossing the border over into Hungary. I couldn't imagine such a horrible thing; that somebody in the winter who... who walking in one boots to cross the country. But we always felt so very protected; and Grandfather would say, "Look, maybe it happens in Poland, in Czechoslovakia. But Hungary is civilized. We are very good taxpayers. They need us here. It will not happen." And then one day, they say that you pack up twenty-five kilo. What is twenty-five kilo? What do you take? Your pots and pans? Your photographs? Your...food? I remember that day, that Mother send me to somebody, to a neighbor, to get a recipe about uh certain--like toll house cookies, that you just spoke about a few minutes ago--because for the trip that would keep longer. And I thought to myself, "Gee, I don't even like it. Why would we take...? I would never eat that. I mean, it's just so dry." So I went and got the recipe; and so Mother and the help and all, they're baking up these toll house cookies or whatever, they.... It was some some kind of a bread kind of thing (cough) for the journey.

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Prior to that, there was talks about rumors that maybe they're taking us to Madagascar. And so quickly Mother enrolled to a class, baking class. I don't know from where they...some of the women got the information that they ...that they need to be bakers, or maybe they.... I don't know what was the logic. Anyhow, somebody gave a class on baking...a baking class. And the class was held at the rabbi's house. And I used to transcribe the recipes for Mother, for all this fancy, wonderful bakers...bake...baking goods. So those are the recollections that I have, that we knew that something will happen. But really nobody, nobody had imagination; and then (clearing throat) to...to really believe the extent. Nobody. And then because of Grandfather position, they arranged a special ghetto for a couple of people...uh, where the school was, opposite the synagogue. And I had a picture of the synagogue. I will show it a little later. And...and so it was the school-house. So we were in the schoolhouse. Some people in that area...the way they divided the ghetto, they build a wooden wall one end of the street and the other end of the street. (Clearing throat) And it was a (cough) kind of a narrow passage with the synagogue, the rabbi's house, the school and uh two more Jewish homes. And um...the Jewish butcher who...who lived behind the...the synagogue. So this was one ghetto. The other ghetto that they divided was in the brick factory, that the rest of the community went. And we had some permissions to go out twice a week to the market--that was probably ten minutes away--to buy some food in the market.

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But it wasn't any warm water; so when we were there for about a week, I had an idea--I always loved children very much--to gather all the children. There were about ten...ten, twelve children--and take them to the ritual bath; because it wasn't any warm water to wash them for

"Shabbat." But I didn't dare to ask my mother, because she wouldn't let me and we couldn't go out from the ghetto only with permission and she wouldn't let me to speak. I mean, it was not in my position to go and speak to anybody. But the soldier who was watching us was a little bit bored; and I went over to him and said, "Look at the children. Look how dirty they are. What do you think, I will take them out; and I promise you, I promise you I'll bring them back in half an hour. Just wash them in the ritual bath." And to my great amazement, he permitted that. And so, without Mother's knowledge, I assembled the children and took them out; and sure enough, we came back. And Mother didn't found out, so I felt very, very lucky; because you can imagine the risk. And then I had another idea. Why don't I take the children into the garden of the synagogue--that was just secluded--and I and Edith will be the kindergarten teacher, and we'll teach them songs and play with them. And we did that. So Edith was wonderful, because she right away felt this is a very good idea; and also said, "Let us not say it to Mother, because she will not let us. She will not let us do it, because she will say, 'It's too much work,' or, 'Something may happen to the children or to you.' She will not agree. It's...it's our...." So in a way, we started to be very independent and kind of rebellious, and continued to do that even in the ghetto. And...and sure enough, we had the children there. And one day the door opens as we are singing and the children are in a circle, and Mother comes in with a bowl of cherries. She went to the market. They let her out, and she brought the bowl of cherries to us. So she knew all the time what we are doing; and those were the most wonderful cherries I ever had. I never, never had anything so wonderful since then. And so, Mother knew Edith and I were the kindergarten teachers of these children; and it was now official that we took care of the children.

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So one day they say that (cough)...now, that special ...special permission is not granted anymore.

We also going over to the brick factory. And we went over, and...for one night, and we slept on the floor; and the next morning they took us to the railroad station. Marching through our town was like a scene out of the Bible. From ancient time. I could not tell you the humiliation I felt; carrying our baggage, passing our house, looking into our window, seeing the people who occupied our house looking at us, and nobody stopping. They marched us to the railroad. Nobody says, "Come on. You cannot do it." On a June day, 1944, 20th century men cannot be just taken from their homes, from their town, from their house, from their belonging, marched into a cattle train, seventy people. (Cough) Before they marched us all in, they took the men to a labor camp. So when Father found out that they're taking the men to a labor camp, one morning he got up and said hastily goodbye to us; and said, "Just don't forget who you are," and, "Escape." Those are the two words I remember. And he went up to Budapest; and somehow, because he was so sure and so very elegant, nobody stopped him. And he went, like always he would go to his office; and here he got in Budapest the Raoul Wallenberg papers. And my father did not go to Auschwitz;

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but we, the family, (clearing throat) were in the cattle train in the hottest day with one sanitary bucket for seventy people--seventy to seventy-five people. Our bundled (cough) luggage piled on top of each other; realizing that we have not even standing room, or very little. I tried to be close to the window, and I remember I was standing all the time; because it was almost just maybe room for squatting down where you were standing. But really no sitting

place; and Edith next to me. At the border from Hungary to Czechoslovakia, they opened the cattle train. And I asked the soldier if he would let us go to the bathroom. He said, "There's no bathroom here, but you can go behind the train. I remember that it was (clearing throat) very funny feeling to be moment free, and look at the sky; but we still did not know where are we going. And Edith keep telling me, "Maybe we just...they will just take us to work. And maybe very soon that we will come back, and...you know. I mean, it will not be so bad." They took us day and night. And at one place, the train suddenly stopped; at [Vecsés (ph)], and we suddenly understood. And I could see through the blinds that some people--three people--jumped down from the train. And, of course, the SS right away after them; and I think they caught two of them with the...and shot them right away. So even if the rest of the train could not see--the cattle train inside--I saw all what happened, because I was so...you couldn't move away from your position. Wherever you was positioned, you was like plastered; and it was a little plank there open, and I could see through and also a little bit through the window. And I saw how they dragged this man that they caught with their dog. So I witnessed first time that savage brutality that really was the lead in to Auschwitz. And when the train stopped again, we arrived.

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This horrible place. Everybody in strange uniforms. I told Edith, "It looks that they took us to the wrong place. Somehow, somebody will come and apologize. Somebody will say it's totally wrong. You don't belong here. This looks like an insane asylum. People are shaved heads and striped clothes." So since we couldn't comb our hair and Mother was so very "Pedant" [German word meaning a person who is meticulous or precise], Mother said, "Put a handkerchief over your head, you know, and come down from the...from the cattle train."

And I had my little brother, who couldn't find his shoe. And I was trying to tell him that he has to be more orderly. A three and a half year old must find his shoe. There was no time to look for anything. Just had to go down, line up in five. And fast, and rapid. And anybody who couldn't go was just hit by the stick. It was like madness. I (cough) lined up; and a tall German soldier came to me and started to, you know, look a minute and then just looked at me and said, "Haben Sie Kinder?" "Do you have children?" I said, "No, I'm barely fifteen!" And smiling and kind of stretching out and being very, um..."I look so grown-up now. Now I really can do what I want to do." Feeling...you know, that feeling of self confidence. And with that motion, with that absolute movement, pointed one direction. And Mother and my little brother to the other direction. And then they asked again: "Children step aside. Children under fifteen step aside." So Edith said, "Step aside. Step aside. They will give you better food. I will work, and you don't have to work. Just step aside." I said, "No, I want to be with you. Let's just stay together." Edith said, "No, just step aside." And I stepped aside. (Cough) Seconds...everything, seconds. It was like...like in a mirage because first your eye was not even used to the light after this darkness in the cattle train; and then this sunlight...this strong sunlight and the shouting. So you wasn't really pulled together, and you couldn't concentrate and you couldn't understand the order. And I stepped aside, realizing in a few minutes that I don't see Mother. I don't see my brothers. I don't see Edith. I'm totally alone. And I am marching, marching, marching with the people. And they took me to C Lager and put me in a barrack after they took away my clothes, shaved my hair and had a shower and gave me some kind of other clothes that came from another place at another time.

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(Cough) And I was in the C Lager in Block 12. Realizing that I'm totally alone. I try to ask the Kapo--the one who was in charge of us-- "Where's my mother, and where's my sister?" And she slapped me, and said, "Those words are not used here. Don't dare to ever mention!" Introduction to Auschwitz. But the first day, I tried to orient myself. I knew I must find Edith. I must find Edith, no matter what. I tried to ask people, and they say to me, "We don't know. You cannot go close to the electric fence, because you will be sucked in and you will be electrocuted. You cannot go out from the barrack; only when they tell you. The orders are very strict. They beat you, if you don't comply. So forget about it. You cannot go nowhere. We are in." I found myself in a block with a thousand people, talking all kind of languages. We were given a place--six people slept on a plank of wood, on top of us another layer. And if one of us had to turn, all the others had to turn; because it was so narrow. One cover, no pillow, no mattress. And they gave us a piece of bread. And I, right away...I...I was very bad with food. Also, I think this was one of my quarrels with Mother, because she always worried that I'm too skinny, too...too tall, too skinny--that I don't eat well. So I always refused eating. And I...I said, "I will not eat this terrible food here. I just will not." They gave me a piece of margarine, and I gave it away. "I'm not eating this food, and I'm not hungry anyhow." So, I didn't ate the first day.

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But the most important thing was for me to find out where is Edith; to find out what is...what's the system here. How... who would know? So I went all around, and tried to know what could I find out. Some girl told me that she knows that another group of people were brought the same time into the B Lager--was exactly opposite the C Lager, divided by a gate. Two gates, actually; the gate of the C Lager, and the gate of the B Lager. And she knows that some

Hungarian girls were brought that day when I arrived to the place. It took me a couple of days to orient; and I gave away my...my bread and my...my margarine again (cough) for somebody to give me a piece of paper, and a pencil to write. And I got a tiny piece of paper; and I saw what happens early, early in the morning before the whistle. That whistle was sounded for us to get out to be counted. (Cough) They took the food over to the B Lager. A couple of girls were chosen out--a couple of people from other blocks--to go and help the...the cans to be taken over to the other camp. So I knew if I wake up early in the morning, I may have a chance to talk to one of these people who are selected who go over there; and maybe I can send a message over to the other camp. Well, only...we were young--fourteen year could think, or fifteen year old could think so simplistically that a piece of paper will reach my sister. And it was such a tiny paper rolled up. The only thing was on it: "I'm in C Lager, Block 12. Come." And wrote on her name, on the other side: "Edith Lok." So one morning, a sympathetic woman was taking over the can of food. Sympathetic woman was, because there wasn't too much kindness in Auschwitz. The rules were so strict. People were so harassed. Nobody smiled. Nobody made...did favors, so nobody could do...jeopardize their own life for somebody else's very easily. But some...somebody I asked, "Would you take over this for my sister, this piece of paper?" And that somebody said, "Yes." And that piece of paper went over to the B Lager. After that I would skim the walls. And I had to be very careful to come out from the block before the whistle blew, because there were guards in two ends of the block. You couldn't go out from the blocks whenever you wanted, not even to the bathroom. So you had to...because I was so skinny, I just could go close to the wall. And, of course, it was not permitted to wander around the...the yards of Auschwitz. Nobody could go out. The searchlight was on. You just couldn't do these things, except very special privileged people, maybe. But I was...I figured out how to go by the wall where the light would not shine. And so I went to the people who took the can over

to the B Lager. And one day...I did it for three days, and one day a piece of paper came back to me. And written on it: "I am coming. Edith."

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So miracle happened even in Auschwitz; because three days later, Edith was one of those who brought the food over. What happened that that woman who took over found a relative there. She wanted to stay in the B Lager, and came (cough) and exchanged with Edith the place. And had to be so swiftly done, so risky; and Edith came and brought over the can of food, or brought back the empty can of food--the empty can (cough) that went over before with the food. And so Edith and I were reunited in Auschwitz. It was such a miracle. I just knew that I never want to be without her ever, ever. And we cling to each other; but it was very risky because it was started to be selections. And the man who selected me into life, I found out later, was Mengele; because he came often to select. Sometimes he looked at people with small hands. Sometimes he looked for blue-eyed. Sometimes he looked children who were tall. Sometimes children who were short. It was always an upheaval when Mengele came. He was so elegant, and he looked so good; and he would...he would just somehow with his sight terrorize the people and put fear in them. And we had to run naked in front of him, and he would and he would select ..."life"..."death"... (snapping fingers)..."life"..."death." He just with his hand motioned. One day Edith said, "You know, I don't feel good anymore. I don't feel good." And our little friend, Ibi got very delirious from the same bad plank bed; was the plank board that we shared. And Ibi started to talk words I couldn't understand, and was...she had terrible high fever. And anybody who was sick or had any kind of rash or something was selected in the morning out. Sometimes they took them to the infirmary. Sometimes they took them somewhere else. This morning they took Ibi.

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And then the next morning, Edith says, "I...I feel sick. You must let me go. I must go into the infirmary." And I begged her, "Edith, you can't! They will take you!" But somehow they saw her, that she was sick. She couldn't stand up for the counting. And they took her to the infirmary; but by now I was veteran. I knew when is the best time to go away from group, when I can go in and see her. So every morning I would go in to Edith and see her there. See Ibi, my friend, totally in delirium; and see Edith getting higher and higher fever every... every day. (Sniffing) I went to the woman at the gate, and begged her to let me in; and if I would give away my bread she let me in. And she asked me some favors to do. Not so kindly, of course. At least, they were favors. She said, "First take all the dead out. Carry the dead out. Then you can go in." I never saw a dead person before, and now I had to carry the dead people out first in order to see Edith. And I told her...I said, "I'm not afraid. They were just like me yesterday. I'm not afraid." So I carried them. Sometimes I had to carry out the... the bedpans, the...the--they were not bedpans that...they were buckets (cough), filled buckets that spilled over as you walked (cough)--in order to go in to Edith. But there were so few who could get into the infirmary that when they saw me coming, people from all the beds pulled at me. "What's happening outside? Tell what's happening!" And I knew that I must tell them stories. I must tell them that the war is almost over, that they just should hold out, that I just heard gun shot...shootings in the middle of the night. Nothing will happen, and they just...just be brave ...hold out, because the war will be soon over. We are going home soon. So those were my stories every morning, before I could see Edith. And one

morning when she wasn't any more in that high fever, I said, "Now when I'm taking the dead, you crawl with me. You come after me, because they're taking away. Ibi is already not here. You must come with me out of here." And that's what happened.

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Edith came out. And here we...we were (cough) together again. Somehow Edith got better, but very weak. And then there were selections again and again and again. One day they said to us, "You will get winter clothes. Go. March up." They selected a bunch of children. This time, the Blockältester selected the children. And she kind of told us stories; because, of course, the SS wouldn't tell where you are going. But she said, "You will get warm clothes. Don't be afraid. Just go. Just go. Warm clothes." And I said to Edith, "Don't worry. I will come back and bring you some warm clothes. I will just snatch another one extra for you." (Cough) They took us to a shower. (Cough) They said it will be a disinfection (cough) first; but instead of a shower or disinfection, it was a different place. There was a window, and was written outside: "Bathhouse." They took away our clothes. They asked us to put our shoes together, tie our shoe laces together, and put our clothes down; and we will get it back after that they disinfected. But it turned out that the shower did not work, that it was really the gas. And the tragic...(pause)...the realization came only after; when we came back, and this Blockältester couldn't believe that we are alive. And she looked at us and she started to scream, "How could it happen? Why are you back? You're not supposed to be back." I think that was the only time in Auschwitz that the gas did not work.

01:49:10

Q: Can you tell us what it was like inside the gas chamber? Can you describe what you were in, and

a little bit about what you felt?

A: Of course we didn't know, you see; because they told us that it's a shower, that we go for disinfection, that we'll get warm clothes. I checked out this story very carefully later. In America, I met two of my friends who survived from the same hometown; and I told them my story about the gas chamber. And one of them told, "I was there, too!" So, I know only that it was dark, that the Germans were terribly nervous, that when we came out they were very angry. They threw some clothes, not our own clothes, back to us. Nothing was, of course, disinfected or warm or anything. We were...we couldn't understand the chaos, their anger, their bewilderment, their shouting--"That never happened before!"--and marching us angrily back to the barrack.

01:51:02

But very soon after, we knew where we were. The fabric of Auschwitz started to slowly break down. The order. The closer the Allies got, more chaos came about. The food was not distributed anymore in time. The...the nervousness of the...the SS was just very felt. I remember Irma Grese. Irma Grese was the SS--the supervisor, the most beautiful woman, like a statue--who would come and count us. She was a pair with Mengele. When the two of them appeared, it was terror and fear. It was... always meant death. And Irma Grese would...her blond hair, beautifully coiffeured, and her beautiful shirt--blue shirt, starched and clean and crisp--and her...and the way she walked, made us even more feel that we are less than animals. We are not human beings anymore. We don't have individuality. We don't have...we don't have nothing left. And the chaos was bigger and bigger. Mengele didn't come anymore, and Irma Grese didn't come, and...came anymore. And they say that

selections...and the selections went on and on, and fast. And one night, (sniffle... cough) we were selected. It...I told Edith, "Wherever you will be selected, I will go. I will go." I am...I was younger, and I can't...I could..."I somehow will go after, don't worry." And we found somewhere...somebody gave us a little red bead, tiny red bead. We used to put on our cheeks to look a little healthier; and the red bead went around in that...you know, in that circle, so everybody used it a little bit. I don't know how much it helped. We didn't have a mirror. We didn't hardly look. But anyhow, the selection was very swift and very fast. It was an SS woman selecting. And I saw that Edith was selected to one place. And we were so emaciated, so skinny by then. And I had an idea. I said to the German woman, I came in front of her, "It's my birthday today." And she put her hand one way, and then shifted to the other direction. And it was like (snapping fingers)... like a moment; and I was motioned toward Edith. And that selection was a very good selection, because they took us to Guben [a subcamp of Groß Rosen, located in Prussia (Brandenburg Province)]. We traveled through the night, and arrived to in [Darseose (ph); Groß Gastrose?] city, Guben, where we would work in a munition factory.

01:55:01

Q: Let us pause here. This is a good place to change tapes. Let's do it. OK.

TAPE #2

02:00:24

Q: OK.

A: Several months.

Q: You're in...you're in Guben?

A: In Guben.

Q: Tell us about Guben. What was it like?

A: It was a smaller camp. It was a work camp. We had to go early in the morning to work in an ammunition factory. We worked until late at night. We came back. We got some food, and could go to...to the barrack. Uh...I was again with children. We were again together with children; and the barracks were much smaller. It was a...it was a better place. Anything...you can compare nothing to Auschwitz. It looked to me that it's a safer place, even if we had to work very hard. And it was very difficult with the big machines, but it wasn't so harsh. Except the weather that you had to march to that factory. But one day close to Christmas times, the SS came in and told us that we have to decorate the barrack for Christmas. And anyone who will decorate it the best, any barrack who...who will look the best, will get a prize. So we were children and we wanted the prize so much; but we looked around. There was no paper, no pencil. Nothing to decorate with. I told Edith, "I have a

great idea. I know how we decorate the barrack. We will choreograph ourselves as candelabra; and when the SS comes in to...to count us, or to see the barrack, we will be the candelabra and we will be the art." So Edith said, "Well, it's not the best idea. But I think... We...we will talk to others also." So we talked to all the others. And we had one broom to clean out that place; and I took the broom and I gave everybody a piece of the broom to hold up. And we choreographed ourselves as a living candelabra. We were the recipient of the award for the decorated barrack in Guben. And guess what was the reward: a tiny little can of snails. But Edith was so intelligent and so smart; and she said, "You know, this is so wonderful; because only the most enlightened people eat this kind of very elegant food. I mean, you wouldn't know what this is, of course, but this is just a delicacy. I tell you what. We will not eat it now, but we will eat it on your birthday. When you have in February your birthday, we will open the can. The magic can."

02:03:49

In February,¹ we were already on the death march. The death march was going from village to village in the middle of the winter in Germany, without underwear, without socks, without coat; just a blanket what we had to wrap around us. Somebody maybe had a coat, but a very few. And this is how they...we had to march from village to village. At night, whenever the cattles....the cattles were taken out from the...from the barn, we were housed there. And next morning and we would have to march. Once we arrived to a place. It was not covered with snow. It was a field, and I remember they let us for a minute sit down. And the grass were eaten up in a matter of seconds. We were that hungry, that the ...that little grass that was

¹ Probably February 1945.

under the snow were taken up and eaten up by all of us. This is how we marched the countryside. Those who couldn't march were simply shot. And because now I became already the strongest from the two of us, I had always stories to tell for Edith, to...to give her courage going; but she was really very emaciated. And one morning she said, "Look, my feet are frozen. I can't walk anymore. I just cannot walk anymore. I can't bear it." So I told her, "Well, we will just run away." And so she was laughing with the talking. "Don't you see the dogs? Don't you see the...the guns? Don't you see what happens to those people who just don't walk? We run away! Where do you want to run?" I said, "You will see. We run away. Just come, just let's go...until tonight." And that night we were housed in a barn, into a hay.... How do you call it where they keep the hay for the winter? And I had an idea: "This is the place. This is where we have to run away. This is where we will...." So I went over to an other friend, and asked if she would want to run away with us. I didn't talk loud because it was very dangerous. If I would...if anybody would find out that we planned something, it would give us out; because easily the group could be punished if something...somebody just tried to do anything out of the ordinary. Every morning that was told us. If we try anything that it's not permitted, a person will be shot.

02:07:32

So it was very risky to do anything. But the friend agreed, and I told Edith, "Now let's dig a hole, and let's go down to the bottom of the hay." It was about three meters. It was a very high hay. "And we just tell in the morning that we feel asleep...we fell into this hole. If they find us, we'll say we didn't heard anything. We just down into the hay." It had to be done very secretly. And we just parted the hay as fast as we could all together. First we dig that hole into the hay, the bottom of the hay; and three meters above us were the rest of them were

sleeping. And we went close to the plank, and the planks were giving some air. They were not totally sealed. You could see also through. They couldn't see in, but you could see out; and it was tiny little um room between...between the wooden planks, you know, that you could get some air in and also look out. And we had a little bread. I had a little bread in my... in my clothes, and Edith had a bread and Ibi had some bread, that we somehow managed to save. And we said, "We...we will just pretend that we fell asleep." In the morning...of course, we didn't slept all night. In the morning, we hear them whistling, and whistling, and whistling again. "There are three missing!" And we see that they come back, send the dogs back, you know, to sniff; but of course the dogs had no idea what they are sniffing. We all smell the same. We all were the same. We had no identity anymore. We had no.... And after probably an hour and a half delay and search and whistle and counting, the group went away. They marched away. There is no way to explain what it is--freedom--at that moment, that you don't hear the voices anymore, that you know that they went away, and now you are somehow...your plot worked! You are free.

02:10:11

So Edith says, "Now we will tell Bible stories. We will tell all the stories that we remember from the Bible where miracles happened. Don't you remember the Red Sea parting? It happened to the Jews, you know. Could it happen to three children? It was a miracle." Slowly, slowly we said the "Shabbat" songs, and the shma... everything that came to our mind to make the time pass; and we knew we need time here. We need time to stay there. Suddenly, we hear the door opening and a German comes in and raking the hay. But we were so quiet and so under that hay, that even if I could feel the boots on...on my head, he couldn't feel us. See, now we were not breathing even. And after a while, went away and closed that barn to the

narrowest--I mean only just for air to come. I can't tell you how narrow it was. I mean, I'm trying to ...to show it now with my hand, probably. And so night comes, and we are singing our songs for ourselves; and we...now that another day passed, and...and the group is further away, and maybe we are...we are safe. And then we decide--it was Thursday--"Let's wait until Shabbat; Shabbat...after the three stars, we will come out." By then the group is far away; and then we will just try our luck. So now this little bread had to...had to somehow be enough. And so we doled out morsels, and we told stories for ourself: what was the "Shabbat" dinner like at home? What are we eating now? Is now a wonderful soup, and now this wonderful chicken dinner Mother would cook; and I would remind Edith how terrible a child I was, that I didn't wanted to eat. I never liked the food. How I will apologize to Mother when I come home! And we will not tell her how we suffered. We will never let her know what happened in Auschwitz, never let her know what happened on this road. She will never know it. Just one more time together.

02:13:45

So Saturday night, we waited 'til the stars came out and we said the Shma three times. And we went to the door, but the door was so narrow that barely we could fit through. We couldn't go front. We could only go sideways to come out from this door, from this little opening. It was already dark outside. We saw from the distance um...a hut. And there was light in the hut. And we knocked on the door; and it was a German heavy-set, tall man sitting in front of a desk, with his pipe on the table and a dog next to him. And Edith, who spoke very beautiful German, said to him, "Please, don't send us away. We don't need food. We already know how to live without food, so you don't have to worry about our food. Just give us any work. Let us do anything. The only thing we want is to meet our parents again. We are

three children. We didn't do anything wrong. We fell asleep. We didn't hear the group going. Let us stay here." The man looked at us, and at her; then he looked at his dog, and said to the dog, "Get those damn Jews. Get those Verfluchtener Juden." We turned around, with our head down, marching out through this open yard. Where are we going? What are we doing now? (sniffing) Edith says, "I see a hand in the dark. Do you see a hand in the dark? Somebody motioning from the...from the barn." We didn't know it is a barn, but on the other end of the yard. It was quite dark, so we couldn't see really; just a silhouette and a hand. And I said, "Yes, I'm seeing it. Let's hurry, and let us go there." And we...it was a barn,

02:16:18

and soon we understood that there are some Italian soldiers there who are war refugees. And they spoke broken German, and we spoke broken German; and we told them that we fell asleep. We didn't know that the group left, and please help us. All we want is to meet our parents. And they said just to stay here, just... next to the cows. Boy how we envied the cows! How wonderful existence they had, compared to ours. So suddenly some warm water arrives, bring us some drink, and then wash our hand and face. And then we realized that from the hay, as we were digging, we were totally covered with black um dust that accumulated in that hay. And that we are not recognizable, even as we looked. Normally we were not recognizable, so even now more. And somehow one of them spoke a little better German, and say to us that in a little while somebody will come and take us to their barrack, and they will have food for us. In little while, somebody came and took us. And you cannot imagine--no way I will have the language, I will not have the ability to paint it or say it in any other way--what it feels when you look up at the sky and you're free, you see the stars shining and

you are...you feel free. I keep looking back if the SS is not following me. Nobody followed us. This Italian worker went in the front, and we just went after him until we reached his...the little barrack. It turned out there were 13 Italians. And the table was set...three, three bowls, three spoons. Somebody took out the guitar and started to play music, and we were stunned. We couldn't believe that this kind of magic can ever happen, not to three children.

02:20:36

I watched their faces if they are not disgusted, the way we looked; because we had sores on our legs.

We had no coverage. We had no stocking, and the the frost and the sore and the dust and the filth. But they are singing. They play the guitar. They told us to eat, warm food, and they talked very rapidly in Italian. We didn't understand. But later, the one who spoke a little German said, "Don't worry. Tomorrow morning when we go to work, we will do a place for you in the forest. We'll take you there and hide you. So after you eat, just go back to the...to the barn. And tomorrow morning you come here again for food, and then just wait here 'til we'll pick you up for the forest." You can imagine that we didn't sleep all night. (Sigh) The miracle could happen for three children. And the morning came, and they took us back to their place and they hastily said goodbye, and said, "Don't worry. We'll come. We will have the place for you ready by noon. Just stay here." And sat there quietly. Then the door opens, and an old SS man comes in and says, "Follow me. (Clearing throat.) Follow me, you Verfluchtener Juden. You damned Jews." And the three children and the SS--who looked like somebody's grandfather--walked the road, trying to catch up with the group. Before we...(sniffing) before we reached the other village, somehow our silence or something penetrated to him; because he didn't go with us to the end of the village. He said,

"I go this far. Now you go by yourself. You know, there are dogs on the road. You can't escape because you're marked. You have a red line on your backs of your clothes, so everybody knows who you are. You're shaved. You don't have food. So don't try anything. Just go to the police station, what is the fifth house after this street or something. And just report. They're waiting for you." So Edith says, "Let's try one more time," when he left. We went into an open yard. (Clearing throat) And there is...there is a woman coming out, and we said...asked her, "Could we have a little water? We are three children, fall asleep and didn't saw the group." And she started to scream at us at the top of her lung, "You Verfluchtener Juden! Get out from here! I don't want...." You know, and said all kind of obscenities. "Schwein!" "Scheiss!" Anything that came to her mind. And next to her was a little boy. The little boy bent down. There was a dish for the cat with some milk in it. And the little boy reached down, and wanted to give us the dish of the cat. And all three of us looked at him; and we turned our head, somehow motioning, "No. We are still not animals. We don't take that." And we turned away, and we went to the police station. They put us into a jail. It was...in the police station was where the police slept, and there was the jail. Says, "Tomorrow morning, early in the morning, I get my horse and buggy and we are taking you after the group. And they will kill you there, (sniffling) because you tried to escape." And we begged him, "No. We just fall asleep, you know. And we are just three children." But nothing helped.

02:24:18

In the morning, he got his horse and buggy (clearing throat) and he took us to the railroad station of another village, where the group was. I should enter cattle train. I mean, there was a big commotion. The SS tried very harshly to (clearing throat) push everybody into a cattle train.

And the SS woman stopped us, and this SS man reported that they found us in this yard and that we say that we fell asleep. And so Edith went to her and apologized that we fell asleep and we didn't know that the group left; and we didn't heard any commotion, and we were so tired, and we didn't meant anything, and please let us just be alive. And she says, "No. I will finish you up in front of all of them. Let us everybody go up on the cattle train, and we'll finish...finish with you." And Edith was so brave and such courage; and she said, "But let us just say goodbye to our cousins who didn't know what happened to us. Could we just please go up in the cattle train and say goodbye? We come back in a minute." And the woman permitted, like last...last request. And so we went up on the cattle train. And, you see, immediately we went to the end of the cattle train. The people were on top of each other al...almost. And somehow, nobody noticed us and didn't know who we are. We were not recognizable. And, of course, we didn't had our cousin there. We didn't know anybody. (Sniffling) And we kind of squatted down in a corner; and we hear the SS whis...whistling, and coming up and looking. But, you know, she couldn't find us; because we didn't have identity anymore. We looked like bewildered animal, all of us. And she...we saw that, and the train pulled out. And (clearing throat) several days later we arrived to Bergen-Belsen. And Bergen-Belsen was hell on earth. Nothing ever in literature could compare to anything what Bergen-Belsen was.

02:27:06

When we arrived, the dead were not carried away anymore. You stepped over them. You fell over them, if you couldn't walk. There were agonizing people, begging for water. They were felling...falling into planks that they were not pulled together in the barracks. They were crying. They were begging. It was...it was hell. It was hell. Day and night. You couldn't

escape the crying. You couldn't had escaped the praying. You couldn't escape the mercy, that...it was a chant. The chant of the dead. It was hell. At night, we had a Kapo who...who was insane. Who was a beautiful woman who looked like a sculpture, a goddess. Her blond hair was very short but kind of curly. Her blue eyes. And she would come out in the middle of the night and [help this (ph)]. And she would step on the people, because she couldn't sleep from the chanting. And the chant...she went insane. She went totally insane, and she would just hit whomever she could hit to silence the people. And that repeated every night. And one night she was stepping on my hand; and I couldn't move because if she would hear a sound, I would be the target. So she was insane. So there's no way to re-enact Auschwitz. Nobody should ever.... But there's no way to tell anything about Bergen-Belsen. So when liberation came, we were already dazed. We were...I say to Edith, "What is it means: liberation? I don't understand that word. What's liberation? What does it mean?" She said, "Free. Repeat it: 'free.' We are free." So I told her, "But then I have to go and find us clean clothes. We are full with lice. We are full with with this vermin all around our bodies. I will go and find you clothes. Stay here. I will bring you something."

02:30:09

And I wandered out from the camp; and I wandered, and I could barely walk. It was...I...I just had to sit down, and had...we were so emaciated and there was incredible chaos. And they gave us some food. The...the...the...the Allies. They gave us some canned hash. And I told Edith, "Eat my portion. You need the strength." And Edith ate. I don't know how much. She couldn't eat much too either. But she became violently, violently ill. So my attempt to find a place...to find clothes (sniffing) was not so very successful. But I found a storage place where the German uniforms were; and I...I found a lot of boots. So I tried to put a pair of

boots on my feet. And I couldn't walk. It just was too heavy. And then I tried to carry a pair of boots, and I couldn't do both. I couldn't balance. So I took off my boots, went back to these wooden shoes that I had; and I tried to carry the boots for Edith. And immediately somebody snatched away the boots. So they never...I could never take it to Edith. (Sniffling) But Edith got violently ill, and she begged me to take her to a hospital. And I said, "I can't. I can't. We will be again apart. We will be again divided. I can't. I don't dare to. I don't." And I begged her maybe, maybe tomorrow. Maybe some help will come." But she...she really insisted. So I dragged her. And before there, I tried to find some potato; because somebody told me if I cook her some potato, the potato peel will stop her diarrhea. So I tried to do that, but of course nothing helped. And then I dragged her to an infirmary, and I tried to pretend that I am sick, too; and tried to help there to take away the bed pans. And very soon an English soldier came and says, "You must leave the infirmary. It's only for the very ill. You can't be here." I tried...I didn't know English, so I tried somehow in German to tell her, tell him, "Please let me stay with my sister. Please don't take me away." He asked me what barrack I am; and I told the number of the barrack. And he put me on a...on a jeep, took...took me away. So next morning I came back.

02:33:39

And you must understand that we couldn't walk anymore. I mean, to going back was like you... you're climbed the biggest mountain. I mean, I went back and just then Edith was put into an ambulance. And I said to her, "I'm going with you wherever they take you. I don't leave you now." And we spoke a few words; and English soldier recognized me, the same one who took me back, says, "Here you are again!" Took me down, and I pretended that I faint that he should take me with Edith. I fell down on the floor; and he went in and he got me a little

something to drink, some kind of liquid. And...and revived me so to speak, and put me back on the jeep. And took me back again to the barrack. And I never saw Edith again. Three days later, they evacuated all Bergen-Belsen; and I went to place. And I could by then barely walk; and I remember that I crawled up the second floor, because they said, "There is an office there where they have the dead and the...and the live list." And person there sitting said, "She's not on the Dead List, and she's not on the Live List." All I remember that, that I collapsed after that. And they took me to a hospital, and I didn't wanted to eat or drink anything. And one girl from the other room came and said, "You must, because otherwise you will never find your sister. You must drink. You must eat." And a Belgian doctor came the next day, and in front of my bed. And he said, "She's still young." And they selected me to go to Sweden; and I was among the children they transferred who went to Sweden. When I hear that they want to take me away, I didn't wanted to go; because I wanted to find Edith. But this wonderful girl who tried to feed me said, "You will find her, because probably they took her to Sweden, too. You will find her in Sweden. Just go."

02:36:16

And, of course, when I arrived to Sweden--wherever I went for years after, for thirty years after it, I still looked for Edith. I never found Edith. Never found Edith. So this is my story of...of the two of us. (Sigh) I made the painting...that is a photograph of a woman who had a tee shirt, on one of the reunions, that said, "Have you seen my sister?" And I got that photograph, and I incorporated into that painting, and.... Just like she, (sigh) I'm still looking. (Pause - Sigh)

Q: I'm sorry. Take your time. That's OK.

A: I don't think I can do it anymore.

02:38:11

Q: Can you tell us about living in Sweden? No? Do you need to stop for a little while? OK. Let's stop tape. We'll just breathe for a minute.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. You're in Sweden. Do you want to tell us what happened there?

02:38:40

A: I was in Sweden. And (cough) one day the chief doctor came to my bed, and said, "If I will bring you the best news of your life, will you promise me you will be alright?" I was so weak, he didn't wanted to tell me any kind of news. And I promised him. And says, "I have a telegram from Tangier, where your relatives lived, that your father is alive in Hungary." I was so weak that he was..he came by himself; because he was so worried that the good news may just finish me up. But it was such an incredible news, because, you know, that it had to be shared with all the girls in the hospital. With...with everyone, because so few of...of us had anybody who came back who was alive. So in a minute the whole floor knew that my father is alive; and I ran around, you know. I got up from the bed, and I was...I felt like I'm healthy. I...I can walk. And the doctor said, "Just take it easy. Don't...don't...don't dance.

Don't run around. Don't...." It...it was just unbelievable that somebody from the family is alive. It was such an incredible mixed feeling, because actually the death--you didn't accept it totally. You always hoped that Mother is alive. You always hoped that (cough) you will find your sister. You always hoped that...that somehow something about your brother. I mean, forever played games with your brain. But when something so concrete as a telegram came.... So I started to get first a letter from Tangier...from the relative, Mrs. [Renée] Reichman. And...and then later, from my father.

02:41:05

And so Father wrote that he would like I should come back to Hungary as soon as the doctor lets me go. And I could barely wait to...to...for that moment. The Swedish people were incredible. They were so gentle and good to us. I felt like I...I woke up in...in heaven. After this brutality, after...after this horror, after this inhumanity, to come to a civilized country, that three hundred years didn't have any war. Who...who.... Volunteers come into the hospital. They bring us a magazine, and we should show them from the magazine-- because we couldn't speak Swedish--what food we want to eat. I mean, after Bergen-Belsen, after Auschwitz, what incredible people! It was like angels gliding. They would organize concerts. I would hear music. They didn't know how to make our lives whole again. Such magical, wonderful people. This family connected--the family that sent the telegram connected also us to a family in London, who had a representative in Sweden who wasn't Jewish. And this representative got a telegram that there is a, that there is a...this little girl here in one of the hospitals; and please look him up, it's part of the family. And this wonderful Swede, instead of sending his secretary or sending a letter, he got in his car and he went to the hospital. But you know, we were so sick that...that we were taken from one city

to the other. They couldn't figure out; we had every illness there was. So they always sorted out us--children with tuberculosis, people with tuberculosis went to one place. So when he arrived to this hospital, I was already in another hospital; and he kind of repeated two, three times. When he caught up with me, he said, "You know, ..." Um, the nurse came in and said that there's somebody from my family here. I said, "I don't have family. I have nobody." She said, "No, you have to come out. You...you.... Somebody is waiting for you outside." And I was so...still so frightened; to be taken out from the group meant total insecurity, you know. You are sick...only if you are in a group, if you are nobody.... And so anyhow, the nurse coaxed me out; and she said, "This is this gentleman, and he says he's related to you." And he explained that that he's not related, but he's the representative of my relatives from London. I guess that nurse and that...that the uncle in London asked this gentleman to look after me. And this gentleman--who was so humane, so incredible, magnificent, wasn't a Jewish man--instead of sending letters or trying through the telephone, he went and and he...he found me. And he said, "Look, I have a daughter just like you, your age. You come to my house and get to know her." And I said, "No, I'm still sick. The doctor won't let me go." And he says, "Just come in then for a weekend. Get to know Mary. She's a very good girl." And I thanked him very much; but I didn't wanted to go. And it took me a little while, after that he left, to see what a gentle, wonderful man this was, who came and with such gentleness tried to coax me back to life. And... and then when the doctor permitted, and when I was a certain weight and...and I could really go, the doctor permitted and I visited them. And I met Mary. And it was so magical this summer, because I was in London and I met Mary again and we recalled this unbelievable time. How his [her] father brought me back and reconnected me with everything that was humane in the most gentle, most wonderful fashion. And I told Mary the story of the hat...

02:46:20

Q: Look at me if you can.

A: I met...I was several times in Stockholm after that, and this wonderful Mr. [Gustaf] Häggberg-- Häggberg was his name--would take me to the opera, would take me to the most beautiful restaurant. Would show me the word "freedom," how civilized man behaved, show me how to be without prejudiced. And I made a vow: "If I ever grow up, I will be like Mr. Häggberg. I will not hate. I will not be prejudiced. I will learn to love the world again, and all people." And one day after a correspondence with my father, we decided that I should come back to Hungary. And I came to Stockholm to say goodbye to Mr. Häggberg. And Mr. Häggberg looks at me and says, "Alice, do you have a hat?" You know, I don't have a country. I don't have a name. I am nobody. I...my hair barely grows up. I have one dress. "A hat? No, I don't have a hat." He said, "Alice, you cannot travel through Europe without a hat! You have to have a hat. You are a young lady now." And he rings the bell and rings Vera, the secretary; comes in and says, "Vera, you must go right now and buy a hat for Alice. She cannot travel through Europe without a hat!" And so we went into a place, the first place, the first little "chapeau" that came--a brown little "chapeau" that came to my hand--I put it on and...and bashfully said, "That's perfect. Thank you." And that little hat was my dignity. He gave back my dignity. And I went back to Hungary and I met my father. And was an incredible reunion on the train.

02:48:42

And very soon he told me that he really is getting married the next week. And it was for me a very

difficult...difficult moment, to realize that Mother is really not coming back, that Father's life must go on the way he wants it to, to go on. And that perhaps I shouldn't come back. It was hard. And I decided very soon after that I should really not live in Hungary, that I really should go to Israel. It was no "aliyah." It was no possibility. And I went up to one of the the group. It was B'nai Akiva. And I told them that I must go, illegal or what; and anyway, I must go. I must go. I must go away from here, to Israel. And they say that there is a Brichah, there is a group of people that will go in a certain time; but I have to have a lot of documents. I have to have a lot of...because they are totally illegal, and they go from Yugoslavia. And that they are...that this group in Budapest is not responsible if we will arrive to Israel or no. But that's my only chance. So I had to find all the documents; and they were very difficult, because Father.... I didn't want that Father should know yet that I am going to Israel, because he wouldn't hear of it. He just wouldn't hear of it. (Cough) And I know that I have no future, that I must go away; that if...if there is anything left for me in life, then it's not...not there anymore. I must find my way. (Cough) And I went up to this group of people; and I told them very strongly that if they don't help me to Israel, then I don't want to live. I just don't want to live. And the young man who sat at the desk was very sweet and very smart. He says, "Don't do anything drastic things here. At least not here." So he was smiling, and he says, "I will help you. I will help you. But it will be very difficult for you, because your father has to sign. You are a minor yet, and he has to sign for you. And we have to make you a false passport. So you have to get all the papers." So I have to...had to go to all the offices. And one day two men came up and told my father to sign; and Father was still under the spell of the Germans, in fear. He signed before he read what he's signing; and he was signing that I can go on "aliyah" illegally. And, of course, when he realized he was very, very sad; and said, "Look, you can't leave me. You are my only child." And I told him that he had to start his life the way he started, and I must now chart my life

the way I have to. And my future is in Israel. And he must...he must let me go.

02:52:22

And so very tearfully we went in to the notary; and he was crying, and I was crying, and he signed it.

And I got a telegram in the middle of the night that eight o'clock in the morning I should be at the railroad station and just find so and so. And I got on the train; and a mother was running after me and says, "Please take care of my child." You know, I was always tall and always looked older than what I was. And so I said, "Your child? Where is your child?" And here was a girl. "My gosh, she's older than I am! She's eighteen years old. I'm not eighteen. She should take care of me, maybe." And the mother said, "No, no. You just take care of her." I said, "OK, I do." And so we got up on that on the train, and was a lot of commotion. You know, it was a lot of people who went with; they're supposed to be together, but they were not together. And we got to Yugoslavia, where one of...a tiny baby died on the train. So we had to bury the baby under the wheels of the train. And her death already was such a tragic mood that all of us who were there...we just...we just couldn't talk. In the middle of the night we boarded The Exodus; and we got on the the boat in Bakar [a small port five miles east of Rijeka]. And it was terribly scary because it...several kilometers we had to walk 'til the boat, in the dark of the night. Just a lamp pointed the direction, a hand lamp, because we were illegal. It was still under...Israel was not...Israel was still not Israel that time. And we got on the boat, and we were right away selected out to...to...to guard the boat. And, you know, selection was always scary; but this time I really wanted it...to guard the boat. I had no idea what to do. And they gave me a gun, and I said, "Did you ever had a gun before? I don't even know what to do with this!" I says, "Never before. And we are guarding the boat, you and I?" I couldn't believe. But Exodus was a tiny little boat, and still

in terrible danger of being attacked.

02:55:15

You know, The Exodus went several times back and forth to Yugoslavia. (Cough) And so the second day on the boat, somebody tells me, "There is a girl who went crazy on the boat, and cries that she will be thrown into the, the ocean." So I went to see the girl; and this is the girl whose mother told me to take care of her. So you can imagine what I felt. So I said, "There must be a doctor on this boat." I went up to the doctor; and again, in German, trying to explain to him that there's a girl whom I'm in charge of who has to be taken care because... because she's sick. And um doctor said, "You don't understand. This is a boat that will be attacked very soon on the open sea, and we have no room for anybody who is insane." And shortly...the, the...the infirmary was a little cubicle, you know; maybe for four or five people. Says, "There's no room here for anybody." So I have to keep this...and I said, "No, I give the promise for this mother, and I will do.... I will not leave until you promise me to take care of this girl." He says, "Well, if you bring her up...." After, you know, it was negotiating back and forth. After a while, he said, "If you bring her up, I will take care of her. Let's see what I can do." And I pulled that poor girl screaming, screaming and hollering--she was sure I will throw her into the ocean, you know--she didn't wanted to go. And we went up; and I told the doctor that I'd stay with her until until we arrived to Haifa. "I will be her private nurse. You don't have to go worry. Give me the medicine, and I will stay." And that's what I did. And then after a while, the captain of The Exodus came; and he looked at me. He says, "I hear that you are giving orders on my boat." I said, "No, I'm not giving orders. But this was a mother...I, I made a vow to this mother that I would take care of her child. And here it is, and I'm staying with her until we arrive. So nobody has to worry. I'm taking care of her.

I'm here from morning to evening. I just go down to sleep. I'm with her all the time, so you don't worry." So the captain went away, and he was very nice. Every day he came back, and every day he told me a little story about The Exodus.

02:58:07

So I found out that this was the youngest captain ever. And that...that the...the run before us, the English came up to look for him, for the captain; and he was so young and he was so very good humored. And he put on the captain's uh hat, and he said, "Do you think maybe I am the captain? I don't know...we don't know where the captain is. We didn't saw the captain. Maybe I am the captain." You know? So the English kind of dismissed him, and never thought that he could be the captain of this boat. And they never found him; and he told me this story. And so....

Q: Time is...time is a little short. The tape is.... Tell us about arrival. Yeah.

A: OK. So anyhow, we arrived to Israel. And you can imagine to arrive into the promised land, and how are the feelings; but here I have this girl, and what will happen to her now? And the captain said to me, "Now leave your luggage here. You go down. We have an ambulance waiting. You and the girl go. And she's going to a hospital, and you take her to a hospital there." And I'm arriving to Haifa and that...with the shrieking ambulance up on the top of Mt. Carmel. And this doctor asked me, "What's her name?" And I have no name. I don't know her name. I don't know who she is. And I thought this will be one of those stories like my sister, who got lost...no name. And I just broke down and I cried; and I had no idea what I will do, because I couldn't give any information about the girl. But then a couple of weeks

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later in front of a movie house, I met the girl reunited with her family. And this is probably the most beautiful story I can tell how we took care of our refugees. Because a girl who didn't had any name, who didn't belonged, here was in Israel to be reunited--found family and united with her family. So Israel gave her, everyone an incredible hope, an incredible future; and because of Israel there never will be another Holocaust.

Q: We can just stop and change tapes. We're almost done. I just want to ask about the art.

03:00:50

TAPE #3

03:00:18

Q: OK. Now. Alice, how long roughly were you in Israel before you came to the States?

A: I was about two...two years. Actually, what I wanted to do very much, when I met my wonderful husband--wonderful, wonderful man--who understood totally what was, and who encouraged me and gave me really the freedom to live again. And I told him I must share one experience with him, and that's Sweden; that we have to go back to Sweden, that he must know what my ideal is in life. What kind of person I want to be, how I want my children should be. The tolerance, the goodness of the Swedish people--what I experienced as a child. And he was wonderful, and he accepted a position in Sweden; and he kept telling me on the airplane, "But don't be disappointed, because you were a child there. You now are a grown person. And people are people. They're not angels." But, you know, we arrived in Sweden and I right away called this wonderful gentleman, this Mr. Häggberg's office. And Vera, the secretary, answered; and she said, "You know, Mr. Häggberg is not here. He lives already in London. But he's exactly here for the dentist, and I phone him right now to the dentist." And do you know that in ten minutes, Mr. Häggberg was in the hotel where we were, embracing us and meeting my husband. And so I knew that I am back with this wonderful Sweden. It was not a dream. It was a reality. And we will...we were instrumental helping the settlement of the refugees who came like I came into Sweden, who remained there. And...and uh my husband opened Hebrew schools in ...in small cities; and it was hard work because we were newly-wed, and he would travel every day to another city. And I would open Sunday schools. And...but then our...the miracle happened that I had a son. And can you imagine, where I got life several years before, I gave life now to this

wonderful little boy. I mean, there was nobody like this...first-born, and in this total ...in this beautiful country, where the people are really angels. And...and when Ronnie was three years old, we decided that...or we go back to Israel, or we'll come for a year to America.

03:03:25

And we decided to come for a year to America. We had enough money just to stay a year, for Moshe to make his doctorate here. And ...and for me to...for us just to see America. And we were so enchanted by what American Jewry did, and how...my husband said, "This is like the other wing of the eagle. Israel and America together balance the Jewish world." The Jewish world that was so terribly, terribly maimed...the European Jewry; now the American Jewry and the Israeli Jewry together balance it...and restore it. And we were more and more...became involved in the creativity part of the Jewish life. And Rabbi [Wolf] Kellman, blessed memory, insisted that Moshe should get a pulpit as soon as we learned the language. He said to me, "You know, there are only ten people here in my rabbinat who is...who are like your husband, and we need him here." And so this is how we entered this wonderful country. And since that time, I don't think we've stopped with our creative lives. We have now two sons, who are rabbis. I have a little girl, Rina. And Rina for me...when Rina was born, Ronnie was ten year old. And Ronnie said, "My mother has a sister," accidentally. Instead of saying, "My mother has a daughter," Ronnie said, "My mother has a sister." And Rina came to me as a gift. As a gift that was very difficult, because Rina is special. Rina is Downs Syndrome child. And I thought that I cannot bear that pain; but Rina today is twenty-seven year old. She's so beautiful. Her soul is like anybody's soul--pure, clean and gorgeous. Rina is a gift from God. And in a way, she is Edith.

03:06:13

Q: Alice, what do you carry with you the most, do you think, from the Holocaust?

A: That I didn't found Edith. (Sigh; pause) Not my personal suffering, and not my own...what...
And no hatred. But the spirit of those who didn't survived. And I always ask what incredible people we are...instead of cursing God and man, we create a new country. We give birth to children, and we raise them Jewish and we affirm them to life, to faith. What incredible people we are. And how incredible our teachings are. And I became an artist, and my art is about this period of life; because in the '70's I went back to Hungary, and I saw that nobody mourned us. Nobody missed us. Nobody cared that we disappeared. And the pain of that realization. That there was no monument in our town. That the children disappeared in...in the daylight in a June day, and never came back. Nobody remembered them. And I felt that my art has to be dedicated to those who did not come...came back. (Sniffling) And to an incredible man, Raoul Wallenberg, who saved a hundred thousand Jews--including my father--and shows to all of us what one man can do. From one side, look at this incredible devastation that Hitler brought to the world. Forty years later, and we still have the scars, the pains; and we are maimed forever. And on the other hand, a Raoul Wallenberg--a man who is not Jewish, who is a Swede, who was an aristocrat, who didn't have to be in Hungary-- but he was a man, a total human being; developed his soul, not only his mind. And he knew how to stand up; and he stood up, just with a piece of paper, with a certificate...with a...with a absolutely not valid certificate, against the German machinery of death. Against the evil. And look what a message for the next generation. Everybody can choose what they want to do in life with themselves, go right or go left. And the Torah says, "Choose life." But the important thing is what life you're choosing. Not only the self-gratification, not only the self.

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But choose life. Look at the life of the others, and help and stand up where...where unrighteousness and evil is done. And stand up and be counted. We all have the ability, just like Raoul Wallenburg. This tape is for my grandchildren; but for all the grandchildren, for all the children whom I will not meet. If they're looking for heroes, they have to look into their souls and found the hero in themselves.

Q: Thank you. There is no more to be said. Thank you.

03:11:25

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PHOTOGRAPHS

03:11:33

(1)Sárvár synogogue, circa 1940. This was an orthodox synogogue, and the pride of the community.

It was still standing in 1976, but had been converted to a wood working shop.