Clara Deutsch Knopfler

World War II Reminiscences

My name is Clara Knopfler. My maiden name is Deutsch. I was born in [Transylvania] in [Romania], … , after it became [Hungary], when the whole trouble started - in January 19th, 1927. So this January I was 75. I don't feel - I really don't feel the years. I just have to look back all the time to believe that I'm still existing; that I breathe; that I love; that I work. And I want to leave something to the future: since I don't have millions, I want to leave my experiences - the good, the bad - to my grandchildren, so that they can make better life, a society without too much evil. And if they *see* the evil, they have to work on it not to happen again. *That* …

My family itself was small: my father, my brother, my mother and I. But each of them, my mom and my father, had bigger family. My father was one of eleven children; my mom had four brothers. She was pretty spoiled by the four brothers; they thought she was great I , and as a girl she was definitely spoiled. But in the same time, her brothers went all to higher schools; but she was a girl; she didn't have to go. She married very young my father, and blended in, in his family. She had to move away from her mother and family.

My mother had an interesting life in a farm – it's actually a little *Staedtl*. I don't know whether you heard about this. I think they were only the two Jewish families in that little *Staedtl*, and they had a small so-called grocery store which sold everything in the village that they needed, but exchange: they exchanged goods. The

peasants brought to my grandfather eggs, for instance, and he gave them vinegar. It wasn't really based on monetary exchange; it is a barter, I would call it now. My father had an interesting life up twenty-one, because he worked in a different city and he really hoped to be a singer. He had an excellent voice, if I would say like a Tino Rossi or a Sinatra — tenor. This is [where] my musical background comes from. He worked as a designer of shoes, but every night he would go to opera, he would go to concert; and any money that he had he spent on his musical education.

Now, these two people, for so different backgrounds, made a very nice, loving home for me. My brother's birth, after five years of marriage, gave even more … to their marriage. It was unity by their faith, by their religious rituals that they both had the same. There was an activation for a better life, because my father, when he was twenty-one, he had to come home because his father died suddenly, so that ten children, who were with his not-very-rich mother, needed him to take over the business. So he had to work very hard in order to keep up his poor family, and his new family.

This is right: My brother was born, unfortunately, with a midwife who thought that his head was too long, so he[sic] pushed the head, and about five weeks after, my grandmother realized that the child doesn't focus, especially in one of the eyes. And, of course, this was a terrible feeling, and they went to one doctor and to another. They didn't want to touch the child, because they didn't know how damaging was that, what the midwife did. But then, after three years (they had to wait at least three years) I arrived, and this brought more happiness in the family, but they continued to try that this child should see and to have

something. He had problems going to the window; and he saw the light but he didn't know what's there. I don't know exactly how, but I know that my mom, from four years old, she started to go abroad, if she could, or different regions where doctors were famous. And I don't have to tell you how much money they spent to bring this child back to sight.

When he was six years old, they realized how had an absolute musical hearing, so he started to play the piano, the violin, whatever he touched: he was talented.

I don't say that I wasn't neglected in some way; but I understood very soon that my brother needs more help; my brother needs something that I have and he doesn't. Then my mother went away to a doctor for four weeks (I was about two or maybe three years old); and when she came home, I didn't want to kiss her; I didn't want to embrace her. And I mentioned it to my father: I pulled away my father and I said, "She's not a good mother; she left me." This is my . . . I remember this; no matter how young I was, I remember this. Now, if I would go now to a psychiatrist he would say, "Well, this is an issue; this is something that you never forget." But after that there was such a life for us, and my mother pushed herself to be the best mother in the world. So I don't think I have a scar. I *remember* this, but I don't have a scar.

So this is my very early childhood that I could remember. I didn't have fights for my brother. I helped him when I could. I don't even think that I was impatient with him; because slowly one of his eyes, that they didn't ruin (because they started to operate on him at such a young age they ruined one of his eyes completely) — but the other one he started to develop better, and he could see

from closeness like this. But after seven years he went to a school of blind and learned how to read, how to write with Braille. Only when he was fourteen they operated on his good eye and opened the pupil, and he could see much more.

Then he suddenly developed; because intellectually he was much more advanced in what he could hear and what he could assimilate by stories and by reading. But then he started to read and enjoy life. I owe him my musical education; my love for books; my confidence — because as soon as he could see he would say, "You have beautiful hair (of course, he meant, of the touch of fine hair)." So he gave me confidence; even though he saw he was Number One in the family, I have something that he would admire in me. Only when I started to play the piano I realized that I will never be like his. And, he came home; he gave a little concert. Of course, I saw that I am far from him.

Then, all by myself, I decided that I am going to play the accordion, which was for him no instrument: that was not serious enough. And I started. "For you it might be good." So I remained with the accordion.

But the house itself, and the home, was warm, was sharing, loving, and *very* little argument. Now that I see in this world, how many … between parents and children; there were none of those in my house. We understood; we give in . . . There was some reluctantly agreement — every child has that. We couldn't go to movies, to theaters on Saturday. They were religious people. This was the greatest surprise for my father: how can he take it from this home that he built, with honesty? And he's just leave this home for no reason, later, in 1944. But until then, I did not see any obstacle in our

life of growing intellectually, emotionally, socially. Even though it was a small community, we still could socialize with people like us, with people who aimed for better purposes. This was till I was 16 and 17.

I grew up in a village,… . It was a small village. I would say they were 2000 souls, so it's a village. Jews, Gentiles, no other religions. I didn't feel anti-Semitic tendency in the peasants or even our social class. The first time I felt that I may not excel because I am Jewish, it was after my fourth year in elementary. I was the best in the class; and the second-best was the daughter of the principal over the Romanian. And in spite of what I was, the teacher gave me the first prize, with the picture of Karol, the king, and his son, with gold medal, telling out loud that I am the best. Then, maybe this was just a normal jealousy or envy of the other classmates, because they said, "She's not even Romanian; she's not even Hungarian: she's Jewish."

This hit me: that because I'm Jewish I can't be the best. It didn't destroy my ambition, but this was the first time that I felt that I'm somewhat different than the others. I played with them; I studied with them; sports — tennis — I started really early. And there was no difference. From there on, I had to watch. Can I do everything what they do, or I will be, maybe, observed.

But, nobody can be the same. We are all different. Two flowers are not alike. I accepted it. I must say, now, thinking back, that it might have hurt me somewhat. But again, next year in the village there was no middle school, so for the fifth grade I had to study at home, and I went for examination in a town. The population of this little town looked up at those who started to study in a

different town (this is not only me, but the other Romanian or Hungarian children too: they had to go to a different town). So, for two years it was almost no different: we all studied at home, tutored at home, and then we went for exam. And then came the seventh grade, and that came the change of Romania becoming Hungary; and Jews, no school. First, there was two per cent, which is called in Latin *numerus clausus* — because it's closed, the number. In other words, in a class there were twenty kids; we had two Jews, that's it.

And that lasted maybe half a year, because after that it came "No school for Jews." My husband — later on I found out he was among the two per cent; that he went to school for a while and then it stopped. So when I was seventh-grader, that's when I was completely cut off, the education. But at home we still had books; we still had music. We started to think of maybe the radio will be taken away. And it was. In '42 they took away the radio. I know that my father listened to B.B.C. I don't know how, but I know that she*[sic]* went in a little basement-type of thing (but no furniture or anything), and that's where he listened to the news.

I know that we had Gorky books in the attic that my father said, "They are Russian. They don't like that very much: let's keep them there." We had in the family somebody who was a Communist and we didn't want to talk about that. I didn't know at that time why, but this is in the family.

So, he was cautious: he went through the *First* World War. My mom went through the First World War. So they were cautious and they whispered and they talked about what's coming - but had no idea what is coming, because it

was a peaceful community. We had a synagogue (actually, two). My parents went to the Protestant church, Catholic — and I really did not feel any kind of hostility because of this. As I look back, probably there was, but I wasn't isolated from them. It was a nice community.

Later on I found out that we had quite many enemies: Jews had enemies - when we were taken away, and they were hiding behind the windows; and when we stopped – because we walked to the train station with our little baggages — we stopped and I asked for water: they made believe they are not there. The long street that led to the train station: I remember this. But not before. Before, to the sixth grade, I didn't know that there is such a thing that, because of religion, you should have a different attitude.

I was a Romanian Jew; I was a Hungarian Jew, later — but a Jew was not included in the Romanian citizenship. I always thought that's the same thing. It wasn't, exactly.

I spent more time with my father while my brother was taken to doctors. And there was so good sidewalk in our little town made up of tiles — Acacia, I think it's called. The smell I still feel it. We walked there, and one of my memories is I saw the first young couple kissing, embracing, in a long time.

I asked my father, "Why do they do so long? Why does it last so long?"

And he said to me, "Oh, they are saying goodbye, and that's why . . ."

But he really explained life to me with very little words, and to accept what is around me. His knowledge, and *self*-educated – reading, as I said, Russian novels, French novels, German music. It's all coming from him: he had

time to sit down, put his arm around me, and taught me all these things, like a mother, when I needed him to be both.

When my brother came home, he used to take both of us to walk. We would go to the same place (it's a long walk there) - very nice houses (rich people had on that side houses). He would take our hands and round turned . . . "Now you kiss each other!" And both of us met in front of him. Little things, you know, they showed how to express love, to show what you feel. And I never knew where it comes from. Now I know; if I like somebody I tell him or her. It's not complimenting; it's natural with me, really. Like people *per se* (that's Latin; can't help it)—"as they are." And that's from my father.

My mother was more, I would say, less physical. She had her love, her respect for her children; but she could not show all what my father could. I think he taught me how to love.

My father said, "Whatever is in your head nobody can take away." And, you know, he didn't really tolerate laziness or take off a day. He was the one who came to the town where, later on, I had to go because that was the only Jewish school, in Klusz(?). And he would take me even to a bakery that I wasn't sure it was so kosher. So he tried to indulge in things that I could take from him; but he did not tolerate if I didn't do the homework; if I didn't . . . His work ethics were very, very accentuated during the years. This is why his loss, as my mom used to say, "You gained a mother, but you lost a father that nobody could have."

It's true. I keep telling about the story when I went home and I said how many languages we had to learn in the Jewish school, to be accredited, to be accepted, to show

that we *need* school. We had Romanian, we had Hungarian, we had Hebrew, German, French — five languages. And Latin, that was a *sine qua non* — that was a "must."

And, when I said, "All this and no English," he asked me, "What do you mean? What's going on with English? I have two brothers and two sisters in America." He's going to talk to their children and to them.

And I said, "Well, Dad, I have five languages, and Latin; math, science, and social studies. Where would I put the sixth language?"

He said, "Is there a teacher there who could teach English?"

I said, "I don't know; I didn't ask."

"Well, if you find one . . . There are afternoons; there are evenings. So you'd better learn English."

So he was demanding, and expected conscientiousness, but he did in a way that you understood his point: he explained why he wants me to learn English. I didn't know that I will have to live with this language here, since 1962.

No - in college I took English courses. I have a minor in English. (Don't tell anybody.) I had Shakespeare for a whole year, all thirty-six plays and sonnets. We called it the Elizabethan Theater. But this came, emanated from my father: to shoot high, because that's the only thing that you can have. He didn't know what expects us, but he knew in those last three years, from 1940 till '44, he had … a premonition - because they took his business; they took his manufacturing possibility; his ambition to sell, to use it.

We didn't have a very fancy house; we had piano, we had accordion. But, my mother said to my father, "She's

sixteen; she might need a nice, new furniture. She has to get married." That was the most important at that time.

So, my father said, "Well, we have a lot of books. We have a piano. Not everybody has a piano, an accordion." So he compensated the lack of money in those years with telling us that we have something else. We had our head, our knowledge, the best school in the world . . . So we didn't feel frustrated. I was more frustrated of being cut off from my friends, being cut off from human touch that I had before. I wasn't suffering that I didn't have every week or month or every Hanukkah a new dress. For four years I didn't believe in new dress: this is what we have; wear it.

As I describe the most vivid way in my book, the Friday nights were absolutely incredibly beautiful. Even in this little town, you know, there was not one family who didn't have goose for Friday night dinner, or a chicken, or a bottle of wine. That was a "must," and everybody had it, even the poorest Jewish family - like the Orthodox Rabbi, who had six children. All the others sent him wine, flour to make a Hallah.

So, our house was no different – except that I still remember that then my mom lit the candles, and that white, starched tablecloth was reflecting on her face. My father would say, "Your mother is still the most beautiful woman. She's my bride."

I don't forget this. This is how he started. Then before Kiddush he would put his hands first on my brother's head; bless him; then he came to me, blessed me, kissed me, and then he'd taste his glass and said the Kiddush. It was animated. He had a beautiful, musical voice, and sang the whole night – before dinner, and I don't know if you would

understand, after dinner, these songs of … - whatever, but I remember every word of it.

And during the dinner, everybody told his or her story of the week. There was no limitation. When the first boy kissed me, in the family everybody knew about it – Mom and Dad. Later on, my mom said, "Oh sure, you wanted to share responsibility. And that's why you told your story." But the real truth is that I felt *free*; I was not hiding things. I had to tell them: they were curious. It seemed to me that they were curious of everything what we were doing.

This was the Friday night.

(Sometimes it happens: [I cry].)

When Robert was five years old, he asked more about, "Why don't I have a grandpa …? What happened to Grandpa? Why doesn't he have a brother, my dad?" He had much more questions; and, you know, it'll come back. Now they are somehow shying away of all that publicity that my mother had when she was 100 years old - Associated Press, and German TV, they all called him up. So I said to him, "Why do you think that Mom is so celebrated?"

My son said, "Well, longevity; and her genes."

I said, "George, no. She's a unique, a special person." Now he knows it. …

[Upon invitation, K. melodically sings Hebrew song *Shalom Alechem]* It was one that he sang [on Friday night], and his Kiddush was very nice, or so. And his Seders were fantastic; and you know that respect that a man was given then. My family was there, my grandmother, my uncles (because my father was the oldest in that little town: his brother lived in the same town, one of them), and five children, five girls of my uncle. He never gave up: tried another one, another one. He didn't get a son. And this was interesting, that my father had[sic] the only one who had a son who carried the name. Don't forget that my father had ten brothers and sisters, and the only Deutsch was my brother: he carried the crown. And I don't know how would he survive after the War without him, because he was the heir of the family. A father should see, shove his son in front of him, and go on with life. Which I only found out after the war. But that is why my brother had a great respect from everybody because he was the carrier of the family name. So, as I said, the Seders, from the beginning of the Hagaddah, he would sing the whole story: the exodus till the end, the … of the goat, and God, and punishment.

For many years I did not attend a Seder. I had relatives who came back, especially when I moved to Krusz(?) for my degree and Mama was with me. We found some distant relatives, and they invited us. My mom was a widow; I was the only one. I *could not go* to Seder, because I never got the feeling and the atmosphere in a synagogue. I couldn't go for ten years, ten years after I came back. My marriage in 1950 was outside, under a hilpah(?), not in a synagogue, because my father sang in

the chorus, and I could hear his voice above the others. I could not go to a synagogue. Where is my father?
I couldn't talk to my family when I came in United States about this, because they lost their mother, all the family in Europe; and they said, "Don't talk about it. We don't want to suffer." So I didn't talk about it. I told you that I did not talk till 1964. In United States I started to talk in small friends or as teacher colleagues listened; and that's when I started to talk about it.

These are things that stopped me. My husband used to wake me up at night: "Don't grind your teeth! You're no more in concentration camp." He woke me up. My mother would wake me up in Guttau(?) – not in Auschwitz but in Guttau – towards the end of our being in concentration camp, and there was so many who died, next to us, from one day to another, from one day to another, from paratyphoid, or malnutrition . . . - from one night to the other. She used to wake me up at night: "Are you sleeping?" Because I don't snore, of course I don't. "Are you breathing?" She would wake me up.

"Mom, let me sleep."

"I want to know if you're all right."

She was the one who lost 100 lbs. She left at 180, and when we came back she was 93 lbs. So I can remember that she walked from the tent to stand on line for our dinner, whatever we got, and every night I saw that dress that she was wearing closer to her body, with a string like a belt around it. Every day I saw her narrower and narrower. I can't even picture 180 lbs. (I converted this from kilogram). And to go down like that . . . I never thought, at the end especially, that she would be able to survive. Very strong woman, strong physics.

In Europe, they didn't have a heating system in the rooms. In the kitchen they had an oven, but in the rooms they had tile fireplaces. They had an opening for the wood, and then up, they could warm up something in a small place. And, every Friday night after dinner we would go around that (only my mother and father could go around); and when they left, went out, then we went to the fireplace back. It was so warm; but it was not only physical warm, but it was the home, the togetherness. I want to talk about it, because those fireplaces had more meaning than the heating system — or for me, maybe.

Now, I have to tell you about another fireplace. (In the book I give more of myself because I could write.)
[I liked] reading, music, dancing – I love to dance. I loved to flirt. I like to like; I like to love; but I wanted to feel to be loved. I always was healthy enough, but – shall I quote psychiatrist, not Freud — Fromm: "Pure love is when you want to give and you don't want to get." Or, "You accept to get, but it's not that important." But I wanted both. And from a very young age I got a lot of attention, and I enjoyed being with boys. That was a pretty serious . . . I don't say "hobby" but occupation.

As I told about my boyfriends: I think I started in the Jewish school when I was thirteen to have boyfriends. I was afraid of anything else to do; but I liked to be with the boys. It took quite a lot of time with me. In college when I met my husband, I started off as being Number One and good, and as more involved I was in the love-life, still a virgin. Then he grew; so my love was contracted for him, and his love mixed(?) me up, especially when another one or so. But this was a very serious occupation in my youth. I spent a lot of time.

I enjoyed more opera if I was with a boy. I would see the movie, but I want somebody next to me hold my hand. And this started when I was thirteen; ended up, of course, in 1944. But when I came back in 1944 I was very serious about what I promised to my father. And that's another thing: I don't know what was his premonition, but he said, "Yes, your mother wants you to be a nice girl, finish eight classes of elementary and high. I want you to go farther; I want you to have a diploma before you get married. I don't want you to be a slave of any man because you don't make money."

I did not get married till I had my diploma in my hand. My husband waited for three years to get married. After three weeks he proposed, and he told my mother that he wants to marry me — after three weeks. And then my mother say, "Okay, and how are you going to live?"

"Well, I have some money from the pharmacy," he said, "that I support myself."

"Clara and you, you support yourselves now. And who is going to support the baby, if he or she comes?"

"Well, we'll think about it later."

I didn't get married till 1950, when we both had our diplomas. And I wasn't a slave. Really, it makes a difference to feel equal. I never thought who was making more money: that's not important. But feeling equal, that we both can live, make money, love, and have a child who is capable to see what's around him. Unfortunately, I didn't have more children, because in Communism I don't know if he could go to college.

My husband had a very bourgeois upbringing: his father was a pharmacist; his mother was a pharmacist; his grandfather was a veterinarian; and those were all sins(?).

If his father was a bricklayer, or a farmer in a … , that would be a very healthy origin. It was like a …. All the hard-worker people - "blue-collared," that's what you would say in United States - those people will be up — never mind that they didn't have the same "marks" as a child who was born from a pharmacist or a plant manufacturer. That was a big crime.

So, we did not have children for four years; from 1950 we married, and I only had George in '55. But even then I said, "I can't go with this marriage without a child." We waited for a visa from Israel, from France, from America. Everybody said, "No, no, no." So we waited. I didn't want to end up pregnant or with a small child in Cyprus or somewhere like the others did. So I waited till I could have a child and I started.

But to bring up a child in Communism, it wasn't simple. All those who came back, they don't have many children. The second generation does. But we had one, maximum two children. And I also was thinking, Maybe I will not have a child. I was afraid, later. The clock is ticking, and also the concentration camp stopped women menstruating. My mother lost it completely; and I didn't know if *I* will be able to have a child. So, these were considerations; but I definitely aimed to at least one child.

In 1940, March the 26th, was when the … took over the Hungarian government, and the Germans signed Transylvania to Hungarians. That's when we were sent home from school and wait for the next happenings. I was thirteen then. [This occupation affected our family life] terribly. Every single day there was a new law. In a small village there was a guy who came with a big drum: "Listen everybody!

Attention!" And then he would read a new law: "Jews cannot go out to shop, only after ten o'clock." "No outside marketing." There was the butchers: "You buy the chicken or whatever, and sour cream, milk, only after ten o'clock." Vegetables — trash vegetables — after ten o'clock. This is one thing that was unbelievable: only after ten, when everything was already left-over, I would say, and that's what we had to have. Next day they said, "You can go out after five o'clock." Next day, "You can't socialize or meet your friends." "You can't go to movies." "The restaurants are not open for you." In a little town, the restaurants were not so important: everybody ate at home; but, every day something new. "You can't listen to the radio [the first one year, I think] only after 6 o'clock."

Something that we never understood: what did we do wrong that we can't do all these things. That's what I remember. I always questioned why, what did we do wrong? And the answer was always, "We are Jews. These are Jewish laws, against Jews." And you know, they went back six generations. There were interfaith marriages; there were people who were happy in that marriage; and they were separated later; they were separated. The children . . . If the mother was Jewish, definitely the mother goes and the child goes. If the mother was not Jewish, then she stayed home and the child was taken away with its father. So the Christian would stay home, but the child goes with his father. We couldn't understand it. This came later, when we were already deported. But before, every single . . .

There is something that my father or so made sure that our education will continue, even in an event when we won't

be able to study. In Romanian time, maybe 1939, when he still had money, he bought thousands dollars in Romania (this I found out later), and he put it aside; he put it in a medicine bottle; and when the Hungarians came, the German occupation came, he put it in the ground in our garden. My mother knew about it, but she didn't know exactly where it was. We came home in l945, at the end of April, and in June we found somebody who could find the bottle.

So, everybody's asking me, What did you live [on]? I didn't: I started to work right away. But this is what started really my education later. But you couldn't handle it; it was strictly … dollars in a foreign country; we couldn't change it right away. I think in my second year of college my mother could take hundred dollars and pay for renting an apartment in the school in the city where I went to university.

That was the German occupation. And even though they were not there right away - they had the Hungarian government to translate and force on us their laws – they were there. They were there, if not physically, definitely by law.

In l94l, first my daddy made shoes; in l942 all the workers that worked for his little manufacturing was out. So, I would say two or three years he worked only by himself, and my mother, and one employer who couldn't return to Romania to his parents, and who lived with us as a family member; and he had him to work, because he was like a family member, so was not an employee.

He had to give [his business] to a Christian - mandatory. They made him give up his business without any paper of transaction, actually to one of his former workers. Without any compensations they took away the

business. And another law, he cannot have anybody "whom he would exploit" as a worker. He had to live from whatever he could create with his own hands. My father was forced to give up his business from one day to another, to one person, who apologized, and he said, "Oh really, Mr. Deutsch, I'm so sorry." But he was the next owner.

This was started first in '40. Even though you are a Jew you have to work Saturday. My father didn't want to work Saturday, but they *forced* him to work Saturday. My mother would sit in the business, and he would go to the synagogue. So these are the little things, this *humiliation* of my parents, this disregarding of their private life of before; [it] was completely eliminated, their life.

[To support the family, Father] worked, reparations, fixing a shoe. Old customers, including the mayor of the village, would want only what my father did. He promised, when he made a pair of boots for him, that he might think about it that he should close the store on Saturday. The minute he got his boots, he had to work Saturday. There was no such a thing that he keeps his promise. And we had to go along, because these orders were life or death, or beating up. I think my father never told my mother that, when he went to the mayor and said he would like to observe his religion, that he hit him. He told us, me and my brother, "Watch out. Obey. You don't have to be beaten up."

It was constant whispering, and we thought that the war was going to be over. Don't forget that this was in 1944 already, when Stalingrad was a turning-point, and we knew he lost the war. They listened to underground radio, and they thought that "This is war. This is how we

contribute. This is how we have to take it as it is. We can't do anything else." But one day in the synagogue appeared a Polish Jew who told so of stories it is incredible: people live in ghettos, people are persecuted, everything is taken away from them (this was in '43, not quite '44), and they didn't believe him. He told this to the whole synagogue. And he came to our Friday night dinner, and they said, "This is impossible, to put families away." So they did not know, far from the reality, something that would go to that limit.

I don't think that they would have believed. This happened to other towns or so – somebody who escaped and talked about it. We didn't believe it. It was something that was not human. And this was already '43 and '44 and we saw signs of . . . They called my father for a forced-labor camp to work in the farms – which was understandable: many Hungarians were in the war, and they needed men to work. It was so terrible rainy season that they couldn't work, so they sent him home after four weeks or six weeks (I'm not sure), while my mom worked in the business, because now they were just the two of them.

He said, "You see? Even God thinks of us; we couldn't work there." But this brought misery: less crop, less everything else. But God thought of them, not to work in work what they had never done. So, they knew something; that something was going to happen. But in their worst dreams they didn't believe what could happen.

And even the ghetto: May 3rd, when they thought that we were going to go from our house, they still didn't believe it. They gave us three days to prepare for the ghetto — little luggages; blankets; yes, if we had any kind of tomato juice that we prepared at home (there was no

buying those things); or preserves; or … we should take with us: anything that was not going to be bad in two, three weeks; because then we really will go somewhere to work. They didn't mention that word "ghetto," or what would be like in the ghetto. What we would need to go there, they thought.

I never told the story to kids; one or two classes were very keen to find out how did we walk out from our house that's in bed. You have to know that we had to hand in every valuable: jewelry, money, bonds, if there were such a thing, to the bank, without any receipt given, whoever you worked for. I don't know how my father could have the instinct of hiding this money, and how he didn't ever (they were beaten up, those who were thought to be richer – that they must have money hidden: they watched all the time this). So, before we left . . . My mother had her wedding-ring: she didn't give that in the bank, and the three gendarmes (they looked like soldiers, but they had those big helmet-like with feather, that the Hungarian gendarmes), [one] saw the wedding ring on my mom, and he said, "You don't need that ring any more; you don't have a marriage; you won't have a marriage."

My mother said, "Oh, I'm wearing this for twenty-five years. I don't want to give this up."

"You won't need it. You won't have a husband; you won't have a marriage; and you won't have a house." That was the first and the only warning what they knew and we didn't. So he pulled off the ring with his own finger, put it in his pocket. "What a Jew! What a Jew! She wants to have a ring."

Now, you can imagine how we, the kids and my father, was flabbergasted. Two minutes after, we took our bags, we

ran to the long walk to the train, and that was the end. The ghetto expected us.

I felt terrible about leaving our home. This was right after Passover: the potato was still on the oven. I heard them, because I had to sleep in their bedroom (my brother was home) – I overheard them. [This was] the night before—or maybe two nights before, when we were already notified we had to leave the house, and that was a *fait accompli* already. The first time I heard my father crying, sobbing: "What happens to us, and why?" "I don't know. I built this house with my own hands; I worked for it. This is our home. I didn't cheat on my customers. I was honest in my work." He tried to find anything that could be against it. "I am a believer. I am an honest Jew." I heard this all.

My mother kept quiet; just tried to comfort him. "This won't be for ever. This will be for time being. The war will be over." He sobbed, and sobbed, and sobbed. Finally my mother said, "You know what: the kids will wake up. I don't want to hear that you suffer so much. And you will see that God will happen. That will be the end of it."

Now, I heard this; my brother didn't. But then we were taken out of the house the whole night; came back; and I was afraid that I will relate them what I overheard. So I controlled my feelings; but the feelings were there. I felt the same thing with my father felt during the night when he woke up and cried till the day came.

This was the first time that I heard and even I saw my father cry – not just crying, sobbing – and wanted an answer to all his sufferings that were in 1944; and they will come more. And he would never understand the reason. He had such a clean life, such a … life, to his mother and

his brothers, sisters, and then his family. And, don't forget it was very hard to have two children in two different towns, to be kept in school, a boarding-school.

March 26th, 1944, when the Germans took over Hungary and the north of Transylvania where we lived; that's when we came home from school; that's ended for ever. March 26th we were told, "No more school in Hungary for any Jewish child." And we left the town where we lived, and we went back to our home village. And after that there was no school. So March, April, till May 3rd, we were home, wearing yellow star and preparing for ghetto that we didn't know, and only May 3rd they put us on train, and took us to the ghetto, which was ten thousand people from all the regions, from the whole region, and villages, towns — in one brick factory that had ten thousand people.

The year ended March 26th, 1944. My family left – we were forced to leave – May 3rd, 1944, two months after we came home from school. And after that we never returned: ghetto, Auschwitz, Riga, all of that, from Mary 3rd. We left, actually, the ghetto, at the end of May. My mother said it was the 1st of June; I said the 31st of May. Who knows the date exactly when we evacuated the ghetto. We had a cattle-wagon and taken somewhere: again, nobody knows where. They just told us that we will work somewhere; we have to work for the German Army; they have to win the war; that's all. And we were taken.

[I thought I would see my home again;] I wanted to come back. I had to believe that we will come back to our house, and we will tell everybody our pain of leaving our home. Two weeks before, a Romanian peasant came to my father and said, "This girl is like my daughter; let her stay with me; I'll bring her up as my own daughter." And I

said no. My father was thinking (because we didn't know what would happen to us), "Maybe you want to go to John Janosvaci."

And I said, "No. Where my family goes, I go too." Two weeks before the ghetto, when we heard about that we were taken out of our home, I really believed that I will come back.

[I never regretted not having gone with this family] – not a day. I would *never* regret this action. I was happy in the ghetto because I was with my family. And my uncle wanted to commit suicide and kill his family, because he saw there is no out of this life. (He didn't know about Auschwitz.) But my father said, "As long as the family works together, are together, how could you do such a thing? Life is precious." So I never believed that I can forget my home; that I will not come home. Hope never left me.

We were notified that we leave the country; we were not notified that we leave to a ghetto. We will live in a place where the Jews will be concentrated, to go to work somewhere else. When my father asked the question, three days before we were taken away, that night, asked my mother: "Well, what would they do with my mother [my grandmother], and what would they do with the little children, in a working situation?"

And my mother had no answers. They'd probably take care of the children, the grandchildren, while we will work. This was three days before. Don't forget that secrecy was the best weapon that they could have. They didn't want panic. In the going to the ghetto, in one of the towns where we picked up more Jews (it's useless to tell the name), the men was taken down from the train and

they told them that they had some work to do: let the train go without women. The women rebelled, and made a panic, crying, spontaneously. I wouldn't say just crying – yelling. And they did not take the men away, because they were afraid of panic; they were afraid of, not revolution but that the villagers, the others, the Romanians, the Hungarians, will hear about, and then will know that something's happening. Too bad.

This was the first women's rebellion that I was there. And you know what? My mother reminded me, now, how they worked out spontaneously; how they didn't talk to each other, they simply, all of them, started to yell and cry out loud. [My mother was part of this,] in the train going to ghetto. That's how much we didn't know where and what will happen.

The day, as I said, was May 3rd when we were forced to go to the ghetto. Most of us were walking behind carriages, where old people, children and *some* of the baggages were, because most of the people had to carry on their back whatever they had, the baggages; there was not enough carriages for them.

Jews of that community were about 400 souls, of the 2000, as I said before, so those were taken to the train. The older who would go, they couldn't walk. It was about three miles from gathering us, to the train. And even the train was terrible, because the Hungarians who supervised our leaving and our getting into the train took advantage of making fun of us, how we looked, and how we carried the luggages. And again, I had the feeling that these were not friends any more; they either were persuaded or taught that they can talk any way they want to us. They can humiliate us; they can lift our skirts to see our legs,

young men who were assigned to supervise us. But sooner or later they packed it in and we went into the train, and, as I told you, one stop, two stops, we picked up more Jews, who were taken to the same road. And one of them was a kind of rebellion, when the men would have been taken to some kind of work (I still don't know what was that), and all the women simultaneously cried and stopped this action. They were afraid of panic; they will know something.

And, at the end of the day we arrived at the brick factory. We were completely disoriented. That was not a home. In Hungary-Transylvania there were different type of homes, ghettos. Some stayed in old Jewish quarters. But we went to a brick factory, which was worse because there was no walls; there were no petroleum lamps. So this was a day when I don't want to remember how lost we were. And we still didn't know anything.

In ghetto we were for four weeks, three-and-a-half weeks - as I said, I never know. They emptied the bricks from the brick factory somewhere towards the hill (there were hills around us). One day there was a rain that we thought the whole hill will come down.

The most difficult situation was the first two days when we didn't have toilets around the brick factory: ten thousand people, no toilets. And that's when they dug latrines. The latrines were against hygiene, against anything that we saw before; but we had to do it. And I always tell my students that my first shock was when my boyfriend refused to do this kind of bathroom. He was two years older than I was, and he simply thought that this is subhuman to do everything in that latrine while a Hungarian guard was watching. They were always afraid that we were hiding some kind of diamonds in our stools, so they

watching what we are doing. He rebelled, the poor guy. In public when they were chosen to dig this latrine, and I remember the look of the ordering guy; he said, "You refuse to obey the orders of the Hungarian Army? I show you an example that you never forget."

So he chose from the public two men, who would hang him to a tree, his toes barely reaching the ground, his two hands put together to the branch. And who was the guy who had to do this? One of the guys was my father. And I was watching, silently crying and not even trying to utter a word. After twenty minutes, when my boyfriend fainted, they cut him off, they pour some water on him, and I see his eyes on me, and I don't think that he ever had any more hope in life.

In the cattle-train, when we were taken away from the ghetto, he told me, "Clara, you will survive the war. You're strong and you believe in living. I give up. The Russians will be in Romania next year." (He was very politically educated.) "They will be in, but I won't be there. You want to bet? I can eat the soda-bottle if I'm wrong. But I won't be around."

After three or four days from the ghetto, we arrived to Auschwitz. We were stopped two or three times in the middle of the night, to empty the cans of our bathroom, number one and number two. The last time before Auschwitz when we were stopped, we found out that we are out of country. And why? Because three Hungarian gendarmes came in, and the last time they asked us, "If you have any gold or silver or valuable that you still have in your pocket or somewhere what you hid" – because before we left from the ghetto we were searched, women everywhere by women; men everywhere by men; and I don't think that anybody could

hide anything anywhere, any more, but they hoped that to find, "because now you are going to go to another country, and you don't want to give to them your valuables, you want to give to your Hungarian country."

Well, we didn't have too much. There were some people who still have something, but not this time. And that's when I found out that we are out of the country. Sure enough, after one day we were out in Auschwitz.

I have to tell you one more thing about my father, who never sat in three days, because old people, young people, seventy in a wagon: somebody had to stand. And we alternated. Not my father: day and night he would look out in the window, the only window, that a horse can reach only, to put out his head. He lifted me one time on his shoulder to have some fresh air, and he said, "The war will be over *soon*, and we'll be together" - the last time when I heard him. And that night we were separated and the last few … when he waved, his one arm around my brother, and he waved. My brother never looked back. And I really, truly believed that my father would come home. And he pulled through till May 1st, 1945: one week before the legal ending of the Second World War, he died.

[When we arrived at Auschwitz,] the … doors opened of the wagon. I right away went to empty my three days' accumulated bladder; I couldn't do anything in the wagon. And I heard terrible noises: "Left! Right! Left! Right! Leave your luggages in the train; we'll give you later. Some Jewish uniforms, the stripe uniforms - we realize that those are workers in that place - talked to my mother Yiddish, and they said: "Straighten yourself; try to be fresh, young, Yiddish."

My mother looked at them like they are men from Mars. She did what she could: after three days of traveling in cattle-wagon she didn't look very fresh. And still we were so lucky. The minute we stepped out from the wagon we saw a guy, like a conductor, with a baton, "Left! Right! Left! Right!" We saw the old people, and young people who had a child, going to the left; we were to the right. Mom was the only one from the wagon, our seventy people, who was chosen to go to the right. And she, as modest and, I think, silly as she was, started to try to get away from us and go where her age-level went. And "Look, Susan's mother; look, Miriam's mother is there; what do I do here with you?"

We pulled her, one of my friends and myself: "Stay with us! At least we have one mother!" This is how she was saved. We saw the wired fences; we saw the . . . She felt right away, from the smoke, that there is a crematorium there.

I asked my mother, "What is that?"

She said, "There must be a crematorium because there are no cemeteries here." But she didn't say that people are gassed . . . Oh, that's impossible.

Immediately we were dragged to a different direction. The guard was …, and I ask questions right away, where do we have to go. Why, we have to go to wash, and we have to see … in the wagon; and then, tomorrow will be another day."

Then my mother asked, "Where are the men going?"

"Oh, you see them tomorrow." This was Birkenau: we never saw any men. "You'll see them tomorrow." These were silly questions, but we didn't know. And he *was* willing to answer, but very laconically, you know – yes or no.

And then we went directly to a shower. While we went really to a shower, the others went to the gas chamber. But we didn't know this; we had no idea, only later. Even after the Liberation, we walked home; we never met till Lublin maybe, one guy who was liberated. We were very early liberated, January 21st, and we didn't know what happened to Auschwitz, what happened to the others, we did not know it.

Men were separated. Among men, old and young, separated, different directions. Women, separated; old people different directions. But we didn't understand why little kids and young women were in that line, and old women were . . . - because they both went to the gas chamber. This was the finest solution of the Hungarian Jews. Not everybody reached Auschwitz like we did. They had nothing to do with us any more; only for those who could work for them.

[My father's last words to me were] in the train when he put me on his shoulder to have some air. That was the last conversation, what he said: "The war will be over."

"Dad, how can you stand all the time? Everybody's sitting."

"I wait; I wait. Let them: they are old, the kids are little. And I can stand; I'm strong. And we will be together again after the war. I'm strong." The last words.

I say [we arrived at Auschwitz] May 31st at 11 o'clock, 1944. My mother says June the 1st, and I listen to my mother, because in 1994, fifty years on the dot, I took a trip to Auschwitz. My husband died already in an accident; I decided that I want to go back. I asked my son to come with me. He couldn't: he had a trial at that time. So I

went alone with twenty people, Americans, Canadians - tourists. And my first question was, "When do I go to Auschwitz?"

The tourists wanted to have breakfast first, in a nice place with white cloths. They wanted to shop after that, in Krakow. A Christian woman was our guide, and heard me talking to the other tourists: "I came five thousand miles to go to Auschwitz, to look at the archives, to see who and where, maybe they know, died."

The group said, "No. First we have to have breakfast, then we'll go shopping, and maybe after lunch we'll go. What's your hurry?"

I couldn't stand it. So I told the woman, "What can I do? I want to go alone." Because one of the tourists said, "So why don't you take a cab and go alone?" These were Jewish tourists.

And I said, "Well, I don't want to go alone."

So then the guy said, "There is a nun group." Nuns were going to Auschwitz that day. "You can stop in their place and then somebody will take you."

I don't go. But this is a solution.

"So, you know," the guy said, "let's wait till tomorrow, and we'll see what happens."

In the morning we had breakfast in the hotel, went to the bus, and at nine o'clock they said, "Okay," and then we stopped to go shopping. She said, "You know what, we'll come back and do shop – or even around Auschwitz."

"And when do we eat lunch?"

"It's about three hours."

"Where will we eat lunch?"

"In a nice place."

When it was twelve o’clock, they said: “Okay, when do we eat lunch? You promised a restaurant.”

He[sic] opened a big basket in the bus: “This is our lunch.” And she outsmarted them, and we went to Auschwitz. This was June, l994, fifty years exactly when I stepped out from the bus to the day when I stepped out from the cattle-wagon. So that’s why I think my mom was right, because this is how it came out, the same day.

It was terrifying [going back to Auschwitz]. You know, I must tell you something: The nightmare that one has after Auschwitz never satisfy you that it was true or not true until you go back. When I went back and I saw the first barrack, and I saw the latrine, and I saw part of the crematorium. A lot of things were taken away, stolen — wood boards were stolen by the population near Auschwitz after the war - but it still gave me back the reality. Yes, I was here; I was in this barrack or that barrack there (they were all the same). I think I recognized one place where we stood for hours for roll call – but maybe I’m wrong, because everything came back in its …. And it didn’t affect me negatively; it gave me the possibility that it was true and I survived. And if I survived this, then my family will, too.

In Auschwitz, in the wash-room there was one line, standing on line to get in the shower-room. And we, my mother and I, we didn’t want to let go our hands. How can you walk in one line if you have your hands connected. So the guard saw when we went in, and he looked at us. “Let go!” he ordered to my mother. So my mother went ahead, and her left hand in her back, and I still had her hand. It was our revolution: I did not let go her hand. But we saw the problem.

And then, the first room, which was like a long hall: "Drop all your clothing except your shoes." Next step: wait on the line. We didn't know where is the shower. The shower was nowhere, because there was another long hall where we stand, where we saw already the women cutting, shaving our hair. It was ridiculous how my mother looked at me after I was shaved and said, "Where is my child?"

My friend said, "Did I … to you, Pappi?" {Pappi was my mother's first name.] Starch[sic] naked in front of my mother at the age of seventeen, which she hasn't seen me like that for long time, she couldn't recognize my long, brown, wavy hair missing. She was next having same thing. And we were waiting, while, as these men (I don't tell this to my students) – as these men were walking next to us, [they were] looking very carefully, commenting: "Nice girl" - next to me, twenty-one years old. She would be furukraina(?), very good.

You have to know that to go to bed with a Jewish woman was a degradation for a German. It never happened in our camp, wherever, that they would start anything. But for the front line, to send women when they were native, that was okay. So, from these naked women, they chose two, three who could stand the pressure, and sent them to the front line. The girl next to me was older, 21, and they were considering her. When they came to me (I was on her side), "She's too young; she can't stand the pressure." And we didn't know what it means, and how much reality is in there. But they took a couple from our lines. What happened to them we never found out. But the comments we heard (I spoke German): "This is too young."

And then came the washing. It really came water and not gas. (We didn't know about that at that time.) And no

towels or soap, anything like this. And then we picked up our shoes that we left before the shower-room, and out to get a dress, a long, gray dress that had no number on mine. Some of them had numbers. Those who didn't have written we had tattoos. Those who stayed long enough in Auschwitz (I have never stayed more than eight days, so I don't have a tattoo). I had a number on my left arm, and those who didn't have at all they painted — from a bucket they painted the numbers on their back. And from there on, we didn't have names, only numbers, like animals. [I remember my number was] 55571. And my mother had 55572.

That was that night. They put us in a barrack where *nobody* could find a place because there was no bed, only the floor, and there were already a lot of people. After our arrival, even more. We tried to stick together with the Hungarian group, but it was impossible, because at night, if we had to go out - they had no bathrooms, no latrines that we knew of – when we came back, our places were taken. And this was three, four days in *one* barrack. We were thirsty; we were hungry; we had to go to the bathroom.

One night, rain came. There was some leak in the ceiling. Everybody rushed to the rainwater that came in, pushing. Now, in this life you cannot believe that people became animals. But you cannot expect to judge these people; you cannot judge that they became animals. Three, four days without water. In the morning they would give you a little coffee; they poured this coffee: it was like a dishwashing, brown liquid. It was terrible. They stole from each other the little bread that we got at night. Mother from daughter. Sister from sister.

Never happened to us: just the other way around: "You didn't eat your bread; here, it's you bread."

Many times I thought, "She's lying (my mother)". But I had to accept it, because she begged me into it: "You are young; you need to eat more."

Now I will tell you about standing on line all the time on roll call; and finally, then, we were selected to leave for a different kind of work. Because we knew that in Auschwitz there is no work: it was a concentration camp and an extermination camp. You know, that's all what they did there. There was no work. Sometimes they sent out commandoes to work in fields to bring vegetables or something. I don't know; I wasn't there. But my aunt, who was there, … Aunt, she worked with Mengele. She knew much more; from her I found out what was going on in Auschwitz.

She worked with Mengele; she was a doctor's wife, this my aunt (I won't talk about her), and when she handed the soap to Mengele (he was a doctor also; did the research on the twins) she gave on a napkin the soap; he wouldn't take it from her hand. A napkin offered the soap for him. [This was because she was a Jew.] That's why I tell you, there's no lovemaking. For the front, they sent prostitutes.

After three, four, five days in Auschwitz, S.S. women, S.S. men came to count us. They counted us constantly, not only by numbers, but also by the rows, everybody in a line of five. One day they announced that they need a group to go to work, some things that hands must be good. And we were told already from old prisoners that, as soon as you can get out, get out of here. And, if they are looking for workers, go, no matter where. So they told us that they need this kind of people, and immediately we raised our

hand. That didn't happen right away: two, three days later finally they gathered a group of maybe five hundred of Hungarian Jews who just came, days before. And, they put us in a wagon, not cattle-wagon this time, just merchandise-wagon. There were still not windows or anything like normal train. And they gave us something more to eat, like two slices of bread and some kind of Wurst that everybody got sick of it. (My mother didn't eat because it wasn't kosher.)

So they took us to Riga. Riga is big, huge city with lots of ships coming and going. But of course they didn't keep us there. They took about, maybe an hour from Riga to go to Kaiserwald. Kaiserwald is a concentration camp - not an extermination camp like Auschwitz - that was geared to concentrate people in work. Immediately, we were assigned a barrack that was much cleaner than Auschwitz. There were even water-faucets where we could have some water. They had latrines, which we didn't have in Auschwitz. And, they assigned us in a factory that recycled old batteries. We put it in different groups, of aluminum separately, the wires . . . Anyway, that was next day's gunpowder, what we extracted from these batteries. So our work was very important.

Unfortunately, we worked always, from six o'clock at night till next day six o'clock. And we were not used to this kind of work; but we have to. And the food wasn't much better than in Auschwitz, but still they wanted to keep us alive in order to produce. Now, there was a German foreman there, an old guy . . .

As we entered in this new kind of work, that was the six o'clock dinner. The dinner consisted of potato soup. I have never seen potato in it, just peels - but it had a

better taste than what we got in Auschwitz, which was nothing. And, it had some kind of grits in it that made it heavier; something that stayed in our stomach for an hour or more. No bread, no nothing.

Around twelve o'clock, when we were very hungry, we were given some kind of coffee – more like chicory than anything else, and of course, Sweet 'n' Low, no sugar. It was the war, anyway. And in the morning when we went home we would get some bran cereal you wouldn't give to a pig, It was light and, if I compare to Metamucil, but not this nice orange juice, that was it. And my mom could not eat that. And I was terribly, terribly unhappy, because I saw her struggling, more hungry than I was, and she just couldn't eat it, that cereal, that milk or such a thing, which was unknown. And a slice of bread.

So I tried to convince her she should eat the bread and I'd drink the [other]. I don't know if she gave up, because she always told me that she ate it, and the bread was still there. This was a constant fight between us. But that was all what we had. I didn't want her to go down right away; I didn't know how long we would stay in those circumstances.

Now, this guy, the poor man - it's important to mention his action, because not all Germans hated us. Not all cooperated fully with Hitler's soldiers. They could do much, much more. But this guy made a difference. When he saw that these sixty women working at two or three tables, tables in a room like this, and at twelve o'clock it was still not so dark in Riga, because that's a Nordic country, but we just felt very, very sleepy, and worked, and started to drop our heads.

He came to me one night and he said, "You, die Kleine (that little girl), you speak German. You must sing, or do something in German."

"What do you mean, sing? I sing; I have a singing voice, but . . ."

He said, "You *have to sing in German*. If you know the text, fine, if not I have you for lady (who was Jewish). She will have you. But you have to sing so the women who work with you sing along, and they won't be beaten. I have to beat up every one, one by one, if we don't produce."

I understood, right away agreed, and I started:

"Dein ist mein ganzes Herz; Wo Du nur bist Kann Ich nicht sein" – which is a love-song of Lehar my father taught me. "You are my love . . . and so forth. And I started to sing, and, sure enough, everybody knew the tune. We were all musically educated; in Hungarian schools music was high. And *never* in the two months was anybody touched or hit.

This gave me such a satisfaction I can't compare with anyone in the world. And I knew it, it's up to me, if I tune in and do something. And then another: Schubert came: "… , meine Liebe." Whatever I know, I try to get together. If not, this woman helped me. But she was so bitter, this Jewish woman. She was Polish and she saw her parents killed in front of her, and three daughters. And, she simply sometimes couldn't remember of anything what was good in her life.

That was one thing. Another thing that happened in Riga was, a mechanic, very young-looking, a good-looking engineer, who used to come to fix our broken machines. And he spotted me and asked the foreman if he can talk to me.

So he came and he said, "I see that you were just newcomers."

was so ashamed; I had no hair. I had nothing to cover my hair. And he said, "I will help you a little bit." So once I got from him a slice of bread. (By the way, this German gave me also a slice of bread that I cut up in many bits.) He came with something in a shoe-cleaner box; he brought me lard, fat - from where, I don't know, but I put it on our bread, and my mother would say, "This must be kosher." She never touched it. She didn't believe it was kosher. It wasn't. But [she] ate the bread; I didn't have to put it on. And he came and brought me a toothbrush, and a red scarf, hardly used, faded. It was a scarf. And after that the only man who can come in Riga to our barrack was this young man, Hanek.

Every Sunday when we did not work, we came home at six o'clock in the morning, and we didn't go back right away. So he came to visit us, and, if my mother allowed, he can talk to me – the only man, I don't know, three hundred women in that barrack. The couple who was in our place was also from Hamburg, and knew this guy from there. The couple was not Jewish – a political prisoner who rebelled against Hitler sometime, and she was punished to supervise Jews and hit them very well she can. But when Hanek appeared, this woman closed her eyes and never said a word.

About six weeks after, Hanek came and told us there will be a selection. We will be taken away from Riga. The Russians are coming. We could see every night the candle-lights (the Stalin candles were called candle-lights), and they looked for where can they bomb. They never bombed our camp, unfortunately. We expected they should bomb, because it would have been over, everything that was bad for us.

But they didn’t; but they scared the Germans in the sense that they evacuated the camp because they didn’t want to show what happens in Jewish prisoners’ camp. And this guy saved my mother’s life. The day before we were taken he said, “Here is a little red paper. Put some rouge to your mother’s face. Make her younger-looking, because if not, she will be selected. (My mom had the signs of being pale, being sick already. I told you she doesn’t eat. So I was afraid.)

When we were in the roll call, and she was, like, five lines ahead of me in a group of four girls, so they wouldn’t know that she’s my mother, I heard the S.S. stop in front of her, and she asked: “Wie alt bist du?” How old are you?

And she said, 39.

“39? Du bist tote dann! – You want to be dead? You still have to serve the German Army. You can work a lot. You are a young woman. Why do you lie to me? You are not even 31.” And he picked up the stick that he had in his hand, lifted her dress, saw her beautiful, strong legs, and said: “You better go back in the line, and you work until you die!”

This is what I want to hear. I could hardly express my feelings, but Mom is again with me. Sure enough, next day we were taken to the ship. I didn’t think that they won’t sink the ship. It was a merchandise ship, and Hanek told me that he saw bread taken to the ship, big kilograms of lard – and they won’t sink a ship that has food in it. That was his only proof that I believe that we were survive.

“So what happens to you?” I said. He doesn’t know. Those old people who were there probably will evacuate the camp, the latest as possible.

And that was the end of Riga. I could tell you stories about how we walked on two cemetery chopped marbles; how we sewed the Hebrew names, and we stepped on them every day while we were walking to our place of work. It was so humiliating; it was so degrading. Sometimes you could see a whole word, like Moshe. It was terrible. They used them for road construction, or cemetery … stones.

This was in Riga. Still, in my days, if I feel the smell of the train, that’s what I see – the train, and the road.

Hanek was a Jewish prisoner who was taken from Hamburg in 1939. His family was killed in front of him, and he was in the second year of college in …. He told me his story. He was bored already.

My father taught me the songs. His idea was that any musical notes or songs, the composer wrote it in his own language. You won’t believe that he taught me from “Aida” in Italian. He didn’t know Italian, but he only wanted to have one thing that is original. This is how he taught me Lehar to sing in German. He taught me to sing in French from Carmen – Bizet. He didn’t speak French. This is his idea: a composer deserves to be known something as he wrote it and as he wanted it.

[As I sang the German song, I thought about my father] all the time. You see, these things don’t go away. I thought, you know, when my mother died, that every normal person would say, “She lived to be 101. You had more Mother in your life than anybody else. So why do you cry?

What do you think now, after so many years (she was sick of the last three months of her life)– how come that you still complain why that she died? Why do you still think of her?”

“I can’t go away from this house; I’m so attached to her memory.” Now, can you imagine that I will ever forget that my father used to sit every Sunday that he didn’t work, with *my* friends who were my age, and taught us hundreds of Hungarian songs. He taught us the first dance steps – valse, that’s what he knew; he didn’t know other … And my friends adored him, because he was one of us.

He never hit me in my life. How can you forget a father like this?

Indirectly, my father saved those women’s lives, because he had so much wisdom in *me* that I learned from him. I must say that my whole philosophy that later on – Sainte Expery: I don’t know if you know a French philosopher existentialist, “*Le Petit Prince*,” “The Little Prince.” It is a philosophy that my father did not know from him; I think he learned it from my father. This is what he instilled in me , the love of life, the love of music. I cannot emphasize enough how he believed in civilization and culture. He was a frustrated intellectual who was self-taught. It’s not because he’s not here; people who *knew* him . . . He doesn’t belong to be a shoemaker: that was a degrading thing - a *Schuster* – this is in German. He doesn’t belong there, because he was more interested in everything else then. But he could admire, when he worked alone, he had no more employee. He made, from the scratch, a pair of shoes, and he looked at it. “Look at this; this is a masterpiece.” You can love your work, even if it’s not composing a song. This is the guy

who hurt me the most, not only hurt his loss. But there were probably more than this who could create and give the world a better living. And they killed him.

[We worried about my father and my brother] all the time. My mother worried about my brother, who was weaker, who was sensitive. But she said, "My husband will come home." My father was strong, energetic, handsome, full of life. And, you see, he carried through May. It was a death-march from Auschwitz. He was all the time in Auschwitz: I heard it from somebody who came home. And, the last week, maybe two-three months, after the rations get closer, a couple of people who were still able to walk, they walked them away from Auschwitz. This is what was called "death-march," because those who could not keep up in this walk, they were left there, not shot because they were not using their guns for this kind of thing; and they marched for days till they reached another camp (I'm so sorry, I don't remember the name: this guy told me from Canada who was here last year what was the name) till they found a camp which was not evacuated yet. The Russians were farther. And it wasn't the American zone either. I was liberated by Russians; many of those who survived Auschwitz were liberated by Americans or so, like my father-in-law. So he pulled through the death-march, because he was strong and wanted to live, until he got to this place, and probably ran down in the march, or he got typhoid fever like others – and he was gone.

The man who told the story was with *his* father, and his father lived three more days than my father. The guy came back; he's now 78; he lives in Canada. The other one who told me the story about my brother and how he was shot

in front of my father, is in Hong Kong now, a famous designer.

[Full Lehar song sung for women:]

Dein ist mein ganzes Herz:
Wo Du nur bist
Kann ich nicht sein.
So wie die Ruhm erwaechst,
Wenn haben Ich
Kein Sonnenschein.
Dein ist mein ganzes Herz
Und so Du bist –
Ich liebe Dich.

That means, "I love you." Once more –… Sag' mir einmal, Ich hab' Liebe dich." Which is "I love you." "You are my love." It is a love-song that everybody knew who was Hungarian musician. Lehar was Hungarian, but he wrote in German because otherwise they would not accept his compositions.

Of course [this song has a special meaning for me]. This was a life-saver. Or the other one, the Schubert:

Leise flehen, meine Lieben
Durch die Nacht zu Dir . . .

This was also a song that captured them, and they knew it from home. Or the Brahms Lullaby - which is funny, because it was a lullaby and we wanted just the opposite! So I kind of left that out. Just for variation I said something. … , if not fully, partially. It's life and death.

[We were in Riga] June, July, August, 1944. In 1944, at the end of August, 31, we left Riga with a merchandise ship that took us to Danzig. (Danzig is now Gdansk) - a

beautiful harbor. It belonged to Poland, and when we were there, Germany; and again, they didn't keep us in Danzig in the harbor, like …, the harbor - they took us to Studhof (that was another concentration camp). This is the first time after how many months? that they took away the long, gray dress from us because it has already lice, and they took us to disinfection(?), and then we got new clothes. My new clothes was a green cocktail dress …. And when we were taken away from Studhof four days after, with a train that had *windows*, and I looked at my looks in the window, and I saw my worn, half-inch hair, sticking like this, out, and my green satin cocktail dress, décolleté (it had a very open cutting) – when I saw my picture in the window, I started to laugh hysterically, then I started to cry. I ran to my mom, "Why didn't you tell me how I look? Why didn't you say something? This is terrible; this is ridiculous! One pair of high shoes and a cocktail dress, and no stockings and no bra, and no nothing."

She looked me [and] said, "Well, that's still pretty – maybe you want to go to a tea party. It's true that they can't see too much your legs, but enough to be elegant." My mom went crazy; she just wanted to keep up my confidence. I don't know. But I looked like a (I don't want to say prostitute!), but terrible shock. I never went back to the window; I never wanted to see myself. This was the dress that we got from Studhof.

Mom got a coat, kind of robe, that was so good that she could put over and in winter more and more, a string and this coat-robe. And it was very good for her, because then she got a kind of black cotton full slip that at night she could wear it. I didn't have only the same dress, day and night, but this was a slip; that was great.

These are the things that you cannot forget. How could we live months and months with the same dress, with no stockings? In Studhof I got her some kind of panties. She wore a bra 40D. She had no bra ever in the concentration . . . Can you picture how she looked? And suffering, humiliated, and taken all the femininity that we had. I don't have to tell you that she stopped menstruating immediately. With me I don't know how come, it lasted three, four months, I think till Studhof, or maybe more. But it was a tragedy. There was no cotton, there was no anything to have, so each time that I had it, I ripped another piece from my dress and washed it.

It was not cold in August, not in September, but starting from October (this was already in Prussia: from Studhof we were taken to East Prussia) we lived in canvas tents, till they built us wooden tents, that thin. Hundred in a tent like this, two bunks, down and upper level. And we used our blanket (we had a blanket): that was our coat, and also we slept on it, five in a bunk, close to each other. If anybody wanted to move, the whole row had to move round.

This was the worst of the camp, because in Riga we still had three in a bed, and sometimes only two - my mother and I. And for two months we could sleep in the morning from six o'clock till eleven. Then they called us to eat, and the rest. But still I would say that that was more civilized than living in tents, with straw under you, or no straw under you.

And, the cold started: Where do you think my arthritis is coming from? One day, this old German S.S., who was not able to be in the army; that's why he became a black S.S. who guarded us. He said, "This cannot continue; these

people have to have some little stove, or something. And there is the big forest; let them cut." So he got us a couple of saws, and we went to the forest with a hammer and a saw and we cut branches after work, dark. And one afternoon-night, going to night, we went, three of us, three girls, to get some branches. It was a frozen little puddle there. I was cutting . . . whatever, a branch; I didn't notice that my right foot was in the ice. And after an hour I went in, and I couldn't move my leg. So Mom started with cold and whatnot. My leg never got better. I always felt, first when we came home, "I have pneumonia." And now, after so many years the doctor said, "This is called juvenile arthritis. You caught it somewhere when you were a child." Now I know it.

[When I came into the harbor on that boat, I saw] *beauty.* There were beautiful plants that we saw from the bottom of the boat, because from the ship couldn't get to the harbor, only up to a point, and they sent for us little boats, sixty people on the bottom. And when we got to the harbor I saw the most beautiful plants that I could remember, red, and like four times as big as a rose: big platters of red roses. And all along the harbor you could see that this is the most peaceful place of the world. And twenty kilometers, or miles, from this beauty, you get into a concentration camp that is almost as bad as Auschwitz; because Studhof, again, was only a concentration camp, where people were distributed to different work. And they didn't keep us there, only there they disinfected us, and those who still had lice, they were shipped somewhere. (We know now; they were killed by trucks - in the truck. There was no crematorium or gas there — not that we know of, or we knew or heard about.)

So the harbor was very nice and beautiful. But what came after, the train and the work . . . This was from September, November, December, January, we were making anti-tank trenches, digging. In 1944 September we were taken with the train, not very long, two – three hours' train trip, to a place where we pitched camp and where we started to dig trenches, first 60 yards wide and 6 yards deep. And they would hide there and attack the enemy, if they would cross from Russia, because East Prussia is close to Russia. That's what we did. But it was still September, it was no problem. Rain or shine, we had to get out and dig.

They were very efficient; they wanted to do it fast. The whole border was criss-crossed with this kind of trenches, back and forth. In October, when it started to get colder, they didn't give up, but we were moved to another place. That's where we got the bigger tents – hundred people in a tent. We made some trenches around our tent so the water would not come in where we slept. And that's where we got the little ovens or stoves that I must tell you about.

How many days I was in that ship – three days, four days. From Riga to Danzig must take at least three - four days.

I was going to talk to you about Guttau, the last stop, between October and January, and the most difficult time to dig, on frozen soil. And at night, when we went home, that meager soup could not warm us up. So we had a stove in the middle, thanks to this old guy who said, "It's impossible to sleep: once in a while they have to wash." One small stove that you have to feed constantly in order to have some warmth, because 100 people were sitting

around, to dry their dress, to dry something; and we had to make time the whole night: some people went to sleep, woke up at 2 o'clock or whatever (we didn't know the time) and then they put more fire. Now, I haven't seen this stove anywhere, in Washington, …; I haven't seen in the Yad Vashem. And in 1994 when I went back to Auschwitz, we stopped in Brava(?) in Teresienstadt, and there is a museum of the holocaust survivors, and there I saw that stove. I fainted.

In Auschwitz I did not faint. When I saw this stove, and I remembered what did we do to have fire there, for a minute I didn't know where I am, and the same tourist group . . . No, Henry(?) was with me then; he didn't come to Auschwitz with me but he came to Prague. He just picked me up and he said, "You are alive." And I told him the story about the stove.

One little thing triggers something that you think it's back in your mind and you don't even remember. When I saw this stove, the whole brutality of people who kept us in those circumstances; the way how my mother went out, brought some snow, and washed her dress under the arms where most of the lice were. (We didn't have in the hair, because we had very short hair: they shaved us everywhere; but in the dresses we had.) So she brought in, then she went to dry near the stove. I lost it.

So, I wanted to tell one more thing that could help me out, is that I never regretted that I stood up for my mom this time. When we were already making big anti-tank, I will show the picture after fifty years that is still there, the surface. We were in that anti-tank trench, and I was in the bottom with a spade, my mom with a shovel outside, six yards higher. We made steps in order to get

to those places. And I hear that the Hitler *Jugend* (Youth)(sixteen years old, they were assigned to hit us and make us work faster) came to my mom. I said this was maybe November or beginning of December, when he started to beat my mother, and I heard the noise, Boom! Boom! And I got up from the bottom of the trench and I faced him, and I said, "Stop! This woman works for you, for the German army, to win the war, from morning till night. Would the bran cereal that you wouldn't give to you pig at home; would the bread that you give at lunch with a piece of margarine, or coffee – she uses that coffee to warm up her fingers, because she couldn't move her fingers . . . Whatever came to my mind, with my German, I told, and at the end I asked, "Don't you have a mother?"

He was so flabbergasted, so moved, whatever, that he stopped, and after a while he said, "Yes, I have a mother, but she's German." In other words, a Jewish mother doesn't count. But he stopped and left. A

All those who worked in my group, they thought, "He's going to bring the black S.S.; they are going to kill us; they are going to punish; that's what we need." And they almost beat me up: the whole group would suffer. My mom started to cry: "You should have not done this. He would forget it; he would stop it anyway." Too late: the whole night we didn't sleep.

Next day, this little boy came back straight to our trench, stopped in front of me and he said, "Here is a carrot. Eat it. It has some vitamin in it. And here is half a cigarette. Smoke it; you will be less hungry." I was plenty hungry, even after this. But the fact that this boy, who was trained and brainwashed to hit the Jews, can be touched by the word of "Mother" - it gave me something

that I wasn't so wrong. There was only one girl who said that she would have done the same thing, just to protect me from the others. I never forget this. That gave me, again, some hope that not the whole world is dead; not everybody's against us; that human beings can be reached, if they have an Achilles heel. I had to tell you this story.

This was still 1944, December or November (we don't have dates exactly). I was in Guttau - that's the last working-place of mine - till 1945, January 19th, we were in the same camp. In between I was also a shoe-repairer, because everybody's shoes was a rag, not a shoe; and they said, "Who can repair shoes?" and I raised my hand, and my mother almost dropped dead.

"What do you know about shoe-repairing? You have never seen . . . How can you take this responsibility?" There were two more who signed up for this job, and my mother had to raise her hand too, because I pushed her up. And the last month, from December till January 19th, we worked inside and repaired a lot of shoes, and saved a lot of people for going out to work in the wet and snow and without any shoes.

From October we were in Guttau all the time. But in December we became shoe repairers, four of us of the thousand women that we started off. From Stuthof we were left maybe three hundred. They died next to us, from malnutrition, for freezing, for paratyphoid. And when we left, evacuated (they made us evacuate the camp again – the Russians were coming), then we were about 150 who were able to walk; the rest remained among the dead ones, who we couldn't bury because it was impossible to dig a grave in January. They remained in the camp. Later, when the

Russians really came they found some alive; they took them to the Soviet Union at that time. One of my friends who is in Miami now, her mother died. She was in Russia before she came home. Many of us were taken to Sweden to recover from what they had; and only after a while they came home to Hungary.

In Guttau we were between the beginning of October here, November, December, January - four months in Guttau. That was our last stop in work.

In Riga …, my cousin showed up with 400 girls. This was in August, l944. And we were happy: finally, for my family . . . She was one of the five girls my uncle had - Ika. She came and she'll be with us and we'll see each other every day, and we already thought of talking to Hanek to tell to the Kapo she should come into our barrack. Almost impossible hopes, but we hoped. And she spent the first day after with us; she spent the first *night* with us.

And next day, when we came back from our work in the morning (we worked from night to next morning) we found out that the whole group was taken somewhere, they don't know where. One of the girls had scarlet fever – that's what Hanek found out for me. And we waited, that they will come back. They were to disinfect the whole group. Next day, at four o'clock before we went to work, the dresses came back with the truck. I don't think they were gassed; I think they were killed by a truck. There were no extermination camps near Riga, not that we ever heard about.

And she never came back; she was the only cousin whom I knew that survived Auschwitz; and she was younger than I was, which was also hard to believe; because above me, and

my generation, sixteen, were worthwhile for them to keep them alive. The young ones, they couldn't work too much.

Something happened to them; we didn't know how, and we didn't know why. Hanek was more informed of what happened to people. He told me that they probably killed her because the whole group was infected.

[My mother and I felt] terrible. My mother and I, each loss that we felt was worse and worse. We still didn't know, exactly, neither my mom or I, what's happening to the people. It's just that, every day, another loss, another event that we could not foresee or we could not *think* of, happened. And just we looked at each other: now, why? One of the girls was taken from the hospital because she had scarlet fever. Only a small group, twenty, they were taken one day. She was still smiling, with her beautiful smile, and to her two sisters she said, "I'll be back tomorrow." She never came back.

[The Germans] hit us to work; they hit us, everybody whom they could, to stand still in the roll call. They hit us to get faster the food. They didn't kill in front of me anybody. This was a working group; my whole concentration camp was concentrated for *work.* They starved us; they gave us just as much as we needed for keeping us alive. And, you know, you forget completely that you are a human being. You live from one meal to another – maybe that will be enough to cope with hunger. You lose your human feeling of, What's going on the world? Where are those who fight against Hitler? There was no politics in the big . . . We don't have a newspaper or a radio. Once in a while they dropped the newspaper in which they brought their food, the supervisors of the work. There was nothing to think about, only, How can we wash our dress? When can I eat something?

Hunger is a terrible thing, a terrible thing; you can only think of survival of one hour to another.

[On the way from Riga to Danzig] we were in the ship for about three days, as long as we went from one harbor to another, from Riga to Danzig. Now, this ship was a merchandise ship; it was one opening between three or four levels. All of them were under, not above like our normal ships - under the level of the sea. In order to get to the bathroom [interrupted]

So if the women did not have enough air, they were sent up there; if they were dehydrated, if they couldn't come back where they started off, they died on the ship. What happens with their body, and how many, I don't know. I mean, I know that they threw it in the . . ., because when some people went up, they saw them in the ocean. The women who died on the ship, they were simply thrown in the ocean. We didn't know how many, and we didn't know why and how long they struggling between life and death; but they never returned.

In Guttau were most of the friends and people with whom we were day by day. These people got sick; there was no remedy. There was not enough water when they were so dehydrated. The diarrhea was one of the most known sicknesses that came from the food, that came from the hygiene, and that killed. We had no name for it. Now, this people went to bed at night; they went two, three times out from the barrack. The fourth time, they would come in, lie down, and died. If they had strength enough to look up and feel us who were next to them, they said, "Don't let us die without speaking up. Who ever survives this massacre, this terrible, cruel world, if you survive,

speak up. We won't be able to speak up. They had their mind.

I know a Kapo who lost her mind there, in our own tent, a woman who missed her husband. She cried every night for her husband. When German guard came in to shut up because they can't sleep, then she started to tell to the German guard, "You have a *beautiful* mouth, lips like my husband. Take me in your arms." And her lips were black … from her sickness. This woman lived thirty, forty days in this state of mind. We couldn't do anything with her; she went crazy. Sex, love, we don't know, but she kept talking about her husband. Nancy was her name.

And those who died, till the last moment they didn't become crazy, they just said what they wanted: "Speak up!" But I didn't speak up for fifteen years. I wasn't very good. I couldn't; it was impossible. Only in United States I started to talk about it; that was nineteen years later that I survived the camp and I started to speak up. And I feel *much* better since then.

They all thought I was strong. I wasn't so strong any more; I was suffering already physically with my right leg, which is never the same. But they thought I was strong; and I was very positive; I never gave up hope. I lost my God, but I never gave up hope. And I wanted – it's not a revenge – but I wanted to tell my father what happened to me. I kept saying that Dad wouldn't believe, Dad would understand. Next day I wanted to come home by all means, when we were liberated already and the Russian soldier attacked me and wanted to rape my mom and, after that, me. (He didn't succeed because another woman pulled him off my mom.) This was coming home, liberated, in Zerblinka. And it was a small little waiting room.

We went walking, and we went on trucks, and they picked us up; this was our coming home from January 21st till April, the end of the April, 1945. So in one place they told us that there will be a train, if not today then tomorrow; if not tomorrow, next day. And that night, drunk Russian soldiers came into the waiting room, and they saw those people sitting close to each other - only a petroleum lamp light was in the room - and my mother with her blanket, but she had reflexes that the minute the guy entered and stumbled on the other bodies there . . . he went directly to my mom; it was some place there, or he could put directly down his foot – I don't know, because I was under my mom. That moment, my mom slipped into my lap, put her blanket around me (I almost suffocated; under her elbow there was a little room to breathe). And I hear the guy putting his hand on my mom's shoulder, and *almost* lying – the other hand to his pants (my mother told me), and my mother kept saying (we knew already three, four Russian words), "I'm sick; I'm old." She showed him – but it was dark – [her] hair. "I have lice," she said. She could talk whatever; I don't think he understood.

Two yards from the scene, there is a Ukrainian heavy prisoner; she was waiting for the train too. [She] started to laugh, and crawl to this man: "What do you want from that dirty woman, and sick woman, and old woman? Come with me." She practically pulled this down this guy from off my mom, and stepped, going to go out from the station. They ended up in the courtyard. This was already in the beginning of February when we waited there for the train. And Mom … took off the blanket of me and her, and I lived again. He didn't rape her.

[Christmas] was in the camp. I was in Guttau, December 24th. Christmas – completely white Christmas, because the trees and the forest behind us was all white. And we really believed that they would celebrate Christmas with everybody. That's what you do.

I was in Guttau. Christmas was close to January when we were liberated. But, this is a big day for everybody. And we thought that being in Guttau in 1944, being through Riga, being through Studhof, all while it was terrible, this Christmas, people are generous, people feel. It's a beautiful family gathering. They will be better with us; maybe they'll have a better food; maybe they will treat us less yelling and kicking. And we hoped. We were having at noon some food, standing on line, when my … A*eltester*, which means the leader of the Jewish group, came to me and she said, "Clara, I know you play the accordion. The S.S. want some music for their Christmas. There is a guy who comes, and while he's eating, take it over and entertain there."

I was very, very afraid; I won't do it. After so many months and not practicing, what can I play, once, for them, something?

"No, you have to do it; you have to do it." The other girls persuaded me the same thing; and they had something else in their mind – I will find out how long will the S.S. eat Christmas Eve – where, and when will be the ending? Suddenly, I realized that one of them had in mind something else, to go out from the camp while they are eating, and go to the nearest village, which we knew it was there: we saw sometimes people coming towards the fields where we were working. And maybe they will be generous and they will

give a piece of cake, bread, anything! So I agreed. There was no question what was my fear; I agreed.

They took me to the dinner. It was a preparation when I went in, but a Christmas tree – there was enough tree in the forest. There were two women who came to the dinner, I don't know where from. The rest were the twenty guards who were with us. I felt the smell of cabbage; I felt the smell of pork. I don't know how shall I explain what hunger took me over. But many times when I was a child I was invited to my Christian friends' for Christmas, and I knew what they make that night. Anyway, I was watching …, and they started with some hors d'oeuvres, some kind of *Knackwurst* – that's how they started their dinner. And immediately the guy who started to eat took his accordion off, a huge (I never played it), a big 120 bass, and the claviature was almost like mine. And I started to try something. I was trembling. But finally I had to do something, so I started to play a Strauss waltz, I think it was "The Blue Danube." They laughed, and it wasn't that bad as I expected to be. But there came another song, and the guy who had the accordion said, "Can you have some Christmas carols?"

I don't know how to play Christmas carols; I didn't learn in my country. "But you have to sing in German."

"Not even in German; I don't know." Then I remembered "O Tannenbaum" – "O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum, Wie schoen sind deine Blaetter." And then I started to sing that. "That's very nice, but we still want religious carols."

And I didn't know. So, he got tired, took over the accordion, and I left. And Aranca, [which] was the Kapo, told me, "You didn't do so badly, and I was proud of you." So she didn't see me disappearing from the room. But while

I was there, I know that they just started to eat; they will have at least an hour or two to get out.

When I came out, my girls were waiting. I wanted to say goodby to Mom; Mom was very ambivalent letting me go: she couldn't take part of this. But when she saw that all the girls wanted to go, "Go ahead, go ahead, I'll stay home." She brought my blanket, an extra blanket, and I had a coat that I got after a friend of mine died. You know, I had a cocktail dress, but this was a coat that had two pockets and … . It was a thin coat; it was a dress coat, but the pockets were good. I was already thinking how much I will bring home for my mom: in each pocket I will have a handful of … .

We went too, six of us. It was dark. The guard that did not eat the dinner stayed for a while outside, then he went in to eat too. We disappeared, one by one. The moon was just a half of a moon, so that protected us. In the first little village, there we stopped and there was light. It was war so not very well lit, the villages, but we saw some lights. We divided each other into two; I went with Leon: it was very daring, very courageous. And we stopped. There were very few houses they closed in front of us. They did not let us go in; but they handed over a piece of bread. Somebody handed over a potato, a warm, baked potato. In one place we went in, we saw cut cakes for those who had come for Christmas carols, to sing. My friend Leon saw the knife. By this time we had already something to eat, and she looked at the knife and said, "Do you want to come with me? If you don't want to come with me I take you anyway. We haven't seen a knife since we left Romania."

I said, "What is this, a monologue? What is this? You can't talk to a knife."

"Yes, I want him to understand that we are in miserable situation. We have no spoons, no forks; we eat like animals. Now I will have a knife." She took the knife; she took the cake; and we disappeared. That was stealing.

When they came out to see, it was in the window, the cake, this cut up . . . it's a walnut cake, I remember it. Three more houses and we had enough; we were afraid … to go back. Somehow we notified the other four girls that we are leaving, we go back, so they said they will follow us. I had the bread in one pocket, I had a piece of a kind of hamburger, meat, in my other one, so I was happy to bring it to Mom. And Leon and I and the two other girls reached the camp without any problem. The fifth girl … us (it's so dark) that she's coming too, so we waited till she started to come – we didn't see the distance, how far she was. She followed us. The sixth girl could not follow her, and when the sixth girl came to the campsite, the guard caught her. This girl was put in highest point of the camp near the kitchen where they cooked outside for us the soup. The guard threw on her water; it froze on her. We were already in our tents; we just heard what's going on, and when this happened one more girl and I got out from the tent and begged the guy, "Let her (he didn't know that we were there too,) let her come home in the tent. We bring her home."

He said, "You don't know what this girl did. She ran out to the village. She begged for food. She ruined all the German discipline and reputation. Let her die right here."

When the change came, we begged so much, and we asked just to let her in, just to save her life, not to freeze. At 4:00, probably, in the morning, he gave in and the change came, the guards' change, and he said "Let him have the trouble" and turned around, and this new guard closed his eyes, and we brought Yolan, is her name, in.

I don't have to tell you how she looked, how she acted. This woman … would never be able to use her toes; they were all frozen. She came home, survived, lives now in Israel, married a non-Jewish man, and she's happy. She has two very successful children, but she cannot move her members of her feet or her hands. This was Christmas in Guttau, 1944.

After Christmas, I must tell you, it was very hard to go on. I don't know why, but I hoped that Christmas would wake up the people and even the guards to mellow. They were so close to failure; they were so close to admit that the German army is kaputt, and they still didn't give in, except one or two, who were anyway much better than the others. By January, 1945, the Germans decided to evacuate our camp, to run away from the Russians. We heard every night their cannons, that they are close by. It was January 19th, 1945. That's my birthday. I was eighteen that time. We were standing in the roll call selecting who can walk, who cannot walk, and my mother slipped a little package to my hand, and she said, "Darling, this is your birthday. Happy birthday to you. I have a little present to you."

I opened the old newspaper (that's what it was packed in) and a saw a layer cake made from three slices of bread. The layers were united with margarine; she keeps telling me that it was marmalade or … When I saw it, I couldn't

understand where did she have the bread from, and when I asked "Mom, where did you get three slices of bread (which looked six)?"

She said, "You didn't eat last night, and the night before, your ration."

"Mom, I could eat a stone, I'm so hungry all the time."

So, the 19th of January is my birthday, and we were standing in roll call and selecting people who would be able to walk (we call "Death March," I will tell you later what is Death March) when my mother told me "Darling, this is your eighteenth birthday. I have a little present for you," and handed to me a little package wrapped in an old newspaper. I took it in my hand, opened it, I saw three slices of bread put together in layers like a birthday cake with margarine (Mom says she had marmalade or …). And, it looked like a birthday cake, but I couldn't believe what happened, how did the three slices of bread came from. So I asked, "Mom, where did you get the bread?"

She said, "Darling, you didn't eat last night and the night before, and I saved it."

"She's lying," I said to myself. "Mom, I was so hungry and I'm so hungry all the time. I could eat a stone. I wouldn't leave the bread for next day. *You* didn't eat it."

"Well, we didn't eat it, and we have it here."

I will never forget that present of my life, the most precious and the most dear to me, how she takes from her own ration and gave it to me to have a birthday present. Pretty soon I couldn't think too much of this, or fear too much (we had no time to fear anything). We started a death march. I had to say a number. Out of thousand women,

probably 150 were able to walk by January 19th, walk away from the camp, leaving behind the dead ones and the very sick ones, who could not walk. Later, when the Russians came, some of them still were alive, and those were saved by the Russian soldiers, who took them to Russia or to a different country. In a way, during the war, they saved their lives. And they told me the story of what happened there. But we went to walk, January 19th around 7 o'clock in the morning, as soon as it was light enough to walk; first in line of five like usually, then everybody went to try to get away from the snow. And if they couldn't walk, we tried to help them; but then, if they couldn't walk, they dropped dead on the walk. They didn't have to shoot them; they didn't because they died anyway. They wouldn't shoot them because they saved the ammunition for themselves. … We looked back at some of them; we heard some kind of shooting, but I don't think they killed them: I don't think that they didn't choose to have those bullets for them, because later on, when we were liberated, they told that they didn't want to shoot us, because they didn't have enough ammunition for them.

Anyway, I don't know how many of us arrived in one place the 19th of January, where we slept only a couple of hours in a farm …, because they urged us to continue the trip, (and) "This is not a place to go": they urged us to get up and continue. And this was January 19th, 20th; and 20th at night we finally found a farm, which was left by German or Polish (I would never know: they were Catholic because all over it was crosses), and we who could speak German we ran to cook for guards, a couple of women in the kitchen. The rest went to a stable full of straw. There was one or two cows; there were a couple of small animals –

pigs, chickens, whatever. And they dropped in the straw and slept.

We who were in the kitchen found near the kitchen a little food-room where they stored some food, and that's where we cooked for them and brought it in to the S.S. But we overheard their meeting – as much as we could, we were so tired.

One said, "What can we do with these women?"

One said, "Well, let's burn them; there is enough straw."

This old guy, who was more human, he said: "No, we are not going to kill them like this, because the whole region will feel the smell of the burning of flesh: that we don't want. Our reputation . . . (Again, their reputation was very important.)

Then another said, "Why don't we shoot them?"

This is when the guy said, "No, I'm not going to spoil my bullets for them. I want to save my life." There was nothing that they can do. He suggested, "Let's take off, leave them in the middle of nowhere. So what? They will die, or go . . . Who cares? This way . . ."

Then we went to sleep. We didn't know what happened after. Probably in the middle of the night we felt some commotion. They left, and in the morning when all those people woke up, we had no black guards. That very day, at noon-time, the first Russian (who never shaved, I think) in a motorcycle came, looked at us like we were people from the poverty . . . He didn't know who we are, what we are; he didn't hear about concentration camps and prisoners. But he felt very sorry, he can't do anything for us.

There were a lot of Czech people among us who could speak Russian, [from a] Czech part of Hungary (you know,

they were all related, these little countries), and he told them that there will come others. He's the first one; he has to go (I don't know where). He doesn't have a map to give us; but we are in East Prussia. So we know where we are.

Late afternoon another truck came, also with two soldiers. "You are here where you are. We can't do anything for you. We don't have food for ourselves. But there will be others who will come."

So we return to the kitchen; we find some rice; we find some potatoes. And unfortunately, the little pigs which were in the stable were cut by some of the prisoners, and as much as they cooked or baked on the straw and some branches, and they started to eat. And that was terrible: they became so sick for months of not eating. No bread, and they started to eat it. My mom didn't touch: it wasn't kosher. (Can you imagine that strength? That faith? Only faith can make this.)

We ate some rice. I think Mom found or so in the kitchen some kind of barley, which was perfect. But she cooked that for those who had the diarrhea. So the rice was given to those who were sick.

And we stayed there, liberated, in the middle of nowhere; we didn't know what to do.

We are free the minute the blacks left us. [Our first feeling was] that we were in a vacuum. We don't know where we were, where to go; we only know that we are free, free of black S.S. who tortured us for months and months. We hoped right away that we go to the village (the village was 20 kilometers from there). We will go and people will give us, and we will beg. And we did beg for three months:

that's how we lived, from one village to another. In one village they were more generous.

Then more Russians came, then they came with us to beg like beggars, and they begged for us. They had some things also, but they didn't have chocolate like the Americans who came to liberate the concentration camp - they didn't have food or canned food. These were poor, Russian soldiers who fought in 1940-41, and they were hungry and they were neglected, and they were wild for women. And really, we had to keep ourselves very strong.

From January 21st when we were freed, we came home at the end of April – I would say 25th of April. We still didn't know the calendar. We didn't meet, for many weeks, any other prisoner who was liberated. Maybe in Lublin we met a Hungarian guy who said he was in Auschwitz, and we said, "We were in Auschwitz too." Yes, but we weren't together. He told us that a lot of people died there. He was also transported somewhere else where he worked. But he was not more informed than we were.

We walked most of the time. When Russian truck came by (which I regretted a lot once), that came by and saw us frozen (it was January) he picked us up. There were two trucks. In one all the girls went; in the first one came a Russian soldier, young, and said, "You, little girl, come with me in front, because you are frozen." I *was* frozen. I didn't want to leave my mother. He said, "No, there's no room. Your mother cannot come; she will go to the other girls. We were about fifteen or twenty. And I went in front. Nobody would believe me that this guy, after five, six kilometers of driving, dark, in the forest, following the other truck (I could see them when we got up there) – but after twenty kilometers he stopped going fast. First

he opened with right hand my blanket that was attached to my head with a string, and put his hand on my thigh. And I started to cry. This was before Tremlinka. I could only say one word, "Mom! Mom! Help me! Mom! Why did you let me come?" In this I regretted I was. I mean, he saw me a little child (I think I looked like a child, a dirty little child). Somehow he had pity on me, he thought of his mother or his sister, I don't know. And he stopped the car before, but then he heard me crying, only one word, "Mom!" He started the engine again, and left me alone. And we followed; we knew the destination was the same for the first truck. When we arrived, Mom was alone in the station; all the others left her. "Why did you let your daughter go? Why do you always spare her energy? Why, she could come with us."

Mom persuaded me to come. "You will be warm, my dear – go!" So the two of us picked ourselves that first house that we had seen, that light. We ran there, and there were all the others. They didn't want to talk to me.

I was eighteen years old January 19th; I arrived in April: I was eighteen years old and three months, a child … tenth grade; still a child but very mature child, in an empty house. Everything was taken out by the Germans when we left the little village – or the Hungarians, or both. They couldn't take my piano, because it was too heavy. Two beds: the mattresses took a lot of place. Everything else was gone – linen, table, everything. And this is so tragi-comic, you know.

Next day, one of my friends, classmates, …, the pharmacist's daughter, across the street, came to visit and see us. Because everybody came to see us, and how sorry they were that we were taken. But this girl proved that

she was sorry. She brought me my sweet-sixteen velvet dress with a white lace collar, and she said, "I knew that you'd come home. I pulled this dress down from the truck. I put it in my closet (they couldn't punish me; I have dresses too). And I thought you would come back." - and handed it over. Now, you can picture that even though we got one pair of stockings, somewhere we begged for a sweater (it was still winter). But we had nothing. And now I had a velvet dress with white lace collar.

The following day was my surprise of my accordion. A boy who was the son of my father's employee, man who worked for my father, who was my age, maybe a little older, brings a big box and puts down in the empty room (we were sitting on our bed). I can never forget this. The box was in shambles when you opened it. And he said, "This is you accordion. I put it in the ground for three months, and when they left I took it out." This accordion I gave to his son seventeen years later, in 1960 – maybe a little earlier, because we hoped to leave the country earlier. And, I don't know if he's still alive, but for a long time we were exchanging correspondence, and he was still there.

This gave me a faith again in life. That is, no matter who is Christian and Jewish, if there is a friendship; if they want somebody to make happy; if you want to do something kind to another human being - that this is proof, this is the friendship that you count on, and it's existing, and it's possible, the co-existence, if we accept the other, if we accept the differences. Not just tolerate, *accept* the differences which is *existing*. There are not two flowers that are alike. I said this many times. How can we be all alike?

Mom and I, we *never* found the home that we left. The home, the peace, the love that the family gives – we never found that love. We hoped, and she hoped, that I will marry, that I will have again a family, and for months she waited for my father, until I heard what happened. And about my father I didn't hear for a long time.

I knew about my brother pretty soon. My brother was separated from us with my father. And they were put next day to work, construction work, road construction – chop stones; and this man who came home and told me he *saw* what happened: he stopped in front of the S.S. and said, "I can't do this work; give me anything else, probably," he said. He showed his hands; he said: "This is my career, this is my life; I can't do anything else. You see, I am blind on one eye." He only saw, this guy said, only the gestures: he showed his hands, he showed his eye: he had to talk. And this guy couldn't wait till he finished: he *shot him in front of my father*. Somebody else had to take him away – pull him away. And my father went on working; he had to.

We didn't get the news yet of my father; only my brother. By the time, we knew much more – how many others were killed, and how few came back in that village. And that our family in America may be existing – my father's family. (My mother had no family, only in France second, third cousins. We didn't even count on them because they separated a long time ago.} But you see, after a tragedy like this, you survive. You have to go on. You have a couple of examples that we are not lepers; that we are people who want to live, create. That doesn't stop, not even these circumstances.

And my mother said, "Your father said you will have to go to college. Your father said that you will marry only after the college . . . " Little things that she built me up again.

I seriously thought that maybe she will get married. Then after a couple of years, "Do you really thought that I could get married?" She would never marry; there's no man whom she could love like my father. They asked her; she was a young woman. Then she got better, and gained some weight, and, you know, she lived to 101.

But something we NEVER got back: our home, our family. When my son was born, five years after my marriage, that's the only time when I felt this could be possible: we could live again; we have a career. Life is beautiful, there's something. But … But my father doesn't see this. Who cares, if he's not around? Many depressions, back and forth; it's not a straight line. But hope, all the time, everything.

And my mother said to the German TV . . . "What made you live so long? What makes you kick?" She said, "To prove that they cannot destroy. The Jews were around for 5,000, 3,000 years; enough, they cannot destroy. You know what, I have a grandchild and I have two great grandchildren. We are here to stay." She said this in Hungarian, of course, …

I got married in 1950, December, last day of December, because that's when I had vacation. We got married, and we went for a honeymoon to another town where my husband had some relatives. There were no hotels, there were no honeymoon places, and we had no money. We finished in June, 1949, and 1950 we got married. He had a job in a pharmaceutical plant, the youngest manager of the injection

section, and I got a job as a teacher, and they wanted to send me somewhere in the middle of nowhere. We were going to get married and Paul said, "*Now* what's your excuse? We have our diploma. If we make the marriage right away, you are not going to go; you'll have to stay here." I was glad to get married and I stayed there.

My son's birthday is January 21, 1955, and it's interesting that that's my liberation day: 1945, January 21; and my son was born in '55; and three years later after my son married he called me up for my birthday at 7:00 in the morning (his time 4:00 in the morning in California), and he said, "Happy Birthday, Mom."

And I said, "George, why d'you get up at 4:00. It's 4:00, 7:00 my time."

"I know you go to school, Mom, and I want to give you present." I couldn't believe; "Your grandson was born on the 19th of January." Is this something? Robert was born on my birthday. He is so dear to me.

I only feel this so strongly [about having children and grandchildren] when I go to a school or a bar mitzvah, where lots of Jewish children are. I had the same feeling. I never, never believed that there will be Jewish children anymore. When my grandson was born, I knew that my family will live, and Hitler did not reach his goal.

There was a museum which was discovered about eight years ago, artifacts that Hitler collected. The first time I saw it in Indiana, that's when it was discovered. The title of the architect's painting was "An extinguished nation." It's art. He finished with us; he collected art from an extinguished nation.

When I went to Israel, the first time visiting Yad Vashem, and there is a children's museum there. You enter

in the museum right near the Yad Vashem. It's dark, only some candle lights - they look like small stars - are lighting the whole thing. I don't know if anybody saw that. And you go around, and every second a child's name is called. By the time you make the round in the museum, you heard thousands of names, and you come out from the museum and see a mountain.

I asked the guide, "What's that mountain there?"

He said, "The Mount Hope. This is the Mountain of Hope." Again, something, a feeling, a strong belief, we are here to stay.

I found out [about VE-day] very late. I didn't know that. This was before we came home, this was in 1944, June. I heard very late about this. We were completely disconnected with the world, with the peace. Then later I found out nobody wanted us, I found that nobody let us in, including my loved United States. We were disconnected, we were outer space.

[I immigrated to the United States] in 1962, 17 years later of our liberation, at the end of June. Till then, we tried to leave the country. I didn't want to live among those people who I thought still hated us. I wanted to believe in a free country: don't forget that we lived in a Communist country from '45 to '62, and that wasn't a picnic, either. Freedom of press, non-existing; freedom of speech, non-existing. If you ask, I was not a member of communist party and a teacher. How can I be a teacher in a for a … country, and trying to leave the country? Immediately when they found out that I registered to leave the country, they kicked me out. So from 1958, I could not teach in public schools, and there were no other schools: there was no private schools. My husband lucky, he was a

pharmacist and he was very much needed. He wasn't a member of party either. No, that wasn't easy and I didn't know if my son ever will be encouraged, because he had parents who were intellectuals. Teacher is a borderline, teacher is okay, but pharmacist, doctor, lawyers, no good. So that's why we wanted to leave the country, but they didn't let us leave when we wanted, and luckily for Kennedy, when we got to France (my relative from France sent us affidavit, … go to Israel), so then my relatives from America said, "So come to America anytime," and Kennedy had that amendment, that those who lost their family in the Holocaust or in the war (not only Holocaust) and had family in United States or anywhere else, they can come. And we came legally.

[When I first arrived in America], I saw the liberty statue. I read a lot about America, I love American literature, so I was not the one who expect that I have on floor diamonds and gold, but I knew that Americans are from many people made up, and maybe they will accept Jews too. I don't have too many disappointments in that matter. I know [*inaudible*]. I know that not everybody likes us, but I could never, never have freedom and lifestyle, and the feeling that if you work, you can live. The feeling that you are exposed to culture if you want to. If you don't have $70 ticket to the theater, you go with $50, or stand in line and get "Two-fers," and you still can go to the theater.

You know, I lived in Israel for a while, in Paris, France, Hungary, Romania. Nowhere in the world can you build up from two diplomas and no other things but two luggages, to build up life from the scratch, without a towel, without a . . . what shall I tell you? They didn't let us bring anything. The oil painting of my son was

smuggled out ten years later. Nowhere else in the world can you have the results, if you want, and choose a lifestyle that is possible. We are in Scarsdale now, Sweetheart. Scarsdale: you know how far is that from …, where I left, *der Staedtl*? Very far. I can't pray enough.

American means, for me, a new life. I don't know who shall I thank: God, or fate, or luck. Because it's sheer luck that I survived; it's sheer luck that I have a child (I never thought I would have a child). It's sheer luck that my work in this country was accepted, that my teaching was not only French and Latin, but something for life. There's a Latin saying *Non scolae sed vitae discemus(?)*: "We don't study for school, we study for life." And this is also for my father, who said, "You study for you." Well, here I am, coming from nowhere, just a little teacher with lots to give. I wasn't prepared to get so much.

In 1976 we had a strike in our school, which was incredible for me. I should strike in United States? I had never been so rich; I had never been so free. I had never been so contented with my work, my existence - and I go to strike? I needed all my colleagues here to convince my husband that I am one of the most respected teacher in schools, with my past and my present, and I don't want to go in strike? So I did. I didn't want to be a …

I taught French and Latin in a private school in Brooklyn called The Academy, for two years until I got my green card. Then I came to Eastchester in 1964. For 26 years I taught French and Latin, and I loved it. Then came the tragedy of my husband's accident, and he was killed in his own plant when he said, "I had enough. I don't want to make millions. I want to live." We traveled a lot after my son finished college. We had money. The law school

wasn't cheap, but we had money, and I made money, my husband - and why to make more money, let's enjoy it. We were in New Zealand, we were in Australia, everywhere where we wanted, so it's stop working.

I stopped working 1991, June. Came home from the graduation. I got a telephone call that my husband moved out the furniture from the plant to whom he sold the plant, and a mixer fell on his chest, and he is in the intensive care. His former secretary called me. By the time I was there, he was in the intensive care, and one hour later he died.

I questioned again God, "Why me?" And I was in a shock for three months dark room, when my principal sent me a letter and his secretary, "Clara, come back to work. If not full time teacher, substitute." That saved my life: back again to the kids. I never can cut the umbilical cord from teaching or from kids. And my mom wasn't there. See, the problem is that she was always there when I needed her, and when she was gone it's, the world is spoiled, the world collapsed. November 5th, I lived, I laughed, I work, but there is an emptiness …. I can't fill it. Maybe my grandchild, or great grandchild.

[My mom meant] everything to me: support, love, confidence, help, to the last minute. I worked all during my son was growing up. Yes, a teacher comes home at 3:00 - but mom was always there; this kid was never a baby-sitter; he had a home all the time, that was all mom. I gave the chapter of my book about mom, and mom in crisis, mom in good times, deserves a chapter in my book. And those spoiled children who don't appreciate their parents, they have to learn something from it: what a mom means. This

was a unique relationship. I think it was a unique relationship.

[With my time now,] I wrote two books: one for my son on his 40th birthday about his father's family (nobody can write *that* book). I wrote my book about my experiences. I work forever for the Holocaust Commission; that's a great help. It started only in '92 when Paul, my husband, died. I doubled my presentations: churches, synagogues, colleges in America, and mainly high schools (this is where I relate mostly to my students; this is my time, my age, my lost youth or childhood). And if I reach, out of 120 students, 20, I made a difference.

[In my life, I'm most proud of] being with my mother for 70 years, 40 years in my married life, and *making her happy*. The fact that my son turned out who he is: he's bright; the fact that he is successful and many times happy It's somewhat mutual. As he said, "The work ethics is only from you; the common sense is from Grandma."

This makes me tick, my mom's love. I think I made my husband happy too, that's another thing. Not too many people, but this is enough for a lifetime. That's the only thing I can tell you. I'm not proud of my book yet.

And I'm also proud that for some people I showed what loving is, what helping is: giving, not just getting. There will be some people who got that from me. If you'd read the letters what students write to me, you would be very proud of hearing it.

I am very proud for my loving my mother, and making her happy in the worst situation that we thought we couldn't come through. Our relationship, our help to each other, it's unique, and *that makes me happy*.

I have two grandchildren - Rachael is 15, Robert is 13 - and they are very close to me. If I tell you that I went for Mother's Day and they still fight who is going to go to bed and read stories together. Rachael sleeps with me still, each night when I'm there. Robert says no, anymore. Last year he still came, and I was in the middle, and they fought, who is going to be there.

[Dedicating myself to educating young people about the Holocaust], that happened in Eastchester, not before, when my teacher colleagues, … to found out that I'm a survivor, said "What is your teaching mean to you if you cannot share the experience that you went through, and you would not try to bring *other* children to know what's life, to give your compassion for old and young, to respect old and young. What is French and Latin do if you don't want to share this?"

I was afraid that I break down, I was afraid that my accent would not reach them; my English, my foreign existence would not be close to them. On the contrary, I had no problem with my English with them. I don't think that behind me they would make fun of my accent. But that's America; they tolerate foreigners.

Yes, [I have been touched by student's] letters, their … that "If I will be ever a President, I would teach this, and it would never happen again." Or, a little Catholic sixth grader told me, "Mrs. Knopfler, tell me what would happen if another Hitler would come, and he would ask us to separate from our parents, to give up our home, to leave my father, my mother, what will happen? What can I do?" and he wrote it, also, but in classroom situation.

And I said, "One thing you have to learn, what's good and what's bad. If you see the evil, fight it. If you see

the good, teach it. Be vigilant, don't let happen things without looking around of you. That's the only thing I can tell you."

[If I could speak to the future, I would say:] Never forget the past, because if you forget the past you don't know what to do in present, and you *can't* have a future. You learn from the past the good, and the bad that you want to avoid. Never let happen what happened to us. Do not look down; do not be prejudiced; do not think that somebody is less than you unless it proves to be less; and, you can change everybody with kindness, with goodness, if you try hard.

You can't sleep without hope. I do have [hope for the future]. I was very disappointed, September 11th: it brought me back again to the darkest time of my life. Do they still do this to people? Can you imagine to have terrorists in America? - we, the innocent America. I think we are innocent. Our politics, we can't believe that this could happen to us. And I tell you, for me, America means a lot. I know the problems; I see; I cannot and I will not, I refuse to criticize. I'm too new in this country to criticize America. I know about things that I don't like, but I can't believe that America can be hurt. It hurts me if America is hurt.

[If I could speak to my father today, I would say that] I still love him, and I hope that I lived according to his principles, values, that I respect it, and if he could see me from wherever he is, he could love what I do, he could be happy that I do. My mother was. She never talked me out of going and speaking. In fact, she urged me to write a book. If I would see once more my father, I would tell him, number one, that I love him, and then that

I lived according to his values, that I respected his judgment. Wherever he is, if he could see me, I tell him the truth.

The first time I was free in my life in thought, in movement, in creating something, was America. Of course it means a lot to me. I am a Democrat, if you would call it, but I'm more hawkish than anybody who was born American. For me, the flag is a lot, the pledge is a lot. Every day in school for forty years I never got tired of it. Yes, it means me a lot; and I was never disappointed in my life in any kind of situation by the people in United States. Openly, nobody looked down at me, nobody was condescending with me. I felt a human being: is that enough? I feel a human being in this country.

The first time we came in this country June 10th, we were expecting my whole family. My father's two brothers, two sisters, married (only two of them had children) – they all were at the boat, because I chose to come from Le Havre to United States by boat. I paid every penny back to the Jewish agency …, but we came with a boat. And one of my uncles was a buyer for, in the Bronx, a big apartment house, and we had two rooms waiting for us in the Bronx, … Avenue, and paid $100 for the apartment, and I was *in heaven* in those two rooms: one for mom and my son, and one for us. For two years, while I was teaching in a private school in Brooklyn, I traveled one hour; back and forth, two hours. I stopped in Hunter College to take more credits. My husband worked in New Jersey, traveled one-and-a-half hour one way. When he had a car a year later, then he traveled only one hour, for fifteen years. I worked for $80 a week; he worked for $90 a week; and we saved money.

[We moved to Westchester] in 1964. My first school and my last school, Eastchester. I applied for sixteen schools and this was the last one that I applied, and I was accepted right away. We moved to Westchester because I thought here I was more secure. In a New York school I might get ridiculized for my accent. This is not true, but my uncle worked here in another household, and he persuaded me to choose Westchester. I never regretted it.

But, what was interesting is that I applied for New Jersey also because my husband worked there, and I went to a school and I was accepted, and just for the form's sake, the principal told me, "You have to talk with the Department Chairman also, and he will talk to you about your career." And when I told him that I speak German, he said, "Where did you learn German?"

I said, "I learned in school and in concentration camp."

He was German. That was my only experience to know that next day my principal called me, "I'm sorry, the job is not yours; it was somebody else who was before you."

When I came to Eastchester and he asked me, the principal, "What nationality are you?" and I said, "Jewish." He said, "I did not ask what is your ethnic origin, I asked you what nationality." I said, "I know. You wanted to ask me if I am Romanian, Hungarian, or French, but I wanted to tell you Jewish, because I don't want you to call me back tomorrow and tell me that the job is not for me."

"What do you think, Clara?"

I said, "I have the experience, and I am Jewish." Next day I got the job.

We moved to Westchester in 1964. We moved to Eastchester, where I taught, in 1964 and we got an apartment for three months without any payment because the landlord was a Hungarian Jew.

My son is an attorney. He practices in Los Angeles for twenty years, and then he worked also in Santa Barbara, had an office, and now he returns back to Los Angeles …

I love to play bridge every Monday night religiously in Temple Israel. I love classical music, and go to opera often and spend my money there, concerts. Sports, I played when my husband lived - every second day tennis. I stopped doing that. I stopped to play any instrument since he died. And I love to be with people, socialize, know people, give if I have love. This is serious hobby.

I tried to instill in my son, my grandchildren, and once in awhile to my daughter-in-law, that even though we don't have family, we have roots. We are not grass, or …, as the French says. Who lives a day, dies, and …. We have roots, and if we don't know about our roots, we would be de-rooted, if it's an English word, de-rooted. Respect what you have. And I have to quote Malamud also: "If you forget who you are, if you forget that you're a Jew, there will be always a gentile or somebody to remind you." No use to run away. Just live your heritage, respect your elders. They're here to stay.

[I said:] "The hope that is born with each human being is always there, never lost: the hope to live." You know what is that in Latin? *Dum spiro spero* – "As long as I breathe, I hope. For life." I feel like an American: free, happy. I am an American.