

September 19, 1995

**Leslie Bennett-Troper interviewed Ruth Grunberger Mermelstein in Brooklyn NY for Shoah Foundation**

---

*Please tell me your name.*

My name is Ruth Rella and my maiden name is Grunberger. And my married name now is Mermelstein. I was born with the name Regina, but I never liked it and used Rella.

*What is your birthday?*

February 29, 1928 but after I came to Sweden I changed it to February 27 because I didn't want to have a birthday every four years.

*Where were you born?*

I was born in Mukacevo in Czechoslovakia and then in 1938 we were occupied by the Hungarians and so it became Munkacs.

*Can you begin by telling us about your childhood?*

We were eight children. I was the third. I had a brother and then my sister who was born in 1925. I was born in 1928. I then had another brother Nute and then a sister, Esther, and a brother Baruch, and then Tobe and finally Pesel. She was called Peska and she was born in January of 1944.

*Tell me about your parents.*

My mother was 41. Her name was Emma. My father was David, and he was 45.

*Tell me about growing up.*

I was fortunate to grow up in a very happy family. We were well off. I can't remember ever wanting anything that I didn't have. My father had a wholesale grocery with two other uncles. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday we were not allowed to go into the business because they were very busy distributing groceries to the surrounding villages.

But I had one uncle who lived upstairs where the store was and he no children. And every time he saw us outside looking in the window, he would call us in and give us something—candy. He made such a big welcome for the children. We looked going forward to go there.

The stores were always closed from 2-4. Sometimes my father would stay at the business, and we would bring him food. It was a thermos. It was stacked. Three containers on top of each other. I used to love to take him the food because, Saturdays, after the meal he would go for a walk, and I would go with him. I loved those walks.

I went to Czech school for 4 ½ years and then I continued in Hungarian school. The Czech school was only a block or so away. It was upstairs. It was the Goode (sic) because, I think, someone named Goode used to live in the house.

The Hungarian school was across the street and not too far away. After the fifth-year school I went to the Polgari. It was like a high school. We learned another language. I took up German language.

In the house we spoke mostly Hungarian and Jewish.

In 1938 the Hungarians came in and that is when all the trouble started. In 1940 they started collecting Jews and taking them to Poland. In fact, I had a cousin, Hendu, who was from Strabichovo that was only about 15 minutes from our town and she was going to Hungarian schools in Munkacs.

They just caught her and tried to take her away to Poland in 1942. My mother she knew someone in the Hungarian army that she grew up with and together with the principal of the school went after her. Just at the Polish border they found her and were able to bring her back. After the war she survived and went back. Years later she was able to immigrate to Israel. It is a happy story.

My mother used to light 18 candles when a child was born or died. It would be lit on Friday night. It was just beautiful.

In 1944 my father was out of town. He came home at midnight. And my mother went to the hospital immediately. He came home and said it was a little girl. I was so happy. It was a little girl. I told him I was so happy it was a little girl.

In 1942 they started taking away businesses and they took away ours and gave it to a Christian guy.

They confiscated pepper. We had a lot as a wholesaler. Black pepper is a big spice in Hungary.

He took me to Budapest in, I think, in 1942. There was a beautiful department store that is still there. And he would bring back presents to all the children. He bought a beautiful robe for my sister. He took me there in the subway and asked how I liked it. I said there is nothing to see because it is so dark. But it was such a treat for me to go.

I am jumping from 1942 to 1944. In 1944 my father was again in the Budapest. He brought home a beautiful carriage to have for my little sister. It looked like a car. But it never saw the streets because at that time because the Germans were already there, and we were afraid to use it. We ended up just having it in the courtyard.

My childhood was very happy and was very comfortable. We always had maids. I remember one, Bella, she was with us for a long time and used to sing us lullabies. She had a sister in Belgium when the Germans came to Belgium, we always wondered what happened to Bella. We had a Christian girl her name was Busecka (sic) and she would comb my hair in the morning. And braid it

every morning. Everybody's shoes were polished and lined up so that when everyone went to school, we would have polished shoes. She made a fire in the morning. But after 1943 we sent her away because we were afraid to have a Christian girl as a maid. We would look to be too comfortable.

We had food, fresh, from Strabichovo because that is where her parents lived on a farm and had fields. So, we had flour. It was legal. We always had bread.

In 1944 when the Germans came in they looked for my father. Actually, the Hungarians took him away in 1943 to Monopol. A labor camp. It was 3 months.

They would carry sacks of flour from one place to another. I used to go to that street to see if I could get a glimpse of my father. I saw him a few times with a heavy sack of flour on his shoulder. I remember that father had a beard and they had cut it off. I was crying hysterically because that I thought it was the worst things you could do to my father—getting his beard cut off.

The Hungarians started in 1943 what was the Kohner Castle. That was a castle that was made into a prison. They took him there, too, for a few weeks. They let him come home but they had beaten him up so terribly.

They had taken away the pepper from his business. He was on a blacklist. For some reason—and I still can't understand it—they gave him back the pepper. So, we were selling it to everyone but at a special price. People would even come for it as a medicine—a little black pepper.

In 1944 the Germans came in. Our house fell into the ghetto. That was in April, and they brought in the Jews from all the surrounding villages. In Munkacs they had two brick factories—the Kallus and other was called the Shajovitch. One day they came. I was home because they didn't allow Jews to go further in schooling. I finished the 9<sup>th</sup> grade I was home for one year. After the Germans came in there was raping and so I didn't even go on the streets. I never even saw an officer. One day I was by the window of our house, and I saw Germans approach—and an officer—and they were asking for my father. He wasn't home.

They said to my mother that if he doesn't appear in an hour or so they would take us away. My father didn't come home. So, they told us to pack a few things. We had 10 minutes. My mother was reaching for something on the table, and he just slapped her.

Before that the Germans came in and collected all the gold from everybody. They took earrings and chains. They took everything off. Our house was a long house. On each side of the house were narrow flower beds. My mother said that the wedding band and the engagement ring she doesn't want to give them. She managed to bury them in the garden near the steps. And for many years I was always dreaming that I would go home and find my mother's rings.

But when I actually came back everything was cemented. I don't dream about that anymore.

They had a buggy or wagon with a horse. The little kids and bags were put in there. Me and the older kids were walking behind it. And we walked to the brick factory.

They gave us a cellar to stay. It was cold. Cement floor. We were there overnight. The next day they told my mother and us to come to the office. My mother stayed and they sent the kids away. An hour or so later she came out and she was all beaten up. Her face was swollen. She looked terrible. We stayed a few more days in the cellar.

And then they said we could go out and find a place in the brick factory. We found a place where two or three people could stand. Someone came and said they saw my father and brother.

He was full of blood—the ears, the face. They beat him up so terribly [she starts crying here]. He stayed with us. But in May he would go out and with a wagon bring food for everybody. They had a kitchen, and he would go out and get food for it.

A year before that my brother Nute had an infection on his foot. The bone came out in pieces and a new bone was growing in. He was 3 months in the hospital. The doctor told my mother he was well enough to leave but he didn't want him to go home so he could stay with him—the doctor. But my mother said no. Someone also offered to take my sister, too, to stay with them. But she said no. She said, "Wherever I go, my children will go, too."

When they started with the transports, we fell into the second transport. That was middle of May, 1944—everybody from the two brick factories.

They took us in cattle cars. We went for a while and then we stopped at the (???). The other brick factory. I was taking care of my little sister. There was a small opening, and I could see out. And I saw my cousin Hendu. She was at the door of the cattle car. And I was so excited to see her. She hadn't seen my little sister yet. And I showed her. Instead of being happy, you know, she had such a sad face. I couldn't understand why. She just went away. I think she felt so bad that we had a little baby.

Then we traveled for maybe three days on that cattle car. Once we stopped and they let us out—just to go the bathroom.

***Where did you think you were going?***

They said we were going to a better place. Where they had a place for the children to play. Young people are going to work. This is the story they told us.

***Did your parents know what was really taking on?***

In 1942-1943 there were people in Poland and they came back. And there were women who would tell us stories of what was happening there. One woman I remember I kept thinking what a poor woman because something was wrong with her. I mean that she made up stories like that. It was going in one ear and out the other for me. I felt sorry for the woman who would tell such stories.

While I was home I took care of the baby. She was like my baby. I bathed her and fed her. I washed the diapers. I remember that my father was so amazed that I would wash the diapers and didn't complain. I didn't mind it.

I remember when he said he would go get some material. Everything was custom made. There was a woman who would sew our clothes and the coats. My father bought me this beautiful material in appreciation. I felt so grown up. I was so appreciated.

***When you were in school did you feel anti-Semitism?***

Anti-Semitism was always around. I remember in school once her name was Metzger Emma. She and a few girls held me down and rubbed my lips with a piece of ham. That's how anti-Semitism was.

There were Saturday classes and my father permitted us to go to school. But we didn't do any writing, just oral exercises.

***Was there a large Jewish community?***

Yes, Munkacs was 38,000 people and half of it was Jewish.

In 1942 the gendarmes were just as bad if not worse than the Germans. When the Jews would go for prayers they would their beards and payots. With the flesh so the streets would be full with blood. They were called the gendarmes and they had those hats with the big feathers.

***Was there any action on the part of the Jewish community to defend themselves?***

We had no say. We had no ammunition or guns to defend ourselves. We just hoped for the best. We hoped that we would be liberated from the Germans and Hungarians. But as far as defending ourselves we couldn't do anything against an army.

***Did you have any radios?***

We weren't permitted to have radios. But my uncle had one. Sometimes the men would go and listen to it. But I was a little kid. I didn't anything of that stuff. But, again, we were just hoping that we would be occupied by the Russians. Just that it would get better.

I remember that the day before they took us away separately, we had a hiding place in the store. It was where we were supposed to go. But we never managed to get in there. We had no warning.

***Were other friends and family taken away?***

Not on the same day. We were inside the ghetto. We had a cousin who lived on another street and he and his family moved into our house. We were some of the first taken but later everyone from the ghetto was taken.

We lived on the corner of Danko and Gijh (sic). It was an L shaped house. After the Danko street there was what they called the Jewish Street because it was all really Jewish. Grandmother's house was on that street. We used to live there years ago before we lived in that house before we moved. I remember my brother's bar mitzvah was done there. It was such a big shindig. There were people standing outside. My father's father was Chaim Shlomo Grunberger. My father's mother died when he was two years old. He had a stepmother whose name was Tova. She was taken with us to the concentration camp.

***Tell us about the transport that you were talking about.***

We had a corner of the cattle car for the family where you could just stand. It was my father and mother and my brothers and sisters. We were all there. It took about three days. The cattle car came to a halt and we were told to get out. Men with striped uniforms—they were actually prisoners—helped us out of the cattle cars. I was holding baby. He looked at me and said, "All the mothers should hold their own children." So my mother took the baby from me. First it was men and women separated. My sister and my cousins were on the left side and my mother and the other kids on the right side.

***Where did you think you were?***

We didn't know. It was all lit up. It was about 10:00 at night. There were no stars, and it was dark but the place was lit. Just men in stripped clothes with a hat like a beret. We didn't know they were prisoners. I gave my mother my sister. And my brother Nute wasn't with us because of his leg. So, they had a car separate. It was supposed to be like a Red Cross. He was there with my uncle, the one who didn't have any children. So we thought it was best for him to be with my uncle. While we were being sorted. I had a little suitcase with things for the baby. I thought, what is my mother going to do without the baby clothes? So, I ran to the other side. Mengele held on to me. I didn't know it was him at the time. He had white gloves. He held on to me.

I said I needed to give my mother the baby clothes. I gave her the little suitcase and we looked at each other and I wanted to say goodbye and a lot of things. No words came out of my mouth. She just looked at me and I looked at her. Mengele took me back.

He said "you go over on the other side and there I will select again." He made the selection.

We started marching. It was maybe for half an hour. By then everything was dark. It must have been about midnight. And as we were coming to one section, we saw chimneys and there was fire and smoke. We were getting close to one place and nothing was fenced. Two men came and picked up a body that was laying off there and threw it into a fire. I guess there just a fire by the side and they did that too.

We came to Birkenau and what was called the Sauna. You got undressed and took showers.

***Was that the first night?***

The first night. Right away. We thought they were going to throw us in the fire, too. So we started screaming and refused to go further into the sauna.

A Slovak girl, she was one of the kapos, she came and told us what was going to be done—they were going to give us showers and clothes and we shouldn't be afraid, and we should go in. So, we went in. We got undressed. They cut our hair off. We went into the showers—the real showers.

They told us later that we were the only group that refused to go into the showers. Others just went in. They wanted to calm us down. They gave us a gray dress. Then they led us to one room.

That is when I saw my father. He was in stripped clothes. He looked at us and cried. What they had done to us. And we cried.

He said to us that he found out that if you have an occupation then you got sent to work. So he said to be a wholesale grocer wouldn't do. So, he said he knew something about locks. And that he was going to tell them he was a locksmith. So, in case they or my mother looked for him to don't look for David Grunberger the grocer but David Grunberger the locksmith.

And then he said, "I want you to promise me one thing. Whatever they give you to eat, you should eat. To survive." "I also want you to be careful of the group you get into. What people you are with." I guess he meant that whatever group could make you or break you.

Those are the three things he said to us.

Then he was taken away. And I never saw him again. We promised we would do those things.

### ***Who were you with?***

My sister and my cousin. Then we were taken away. To the A lager. The 26<sup>th</sup> block. We were there and one day they came in and took us away. We got the tattoo. My number is 85878. I tried to rub it off at first because I thought that the number is the only thing that—if it could escape—is going to be in my way.

After that there we were about 300 girls. They gave us white kerchiefs. And every day we were going to work in Birkenau. Taking the clothes from the transports and sorting them. Where we going back and forth. Every morning we got up at 4:00. They would count us. Counting us for two hours. Just standing and counting us.

I remember the first day they gave us some tea with leaves in it by worms. At first I couldn't drink it. But by the same thing the second day and the third day, I learned to drink it. I shoved away the worms and drank the liquid. They gave us a brick of bread divided into four. That was the day's meal. Sometimes a soup had beets and potatoes. I never knew that beets and potatoes went together. I used to think that if I ever get out, I will make soup with beets and potatoes.

For three weeks we were going back and forth and after that we were moved. There were two blocks. They gave us red and white polka dot dresses and then black and blue and white polka dot dresses.

At Auschwitz-Birkenau we had it pretty good, unfortunately. Because the transport would come, and they would sometimes have food in packages and the clothing. They had bread. A mountain of bread.

***How did you get to be around these things?***

We were selected. It was our job—to pick up the clothes at the Sauna.

***Nobody would stop you from taking the bread?***

We were in a barrack so we could sneak eating whatever we found. At one point it got around that we weren't eating what we were given because they put some dope in the food, in the soup. They were concerned you would become normal.

At some point they gathered us around in a circle and gave us a large bowl of soup. They went around to see that we finished it. It was called bromine. It relaxed us. We weren't normal and we never had our menstruation.

So, we were working there. One day I saw a transport coming. An old man lost his shoe. So he tried to pick it up and the SS were beating him and they said never mind because you are going to get new shoes. I was on my way back to the sauna and he asked me if it was true. And I said yes.

What was I to tell him? No. It is not true.

One day I was walking and there were quite a few barracks at Birkenau where they were sorting clothes. They had a warehouse with all the gorgeous stuff that people brought. At least once or twice a week big trucks would come in and would take everything away to Germany.

I remember a woman who was from Munkacs and the brick factory with us and was walking by me. There was some piles of ashes and she said, "You see there is where your sisters and parents and are." I thought she was crazy, "What is she taking about?" I just let it go. And one day I was working, and they had no bathrooms. So, I had to go back to the barracks and outside they had big barrels. I went by the crematorium and they had little windows—very, very small—with bars. And they had flaps from the outside.

I saw a woman holding onto a bar and she had a little baby in her arms that was crying. She was yelling she was screaming. And the SS came quickly and closed the flaps.

And in a few minutes later it was quiet.



And I came into the barracks and was I screaming, “Now I know everything. Now I know everything.” My sister Manci slapped me because she didn’t want the SS to hear me. I guess I would have gone in there, too. I knew, we all knew, what was happening. And that is it.

We had a good guy who was our kapo. He was nice to us. They had little capsules that you light and they burn. And so we made ourselves a little oven and we would cook things. We would have someone outside and if the SS came, they would say, “Geshen” that was our password. And we would clean everything fast away.

One time I saw the Sonderkommando, the ones working in the crematorium, and I recognized a few people from our town. One was Dr. Peter Zoltan. He was a dermatologist in Munkacs. I remember once I cooked some barley and pushed it under the wire for him. Everyone was yelling because I touched the wire. But it must not have been on. They said I was meant to be alive—after Mengele and then that.

If you took clothes you had to put your number on it. And one time I forgot. One day the Slovakish girl who was named Manci and maybe six foot tall was in charge. She slapped me. I saw stars. I was thinking this is also a Jewish girl and why does she have to do this to me?

***Was she a kapo?***

She was a kapo. .

One day they said they were going to have a concert. They selected girls who said they could sing. And they had instruments. We had to go along with it. In the center they made stage for the little band. The Germans announced on the radio. It was that the refugees were from Wiesbaden, a resort place, and so this is how good the refugees have it here. We couldn’t sing but we had to play along.

Then at some point the transports stopped coming. But sometimes where there were holidays like Yom Kippur, they would bring in some more transports. Every time they said, “lichter aus” or “lights out,” we knew something was going on. Or they would make selection from our girls.

For example, you couldn’t be sick. That would be terrible. They would just take you away.

Did you ever get sick?

No. Fortunately, no. But on my left leg I had a sore from vitamin deficiency. I was lucky because in Sweden they told me I was very lucky it didn’t touch my bone.

***So, they made selections from your group?***

Yes and every day we had Zeilappel. The barracks were double bunk beds. There were 13 in one. You couldn’t lay down or stretch out. You slept in a sit position.

And once they said they wanted 50 girls. We didn't think the last ones would ever survive. We were surrounded by the crematoriums. We had seen too much. So we had nothing to lose. So we would take a chance and volunteer for the transport.

A civilian guy came. He selected my sister and me. And left my cousin out—Edith. And we begged them and said we need her—we are always together. So, they let her come, too. He went away and a couple of weeks happened. It was couple weeks and no more transports were coming and so they having us were emptying out the barrels, the ones with urine and feces.

Towards the middle of end of December they came back and took us. They gave us some bread and margarine. And they put us in cattle cars and it took about two days to Reichenbach in Germany. It was an open field and there was only one building. It was made out of all cement. We had a thin blanket. That is where we stayed.

This was end of December. Every morning the snow was up to our waist. We just had that one blanket and with no more clothes. Still at 4:00 in the morning—Zeilappel. We would walk about four miles to a factory. It was a place that made parts for airplanes. We worked with civilian people. At least at lunch we had a good soup. A thick soup. We couldn't talk or mingle with the civilians.

But I remember there was a bakery downstairs and we would pass by and smell the delicious bread. At night we would march back to the building. This went on for a couple weeks. Every morning the snow was so high we took paper in our shoes. Sometimes they would take it away—

***When you were in that transport from Auschwitz it took you two days. Did you take through any towns or see people?***

No. Nothing.

We were working there for a while and then one guy came and said they were bombing the city of Reichenbach. So, we needed to move. He also said, "Siberia didn't have a winter as cold as this." So I guess they had no use for us and again they gave us a loaf of bread. They said it would last four days. We started marching. This was in the middle of February and starting marching through the whole Sudeten Mountains in Germany. It was so cold. And a lot couldn't make it. They shot them and would leave them on the side of the road.

One night we stayed in a stable and one night we slept in a church. We came to a place I think it was called Tratenau. We were there for a few days. And then we went on another cattle car. We had that one blanket and this one was open.

I remember it was my birthday. A girl who came with us recognized the station and said it was Stuttgart. It was pouring and we were soaked through and through. The blankets became like a mold around our bodies. And after a few days we got to a camp that was called Porta. That was already in March.

When we were in Auschwitz, we had two barracks with SS living there. So they wanted to be sure that we would be clean so every night we had to take a shower. The water was ice cold. There was a platform in the sauna and there was an SS walking around with a dog to make sure that everyone was taking a shower. I am still today so petrified of a dog.

So when we came to Porta, it was a beautiful sunny day and people were just sitting around. They were delousing its other with body lice. We hadn't experienced that.

We were only in Porta for maybe two days. Next they took us on a train and ended up in Hamburg. We couldn't get over what the Germans were up to. It was a mountain. The bottom of the mountain had a door in the bottom and there was a hollow and inside was a factory. We worked there, too, making parts for airplanes. After a while they have enough material to make things, so we were building roads—digging and with wheelbarrows. We were there maybe two weeks. It was the late of April.

Then again then put into cattle cars and were taking us away. All of a sudden, we stopped in a deserted place. We were just standing there. And then we couldn't see any SS. So, one of the girls was running out and came back and said, "We're free. The SS are gone. We're free!"

We didn't believe her.

Then we realized it was true. Everybody was hugging and kissing and crying. So I will never forget that moment. We were thinking what could happen to us now. We didn't know. But the Red Cross came.

Other camps when they we liberated, they just ate regular food and got sick. We were given oatmeal to get us used to eating regular food. Lots of oatmeal.

We were taken to Denmark. I remember the prince came to us and shook hands and welcomed us.

### ***How were you transported to Denmark?***

We were still in the cattle car. Then we got off.

They made us sandwiches like a normal human being and we were put into a normal passenger train. And they took us to Sweden. But between Denmark and Sweden there was water. So they put us on a boat.

I remember that when we were walking in the Sudeten Mountains, I found a bucket. Then we found some salt. So, I put the salt in the bucket and carried it all along with me. I still carried it even on the boat. We really couldn't believe that we were free, that we were liberated. But at some point, everything I had I threw in the water—like little items that I carried and the bucket and the salt. I didn't need it anymore.

Everything went into that water. We were really free in Sweden.

We arrived in Bredaryd. It was a school, but they made beds for us. We had doctors to examine us. They took care of my leg. That's where they told me I was lucky because it had almost reached my bone. They gave us a coat and wooden shoes—clogs. We were there for about four months in quarantine. We were still all together—the five of us from Auschwitz. My cousin and Magda Fredlich (sic) she was a partisan from Yugoslavia. Another girl was Hermelibou (sic). Every loaf of bread we got we divided five ways. We always had the same amounts.

We made it all the way to Sweden together.

It was fenced in at Bredaryd—in the quarantine. One Swedish guy and his little girl adopted me and he brought me a necklace. I still have it.

There were 100 of us girls. At that point the Red Cross had us list our names and name of people we were looking for. There was one woman—who is now in the US with a husband and had a child—who stayed in Munkacs and they were hiding. They were the first that we got a telegram. We were so happy for her.

My sister used to remember that we used to write letters to an aunt in Philadelphia. She only remembered Harry Braun in Philadelphia. We gave that name to the Red Cross. And one day we got a telegram that they found us. They started working right away to help come to America. My cousin's father—my uncle—he survived a concentration camp and went back to Munkacs. Edith didn't know what to do to go there or come with us. My aunt and uncle didn't want to separate us. Even though she was my mother's sister but to my cousin she was nothing. But my aunt said she wanted all three of us. So she didn't know what to do—come to America or go with her father.

My sister was the one who took care of me and made decisions for me.

And she said to my cousin, "Listen, Munkacs you can always go to but America you can't. So come to America first with us and then decide what you want to do." And so they sent papers for all three of us.

We had a beautiful summer. There was a lake where we went swimming. We were young. We tried to forget. Well, we could never forget. But we felt we needed to go on with our lives.

Then 50 of our girls were under 18. I was just 17. In fact, I know I tell my grandchild who was 16 and I picture myself being taken to a concentration camp at the age. She was still a child to me. I know what I had been through at that age.

One of my birthdays a while ago they asked me how old I was and I said 16. So, a guy comes to me door and has a big basket with balloons. I said that it can't be for me because I was 64. My daughter had sent it to me and I called her up and she was yelling to her kids, "She got it." And then we had a nice Shabbos meal and had a sign up—Happy Sweet 16—and a cake, too.

So, when they found us in Sweden, they sent us money. We got some clothes and went to Stockholm. We went to the opera. I remember that the money was great but didn't mean. I tell

people today that I had money once and the devil took it—the material things don't mean much to me.

***Did you ever try to find out what happened to your family?***

My uncle came over to America years after we were here—Edith's father—and I asked him what happened to my father. He said, "Nobody knows." Anshu was initially selected to live like my father but nobody knows after that. My other family members . . . I know what happened to them.

I just always think about my mother, what she thought, what she thought about her kids. I've tried she hard to remember the two little kids because I don't have any pictures of them. I try to remember their faces. I shouldn't forget. But I have forgotten. They were so cute.

So, I went to school at Fjallgarden. I was started in wintertime. There was one teacher and a few assistants who looked out after us. We were learning Hebrew and English. After ten months we went to Gothenburg and we took a boat. It was 13 days, and I was sick for all 13 days.

We sent them pictures so they would know for who to look. We came to Philadelphia and the phone was ringing and the person had read the paper that three girls were looking for Harry Braun (and we had just walked in the door).

The papers were filled because people were looking for people and we were just so fortunate. Then my aunt became like a mother to me. I remember that she would say to us to relax, don't work just relax and do nothing.

We were young, too, and we wanted to get out and see people. Our cousins got us some jobs and I went to night school and learn English. I would read books and with a dictionary. So I ended up getting a job. At first, I worked in shoe factory but then a job in an office. I was paid \$20 a week but my uncle would always give me extra money.

It was too much longer after that I meet my husband. We got married and moved to New York. Everyone was so nice when they gave us presents—a table full of electric appliances, an iron, coffee maker. And then an ironing board and \$85 which was a lot of money at that time.

After I had my daughter, I would go back, and they bring out toys.

***Did people tell you what happened to you and your family?***

No everybody talked about it. Across the street was a woman who lost her only child, a son, and I made a condolence call to her, and she said, "Is it true that in the concentration camp that didn't even give you orange juice for breakfast?" I said is this what you know about concentration camps? I couldn't get over it. I was shocked.

I didn't tell them unless they asked. But even then, not that much. It was just too much. Some people here knew, though. I remember asking a friend if people here knew things and did anything and she said, "Oh yes, we would go to Washington and protest. But it wasn't enough.

*Did they believe you stories?*

I think that the only that really believed were those that went through it. Lately, they look at movies and say is it true that you went through that? And I say, “Whatever they tell you is not enough.” I can’t blame them. I couldn’t believe when they first came back from Poland and told us horrible stories. I didn’t believe it—so, why would they believe it.

*What do you think sustained you through that whole experience?*

A will to live and a need to explain to the world what really happened. That’s why we made the decision to leave Auschwitz on the private transport. We just didn’t think we’d ever get out alive. Because we saw what was happening in front of our eyes. There wouldn’t be survivors from there. The chimneys had been going night and day. So, it was black or white to us. The skies were red by fire.

We used to Philadelphia to meet with my aunt and uncle. In Jersey they had factories with tall chimneys. I always got jitters. It was back in Auschwitz. One time we used to march from the A Lager to the warehouse we used to go by a barrack where they had bodies on top of each other. One time here I used to get chickens by the cases. I’d pile them up in the sink and pile them up and put them in plastic bags. I did that in the basement. One day the chickens became bodies to me, and I ran upstairs. I started talking to myself, “They are not bodies they are chickens.”

Those things come up. Or if I see children, or my grandchildren, three months old and I just see my baby sister. How could they do that? You get old but you still ask, “How could they do that?”

If I see a cat or a dog in pain it is terrible to me. And they would do that to human beings. And for what? For one reason: you are Jewish.

In 1989 I went back to my hometown after 45 years and I told you that I am dreaming about my mother’s rings. I took the biggest spoon I could find in the hotel in Budapest and wanted to find her rings. I even took other rings along to exchange if I could find them.

My daughter and cousins wanted to go to Auschwitz to Prague and then to Munkacs. I didn’t really want to go to Auschwitz but I think all the children should go there. So, we went. I remember they showed the double beds and said that eight people would read in each one. I called over the guide and said, “It wasn’t eight it was 13.” He said you were one of the first who said that, but I will tell people to change it.

While we were there standing and talking to him, there was a young couple that were listening to me, and she said she lives in the States and her parents were from Poland. She said could I use a camcorder to answer questions. I said it doesn’t matter.

She said, “What did you do to deserve such a fate?” I said the only thing was that I born Jewish. That’s the only thing. She said that but you must have done something. She was trying to convince herself that Polish people had to have a reason.

I said, “Listen. I had a 4-month-old baby sister. What did she do?” Then she started crying. I saw her outside about a half hour later and she was still crying. She had come to convince herself that the Polish people had been right. Maybe she realized she didn’t know the truth.

***What kind of feeling did you have there?***

I found my Block 26. It was still there. I came there with a terrible feeling but somehow, I was relieved like when you go to a cemetery. These were the grounds that my parents walked. I was glad I did to go. I showed my daughter that place. I said I am only taking one of my children. My son David said he wanted to go with his wife Nina. Zvika was still single.

My daughter went to Budapest after that but later she said that is not the way—you go to Auschwitz and then to Israel. We built Israel on our ashes.

***A lot of people made very hard choices when in the camps. Did you have to make hard choices?***

I relied on my sister. She made most of the hard decisions. I survived because of her. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have survived. I didn’t know what to do.

I was a naïve kid. I used to walk with my father and be with my mother like hold onto her apron strings like when they sent me to my grandparents. I never stayed for the whole week. They used to come into Munkacs in a horse and wagon and they would come in for business to the city—Munkacs. And I used to say, “Let me ride with you.” And they would say, “Oh no, you won’t come back.” I just loved to stay at home with my parents.

It was just a very happy childhood. When we had a summer home in the country there was one girl who was there who had a German friend who would come and visit. I think it was an exchange program. The German program would send her—totally free. I was so upset. I never thought I would be affected that way. I just looked at her because we didn’t get that.

***Did you ever dream about your experiences?***

I’ve always had my husband to wake me from my sleep. He went to concentration, too. And does also. As I said, I used to have the faces of my parents in my dreams. I still wish I could see them or talk to them. But it doesn’t happen lately anymore. But I think of them—my parents, my sisters, and brothers. Almost every day.

***Tell me about your family, your husband.***

I know my mother-in-law and sister-in-law from Europe, before the war. I used to visit my grandparents, aunts and uncles that lived in Strabichovo. That is where my husband is from. My father-in-law left from there to the U.S. in 1940. Ernest was the oldest and they sent him to

Budapest to learn a trade with his cousin. He took up a trade as a baker. He was there for four years. Then in December of 1944 he was sent to a camp for six months.

We came here in April 8 in 1946, and he came in May. His father was here. He had been drafted for a couple of months. They found him through the Red Cross. My sister-in-law came over, and they lost two brothers of the six children in the family. My sister-in-law came from Europe with a fiancé already and she got married here.