

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Friedmann
Forename:	Dr. Gertrud
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	19 April 1929
Interviewee POB:	Piestany, Czechoslovakia

Date of Interview:	9 October 2015
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Jana Buresova
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV155
NAME: Dr Gertrud Friedmann
DATE: 9th October 2015
LOCATION: Belsize Park, London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

The interviewee is Dr Gertrud Friedmann, and we are in her home here in Belsize Park on the 9th of October, 2015.

Thank you very much for being an interviewee for the AJR project. Could you please give us your name, and your date of birth and where you were born?

I am Gertrud Friedmann, born in Czechoslovakia in the city called Piestany in April, 1929.

And could you tell us something about your family background, and your life at home?

It was a beautiful family, really. They couldn't have better parents as they were. My mother was busy, because she had a...well, she was producing fashion...and she, there were girls always working, and learning. It was a three years' ...apprenticeship. Everybody, the schools were very good, so they went to school twice a week and the rest was with my mother, my mother's place and they were...

Where was your mother's place please, and what was her name?

My mother's...?

Where was she born?

Margaret Friedmann, born Winter, in Kežmarok.

And she lived there and she studied there?

No. She lived with us. [laughs]

No, in her home town...?

No, in her home town was the rest of the family. The parents and the sisters and brothers until they were young. She had six siblings: two sisters and four brothers. And they were all educated; everybody had a fantastic job and education. And...they were very peaceful. They were not anymore...This was the generation of Art Nouveau. There was the revolution in learning, in, in arts, in...in the professions, in everything. Modern. The modern times started there, and they were enthusiastic about it. They were no more religious, but... very good people.

[0:03:12]

Were they Jewish and observant?

No. They were Jews, yeah, origin, but not observant.

Mn-hnn.

They took is so easy.

Did you observe any particular festivals, Jewish festivals at all?

Yes, my family- My parents, yes. We were doing it.

Do you remember any particular ones, and how you celebrated?

This is Easter holidays I remember, because they took so long and we had not to go to school or something like this...

And what was your father's full name and his occupation?

Alexander Friedmann, and he was a hotelier, in the hotel business. When I was born, he had the hotel called 'Europe', in Piestany. But in 1929, there came the big financial crisis - the 30s. And people all over the world who usually came to the spa, because this was a spa, and a very good spa, very modern, very nice and very good. There was a natural... fountains, for this hot... mineral sulphuric water. The Romans when they were there 2,000 years ago, they were the first ones who knew already what- how healing this water is, so they made it famous. They taught the locals this- You know what you have here? This is wonderful. And so later there came people who wanted to build it up somehow. It was...only a small, very small city. Only the locals were bathing and taking some advantage from this hot water and hot mud also. Sulphuric mud. This was very good for arthritis and for all possible other medical problems.

Did the economic crisis affect your father's business a great deal?

Yes, of course. The patients, didn't come. Nobody. Otherwise, Americans came, British came, Germans, they were as at home there. So many guests from all over the world. From India. Because two Jewish brothers, Mr. and Mr. Winter, the Winter brothers, they were very good and skilled in doing business, maybe. And built up the business. Not doing it only- because it was a risk. It was not a very big business. Then the people came, and they built up hotels and so it started very intensive... economic life there, so...

What did he do when the economic downturn affected the business?

[0:06:32]

This- this was very bad. So the hotel you could close the hotel because people didn't come. And so therefore my parents went there. They were not born there, but they heard they were building there a spa, and they were enthusiastic about this idea to work there, also. But then during this- nobody came. There were no clients. ...And this was the same during the

wartime. Only the locals came and - and Germans of course, they were not scared. They felt very safe, during the wartime. But nobody else. And the Indians, the Maharajas came. And next to this house where my mother had this...well... OK, 'Salon' they called it. Salon? Modesalon- Modesalon Friedmann they called it, was a big, big...OK, advertising outside the house. And then... yeah, when they came, the guests it was work. Everybody was happy to have work and to have income and to be happy. And there were no problems, everybody, if you are a Jew or non-Jew, there were no problems. The Christians were very tolerant. There were some Protestants in the city, and the guests when they came everybody was happy to have somebody who is speaking English, for example. And this is how I learned, because I like to talk, and when I went with my mother to the biggest hotel – this was Hotel Thermia Palace – this was very exclusive and only for people from English-speaking countries. They were there and millionaires came, and as I said, the Maharajas. [laughs] And so, there were some old ladies, or, many old ladies coming and gentlemen and they were happy to talk to somebody, some locals! Because the local language was Slovak. They couldn't understand; they couldn't coordinate. They couldn't go shopping; they were lost in the city. Otherwise, otherwise the park, and very nice... concerts in the centre of the Spa area, twice daily. So they cared for the guests. They had a very good time, the guests there. In the evenings in the hotels there were musicians and dancing was every night. And Saturday nights there were balls. Ladies needed long dresses, because they were not prepared. They supposed, Slovakia, what is that, that must be very, very backward...area there, no? And then they were very surprised that they needed ball dress even. Not only, simply in sport dresses they came. There was golf around the hotels, close to the hotels and... Sport possibilities of course and beautiful mountains. Hills close to the city. Riding. Horse riding. And some... other sports, football of course, football club and swimming club and competitions.

Did your parents have any time to enjoy any of these or were they working too hard?

[0:10:36]

Yes, yes, on the weekend; at the weekend. [laughs]

Would you like to tell us some more about your mother? Her maiden name, and her...and her...?

This is what her maiden name was, 'Winter'. And she was not related to the owners of the spa, or these two...

The two brothers...

No. [laughs] And this was funny because it was so popular. And they considered them the communists, that the Winters are - are capitalists, yes? When I came to do the exam at the university in 19...49, that they will accept me, in Prague, one of these professors they were asking questions. He must have been a communist. He asked, "And how come your mother is a Winter?" I said, "Yes, and...?" [laughs] "Well, so, we know who the Winters are. So...They are not working class." And I said, "Yes, but there were not only this Winters in the city. Only the rich Winters. There were also poor Winters in the city." Nothing else. And they accepted me. [laughs] Accepted me. And they know what to say...something so...Communism.

Yes. In your school days...

Yes?

Which language did you study in? Slovak?

Only Slovak. Only Slovak. Yes. In the Slovak schools, only Slovak.

Mn-hmm. Did you learn any German as a second language in school?

No. Not at the beginning. We had some lessons in German. Yes, we went- There was a German school also. And so once in a week we went to the German school and we had two hours or something like this in German and with the German teacher and then we left it. Nobody was enthusiastic somehow. Nobody.

And religious instruction, did you have any, as a child did you have any religious instruction?

Yes, there was something... Oh, yes, there was a teacher. There was a teacher. Now I remember. There was a teacher. But not everybody was listening. The parents of our generation were modern already. So...

Was the religious instruction about Judaism or Christianity?

Well, OK, it was general, from the Bible stories. We have to, in every religion the same. Only the prophets were different, but otherwise it's the same. I never read everything, but some small passages what I read.

In your class at school, in...at a junior level, were most of the girls, or were there boys – were they Catholic or Jewish?

It depends in which school. At the beginning it was a Jewish school and later the *Gymnasium* was a mixed school, no? A State school, for everybody. And because they were already, when I went to secondary school here, to *Gymnasium*, so...

Which is a...a senior school.

Yes.

[0:14:27]

I just want to explain for viewers that a 'gymnasium' on the Continent is a senior school.

Yes, Yes. So, after we after the six years' public school. OK, there were already fascists in power. It was 1939. And I was ten years old. And they made a law; they called it *Numerus Clausus*. 'Closed number'.

Yes.

The...the government made this law. And so the teachers had to choose now, only three children from our class. We were all girls and boys in one class. Only three children could go to this secondary school – would be accepted. And all had to do an exam, under this

condition. So... the- the teachers had a very difficult task, to solve this. Because we were there around all together thirty or thirty-five. And now they knew the parents, they- how wonderful they are and how they prepared their children for higher education, to start this *Gymnasium*. It was difficult. At the end, they chose – sorry, four...four, sorry - I said three because I don't see me as included. The rest were three; I was the fourth. And they choose...they choose from the bank President. There was a Bank Director of the bank, the son, he was the first. And there was boy from an architect - a very clever one. And then there was a girl, a small girl with red hair. And I was the fourth one. They choose not only if you are good or bad, so we were good anyhow, but also that they don't look very Semitic. You know? There was a few of us, we were blond, blue eyes. And some of them, they came from Spain originally. The Sephardi Jews they had beautiful dark hair and dark eyes. So this, some children would not let them in peace, you know? So, the rest of us, and then we were very independent and answering and we were not scared or not... and so on, so. And then we came there. The season started the first September, so we four of us, these two boys and two girls, we went there to the school. And we were waiting that they would call us and put us in a class.

What was the name of the school?

[0:17:49]

Gymnasium. Gymnasium Piestany. State Gymnasium. And the other children were looking and watching us. We didn't know the children, only some, who lived in our area, but not the rest. And...we were standing there, and then came somebody, a teacher, and he asked us to come to the Head Teacher. So we went to the Head Teacher and he said, "I'm sorry to tell you, but the law has changed, and not any Jew can come to school any more, here." And we had a shock. First we were very silent and then...And, "What can we do?" "Yeah, you can go back to your school". And so we went. But, at the beginning we were total silent. And then later, we had to walk back to school, we started to talk. "We'll show them". "We will learn at home". "We will learn twice as much". "We will read every book". And I don't know what. "We will show them that we can do it without coming here". And then when we went back to the school, to our class, to our old class, they were sitting there the rest, and they have seen us. They were happy. And in a certain way, we were also happy we came back. Because the difference! There were so good pupils in this class, who - who were not chosen to go to

this *Gymnasium*. And I'm sure they were unhappy that we were... And for us also it would also not be very nice to be friends with them. So at the end it was a very good solution that we were not accepted, and that we stayed with together with them until the deportations then start. This was few months later.

When did the deportations start?

[0:17:49]

In March... '35 or '36 I think. But not from our city.

1939?

No. '42.

1942.

Yeah. '42. Shall I tell, how it was? It started?

Yes, please do.

It was really, really a psychologist did it. A German psychologist prepared it. Why? Because first they took the girls... from sixteen to forty, single women. And this was a tragedy. Sixteen, some girls in sixteen were very young. And you can imagine you had only one daughter, and she got a letter, "You must come on Saturday". Always on Saturday to punish the Jews even more because, on Saturday for them to travel was something horrible; it was a sin. No? And to have some luggage. You can have some luggage, 20kilos and some food for three days' travel, by train. And this was really... something very painful. But they did it, because when the girls left, the parents had only one idea: to follow them. To be with them, together. Not everyone, but... these people who the girls left. And this was so sad. [pause] Now. I must keep myself under control. [coughs] Sorry. My sister was sixteen. But, there was a gentleman in the Jewish community who was organising this. And he knew my mother very good as a business connection. He had a connection; he had a shop.

What was your sister's name?

Textiles, Mr Urban.

No, your sister's name?

Oh, my sister's name. Edith. Edith. And she was sixteen in July, and this was March. So... he knew my mother very well. He excluded her from the list, to go to the...away, yeah? But her best friend was an example for parents. They had only one child, one girl and how tragic it was. And she left.

Could you repeat the name of the man who helped your sister please?

This was Mr. Urban. The same man...

Yes, I just wanted to...

Yeah. So he- Simple, they needed a list. They didn't know themselves, the fascists, whom to send or not.

What was Mr Urban's position in connection with this?

[0:23:27]

In the community he had some position; I can't remember exactly what kind of...

OK. Prominent in the community.

Yes, in a certain way he was happy to organise this. They asked the community to organise ...this...who- the list was most important. Yes? Then they had the list and the address. So who came voluntary was OK. When they didn't come they went home and looked where, to get him.

Mn-hnn.

If somebody run away and wasn't at home, so they could write, "He left; he ran away". They were not personally interested, these men. These were simple, uneducated fascists, who came to collect the people. The more educated fascists, who had a high rank, and higher rank and they were organising it in meetings, but not on the street or so. You could see how they were walking in the morning. They had rifles. You can imagine, they saw the people going to - in a School. At a school where there was a big- there were big rooms, and so the school was closed for Saturday when they prepared a transport. And from there they took the people to the railway station and put them into the... *Wagons*, I call it. How they are called?

Yes. Where did those early transports go?

To Auschwitz. Straight to Auschwitz.

Straight?

Straight, yeah. Maybe sometimes to, to Bratislava. To the main city. Because there were more. They needed one thousand people - persons. One thousand. And they got on the border- At the border the Germans accepted them. They counted the persons there if there are one thousand, and they paid for every person to the Slovaks I think 500 Crowns or something like this.

What was that payment considered to be for? What was it for, that payment?

[0:26:13]

Simple. They sold. They didn't want to have the Jews there and they sold to the Germans. They thought- the fascist said, "They are going to work, for work there". You know? Modern slaves. To work there. So everybody said, "Oh..." – the majority, not everybody, that – "Oh, for work? So OK, we show, we will prove them, we are not businessmen. We can work also". Dig holes or build buildings and I don't know what. Yes. This was the naivety of the people who were not listening how Hitler was talking in his speeches; how much hate he was... doing...in his...talking.

Mnn. Did these transports, within the community in which you lived, bring people together, or...?

Yes, very much. Very much. Because we were exchanging the experiences: what to do, where to go, what is it? But they still thought, "It's not - for work, to go, it's not so bad...", you know, to work there. I have a letter of my uncle, he was a Professor at the Economics School at Trnava. And he loved his profession; he loved everything what he was doing and he came always when there were holidays to our place to Piestany. He had a very nice room somewhere and he was so happy to be in the spa and he came to us every day to visit us. And he was so obsessed with his profession, that he couldn't be without any work, his work, during the holidays, so I had to learn typewriting. I had to learn accounting. [laughs] You know? And I was eleven years old, or twelve years old, something like this. And he brought a typing machine, a typewriter - a very funny one. I left it there in Slovakia. And I'm very sorry that I didn't take it with me. It was a unique...typewriter. And then later, I got always a typewriter. And he was also in the first transport. When the boys came, you understand? And the boys also said, the boys said when the girls went, left "So, we'll go now, we'll show that we are also...we want to do work something, and do something - we're not scared of it. The Germans are not, not...not so bad". I don't know what.

So the boys also went in 1942?

[0:29:30]

Yes, because they were so prepared for it, in Auschwitz and everywhere. And they needed to build up in Auschwitz the barracks, so they needed these young people to - to build there - inside... I don't know if the crematoria and the gas chambers were ready, already. So they needed workers and... to come. Even though they were not experts, but they did something there. And therefore, because the girls went first, this is the psychology, that "We meet again girls there. Our sisters, and so on. Neighbours." And the parents of course also, so there was not a big hesitation they should go. Our girls are there; our children are there. We meet them again. This was the promise. Ja. And so it was one group after the other. When the boys left, then the parents came of course. Or families with small children, this was the worst. There were no more differences. The parents, or the older ones or the younger one they were a family already, so they took them all. I witnessed how...I- my father meanwhile, we were

protected, because Jews who were in the Slovak economy very active, professionally, they had exemption from deportations, because otherwise the whole economy in Slovakia would collapse. They were not businessmen, they were farmers, the majority. Some of them were not, of course. And my father had a job, where a friend, a Czech friend, a non-Jew of course, a Christian, very good, a couple and they had no children. And my father got from his shop, he was producing leather items, you know, leather belts and... so small things. And my father was a good friend with him. They were fans of a football club, and every Sunday they went together, when it was possible. And... therefore my father had an idea that it would be very good if he could give him a job. And he gave him the job. It was fiction, you know. That he is the...represent- the sales person. for this company. For his company. He is selling the leather belts and leather products – yeah? - for his company. So they had a name and...and my father started to travel. He went in small cities, and when there was a leather shop he went inside and he offered the leather belts. And some people, some, they ordered and they did it also. They had one man and he was producing the belts and others were buying. And so my father was a very successful man. He looked very nice. Blue eyes and dark blond hair. And he could talk very nice to people. So everybody felt as a human being, you know? He didn't talk to somebody, "What do you think?" or, "Who are you?" or something "I don't talk to..." - I don't know. And...and therefore he was successful. And so we could stay. We were not deported because of this friend who give him this.

How did you feel yourself, watching other people being deported?

[0:34:02]

Very miserable, very- we were very unhappy. And not only, I didn't tell you the deportations started in our city, Piestany, the first of April, the girls. They took the girls, yeah? And the teacher told us the day before, "So tomorrow we have this, and this, and don't forget to do your homework" or something. And I got up and I said, "Tomorrow is... You want us to come to school tomorrow?" She said, "Of course". And I said, "I won't come. Our neighbours, our sisters, our aunties will be deported away to Poland. We don't know if we shall see them at all again, and you want us to come to school, tomorrow? I won't come. It's the last day I came to school". And I left. And the rest left also, not all of them, but they left. And this was the last I went to this school. The teacher was innocent! She was herself ...single, and nearly on the list, but because she had still the teaching job, because we were

there, the families. Since then, ja, we were always busy, you know, running from one place to other, and listening to what is happening. So...not everybody knew me in the city. And I didn't look- I was very small, so everybody said "Oh, such a small girl!" so they didn't look at me. I was not important in this time. But I have seen everything. I have seen how they are leaving their home with a bag full of maybe for sleeping or something only. They couldn't take anything. They had to leave everything there as it was. They couldn't take money; they couldn't take anything. And if they took jewellery or so when they came they, they took everything away. They found everything.

Was that before they went on to the wagons? Were they...

[sound interruption]

[0:36:23]

[0:36:43]

Then the families came. And so they... sorted them out, the women to one side, the men to other side. And there was sometimes a very sad decision - was a horrible decision for parents - what they had to do, if the children stays with her, or if the children goes with their father. So they had to do it in seconds. Because they were very brutal, these people working there. These SS. They were very brutal. And for example, the lady who owned the family who owned the house where we lived in Piestany. She had two wonderful boys and I played with them. They called me to come; they were small – they were younger than me, and they didn't have a nanny or somebody. She wanted me to play with them so they were very nice, and we had a good time. And sweet boys. And what happened when she was there in Auschwitz, she- they said, "Left or right families, yeah?" And some boys went with the father, some boys stayed with their mother. And she thought it will be better for a father to be with- or for the children to be with the boys. And she sent the children, the boys, to their father. And at the end they were the same day as they arrived, gassed in the gas chamber. She not. She was a single woman there standing, so they sent her out and she was working and she survived. But she was so unhappy. And she came back. That she sended the children- If the children had stayed with her she would go also to the gas, but... that is the question. She was never happy, in my opinion. She came and, my mother said, "How good to see you that you are alive". And she said, "But how can I be- I am alive but I can't be happy. I can't sleep, I can't- I see always the children going on the other side". These...these are tragedies, no? Inhuman.

Totally. And... this was the example for the deportations. And we were, we were until a certain time protected. But it happened the same, that after a certain time, the... government looked: Who has this exemption – yeah? - from deportation? It was too much for them. Around 25,000 people with families were protected. And... they had no more people for deportations, so they ...changed the law, and said “These people are no more protected. Only doctors and - I don’t know – pharmacists and very important professions. So around 20,000 were- were again prepared for the deportations. But during this times we learned something. You know, there were some people for example they came as, my mother had a case. Some – a woman came to her and told her that, “Listen. I can help you. I have somebody in the government and he will take you away from the deportation list – or something. He will protect you. He won’t let you go deportation, but he’s asking 20,000 Crowns”. And my mother came home, and... she told it to my father. And my father said, “This is a trick. You have nothing in your hand. And this is too much money. We need the money. How can we survive otherwise?” And my mother said, “No. This time I...I have a feeling”. So she gave her this 20,000. It was the last money what they had saved for their whole life until then...

[0:41:23]

Were they allowed to withdraw it from the bank? Was there a big problem over that?

No, the, the- it wasn’t in the bank. It was hidden in the wardrobe between the towels. I witnessed it how they were arguing, my parents. They were never arguing in my life before then, this terror system. But there was this, because of this money, and because my father had a good instinct and my mother wanted also to do something and she was sure that they would do and hope, and so... She was desperate, of course, of her life. And so she gave the money and ...my father delayed that feeling. And next day was Saturday. And we were still sleeping. Somebody was knocking at the door. So... my mother opened the door and there was our neighbour, the wife of an...of a pharmacist, who – they lived behind our house. It wasn’t our house, only where we lived, ja? Behind the house at the end was another home and there had also hotels and restaurants and so on. A very nice woman, and a Jewish woman. But she was protected because they didn’t have enough pharmacists in the city, only four. And they were all Jewish, but they needed so they were protected. And she said, it was seven o’clock, and she said, “You are still in bed?” She came in and she had seen that we children were in bed. I don’t know if my parents. And, “You are still in bed? You are on the

list. You will be deported today! Go away somewhere!” So she didn’t have to say it twice. We jumped out of the beds. We took, we brought items that ...we had My mother took one chicken had cooled, from the pot what was prepared for lunch, and some bread and we were in a few minutes, on the road into the hills. We knew the hills very well. My father loved to walk there, and skiing and everything. It was so beautiful and close. And the streets were still empty. It was very early - seven o’clock. And...

This was which month?

Pardon?

Which month was this? Which month. When was this?

It could be ...What was it? May, something like this. I must look at it, the deportation list, the date.

And in which year?

[0:44:12]

In ’42! The deportations, they were so-

In 1942...

They learned in Auschwitz, the fascists, the Germans that it’s a ...a factory. And they needed always some people to... kill. Because they learned, they sorted out items, for example dresses and what they had and sent to Germany. And...I don’t know what. So for them it was...very ...a high income, what they found and got and so on, including the properties of course. Who knows. And so this was the first miracle that happened. That this woman knew somehow accidentally, that there is- I don’t know until today how she knew it that we are on the list. There were not too many people already in the city - Jewish people of course. So we went to- On the top of the hill was a hut, and... we were close to it, sitting in the wood, under the trees. And thinking, ‘What are we going to do now?’ ‘Where do we go?’ So we were sitting there until the evening. Meanwhile, me and my sister we were walking around the

place where the parents were. We had to eat, there was the chicken with the bread. And we were walking to see where we are, and if there is a chance maybe a bungalow, I don't know, not a bungalow- a cottage – a cottage or something, to stay overnight! We were scared to go back to the city. We didn't know what can happen. Maybe they are waiting for us, or something like this. So this was very important; it was already cool. We couldn't stay outside in- to stay and to sleep there. So we- My father was in a position as a General, you know? He could give orders; he was thinking. And this was the result. This woman who took this 20,000, she put it in her pocket maybe, or, or in the pocket of this man for whom she wanted to give it, I doubt, in her pocket maybe. And then she let us go. She said they must go. So therefore we were on the list. And so my mother never, ever had a commentary and never ever lost her temper to speak, not Slovak, not German. Not to say any word in German. This was very good, because, for the next two years we needed to keep the knowledge not to speak German if we meet somebody, and, not to say immediately something. And think first, and don't trust everybody. This was so important. This is the way how we survived!

[0:47:54]

Before you fled to the hill, was there rationing, how did you buy food? How did you obtain food?

When?

Before you fled to the hill, before...

Aha.

Yes...

No, we had some cash.

But for food, was there rationing in the shops?

Aha! No, I can't remember. No. Only market, there. And they sent me on to the market to buy something. But not there; we left. We left. Immediately. We had to sleep somewhere so

my father made a decision. He went to somebody who knew him, again very nice people. And they were renting from their flat rooms, for guests. And so my father made the decision, when it was dark, we went back to the city, and they went to this friend what he knew from football also. From football... games, somebody. And they stayed there. And they gave us- we took the keys from our flat. And we went to our home. You can imagine, we two girls. And in the front of our home – our flat - was also a fascist living. He was in uniform. But he was somebody who was an alcoholic. So when he was drinking, he was drunk all day, you know, so, we were not scared of him. He was just sitting in the uniform, he was walking in the uniform, but maybe he was collecting people also. He was a very stupid man. OK. And this was a risk to send us home. But they wanted to know... how does it look like in our flat if they were there or not. And...and my father said, if we are divided it's better, because... one group can survive and help the other one if there is something. So we came to our... flat. We opened the doors, and we noticed from outside was such a stick...or...

Yes. A seal.

Sealed. They were looking for us; they didn't find us, so they sealed the door. But it doesn't – it didn't play for us any importance. We took it off and we went in. And we were trying to imitate my father's voice and talk and I don't know what we were doing. So this fascist neighbour he was sleeping maybe could hear some voices he didn't know, so he thought maybe naughty children or so. And then we slept. It wasn't a simple night with my sister [half laughs] alone and they were there. They wanted to pick us up, so it was true. And in the morning, my parents came. And my father went to the office, where...this was all organised, the deportations. And told them that we were visiting somebody somewhere. I don't know what he said, really, and so on. And that we are going now to the...They wanted to have the city free of Jews. So my father said, "We are going out. We won't stay here. Voluntary, you have a free city, and you have no Jews any more here. And we go." I don't know what he said, everything...

[0:52:00]

So, and then we...Ja, it was- It was in June – in June, I remember, or end of May. Because... my father again, he took over now the command. He was as a young twenty-year-old in the First World War a soldier, and there has learned how to survive as a soldier during the war.

How to protect himself, and he was very good. And since then, we didn't discuss with him, anything. We accepted his commands. And he had wonderful instinct, brain and help of God. Miracles happened, really miracles. That you can imagine that we, he said, "You girls have rucksacks and some dress, one, two - no more. Coats. Warm." We prepared to sleep outside in the hill, on the hills, in the hills, yeah? Something like this. And we left. First, we two girls to the railway station, and then they, to railways station. And there we said 'goodbye'. And the first train we entered with my sister, the train, and where there was place we sit down. And there were two men passengers, ja? And after a certain time he started, they started to ask us, "Hello, where do you go?" And we said, "To Zilina." Here some... "How come that you are going to Zilina?" "Why are you going to Zilina?" And we were... I don't know what we answered. "We are visiting our uncle," or something like this. And they said, "But there is no, there are no holidays yet. What kind of holidays do you have and you are going for...?" "Because" we said, "we are visiting". ... We didn't know what to say. But this- it wasn't dangerous. They were not fanatics. They were not. Otherwise it was suspicious for them: why do we go? This was the first lesson. Take care what you say. Take care, every word. ... It could be a very bad person, and they were coming, the fascists were doing controls in the train, not from children maybe but from adults they were asking their ID-s, their identification cards, yeah? Identity cards, passport, ID-s – OK. And... if somebody didn't have a - a proper ID that he's a Catholic or so then - then nothing could help and they took him down off the train. And they got some people, so. So - so we learnt! And then we went to Zilina, and to our uncle and his wife... And he had an exemption, because he was the manager of a big liquor factory. Liquor. Firma Ritter. They were producing the Slovak... whisky. Slivovitz, they call it. You know? And therefore this factory had to work, but how, if there were not experts. So they couldn't send him, deport him. He was free for the... for the, to work, yes? And to manage the factory.

What was his name please?

[0:56:00]

Armin Winter. ... And his wife, Valerie. They had no children. This was the generation they have seen that something is coming, so they were younger than my mother, and they didn't want to have children in this... horrible political situation. So they were very clever because this would be much worse. More pain. And... they were very nice, and they welcomed us.

And he had income and everything, as a manager. So...a very nice flat. Modern. And... they let us... stay there nearly two years. My parents came also, because they didn't want to come, but they went in a – in a, in a city where there was still a Jewish old people's home. And there was a young rabbi, and he was doing something. He was 'revolution-ative'. He was organising; he was resisting to the deportations. And he was giving the people fake identities. And this was good that my parents were there a few days only. Because he got, my father got the address who is giving these fake identities. And this was a young man... in the city where this young rabbi was...

And which city was that?

[0:58:06]

Nove Mesto, Nove Mesto: 'new city', is the translation. And, and he was ...in another city, a small village. In a small village in the city... I don't know what position he had, but he was the highest position, yeah? So nobody could see what he is doing of course. Nobody. He was selling, OK, he was doing it for money, but... But the rabbi tried to give for everybody what, who needed some help – help! So he was selling Bianco - the birth certificates. This was enough. Or wedding certificates. Ja? To write and there was a stamp, *Stempel*, on it already, and a signature. So everybody could do it himself at home. You could enter your name, and your religion, and your age. So they came then to Zilina...and with this papers. My uncle...

So you had the blank sheets...Not blank but they could fill in the blanks? Yes.

Yes.

And my uncle had a very nice handwriting. And he put the names, the age for example. My father was forty-something and it was still suspicious he could be a soldier or a partisan or what. So they did him older. And we girls, we were younger... as children, on the paper. And we were Roman Catholics. So this was the important thing. And we survived everything with this papers. I have them somewhere. And then...

Could I interrupt just one moment please? When did you and your sister... get together again with your parents? You said that your parents...?

[1:00:39]

A few days only.

Ah!

A few weeks, maybe a few weeks. Not very long. Because they couldn't exist; they wanted to do something, not to be at my uncle's place so long. Only at the beginning. And there- in Zilina was a concentration camp. So they brought the people from all over the surroundings to Zilina. And from Zilina was a route like this, to north, to Auschwitz. Non-stop railway station – railway connection. So at the beginning when they had in cities more people than thousand, this was different; they took *direkt*. But from Zilina, they brought the people from Zilina later – individuals what they got. And from there they took the deportations. So... we knew always when there is a deportation... because my uncle was with some other young people very well organised and helping everywhere so many people. You can't imagine when the last deportation was. They were talking about it, there were not too many people and they wanted to close already... everything. [inaud] ...prepare people for so many people. So when the last deportation was, there was a...a very ...tense - tense atmosphere... among the people.

Which year was that?

In...what was it? What was it...? It was the summertime because we went to Sklene Teplice. ...In '44. Ja.

Thank you.

[1:02:42]

In '44. ...In '44 we knew already the - ja. This was in Zilina. So there was a school. And I went to school under the name of my uncle. ...So I was 'Winterova'. I have papers of it. [half laughs] And... the parents of - of his wife were also in the flat. So we were in one flat together. We were four, and they were four – eight people. And one day, my mother couldn't

stay any more [half laughs] because there were tensions between his wife and my mother. My mother wanted to help; she didn't let her do anything and so- So the neighbours gave one room to them and they moved into the room, to the neighbours. But one day came the - the news that this is the last deportation. So, we heard about it. And everybody was in danger, because they wanted to have maybe 1,000, more people, so... So...at the end they were very brutal. Everybody. Even my uncle didn't know if they don't put him, or these organisers who helped to organise from the community. They were put into the last- They were there at the railway station, standing close to the train what was going to Auschwitz. So they put them in, at the last moment, these people who were organising it, from the community. But we had the experience to do something. But what? Where to go? It was too late to travel and...or to run away somewhere. Where? So my my uncle and my father decided. Ah, and we were hiding- Yes, I know. A cousin and his mother was the aunt of my mother. My uncle took them out. They were from another city. And they - they landed in Zilina in the concentration camp. And the man was so clever, the cousin, that he got somehow to call my uncle: "We are here. Please help." And my uncle went immediately, because the...the produce what they had is vodka and Slivovitz, ja? This what Slovaks were drinking, non-stop - some of them of course. And this, he went there to the high-positioned fascist, and he promised him so many bottles when he let his family out. This was the mother and this man with his wife and small child. And he let them out. My uncle then delivered the bottles... and he survived. They survived. They were with us, in this flat. They came out of the concentration camp in our flat. And next day, we had these deportations, ja? So...we- They came around ten o'clock. We were there fourteen people – eight, no twelve together – they were four. Yeah, something like this. I must count again. And they... they knocked at the door. And- very loud. We could hear how they are knocking at the door, and this is a four floor house, on second floor, first floor, like this. So uncle said, "We have no options. We stay sitting where we are. Everybody in his room on the bed. And don't move. Don't say anything when they are banging on the door". And what if the child will cry? So they were talking about it, what to do, something, to give him to drink or I don't know what. And what happened, they were banging, and the, the reaction of this banging, to know, this is your ...end, if they get in. The heart was so, hop, hop...very...

Beating.

[1:07:49]

Strong...beating. Horrible. I felt it here in my neck. And then we could hear a voice, telling this man to "Stop it! This is his house, and I'm a German", he said, "and you must trust me. I have seen these people very early in the morning to go away with luggage in their hand. They are not at home. They are not here. They left." Can you imagine? Because the owner of the house, it was a big house, was a German engineer who lived in a villa next to this house. He built the house; it was his house. And he said, "I don't let you ruin..." Because they said, "You must break up this house, the door, the entrance. You know, they are on the list!" And he said, "You will pay for it. It's my house. I don't let you to ruin this". And so, we could hear it. Word for word. Word for...every word. I remember it. And... they left. They left. And this was how we survived this horrible time. Only, only and we said, thank you to him. Of course he knew it. His wife was a Jewish woman; therefore he wasn't a Nazi. Otherwise they were so enthusiastic the - the Germans - if somebody was a German, about the success of the German, no, all over the world, so...

Did you experience a lot of anti-Semitism during your early childhood from the Slavs...?

[1:09:46]

No, no...this was normal, SS. But this was a point where my father said, "Pack your rucksacks, your *Koffer* - everything". And we preferred, this man, this cousin with the child and the aunt; his mother and the wife left immediately, next day by train to the place from where he come, where he came. And... he didn't go to the same village. But he went another village. And there was... a wood mill. A mill, they were cutting trees, and selling the wood you know for fireplaces and so on for fire. They didn't have anything else. And after a few days it was working, and everything, and a few weeks, it took a few weeks. And then my father was all the time thinking what to do, where to go. He called us: "Come here. Here's it's very nice. And it's a small village. I live totally isolated. Come." And we had these fake papers, you know? And it was May, or ...beginning of June or something. So first... my father took me. And with him, I was travelling to this village. It was far away. Enough far away for...the centre where ...so many where the deportations were and so on. And... I came there and I was very- They were happy to see me, because I was going with the baby for walks, and outside the house, and so. And I looked at everything, how it's working. If there are neighbours. Good neighbours, bad neighbours. And they were looking at me, but they

haven't seen nothing suspicious with me. The papers were OK, what we had, so... And I looked as, as anybody else. We were not dressed as city people. We were dressed as them. You know, scarf or something here and simple! Simple. This was very important. And... Ja. And a few weeks later, my mother came, and my sister, she didn't want to come because... we had there very good friends. But my parents said, "You must come", so she came also. And we were there... It was May...26 October... Now I can't remember properly. I must calculate how it was. How long we were there. I know. I know. I know; 26th of October was the uprisal of - until the uprisal of the Slovaks. But we...

And that was 1944.

[1:13:10]

I know. Yes. In '44 26th of October, it started. But we were a few- few days before...few...In June. In June. It was in June; I remember. We couldn't stay there so long with this family. There was...We were too many. If I was alone, that, this was different, but, we were too many. So... this cousin told us, "Here, not far away, two hours walking, you can walk," we would take a...a, a carriage with a horse, "we will bring you to there. You. There is a spa. A small spa, but a spa. So you go there. There are holidays, for- school holidays already. And you are doing holidays! You have good papers. And you ..." We changed the name of course. We were not Friedmann, we were Fabians. This was our family name, Fabians – Fabian. And so we came, and we found private a room where to stay. And we went to swim and so swimming and, and we were with these people where we lived. They had fields and they were going through the fields to work. And my father went with them to do help. And we were helping, you know? With my sister. So they liked us very much. They didn't notice any suspicion that we are something...illegal, or hiding, or Jews, or something. They didn't know it. They were very nice. And it wasn't expensive. It was cheap there. And my mother did something for them, for the women, you know. She said, "Oh... I will do something for you. Buy some nice material. Bring it". And so they were very happy. And so we had something to do, to calm our nerves, sitting, you know? And doing...I was eleven years old and I had to do ...[laughs] But my sister also. My sister learnt to cook and so it was very good. Very nice people. Beautiful area.

[1:15:31]

I was going to ask you, during this period, even though people were friendly, you say, how nervous did you feel about being discovered?

Ja. Of course! Always. Always. But... when there was somebody nice, I had it under control.

Mnn...

Only if you looked at the person, you have seen how the person is looking at you, watching at you, and what, you know? Suspicious, or so. This was important... to see. And, and of course my mother had troubles, because her Slovak was – had an accent in German.

Yes, that was what I was going to ask you also about, the accent...

This was very important. And she was wonderful. She kept herself so under control. Not once, nobody noticed- anybody could notice that her Slovak is not perfect and that she is speaking- her mother-tongue is German. You know? This was so important, otherwise they were suspicious immediately. German? [Gertrud imitates an immediate arrest] And in the papers were written, ‘Slovak National’ and so...

Yes...

She was perfect.

Because when your mother, or, your parents were much younger, and... before they were born, it was all part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and German was the major language.

Yes.

[1:17:10]

Yes. And this city where she was born especially. And so we learnt always something. Always. And later, we had – later... confronted by SS! And she kept her... She, she - she kept the shock what she had from this confrontation, what she has seen, and what she has heard about. She witnessed it, the confrontation with the SS, you know? She was holding her

hands like this. I could see they were quite white, here the tension in it. But she didn't open her mouth! Because I had, after the war, I met my school friends. They lost – two boys – they lost their mother. And they told me the story how it happened. Because they were confronted with SS. They had suspicion. They didn't look as Jews. They had good papers. They didn't have... the SS had suspicion, and she started to - to speak German to him - to this German man. The boy, the son told me, and she started to scream on him: "So what are you asking so much? Take us already! Take us! Kill us! Why are you asking so much? I can't bear it anymore!" And he wanted to know if the boy next to her is her son or not. And she said, it was her son but he also didn't look Semitic. And she said, "No, it's not my son." She started, but this German! It was a mistake...and to - to lose their nerves. Two women, two the mothers - the boys survived and the mother not. This was later at the end of the war when they take them. And they took them immediately to a concentration camp in the last days.

Were you aware of many Slovak people betraying Jewish people?

No. Some, yes, but...who knows? Difficult.

But not that you - you knew of directly?

It's difficult, because they didn't survive if they betrayed them. Because the uprising was horrible. The in consequences this was such a synthetic thing, you know? Between the governments of London, and government of Moscow, of the Russians, they cooperated. But it cost so many people life. So many people. Unbelievable. And to survive this was also very difficult. So, can I continue or, or would you like to drink something?

[1:20:09]

What's the time? Would you like to stop, just before the Slovak Uprising?

Yeah. This is the story, with miracles – the miracle story.

Maybe that would be a good place to stop. [There is no significant break in timing before Gertrude and Jana resume]

But it wasn't the nation; the nation wasn't doing it. The politicians made it, and this is not working – this was not working. Hitler sent 45- or 50,000 - nobody knows exactly - people there, SS, to... liquidate this...to, to fight. And the locals were young soldiers. And... some civilians who never were fighting maybe in their life. So it was not in the whole country, only one area.

Which area was it, please?

The central area; where Banska Bystrica was the capital. Banska Bystrica. [pause]
So we were in this spa, and one day it was already nearly coming - September coming. The end - July was ending, and then the spa was closing also in a certain way. The guests were going home and especially with children who had to go to school! First of September was the school always beginning. Maybe if it was a Sunday not, but otherwise, yes. So – and we couldn't stay there. They were asking, – they would ask, “What are you doing here? Why are you not going home?” No? They could be suspicious. So we had to go there. And then the cold weather is approaching. [clears throat] My father said, “I go to Banska Bystrica.” To the capital of this area. This is something... a big city, relative, ja, in the area. It's important, in a big city you can disappear. Not in a small village where every neighbour is coming, “Who are you?” and so on: “What are you doing?” So, he left. And he was next day back. And he said, “Take your luggage. We are going to Banska Bystrica”. “And why? What happened?” “There is an uprisal.”

[1:22:49]

And he left. My father, the less suspicious you are in a big hotel. You know? And he was always going in the biggest hotel. And... the German came at night... Not the Germans, sorry, no, no, the uprisal people, the Partisans...

The Partisans.

...from the surroundings, ja. Of course. The Partisans came, at night. And because he looked similar, as a German Nazi, they nearly shot him. They said, “You are a Nazi! You are a German...” - and so on. He was surprised. He thought, “I'm not listening well. Who are they?” You know? So then he... of course, explained them who he is, and he came

immediately to pick us up. We go there; it's free! There are no Nazis! There are Partisans; there are Russians! There are... [half laughs] And... so we went there. And he found a room for us. And we were in the centre of the city, very close to the centre. We were living in a one room, very good accommodation. And we were active, you know? Immediately they needed help to keep the... area free of Nazis. So... their- The local Nazis left; they ran away, because otherwise they could be hanged. And...this...other...no, revolution was functioning that they needed to build, for tanks, you know? Such a deep... walls... How do you call it? Something like this, so they can't come with a tank. You know? A hole...Not a hole...

A ditch?

[1:24:47]

A ditch. Ja. Ditch and so, something like this. So, who could? Our friends, we met some friends who came from other cities, from Zilina and so all over. Interesting, our- our...no.Ja, our Uncle didn't want to come because he was busy there. He couldn't leave the factory. And... we were busy. My sister, she could, she was accepted as a nurse, at the headquarter, because they had... casualties...ja? Casualties?

Casualties.

Casualties. I never knew how to pronounce it. Casualties. Thank you. The Russians came in many planes, but the airfield there, of this airport what was in Banska Bystrica was very small, for small planes prepared. And not these military jumbos, or what it was. So if there came ten planes a day, maybe three, or how many were... they - they didn't land properly. They exploded, or they got fire or something. So the poor - poor young soldiers. No? It was horrible. And they had many wounded; they needed help. And so my sister got a job and she was helping there, and she was very proud, at the headquarters to work. My mother was working where they were doing uniforms for the soldiers, special uniforms. Green, the same as they had before only not this fascist sign. The Slovak had had a fascist sign. And then... my father was digging...how do you call it?

Trenches.

Ja, the trenches [half laughs] ...around the city, with some young men they had there...

Ditches.

OK, ditches. [half laughs] And I was then the... messenger. I went to the father, out where he was digging with all other friends and so they got some food also and so on. Or I brought the food. They told me what they want. Then I went to my mother to look what – to get some news, and brought some news. And, and then my sister, I had to look very often after her. And...

And how old were you...? [sound interruption]

[1:27:35]

Your journey in Slovakia has been quite tremendous. You've gone from Piestany, to Zilina, to the village of Hiadel... Zvolen... Banska Bystrica... Sklene Teplice...

Yes, yes.

How did your family feel about the... special arrangement with Hitler for independence?

When?

At the start of the war. When...at least the war in Europe as it started. In 1939, in March 1939, Slovakia declared its independence from Czechoslovakia...

Yes, yes.

Did people really believe that they would have their freedom and be safe in Slovakia?

We were not discussing about that. They didn't tell me anything. But they are not enthusiastic, of course. They have seen something is coming.

They felt it?

Ja. But they - they had no options to go away so fast, or something. That it would be as bad, nobody could believe it. Nobody. I'm sure so many people don't believe it today, even if it happened.

Mnn. And did your parents speak about this arrangement with Hitler? Did you hear them speaking about it?

What kind of arrangement, please?

For Slovakia to be independent... in 1939...? No...

They were not enthusiastic because the Czechs were doing a good policy, no? No, they knew that something, but they didn't know where to go so fast. It's not so easy to go ...

[1:29:30]

No. It must have been a shock.

Ja. It was.

Yes. So... in terms of internal / external politics, the next major element was the ...Slovak uprising.

Mnn.

And... you were speaking of... the young people who took part in that, the Partisans and what you and your family did. And you were saying that you were a messenger, you were a young messenger. Would you like to tell us more, please, about what you were doing and the situation and how people felt about the uprising?

They were not discussing it, this people. That's the problem.

Mn-hnn.

Nobody was discussing. It was there. We didn't know the negative things what happened and so on. There was no information. There were no, in the news anything. Only the negative things, so.

What were those negative things that emerged from the uprising?

Pardon?

What were the negative things that happened, that emerged from the uprising?

They were killing the people!

Because the Soviet Army came in, through the pass...

Yes, but there were not enough. There were only a few, and this was not enough to hold it. And when they were fighting with the Germans they had losses, so... It wasn't nice. The worst thing was that they... burned the whole village, when they were in an area where there were some Partisans or so.

The, the Nazis?

Ja, the Nazis - the SS. These were special units, came. Units - they had experience to- of killing people in the – in the Ukraine. They started in '41 or when already in the Ukraine, they were killing the people. So...

[1:31:56]

So these were the reprisals, even though the Germans... were retreating at that time, they still...

Until the last moment they killed.

Until the last moment. Mn-hnn.

Ja. This is the inhuman in this, because the leaders of the groups, of the SS groups – I have there in this in the book from this museum are the names, of the leaders. The majority was always a lawyer on the top of such an SS group. You wouldn't believe it that a lawyer can do something like this, to kill people before they left.

And did they shoot anyone they found, Jewish people, or Partisans?

All of them!

All of them.

All of them.

Did you witness...?

I will tell you until the finale of my story, the end, how it ends. This is the worst thing what happened to me in my life until now.

This is what you witnessed?

Yes.

And how old were you then?

In '44, fifteen already. '44...Fifteen and I was celebrating my birthday... We were already free. The Russians came to the place where we were, our last station, on the 13th of March, we were already free.

Of '45?

Ja, and so immediately we were all immediately busy. We went voluntary to work in this Russian ...contemporary hospital. There was a school and they made a hospital. They had many...injured people. And they...had built up a surgery, immediately. We would help the

Russians. And they, there were some foot, or something, mostly - what I have seen - they amputated immediately the foot when there was broken something: Zack! And this poor man! You know? It was very difficult. And they had some...

Did they have sufficient anaesthetic... medical facilities?

The Russians? Efficient what, please?

Facilities. Anaesthetic and...?

[1:34:34]

No.

Nothing.

No. And there were some Jewish soldiers among them. So I could talk to them, because they spoke a little bit Yiddish.

Mn-hnn.

They, which was good. But as I noticed, it's German with a little bit Slav, so I could answer them. And they were very happy to hear, to hear it, who I am. And... I was such a volunteer there. There was one big class – one big room. And there were the soldiers, one, next one, one bed next to other. And these two Russian Jews, I could see how they looked like. They were dark haired and so on as the Sephardi Jews are. And, and... I asked them who they are, where they are, and so on, and if they want something you can have something. And what they have, they showed me, no legs. So this was so sad, young people. And they said, "Oh this is so wonderful that you are the first person who can do something for us. We would like to give a note home that we are alive. Even we have lost a leg, but finally, for us is over everything, and we are alive. So, please can you bring us paper and pencil?" So I learnt Russian. My father, the last weeks of...of the war, he was sitting in a bunker, where we lived. This is in the story. And there in this bunker we were all sleeping overnight. It was the best thing at night to go in hiding in the cellar... of the building. And there were... potatoes in one

corner, you know, so many, because the big family – this was big family. In the other corner, some other vegetables and food. And we put some covers on it, and there we slept overnight on this - I slept on these potatoes. And... my father didn't want me to talk too much or to do – last moment if something can happen - he bought me- One day he came in from the city, he went into the city, telling these people where we lived that he is working...

Can you say which city, please?

[1:37:06]

Well, Zvolen.

Yes.

Zvolen, the last station. And, this was a big city already. And then... he came in the afternoon back, where he said "from the work", so they believed that he is working, OK. He wasn't working; he was sitting in a coffee shop what was...what was visited by the German officers. ...They were there. The simple man had to fight, but the officer did not. He was in the coffee sitting, and so. And my father had a newspaper, a fascist, a very strong fascist newspaper in his hand. And sitting there in the coffee shop, drinking coffee and reading that newspaper. So they didn't even look at him, who is behind the newspaper because they thought 'somebody is a fascist', no? And so nothing happened to him. We were, but we were always nervous waiting in the afternoon if he is coming back. Thanks God he came back. And this was - I am telling this story because one day he came, the last few weeks of - for us - before the Russians came. And he brought me a Russian grammar book. You know? You can imagine. And so with conversation and...and lessons and - I had to learn the 'azbuka'; I had to learn the ABCDs first, no? So I told my father, "Wonderful." Because he said, "You like to talk? Learn this, and shut up." [laughs] Because I was... always saying something. Ok, and this was very good. I really was silent, and looking at this book and learning the ABCDs and everything to communicate. Very simple sentences but it helped me. And so they were surprised that I was speaking quite well Russian. And they said, one of them said to me "Oh, you are a White Russian. [also known as Belorussia] You are our enemy". So I, "Oh, I'm not! I never...! I learned it!" I had such a strange accent, such an accent or what...[laughing] You can imagine, I never heard it and then...OK. And...so...this was...my father...Ah!

What was, when he went into the city, what actually was he doing? What was the purpose?

[1:39:44]

So, he is running? The camera is running? Ja, ok. We were there in this Sklene Teplice quarter, in this spa, and it was very nice, and everything but, the uprisal was over, and now where do we go? And we had to go somewhere, so we went to this Banska Bystrica, and there was the uprisal, and two months it was very nice to walk there and to work there and to talk to people from west - from Israel. There were three volunteers: two boy, men, but in English uniforms. But they came to see if somebody survived there, and what is the situation of the Jews. And so they were happy to talk to somebody who could tell him, or her. And there was one woman, – Habiba Reiss something like this. And she was also in the British uniform, but Israeli. And, and they were, we were talking to her, and so on. But they made a mistake. They, they thought they were not informed what's happening there, so they sent the people in the uniform. But when it was over, what - in what should they walk, now? They were not... clever enough to immediately to change away their uniform, and to dress properly normal as civilians. And somebody who was not speaking the local language, they were lost! And so they were all shot! It was a tragedy for these people. They were exposed, for nothing to the Germans! Because, we were living there and these two months and so and then we were hoping the Russians maybe they came overnight. But they were still not close. The Russians stopped somewhere, because there were mountains, and they had some conflicts there. And so they didn't come so fast. And they didn't have even weapons enough. So one day we were talking, the Germans were coming from the north, from the...Germany, or even lower, Poland or Czech countries where they were still. And they made an offensive. They came to Zilina first. And then they came down to Banska Bystrica, we were south, place. And everybody who could, run away. So, it was so fast that we were one day thinking about it 'where do we go?', and the next day in the morning was the news that the Russians are coming – [corrects herself] the Germans - pardon - the Germans are coming, the SS. Brutal Germans, the most brutal people, I think so. And what happened: So, we didn't have too much time. My sister was in the headquarter working there for the Russians...

[1:42:50]

Because she was working in the hospital, wasn't she?

Yes. Yes. And we were at home. And my father said, "Take the food, take everything what you want. You dress up. And let's go; we must go". And everybody was running. There is a picture from the city centre. From right side, everybody was running, was running to the left side into the hills. And this road has a name also...the...the, the...straight into the... hills. So, into the mountains, let us say. Ja. Into the mountains. Everybody - this was one way, how to save your life. Into the mountains, to hide there. There were no options. If you had somebody drive it, but this was not- we didn't know anybody there. So we were running and there was coming a horse carriage. And my father asked if he will take the soldier, a soldier – if he would take us out of the city. So he said, "Yes", he got some money, and... we were going out of the city through the main place in the city. And this were, we were running. Not knowing where. Very upset. And on the other side of the road - so we were on the right side, yes? And going out. And on the other side of the road were standing people, all possible age, with flowers. They were standing there to welcome the Germans. You can imagine! You can imagine. I was so upset... I was so upset. So, and we were double upset because my sister wasn't with us. We were nervous what is - where is she? Why doesn't she come home? Now we are not at home, how will she know where we are? No? So we were going and going and going. We came to a stop. There was a station, a railway station or a bus station or it was something like this. The main road out. This is out of the city already. So there, the man said, "You must go". So we got out from the carriage, and we were... standing there. And my father ...somehow left a message for my sister. I don't know if he was picking her up or so. She didn't come. And my mother was totally devastated. She said, "We don't go without her". And my father said, "We should go. The Germans can be hundred" – not hundred, but – "two kilometres away!" "No we don't go". So they sent me, to go, to call her. And she was stubborn. She said, "I am a soldier now". As a soldier, ja? "I can't betray it - betray these people here. I can't go out." She was giving a lecture! And I said, "You must come!" "No." So then I was running back, and telling my parents she doesn't want! And meanwhile, less and less cars, and less and less carriages are coming! And we were very upset. And after a certain time when it was really on the high point of nervous... situation, I have seen on the top of the road there is coming - somebody is coming, not too many people. And this was my sister. So she came. Nobody said anything. There was a first military truck, a big truck with soldiers on it. And my father went to the driver said, "Please can you take us, where do you

go?” And he said, “Into the hills. Into the mountains. We are going.” “Can you take us?” “OK. Jump on the car.” So, my parents went in the front. And I had to go up at the back with my sister and climb on the car. It was a truck - open truck. There were young soldiers and they helped us to get up. But one of the soldiers pulled up – me. Because I was so small, he had to bend. And he had here a rifle, and his rifle slipped down, and on my head. Now, I have seen, for the first time in my life [laughs] I have seen... so... But luckily I had nothing broken, and I did like this, and recovered from this. And then I was sitting next... to them and talking where they are going and so on. So, we came out of the city, few kilometres further was a village. And the driver brought us to the centre of the village. And he said, “Now you must go. Now I can’t take you civilians any more. I have the command to go there and there. And I can’t tell you where it is.” So. OK. And we were very unhappy. But we were from the other side, it was good; it was a village. And the villagers are nice people, and it was evening already, because we were waiting so long for my sister. And nobody was there any more with us, so it was not so nice. And this was a square. Every village had a square. There was a church in the square and so a water and a market place. Every village. Very nice. Then we...we were, my father said, “What are we going to do? We must try to find somewhere where to stay”. And there was... a...*Brunnen*, no? Where water is coming out, such a big...

[1:48:48]

A well?

Well. Thank you. And there was such a fence around it. And we came closer to it. And we nearly collapsed. There were some dead people. Three people – three persons. And we asked somebody who was there still, “Who was that?” And they said, “A German family”. They ...made revenge, you know? And then there was, one of the home we notice there is a man, a strong man, standing in front of the gate of the door. So my father went there, and he came back and he said, “Come on. Let’s go. He is renting to - to sleep somewhere in his home... overnight we can stay. And he is not asking too much. It will be good. Let us stay here overnight. We can’t stay here outside.” And... we came in. There was such a wide door, for a carriage to drive in. This was how they made it because the most of this population were farmers so they needed a carriage and so... for the animals in the back. And so we came in and opened, and what we have seen, this was such a big hall. And then turning here, on the left side was straw, or hay, on the floor. And one people next to other, maybe twenty people

were lying there... on the floor, on the left side. On the right side, the same. And he brought us in, he said, "Here is still place for four people. You can lay down here. You can – you can sleep here." So we were surprised [laughs]; what kind of hotel is this? But we were very... He didn't have to tell us twice.

[1:50:43]

And during this horrible... persecution the hunger was the last thing. Interesting: we were not hungry. Only a little bit food and a little bit bread, and it stopped. It was very interesting. And, but sleeping was the best of course. We were very tired exhausted mentally and so we were sleeping. And there, next to...to my father was a man, who looked very Semitic, so we knew who he is. He didn't know who we are. And there is a woman who looked Semitic but is very young. Ja? And in the morning we were talking together my father, with this man. Came out that he is a lawyer from a city, and Jewish. and this is his...he said, his wife, or something like this. And we didn't talk to him too much. And then next day in the morning my father said, "We pay, and we go. We must go. This is not a solution... Too exposed in the centre of the village. And... we can't stay here; it's not possible". So we must go. And we went back on the main street, main road. And we are waiting a few minutes, and there come again... a truck, with soldiers. Ja? So... they took us, they were very nice. They took us. And when we were more kilometres towards the Russians. But they were still far away. And they said they are going to Kisela Voda and there is a hospital, military hospital, and they need people to, to...to help them. So many... They have so many wounded, injured people, soldiers and Partisans and so on. And we said, "*Prima*, this is something- this is something for us!" My sister, and my father can help. We can help, all of us. And I was the interpreter - in Russian. [laughs] You can imagine! So. And the biggest fun was when I came up, the same: My parents are in the front sitting. We went in the back. When I came up in the truck, there was a place next to me was sitting a young, blond, soldier in a Slovak uniform. And...then I noticed - and he was not talking to me. He was sitting next to me. He had everything: hands and legs and mouth. [laughing] But he was not talking to me! So, I was looking at him, he was smiling, but he didn't say any word – a word. And then, I ...asked- I noticed that he has a tri-colour here, not a Slovak ...thing. And...so I asked him in Slovak something, "Do you have problems to talk or something? He said, "*Non, je parle francais*. I said, "*Vous parlez francais?*" [laughs] That was the obvious question! "*Oui! Je suis francais!*" or something. And I said, "I speak English." "English? Hallo! Come here! Raoul! Come here, come here!

She is speaking English!” So there came an older gentleman; he was grey haired already. He was speaking English, and he was from France. They were French Partisans. You know? When there was the uprisal they were in Slovakia as... as war... No, what’s the name of it?

Prisoners of war?

[1:54:46]

Prisoners of war. And then when the Partisans made the uprisal, they- they joined and they were fighting.

They were released from the camp?

Yes, they were very happy that they can fight against the Germans. And this was funny. And so they came- this man asked me, “Where are we going? Do you know something what is happening?” [laughs] And so I was talking to them, what I could. And...and then they told us they are going to a place where there is a hospital and this story and so we went with them, there. And when we came there on the place, were- were very disappointed, because the driver had to leave with the car the main road, towards – towards, to east – towards the Russians, main road, up in the hills, where the hospital is! So we came there. We left the car after a certain time. It was far away – maybe thirty kilometres from the main road. It was a good feeling to be in the woods. Only trees. All possible high, small, very, very dense trees. Forest. Even now this is the business what they have. They are planting trees and selling the wood. And then my father said, “Sit here on the lawn.” We were sitting on lawns. “Stay here. Don’t move. I come back. I go and have a look what kind of hospital it is”. And he came back after a certain- He was disappointed. Why? The whole hospital, there was a cottage like this, a room maybe. And there were only people they had no legs and couldn’t walk... or something else. And, that was the hospital. So... he was not enthusiastic about it, because it was too small to get a job or something there, or to stay, or so. It was nowhere to stay. Nowhere. Only small cottages what the wood pickers... No. Wood...?

The woodsmen.

[1:57:07]

The woodmen? Ja? What are doing the...the cutting?

Cutters, maybe...

Wood cutters? Ja? OK. [laughs] I can't remember. Ja, they had such small huts there when it was the season, they were outside working and staying overnight. And there was a small fireplace and so. But where to find one? So... It was close to the road, also. It was not for us. And my father said, "We go uphill". And so we went uphill. And overnight, we found such a hut. There was already an old soldier, and... Ja, I forgot to tell that this lawyer, what was in this house before, in... This lawyer asked my father, "Please can you take us with you? We, we don't know. We won't stay here. We don't know where to go, what to do. Please! Take us with you". My father wasn't very enthusiastic, but he couldn't say no, because he liked to help. He supposed it won't be so bad. We bring- take them away from there, and then they can go where they want. But OK. So therefore, we took them with us, these people, and then later... We were sleeping maybe two or how many nights in this hut, with these people and this man, the soldier. The old soldier. And one day the old soldier, this old soldier had maybe suspicion, who we are and so on. He told my father, "You know, I could hide you. I know a place where you could be safe and hide you, and nothing could happen to you.

You would be very good hidden there". And my father said, "Yes, and where is it? Tell me where it is." And he said, "Well, you come with me, and I will show you." You know? And my father didn't trust of course, as always. And this was very good. My father said, "Tell me first. I must understand..." "No...come with me. But the family must stay here. Only you." So... my father, he called us, "Let's go away from here. This man is suspicious because he want only me. And who can, can warranty that when I come back, you are still here? Or opposite, that he let me back? He can kill me." Why? Because he has a uniform. And he wanted to go home. As a Slovak he could, he knew where he is, but he didn't have civilian dresses. You know? So he needed his shirt, and his trousers, and his coat to get... home. And maybe he would kill him. So luckily he didn't go. And then we met young people. One young man, and he was from the area where we were. And he was very nice and... later- And he- they needed the shirt, and the trousers. So he asked my father "Do you have another trouser? Please, I must, I will go home. I will walk home." And my father gave him the trousers. And so after the war we met him. [laughs] So...

[2:01:01]

I'm sure he was very grateful.

Ja. He repaid it. So he said, "He is a very good, not a capitalist." My father... [laughs]

So where did you end up?

This night was horrible. We ended up in this hut. We slept there, but, next day there was a shooting. And it came from the bottom of the hill, so we knew the Germans.

Up early...

Ja, they were early, correct. And we were running up, as crazy. I remember I left everything what I had there. Maybe only one bag for of something. I can't remember. And everybody else. You had not to tell them twice – tell us – twice: run away. We were running as crazy. I was in the – in the best condition, physically. So I was running on the top, and then there was very nice density of... behind these trees and, and bushes we could... stop, breathe a little bit, and think about it, where to go. And there was a path. A footpath going up. So up is the dream, was the dream of us, where is better hiding. And... we didn't know if the Germans will climb up as high or something, so. But for us, it was good. We hoped to find more Partisans there.

And did you?

Yes, we, we went. And we came in a valley. And saw- Here was the hill, and then it was a little bit - maybe as wide as this room - with grass. It was a lane, you know? No, sorry, a line. A line. It went up, and this grass they needed grass to feed the horses and cows and what they had, the animals. They were producing there, so they needed the grass. And they made, and it was another advantage; if there was – a fire in the forest - a forest fire, it stopped when there was the line, this grass. I must ask somebody how many metres. It would be, now I am interested in it to know. And, so... there...ja. And there were- there was...until October - October, ja. There were haystacks. Ja? Two, in this valley when we came there. And there were some young soldiers. And when it started to be dark, and so we said, we were tired, "You children, let us go in the haystack." So because there were two in one, my parents got

in with my sister. And there were so many- there were a whole group of soldiers, young soldiers. Enthusiastic for - for freedom. And now, the parents made the decision, "You go into the other." But there was two soldiers already in this haystack, and it was place only for three people. It was narrow. Maybe there were more, I can't remember, but I had to go in there. And then my mother went with me, and she- the boys were in one side and I went on, I was- I lay down on the edge. And said "Goodnight. Sleep well." Basta. And in the morning... - the boys slept already. They were very tired. They were marching...They had to come uphill, walking, not as we were, by car brought up to the Kisela Voda. And he- ja, they woke up at night, at the morning, sorry, I woke up, and they looked at me and said nothing. And then my mother came, with some breakfast. She had pieces of bread always in her pocket. I don't know from where. And she came and said, "Gerta, come already, I have some breakfast for you." And the boy next to me said, "What? Gerta? You are a girl? And I slept all night next to a girl and I didn't know it!" [laughs] Sweet. "You see how good you are?" It was such a fun- this, there were some funny events also. But they were very nice. So, and then we had this breakfast, and we continued - up. My father had some information talk to the people, and so higher, up, up, up. And then we came... again to ...it was so steep uphill. And there was once a heavy storm, maybe years ago. And the trees, because of the storm, fell down like this... like this, ja? And the roots came out. So the roots were so, such a big with - looked as a big umbrella and was a good protection against rain. And the rest is going down...on the body of the tree, ja?

[2:06:58]

It must have felt very cold at times!

It was cold, but we were dressed. We had warm – everything what we had, we had on us. We had no luggage any more – bags or something. Only bags, with toothbrush – I don't know what. And we couldn't wash, of course. This was horrible. [laughs] There were some creeks sometimes, so we can wash our hands or something. And it was going... very uphill. And then there we were going, and again we came - ja, we didn't know where we are. And we wanted to come into a, into a village! In a village we could knock at the doors and look for- to stay somewhere. We were waiting always, and my father was going and looking for- who would take us to rent for a longer time, to stay there with them. And we stopped at one...creek...was running from one side.

A stream?

Ja, a stream. And my sister said, "Water? Stop here please. Wait for me. I go up and look from where it comes." Maybe she wanted to hide, because she wanted to clean herself, ja? Wash herself: "I must wash myself. I can't go like this not to wash myself." So we said OK. It was calm, early in the morning. Go. And we were standing there and waiting. After a certain time, very short time, she came back with an old soldier again. For me, they were old, so, but so around forty-something. But they were not old, because of the soldier function. And he had a rifle, and so on. And we said, "Oh, my God!" And he introduced himself, who it is. And it was also a member of a unit, Partisan military unit. But he ran away, something like this, from the normal Army. It was dissolved, the Slovak. So everybody of the men tried to go home. But they needed the civilian dress. Civilian dress. As a soldier he couldn't go.

Because he would be treated as a deserter.

Yes.

Yes.

And this man was desperate also to go in a village. And he said, "You, you, you know what, you can stay here. Maybe you come with me. I found a hut here," 'Hut' is OK? This cottage?

Yes.

"Maybe somebody left some food there. And I don't know what to do. You know I am hungry but I don't like to take somebody's food. I had a bad conscience. Maybe these people will come, and then there is no more food, they will be angry with me. I can't do it. Maybe you come with me? And you stay there, we stay there and then you help me to make decisions?" something like this. So we said, "OK, OK." [laughs] And it wasn't far away. It was in the woods, very good hidden from the road where we were. It wasn't a road; it was for walking only.

Did you feel nervous? Did you feel frightened that he might harm you?

[2:10:43]

No, this man how he looked, how he was talking, not. Interesting. We were- we trusted him immediately. And it wasn't far - far away. It was a beautiful hut, and there was full a big basket with food. Food was bread and sp...no, *slanina*, [Slovak for bacon/lard] the fat of the – *slanina*?

Ham.

Ham- the fat. The very fat...How do you call it, in English? It's not ham, it's...

The fat...

The fat, how do you call that fat, please?

It's fine... 'fat'.

It's what?

The fat.

Bacon.

Ah...

Bacon. Pure fat. Bacon. Of course my parents are shocked, but me, not. I ate it. [laughs] So did my mother, small pieces, and my sister also. We ate it. But I was so hungry! [laughs] The bread was not good because they didn't have yeast, already. This was not in the war any more. They didn't produce yeast, so they couldn't... do it. And bread wasn't going up. And so, it was good to have energy. The bacon was very good. The bread... was also not bad, [laughing] in this situation. And, ja, it was, so we slept there very good. So, we were four and this couple was with us, still. The man with this - his wife.

Did they eat the ham?

[2:12:34]

He was not religious at all but my parents, not. They were so religious in this sense. I don't- They ate the bread. I don't know if they ate it. I haven't seen it. No. Never. They were not hungry. They had this and this. They were hungry maybe but the bread was for them enough. This was the first good thing. If my sister wouldn't say that, "I must go and wash myself...", we would continue... And then we were very happy there relative- compared to other situations.

How long did you stay there?

The next night was again a miracle...

Ah...

Because very early in the morning, we made there, under the tree which was so down, yeah? We couldn't stay in the hut. We were scared, because [near] to the hut was a foot path. So if the Germans would come, they would go there. They will see, so we- my father said, "It's better we sleep under the trees somewhere." And so it was. We found a very nice big, it reminds me of this, but it was bigger, and the tree was down, and it was rainy season. Never mind. We stayed this night under the tree. And in the morning, we could hear shooting. So we know the Germans are here. And they were there in this place where the haystacks were, you know? And they found people there – around thirty. Two families were there with many people and they shot them all. And there was one father, when he has seen what's happening, he pulled a child, he had a child - a girl... my age, or sister's age, something like this. My age, I think. And he pulled her down when he was falling, and covered with his body. And the Germans went from one dead to other after a certain time. They took what they wanted and looked if this person is dead. If the person is only wounded, so they noticed a person opened their eyes, or something, they killed the person again. But they didn't find the child. The story that the child survived, I heard only after the war, when I met this girl, accidentally. You know? You can imagine. The villagers came, when the villagers heard some shooting, after a certain time they came. The Germans left, and the dead were there, so they undressed

the dead. They, what they could... everything, and they buried them. They made a nice... burial there so, grave or something like this. And this girl, later she committed- She had a family with two beautiful children. She was married, but she couldn't get over it. She committed suicide.

I wondered. I, I did wonder about that. I was going to ask you.

[2:16:04]

You can imagine a small girl, witness something like this?

Yes...Mnn.

And the father saved her life. Saved her life. This were telling then later the villagers to us, the details, because they brought the, the, the, the grieving girl down to the village, and... cared for her, and then... the connection- The churches were doing a lot. They connected to other churches and maybe the child was talking about family, or about what. I don't know what; how it was, I can't remember.

You had some amazing escapes. Narrow escapes.

Isn't it horrible? Horrible. And so wait a moment. We were there...Ja, we were... moving. No, we stayed under the, under the tree. And... under...ja. And then, I don't know if it was next day or the same day... I think it was the next day. I must a little bit concentrate. Because of the girl I left it. ...The next day, we were also sitting there. It was so - so early in the morning. Maybe it was the same day. And the shooting was so strong, that I had a feeling it's quite close ...to us. So I run up into the... hill, higher. I was running as crazy. I had to climb, half climbing. It was very steep. And my parents... didn't say anything. I couldn't hear anything. I was running. The shooting was - I was so trembling - so upsetting. And after a certain time, I noticed I'm alone! That nobody else is running with me. And I stopped. I sat down on the floor, and I was thinking: what to do now? Hopefully my parents didn't go away. What should I do if they left? And I was sitting and thinking what to do. And then my sister came, looking where I am because they were unhappy that I left. But they couldn't hold me, I was so fast away. It was so horrible! And I...I was sitting and noticing it was something

in the same direction coming as I came. And I had a signal with my daughter – sister, sorry - to whistle. You know, whistle as some birds are whistling. ‘*Ta da di da di da dem*’

So I was whistling very strong and she could hear it and she found me. She found me. And she told me, “What are you doing? You know, the parents are so upset! They are scared of what you are doing! You shouldn’t do it alone!” OK. And I, I told her, “And what now? Now we go back, and we must go somewhere, but where?” And in this we were sitting there, and next to us were some bushes or some high - they were relatively high – very dense young trees, something like this. And next I noticed there is a footpath. And it was going downhill. And we were talking there, and then we could hear steps coming, [makes sound of heavy footfall] like this, you know? And we hid behind this bush, what was in front of us, and were looking who is coming. Oh, again, the heart beating! Then tension was so big. And then we noticed two young men came. They were villagers, but they were marching as soldiers. And they came, and they marched downhill in front of us. They couldn’t see us. And maybe three metres, or four metres later, they stopped, and turned. And we were looking, we had our heads outside from the bush, you know, and because they were down, maybe five metres I’m not sure how many, and we looked out, in between the bush, who it is? Where do they go? And they turned immediately. You can imagine something like this. They, as they would feel that somebody is... They turned, stopped, and came up. “Who are you? What are you doing here?” So, and my sister told him, “We are a Partisan unit - members. And we are here for...looking where what happened here, the shooting” - and referred down to the Commander. [laughs]

Quick thinking!

And they said, “Yes, Partisan, you name? Take us with you. Show us, where.” And we asked from where are you? And they said from what is it- “From Hiadel”, was the name, “from the village here; we are local from a village here.” “And how far is the village?” “Not far. Come down here.” And so on. “And there are the Germans?” “No, there are no Germans.” So we said, “So let us go. Come with us. We show you, where we are. Our unit.” [laughs] So we came with these two boys down, and my father looked at us: Who in the world? And then he was smiling. Everything OK. And then we told him who they are, and where there is a village. And this what we needed! Local people who know where is a village!

[2:22:36]

Mnn. Because otherwise you can go round and round in the forest.

No, we are lost in- it's difficult to survive.

Mnn.

Especially when there was already... autumn!

Yeah.

I can't remember exactly the month... OK. It was- Ja. It was November. November. I remember now, because we had the first snow, one night. So one centimetre snow. So, when we were walking, you could see the imprint of the shoes. So my father said, "We can't stay here during the winter" or something. Everybody can see that somebody is walking here. That we are there. Here. If you have a hut you come into the hut. No? So they would follow it. So we must go into a village. And, my father was very happy. And he asked them, "Do you take us with you?" And the boys said, "Yes, we take [us] and we will take care- we will find you, where to stay." And so it was, but... Did I tell you so we were our family, these two, the lawyer and this girl, and the old soldier? And these two young men, they brought us into the village, very thoroughly. But it was dark until we came. We had to cross a road. And on the road we could see, before we went, so, it was so steep to get to the road, to cross the road, and on the other side where we had to go up, again, the hill, was again so very...*steil* – you know? So steep.

Steep.

And there, we, we, my father and the other group went first. And my mother, she couldn't, she was so upset. And maybe she had some asthma or what, I don't know. She, she couldn't breathe from upset or.... I don't know. Maybe just too fast, to go downhill. And she said. And we two girls were with here- with her. And my sister and I hooked her from every side, and we pulled her on the front, to go. And she said, "Please let me. You go; you save your life. I don't want to live any more. I will stand here. I don't want to be..." I don't know what. Some horrible things. "I don't want to be a bara..."

A burden.

[2:25:27]

Ja. "...for you." But we didn't listen, so we pulled her. We had to run through an open field. You know? So, everybody could see us if there was somebody. But nobody was there. And then we came to the, where we had to cross the road. The other part of the group was already on the other side of the hill, of the road, behind. We could see moving them. And then a car came; you can imagine. So we had to lay down into the - on the floor of the forest, or what it was - field, and not move. Because the Germans came, and in the car. And it was already so in the afternoon, wintertime dark. So they had lights, reflectors, and they were so.. looking, you can imagine, like this, if they are on both sides. With the light. So big- Something like this, no? And looking in the valley if there are some Partisans or not. Luckily they didn't find it. Us. They didn't find us. And we were waiting. And when they left, we had to pull my mother, half wearing her, you know... And on the other side. And when we came to the village, it was the first house at the beginning. It was a big house. The boy told us, "Please, stay outside. Wait for me." And he went in. And he was the older one, the two boys. He was asking these people if they take us. We said we'd pay for it. And for them it was money - valuable - even it was not too much. And he, then he could say that we are good looking people. I mean we were not look as somebody who comes from the street or something, no? You understand what I mean. OK, and so he said, "Please go in. Goodbye. And I hope to see you later." This was his goodbye. They both disappeared. And the soldier went with them. And... the lawyer, this woman, he stayed with us. And they had... farmers, big room. And there were beds with children inside. It was very busy house. [amused] And for us, it was one corner. They brought some hay, and straw, and, "Here you can lay down, and sleep."

[2:28:30]

As we were, dressed, we were sleeping. And next day my father was- wanted to negotiate to stay, and so on. So he said, "No, you know, because these young men found something for you. This one. Where it was daytime, where you can sleep and stay. This is a house. There is an old woman. She is ..."

Deaf...and dumb.

Deaf and dumb, or how. Ja. Thank you. Deaf and dumb, and there you can stay. And my father went there, and had a look, and was enthusiastic about it. This was further - further at the end of the village, on the other end- at the other end. And there was so, uphill you had to walk. [half laughs] And there was a house, a wooden house, a very interesting architecture.

Traditional?

Traditional, yes. And she was just so smiling when she'd seen us. "Oh, nice!" And she was alone there. And there was one big room in the front, at the ground floor. And then on the roof was the hay, and the straw. So this was the whole inside of the house. The toilets were outside of the house, continue around ten metres up on the hill. And there, the toilets had a special...it was so funny for us. They had walls from left and right so from down the street could nobody see something. And from the back was something, but not from the front. There was not a door or something, no. [Jana is amused] So what can you do? And, and we were sleeping very well there. All on the floor. They were very happy, they had no work with us. Bedding and so on. No beds - on the floor.

How did your father manage to keep paying people for all of you?

[2:30:57]

Ja, because it wasn't much.

Aha.

Because it wasn't much. We had - but a good question. But money was less and less! But it wasn't much, and then when we were... living with people where we could do some dresses for them, and so on, they didn't ask money any more, or not so much money or something like this. So we survived. But, this was very nice; her name was Katka. And she was always smiling. She didn't know at all what is happening because she couldn't hear properly, no. And talking- but she was nice. She- My mother was cooking for us. My father went to the shop, and brought something. And we had a very good connection. And the lawyer; we left

the lawyer there. We haven't seen him again. And the soldier disappeared also; maybe home. Because they helped him with civilian dresses. And...the result was that we wanted to stay there, if we could, until the end of the war. But next day, these people where we were the first night, had connections with the Partisans. Because they were the first house at the beginning of the village. So even the Partisans came in and they were very nice to them. And they told them that we are, that we came. And the Partisans needed something, some medication. And they didn't have money maybe also. So they needed somebody as my father who will go in the pharmacy, and buy it or organise it otherwise. I don't know what else. And ...and we- at night, it was knocking at the door, very silent. And maybe five Partisans came in. One woman, and four- they were officers. They were not so simple. They were professionals, you could see. And the woman was also... I think a Russian, a Russian, or...it seemed so. Ja... Ja. They needed help. So they knew that my sister is a nurse, and they asked her. In the evening they could come and go to the village because the Germans didn't have courage to go in the evening out. They went back to the city from where they came, with a truck. At night they could be killed very easily, no? So they were scared to go at night. So at night it was very good; it was forbidden to move outside – military points and so on. But... they told my sister if she can go daytime, in this and this house, number this and this, to look after - this was a Colonel of the Russian Army – to look after him if he needs something, and buy it and so on. And, or my father can do it also. So, next day in the morning, my sister and me, we went. And came there to the house. The... peasants, not peasants, the villagers, locals in this house were a little bit scared. But, I started to talk, and so they have seen with whom they deal now. And then...they took us into the roof. And in the roof, in the hay, was hidden this Colonel. You know, they could cover it if the Germans would come and so on. And the man had here, his hand was from a shrapnel, from was broken, and the muscles were gone. And ...it was...

Bandaged...

Yes. And it should be changed and have new, fresh, to heal the wound, so, we had something with us, what my grandmother was an expert on special teas, and my father remembered. So we brought in the bottle this tea, already cooked and boiled and everything, so that's hygienic.

[2:36:05]

And when we have seen these wounds, my stomach nearly went up. Horrible. I have never seen something like this. We could see his nerves! All this...all this... It was horrible. It was something. So we washed it. We cleaned it with this tea. So, it can better heal and otherwise we had no nothing to give him there. Only clean, again clean. I forgot those expressions. OK.

'To change the dressing'.

Dressing. Ja. A clean dressing. This was very good for him. And he was very grateful. And... theoretically he survived, because...it, they, they, somehow they heard about it...some other people came from the end of the village where we were. Asked my father because of the address I told you if there was something else if they wanted. So we were supporting them. Some other had some, some...I know. They came and asked my father exactly what kind of medication they want. Not only did my father paid for it, but he had to bring it, and then at night, they came to pick it up. And there were very nice people among them. Politicians and so. And they got something to eat, to drink and so on.

You were going to tell us about when the Nazis came to the village... up on the mountains, to Hiadel.

[2:36:05]

Ja. Ja. I told the story with the soldier. And then we had promised him to come again...to the-it's running? OK. And...and, and it was the next day or...next day I think. We were sitting at the breakfast there in the house where we were with this deaf woman. I can't remember now what her name was. No. OK. I will remember. And she, ja, and we were sitting. I remember my father was sitting here, and I was sitting on the right side... and I was looking out of the window. The window was opposite the table where we were sitting.

And I could see it was snow already. So there was such a small hill, opposite. And this was all white. But before it was white it was green, no? With grass. And then I noticed there, there was walking - the animals are walking there and so on. So I was looking at the hill. And this morning, everything was white, except on the top were so, black as matches, you know? So, small sticks. And I was looking and - what is there? And then I was looking better and watching a certain time, the sticks are moving. I went, "Oh, my God, the Germans." And I

got up. And I was running on our side of the hill because this was such a valley. Here was the road, and the water flow. And here were the rooms and hills. And so I left out – went out - and was running where the toilet was, on our side. And I stopped in the toilet and was looking, if there are Germans, and if you can run on our side into the hill, into the forest. Ja? And then I was looking, looking, and then I noticed there is also something moving. And so I knew the Germans are there. They surrounded the village... from all sides, on the top. And then they had a command, maybe, a watch or I don't know what - they came down. So I came running down, and opened the door, and jumped in and said, "The Ger...!" And I didn't finish it, because two Germans are sitting already at the edge of the oven. You know, there were, ovens, big ovens. And the oven was from *Keramik* - ceramic tiles – and heating was here, so it kept the heat for the whole house. You know? And they had a bench around the oven so you can, you could warm yourself, if you want to sit there. And the two SS men were sitting there. And luckily I didn't say it in German! It was- so I stopped, and my mother and father looked at me. So I went there and sat next to my mother. Luckily, my sister was dressed as a girl from the village. We were all dressed already. And nothing was there suspicious: some luggage, or something else. My mother was sitting like this, and she had a bowl in front of her and doing something, preparing lunch. And like this, because there was a rucksack under the bench of the oven, ja? And she was hiding it. She had a long – long something on, and, and so it was hiding, so they were not- And the straw wasn't on the floor anymore! Because every night we were sleeping on the floor. And on the straw.

[2:42:32]

It must have been absolutely terrifying!

It wasn't! I tell you it was only one disadvantage that when we had naked legs- we couldn't have pyjama or something like this - there were parasites. And they are climbing around the hay or from the straw here and they were biting. But this was everything. But... if dangerous German would come and be suspicious to see this. So- so they were not suspicious because they didn't know how we sleep at night, if there are rooms or not.

And these men didn't talk. These were- they sit down, there was no- and they were looking for us and so and so and so. And this was simple men, these - these two Germans. They were older men also, and they were happy they are not fighting in the Wehrmacht somewhere in Russia, you know? For them, it was a very good job. Because to kill people who are not...

defending themselves was very easy for them so they did it! They had a command. They- they were innocent. They - the decision made the Commander, if to shoot somebody or not. So they felt innocent! OK. And they were sitting there, and sitting and then my, one of them said, "So what time is it?" To- each to other. "What time is it?" Because at five o'clock they had to meet again at the main square of the village, all of them. They left then. "What time is it?" And my sister... made this. [indicates the time?] You can imagine? We were shocked. And my father, was sitting at the table like this; I'm sure he was praying, and talking to God. And, and like this, you know, my hands, quite white. And my mother was doing, continued to do this and so. And then he made - this German said... "You speak German?" This was, as I told you, suspicious men. And she understood immediately what happened, that this was a mistake. So she- Now she had to get out of it. She said, "No, no, no, not much...*Schule, Schule, Schule...*" This was such a *Dialekt* that they noticed her German is not good. *Schule.*

School.

[2:45:14]

Ja. School, school. So he does a little bit 'Hmm?' But... they, [indicating how tense the family were, mild laugh] ...the heart again. And they got up at- and, and left. Ja. And next day, we got again visitors. We noticed in front of the windows of this house, many, some people, some more people are standing there and so. And - Ja. This was what I wanted to say: When they left, after a certain time I left, and I went to the main square to look if they arrested this - this Colonel, this Russian. If they found, or somebody else whom I know from this - one of the soldiers what came to my father because of the trousers. He was also a nice person. So...no. The Colonel was good hidden. They didn't find him, I think. And the Partisans should come the evening, what we wanted to stay there. But it happened that this morning the villagers came, and one of them was- came into the house. And they had - as weapons, I think - they had showers [shovels], and something, in their hands. And one came in and they said, "We don't know who you are, but please go away. The Germans said, '*When we come back - we come back in a few days - and if we find one Jew, one Partisan or one Gypsy in this village, we will burn the village.*' So please go away."

[2:47:14]

So... he didn't have to tell it twice. We took, in minutes, our items. And they brought ...a ...horse carriage – ja? A carriage with a horse: correct?

Mn-hnn.

And they- So we loaded...it was in the afternoon already. At four o'clock. I remember. And there was the valley, and... there- there was no sun any more. It was, it was – winter? When was it? One second, ja. It was November – December beginning, or end of November, something like this. Ja. November. And it was so dark there in this valley, so we had no options as to take this ...cart what he gave us, what they brought...with a driver... and say 'Goodbye'. And... before, when we are moving, they came- we passed a house and there was one of the Jews who were hiding there – dead - in front of the house. They'd killed him immediately when they saw who it is, ja? And so we were parting there, and in a certain way we were happy that it didn't happen to us, but we were unhappy, because we didn't know where we go. And...It was very interesting - I was sitting at the back of the- It was open, you know, it was- I shoot photographs of this carriage, once, how it looks like. A Slovak original thing. And it was at a certain, as in a movie. A tragedy. We were going out from here - there was the village, away, away, away, and there was a station somewhere in a village very far. I didn't know how long we were travelling; I think one hour for sure. And it was cold. It was dark. And there was a little bit in some, in homes was light, and they were heating. You could see some light; it was forbidden to have light because of bombing. But the villagers didn't care maybe. And it was very interesting to see the smoke coming out of the chimneys, you know? So I was sitting there, not knowing where to go. And seeing these homes, where is fire...and where there is nice warm. And we were freezing in this carriage and, and going nowhere - to nowhere. And they are sitting, and safe sleeping, and so in a certain way this was as in a movie.

[2:50:23]

Did you feel, at that moment, did feel very envious and think that your personal situation was just never going to end?

Yes. I was very unhappy. When I have seen this warm – warm - this smoke coming out of these chimneys and the small lights in the windows...

And the whole life that it represented.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes. And so we came to – the miracles are coming – to the station. He helped us with the luggage; we didn't have much... any more. And he said 'goodbye' this man who brought us there. We didn't know who it is. One of the villagers. And he returned. We said 'thank you' and I don't know if my father gave him something. And then, there was a small...station. Railway station. Such a small house. And he came there... And to the station, and the left was the office of the manager. One man was only there, who cared for everything on the station. But he was the main person; I think that he was doing everything. And my father was talking immediately to him. When is a train coming, where it's going. We didn't know! ...What.

Mn-hnn.

It was wartime. And he told him there was coming one in half an hour, going to Banska Bystrica, and then is other coming, that is going to Zvolen. And...there...Ok, my father came back and said, "OK. Now I know there is coming a train in half an hour. And you- I stay here with the luggage," – bags, what we had – "you go in the waiting room, and I call you- pick you up when the train is coming." What happened: We went into the waiting room. My mother was the first. And we followed her, we two. And the waiting room, from your perspective was: Here was the window in the waiting room. We had to walk there a few metres. There was nothing and the left was something. When we came, we were marching behind my mother to the window, and then we turned and what was there? Five SS were playing cards at the table, and above, was a ...wardrobe with - with rifles, with some... guns, how do you call it? – *Samopal?* – No... such a rifle, how do you call – rifles?

Rifles.

[2:53:25]

OK. These Russian rifles were...automatic...

Oh! Machine guns.

Samo...samohot – no, *macht nicht*. Machine guns. OK. Horrible. And there – and now, this heart beating was nothing until...So now we sit down... and we were sitting; I was next to my mother on a bench. And there was a small table in front of us, and there were chairs. And she was holding my hand; she nearly broke my fingers, she was so upset. What now? Who could expect something like this? My father didn't ask him, but there was the man, and he didn't say anything 'Don't go' because he didn't suspect us, so. Now we are sitting here. Half an hour the train is coming, and hopefully we will survive this. And what happened: One of them looked at us. Got up, and came to us! You see, four people were playing, and not interested. And one of them, from these – there were five together – one of them got up and came. Who told him to come? He has seen we have nothing. Luckily we left our – the hand bags

Luggage.

The bags, the luggage there with my father, and my father didn't come in. Because if they would suspect him, they would tear him down... trousers. They would not argue with him anymore. So luckily he was outside. Luckily we had no luggage. But now we were there. And he came, and he was shout to my sister, "Come here. Closer". He didn't come close to us. He was standing in the centre of the room and, "Come here. Where do you go? Who are you? Where do you go?" And she again, she had to make a decision with the language. So she said, "*Nerozumiem, čo pán mi hovorí!*" "I don't understand what the gentleman is saying." But then he said, "So, where? Where? Come! Come!" So he had some words, Slovak. She said, "Banska Bystrica." "Ah! Banska Bystrica. Mn-hmm! Now, at night?" Now - at night. "And what are you doing here? And what do you want? Where are you?" and so on, he started to ask. And... and my mother was holding so horrible my hand so how he started to ask, I pulled my...ja...He - he said a very important thing. This was the... alarm for me. He said, he was walking around her, and looking from the shoes what she had, until the top. And he said, "You are not a Partisan? Hmmm? You are not a Partisan?" And she said, "No!" And, I - I don't know if he could hear it, because I jumped immediately. I pulled my

hand out of both Mum's hands, and I went to with my sister, and I started as a crazy person to dance around her, and to sing "Editha! Ha-ha-ha! Partisan, Editha! Ha-ha-ha! Hallo! Hallo! Ha-ha-ha! [other words in Slovak, *Buchni ma*] *Buchni ma*, meant 'hit me', you know? And she understood, because as children, we were fighting. She wanted that...and so we were fighting often. So she started to hit me. "Stop it! You don't see the gentleman!" In Slovak, you know? And I was 'Ha-ha-ha! Tra-la-la!' - dancing as crazy. And he, he was looking ...looking ... walking around again. And he didn't believe it. But then one of them, playing the cards, was screaming, "Come here, Paul!" or whatever was the name. I don't know, sorry. "Come here! Let the stupid girls there! What are you doing? Come here! We want to continue to play!" So, he was so slowly... Ja. I know what happened. Sorry- the most important I forgot. "You are not Partisan?" he asked, "Yes?" And she didn't say anything. And he said, "You know what we do with Partisans? Puf-Puf!" He was so showing it. Puf-Puf-Puf. And this was the signal for me. This Puf-Puf. I went to her; I forgot you see? And around her I started, "Editha! Puf-Puf-Puf! Editha! Ha-ha-ha! Puf-Puf-Puf!" You see? I [inaud] as this, and this...?

And it distracted him, though, and it had the desired effect.

[2:58:53]

Yes, this distracted him from this, and my sister could be silent. And...

That's so brave of you.

Yes. 'Editha, Puf-Puf-Puf', you can you imagine! A young person, she was twenty!

Yeah.

And he said that I'm crazy, so it was good; I played the crazy girl. Because if he would say something in German, and I understand, it wouldn't be good, but 'Puf-Puf'. It was very good that he say it. Horrible. This was the worst thing what happened to me, during the Holocaust. 'Puf-Puf'. And then the other soldiers said, "Come here. Come here." And he- He went very slowly back to them – only two metres – very slowly, and always looking still to her and to me like this. He didn't go voluntarily, you know? But he didn't know what to do. He was

blamed now with the ‘Puf-Puf’. It was his fault that he said ‘Puf-puf’. Puf-puf. And then, after a certain...Ja. This was the miracle. Not only the ‘Puf-Puf’, but in this moment when he was so slowly going away the door opened, and the- the manager of this station come in, and said, “Your train is coming! Fast, get out from here! You stupid girls!” You know? Maybe he heard what happening. “Get out! Get out!” And he hadn’t tell it twice. My mother understood. You can’t imagine what could happen then my mother would explode and say something in German. No? “What are you doing to my daughters,” or something. We would not be here. Because...and she was so wonderful, that she kept herself so under control. Not to say: she left us to us. Left us to us...left us. Something like this.

[3:01:05]

Gosh! It makes my- It makes my blood run cold just hearing this.

You can imagine. This is a miracle. And the second miracle is coming. That then we- we run out. We took our luggage. And my father was going, “Where are you so long?” He didn’t know exactly what happened, but he noticed something happened. And the train came, in a few minutes! This was so- seconds! The train came; he opened the door, this man. The station man was very good. All were the Slovaks good what we had – what we met. And we jumped into the train. This place where it stopped, and where he opened the door, we jumped in, and stayed in the end – at the entrance. We didn’t go into the carriage, inside. And were first breathing. Calmed down with breathing. We were so upset. And then we, I have also troubles, hoppla. [she has breathing difficulties at this point] ...And then we calmed down, this were maybe seconds, maybe minutes. We turned us a little bit and moved - there was a toilet in the corner. And in front of the toilet door, was a young man. And he was dressed in a shirt, and in trousers. And this was our experience. Outside was zero degrees, and he had only a shirt and trousers. So we knew it could be somebody who is running away from the Army and home. And- and it was a fantastic person. Good looking young man. And, my father said, “Let us go. I go with Gertie and look who is - if the train is empty, that we can sit down and maybe sleep.” It was already again dark outside. And we went there, and my father, if he would be alone, he would be a Partisan and: “What the hell?” – or something else. But with me, he was a father, with a child - it’s OK. So, we came there, and in every compartment were soldiers. But not SS. They were the *Wehrmacht* coming from the front. And maybe going to Germany to exchange to have - and the other came ...there. So, we...

came back. And my father tell my mother, "It's full. We can't sleep there. So we must stay here." And then they started to talk; where would we go? To Banska Bystrica was the train going; should we go out - get out there? Because we didn't know the other villages also, and the big city... And we know the city itself already. We were there – no? - already a few months ago, or weeks ago. So my father said, "It - it would be the best, but... I don't know." And this young man said, "You can't go to Banska Bystrica because, immediately as it is dark, the SS is coming to the station, and everybody who is suspicious, they arrest him, and take to the prison to get him... exactly who it is."

[3:05:03]

Mnn. Questioned.

The ...identity. And they were shocked to hear this. And he said, "There is coming a village now. And this village... is, I know somebody, and I can try, a lady, to ask if you can stay overnight there. If you come with me." So we didn't have options. We were in the train and we had to do the decision – my father especially with my mother. And my father said, "I trust you. We go with you." So the village was ...short time we get out of the train. And we were walking and following this young man. And after a certain time he stopped, and he said, "Sorry, wait here for me." It was very dark. Because there was forbidden the light because of bombing, no? So it was very dark. And, "I will come back, and I tell you. I'll pick you up." So we were waiting a certain time, and a short time he came back, and he – he asked for my father if he has... matches. So my father gave him some matches. And then he went and he came again back and, "Please, let us go. But there is a problem. And therefore, don't go one next to other. We will make a line, and you have to follow one step behind other. Don't move right or left. Please, stay in the line. It's a problem there." So my mother said at first, "I don't go." She was totally *fertig* [finished] already with her nerves. She didn't know what it is. So my father said, "You must." He was the first, the young man, my father, my mother, my sister and I think I was at the end. And we were walking like geese or, some other animals. And, we knew it, so we were disciplined. And... we were walking, and after a certain time we were on the other side... of a valley, such a - as you said, yeah? This. And we were continuing... until he brought us to the house what he promised there is a lady. So in front of the house he said, "Please stop here, stay here. I go inside." And he left, and after a certain time he came back. He said, "Please come in. It's OK, the lady will give you- You can stay

overnight.” So we went in and he said, “I wish you a good night. I see you tomorrow, at the station where we came, at ten o’clock. At ten o’clock is a train to Banska Bystrica. And daytime, if you go, nobody will ask for papers, because it’s very busy daytime. But at night.” OK. ‘Thank you’. And we were very happy. ‘Looking forward to see you tomorrow at ten o’clock’. And the lady took immediately over the commander or ‘commandment’, or something like this, and said, “Please come in”. And we came a very elegant, nice... small house. And in the living room, she brought some – some- something like this, it was very high. And here you can sleep, at the floor. Floor sleeping was for migrants as we were [inaud] So what? We were very good. And ...she asked if we want something; we didn’t want anything, only to sleep. And next day morning she prepared also breakfast for us, and, and she- my father asked please could we stay longer? ‘I will pay for it... and... I would appreciate it to stay longer’, until we make a decision where to go next.

[3:09:45]

And she said, “I’m sorry. I can’t do it. I promised this young man for one night. But for one night is OK, but no longer, no more. I don’t know you; I don’t know him.” So we said next day morning, ‘Thank you’. We looked at our watch. Ten o’clock we must be at the...

Station.

Station. Ja. I’m showing there the station was there. I see the station in front of me. And what happened. We went there, and there was a very nice road, an alley with trees. But the left of this road was...a...a river. And... when we asked where to go to the station, so they told us, ‘...here beside the river, and then there is a bridge. You cross the bridge and then there is the station’. OK. So we were going, going, going - there was no bridge. And we came to a place where there was a bridge, but the bridge was... blown in the air, by the soldiers or the Partisans, because they didn’t want the Germans to come into the village. So the bridge was like this: broken in the centre, and like this, here. And we said, ‘No, this is not the bridge we are looking for; we are looking for the bridge’. And we stopped to an old gentleman and asked him, “Where is the bridge what is going to the station?” He said, “This one.” “And when did it happen?” He said, “Maybe six weeks ago.” So how did we come? You can imagine, this was it, what it was, this young man, who was also ...surprised that it is in the water, because he was as a soldier away. But it seems so that it was his village. He had

knowledge about the village, and who lived there. And we were – So, this was the bridge, and on this upper part, we were walking [laughs]. And now we had to go to the station, and there was no bridge! So we had to cross again, daytime. We could see where we were going. And my mother, again, “No. No.” Then...I think she covered her eyes. And we pushed her, slowly step by step, on the other side. Because it was horrible, really horrible. And then we were sitting, and looking at our watch, where is the train? But where is the young man? It was ten o'clock. ...He wasn't there. So my mother was sitting with the luggage, and we three of us, we were one side, other side, in all sides looking where is this man, to tell him 'Thank You'. Or to keep connection, to send him something one day. He didn't come! And I came back from my side, and I told my mother, “I'm so sad that I couldn't- can't- that I can't see him, and that I can't tell him 'Thank you' for the- [with emotion, Gertrude exhales] ...For the rest of my life. And my mother said, “He won't come. He was not a human being. He was an angel.”

Mn-hnn.

And the train came. And we jumped into the train. And we went to a big city where we were not before. You can imagine... Who told him to ask us if we want to come with him, and he will find a room for us? Unbelievable! A stranger. Unbelievable story!

[3:14:02]

And then we came to Zvolen, because my father remembered that there was somebody when he was selling these leather articles. ...And we came daytime, so it was... noontime or something. There were not SS and so on, in - in the city maybe, but they didn't make *Razzias* [police raids] or they were still sleeping. Who knows what they were doing. But, then we came to this place. We divided. My parents were in the front walking, and we girls behind them. So if somebody came into troubles with the SS, of two of us, ja? The other part could turn and go away, and... help later maybe, to do something. All four of us - a family – if everybody could see, this was not good. A family is moving during the wartime; this was suspicious immediately. Or at night. In the city. So we – we came to this family, shop, this was the leather shop. And they knew my father. They recognised, the owner, my father immediately. That because he was such a nice man to talk. And he didn't know the name of my father, that he's Friedmann. He introduced himself with the name of the company what he

was selling this leather for a certain time when he had the permission. And then [clears throat] ...ja, these were very nice, these people. Sit down and talk to- what you want? And my father told the story that we were in the spa, and the uprising came; we didn't go immediately home and so on. If we can stay overnight, [half laugh] again. And they let us to stay in their house and he said, "I can give you an address of a woman who is renting rooms". So my father went there, and immediately took a room, and we said 'thank you' to these people. And left something; I don't know what. Not money. We were not doing it for money. And we went there to this... people in the street named as Bottova 13. Number 13: it's a happy number. Bottova - Bottova is a Slovak...Slovak...no...book? No, you see? Writing. He was writing book – Boto...*Roman*...

[3:17:18]

Novels.

Novels. He was writing novels. Writer?

Author.

Author. This is what I was looking for. In a moment. And, and there was a very nice small house. But from outside big... windows. And the lady was- landlady was like this. Her husband was a train driver. Older man already, but young, very young. And very good, sympathetic. He was every day working. Then they had three children. One son was twenty. And the other daughter was as old as my sister and the youngest was as old as me. So we had immediately contact, and they were very happy to see somebody from another city. They didn't ask us from where we are immediately. [half laughs] But, later... we had a very good friendship with them. And they - they didn't ask 'why are you here?' This was school time and so, and holidays were over. And I don't know what my mother told him. I didn't ask him but maybe only for a certain time, something, he has a job there or something. I don't know. And so- And then my mother with three girls, no? So she started to do dresses for them, and we were helping, when we were not busy otherwise. And going, playing ball games with them. They had a garden. And it was very nice. We paid. It wasn't cheap, what they were asking, but it was OK, what she was asking. And one day, it took some, some weeks you know, and the neighbours they're very nice. And one day, I was playing in the

garden, in the...so, the entrance was next to the house. Here was the house – ja? - and here was the entrance and the garden. And then you had to go around the house, and here was the basement and there was the kitchen. So...They were five people in this family, but they slept together so that they could rent ...not rent. No. You know what I mean? Opposite...

Hire it...?

Wie?

To let another room.

Ja ja. So if I'm renting, what am I?

A tenant.

[3:20:06]

Tenant, thank you. [laughs] (Horrible...) We were tenants, ok. And one day, I was playing there and dancing and singing. I was singing, I killed every suspicion, because I was listening to radio, when they had some radio. And they were singing all the time in the radios. And so I learned something. And they liked it very much, you know? And the end was, that one day I was jumping there outside, [laughs] and the landlady was very funny and she liked me. And there was snow already. And there was in the courtyard, such a...a little bit water in one place. And she said, "Gerta," – Slovak, no? – "You are still jumping and so on. You know, I have an idea. I give you ten Crowns if you sit with your naked bottom in this water." [both laugh] You know? She was funny. And I wanted to know that I have, I'm not scared and so. I was thinking about it; I will do it. And in this moment, the gate opened, and two SS marched in. One was smaller, the other was bigger – taller. Ja? And I, I, I – you know? [mimics being shocked and surprised] I got stuck. I didn't say anything. And then they came to me, and they asked, "Where is Mrs Grendarova?" And this I understood, Grendarova. And I said, "*Pani Grendarova! [Máte tu návštevu!*] Come here you have a visitor. And they came, and they told her the one was- the one German was Polish origin. He spoke Slav language, so how good it was not to talk at all with these people. In front of these people. And they were asking her that they heard she has one room, to... rent, if they can have it. Then she said, "Yes". And

this was the room, in the mansard, they call it. In the top of, in the roof. How do you call it here?

Attic.

[3:22:29]

Attic. In the attic. And this was empty, because before there was a mother and child, Jewish one, they were living there. But we didn't meet, any more, no? And then somehow they got them, the Germans, and took away. And she was already advertising that there is a room free. And these two SS men came, and moved in!

And this was at 13 Bottova Street?

Bottova 13. You can imagine. So, when they left, I ran inside to the house, and my mother was there, my sister and told them, "The SS comes in the- above us". Exactly above us. They took the *Treppe – Treppe*, the stairs - in front of our entrance into the room. We had one room and two beds, and one sofa. We all four slept in these two beds. We had a system. My father had a system. Head and legs, you know? And my father and my mother were in one bed, and then came Edith, and then me. We slept always like this with strangers. My father could... do something if somebody would try to get to the centre. And I was very aggressive also. [laughs] I would kill anybody who is trying to touch my sister. You know? So they were protected in the centre, and this was very good. And we had place. We were so tired emotionally, mentally, that we slept immediately; we didn't have sleepless. Seldom. I don't know. Me, not. I was very tired. So they came with their luggage, and they stayed six weeks. You can't imagine how everything changed. Because they were asking questions, after a certain time. Again, this smaller person with - with Polish origin, was a very bad personality. You could see how, when you were talking to him, his face and so on. The German, from Hamburg, these are maybe more cultivated person, I don't know. He was more idealist maybe. And... And he fell in love with my sister. She looks as...there's a Swedish...film *Schauspielerin*, wait a moment. ...Ingrid Bergman. You know Ingrid Bergman?

Mn-hnn.

[3:25:18]

So my sister looks, even today, very good. But, she looked better before. And, and she said she don't, doesn't speak English, she learned already – no, - No, no, German, sorry. No German. No, *trocha, trocha*, little, little, that was it. And they didn't like me. He, especially not...

Why?

Because I didn't move away from her. I was always next to her. My mother said, "You should not move from her." My father also. My father would never touch us as we were as girls or something, or kiss or something, or hug. So Never. So they were conservative people, and this is very healthy. Children must grow, not to be... like this. So, we trusted him and, we could trust him. He was very good; this wasn't always the case. There was always- I know stories. OK. This is not the subject. The subject is that this SS is laughing at her, smiling at her, and looking at me like this. [mimics a frown] [laughs] I look at him also; 'go to hell'. And he... They were not all day there, they were working. So what was the work? To go to the Jewish cemetery, and by truck were brought these people who they got, the Germans. And they were shooting them. This were what these two men were doing. And when they finished they came, and this lady...the – the... Mrs Grenda- landlady, was inviting them for tea... at five o'clock. So they came. And they wanted us also to come. So my sister and me and their girls, her own girls and her boy, we were sitting there and drinking tea and talking to them. Ja? So I didn't talk much, because - only Slovak. And the son, who was twenty he learned already German at school. And he was the interpreter, so it was very good. And we could say in Slovak what we wanted. They didn't understand. And this was going... certain time very good. And, we could hear from them what – they didn't say what they are doing, they didn't. But they were working every day. They had a car also, and I was thinking about it, how...how to destroy the car. This was my idea. ... Horrible! I couldn't sleep at night sometimes because of this destroying the car. Imagination. But it didn't help. And one day I was again jumping outside in the front of the kitchen of Mrs Grendar. She came to me and she said, "Tell me, at the end of this stay, of them..." Otherwise... Ja, one day at the morning, at nine o'clock, I was listening to '*London is Calling*'. They had a radio, the homeowners They had a radio.

Wasn't that banned? You could be shot for listening to...?

And we, we had no radio of course. No? And...Ja! Of course. And, and- I was- I knew where it is at nine o'clock. The SS went at eight o'clock to work, so, nobody was there. Everybody nearly was at work. Only the... landlady and me. And the two girls, I think they were at school or so. And then this- the, the, I knew about London. ...About the news. And one day, at nine o'clock I was listening. And it started, the news: *Da-da-da-dum*. And the door opened. And the ugly SS said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Tralala! Musika! Etvasteva! Tatata! Tralala! Tansui! Tansui!" You know? He said, "Crazy girl." And left. But- a few days later, I can't remember how many days later, I was outside, playing, in the garden, in front of the kitchen. And she came out and asked, "Tell me, why are you here? Why you are not at home?" She didn't know from which city we are. I don't know what my father said. You, you, you. There is school time and everything, and you are not at home. Why are you here? *Eigentlich*? She never thought about it before and now... somebody asked her. Why are these people here? So, I was shocked. But I was... a certain, expecting it. Expecting. Because it wasn't normal that a family was in one room and not going home. So I was shocked. I was thinking very fast what to say, because it was very dangerous. And I said, "Ja, there is a reason". "So why?" "But I can't say it." "So please tell me." "You won't say anybody?" "No." "Nobody, you can't say nobody! Promise me not to say anybody!" "No, no! I promise!" "I shouldn't say...my, my, my, my Daddy will be angry. I shouldn't." "I promise I won't say anybody!" OK. So I tell you. You know, my father, is a big fascist. And there in the city where we live, they know it. And my uncle, phoned, made a phone call '*Don't come home, because the Partisans threatened that they will kill your father when they come home.*' So we can't go home. They will kill our father." And I told it, everybody in the family. And next day, in the morning it was knocking on the door. The SS came, and he brought a big piece of meat. A sympathetic [laughing aghast] gesture. You can imagine! You can imagine? And I was only fifteen or sixteen years in... in '45. So I was – no...Ja. Sixteen. I was thinking, a lot of times. You know, I, there are many here. I was thinking what to say. And I didn't know so I was always saying to her, repeating, "You shouldn't tell anybody and so..." And meanwhile I was thinking, what to say? This was the only way. And they believed it because he looked...he could be a German, by the look, how he looked like, so... He is a Nazi. A fascist. Oh, he was a Slovak fascist. He could be a Slovak fascist my father, not a German. But he couldn't be a German with speaking such good Slovak!

[3:33:20]

Such quick-wittedness! I mean that...

And then the end is coming. Sorry. The end was...hoppla, I stepped on it. The end was that the Germans left...home. This SS, after a certain time. And... and then we had peace. The Americans came, were bombing. ...But, we were lucky. The bomb fell into the garden and not into the house. You can imagine? Next to the house fell the bomb. It was not American bomb. If it would be an American bomb, I'm not sitting here. Because they had bigger calibre. These were Russian women – an air squadron of Russian pilots, women. They were coming at night, flying very low. And there was a railway station where we- next to this Bottova Street, at the end of the street. But... she pulled maybe too late, or something, no button, and it fell next to the house.

Oh, my goodness!

But, but I told you now the finish of the last miracle. The last. Sorry. I should wait for it. Never mind. Can I continue? So they left, and we had few weeks very good time. Peaceful. And we were doing the dresses and not talking. They always talked to my mother.

This was 1945?

[3:35:09]

Yes.

Yes.

February or something like this.

Yes, because Kosice was liberated early wasn't it?

Yes, so it was February. There is something climbing...

It's a little ladybird, and I could feel it...sorry...

I take it. And the Germans left... and we were sitting and waiting until the war will be over. They understood it, these people in the house, or, the owners. Because we shouldn't go until, maybe home, at all. OK. And nobody asked any more. Anything. They had maybe small suspicion, but ...never said anything. And then...Ja. I remember now, good. So they left before... Christmas, home, as a reward, they knew they killed everybody – cleaned the...

The SS?

SS. So they left all, home. And the Russians were coming close. They didn't want the SS to be killed from the Russians, somehow. They left. And we were preparing Christmas came December - in December. And this was not too easy. This was... a problem for us, in a certain way. But we know – we knew how to behave, what to do. But the songs, we knew only the beginning...all of us.

Oh, the Christmas carols.

Yes.

Yes.

And my mother especially, only in German. No? My father was not...the question...he didn't sing. He was not singing. But we girls were prepared. And one day, I- I think it was the first day of - after the holy evening, ja?

[3:37:29]

After Christmas Eve.

Yes. Yes. They came around five o'clock to us, inside. Only the girls. The owners, the landlady, with her two daughters. And they came in; they knocked at the door. "Can we come in? You know, we are sitting so sad somehow. Why don't you sing carols? Let us sing carols.

We will sing with you.” OK. They thought we were sad because we were not at home; this was normal. So let us sing some carols. And she said, “Everybody of us will sing.” And I said, “OK, everybody of us will start, and then you must join. It’s nicer when a group is singing.” And they said, “Yes!” [laughing] And this saved us also, our troubles. Because she started, the landlady. Then she said, “You, Gerta.” So I continued or I started again. I don’t - No, it wasn’t my turn. Then all connect... was it. And then... it was my turn, after her. Now you. And I knew a very nice song so I started to sing it loud. And then I said, ”All!” And my sister then her daughters. But there was another problem. My mother. It was her turn. And she could only, in German, sing *Heilige Nacht*. Nothing else. The beginning. So what now. And there were seconds of silence. You know? Shock. And you know what happened in this seconds of silence? The bomb fell into the garden. Exactly this what I wanted to tell you. I don’t know if I would believe you if you tell me this story. I don’t know. But you can ask my sister and the rest. And even them... And they jumped up, and they run to their home, to look where the bomb fell in. So, we could see it was a small bomb but the crater was big as this room. And, and luckily the house from this side, where we were sitting in the room, was protected by wood - strong like this wood – panels. So the damage wasn’t big. Ja. We survived. They never asked again...[laughs] about us. They never doubted then, that we are not ...Christians, so this was very good. They were very nice people, but they wanted to know. Who knows ...what it was. They were right. It is a risk – it’s dangerous to have us at home. But this bomb... saved our lives.

Unbelievable story...

[3:41:01]

Did you stay there until the end of the war?

For us was the end of the war in 13 March, when the Russians came. And this was good. Meanwhile I could- We were sitting at the cellar every night, still. And there I was learning and reading the Russian language. Reading, writing. And there was a young couple they moved in, into the mansard on the top, when the SS left. He was a soldier who ran away, and he had a young wife. They married, and they left home, because they knew at home that he... deserted the Army. So had to hide also. But a different level. And... we were in the cellar every night with them. But then – then we stopped and the bombing stopped, and everything stopped in a certain way. And we were waiting for the Russians. And one day we looked out of the window. It was the 13th of March, 1945. 13th of March.

And the Russians marched...

Came. Ja. We could see how they came along the street. Two of them in one side, on one side, the other side, you know? At first only a few. And behind them [half laughs] was the Army.

Did they march in, or did they come in tanks?

No, no tanks.

They marched.

Ja, they marched. They...Ja. I went then. Two days later, ja, and then, who was on the top? The last one? This young couple. This young couple stayed a few days, and then they left somewhere else to live. And in this room was again free, a Russian Mayor – *Major* – Major?

Major.

Ja? Came and lived in this room with somebody who was cleaning his shoes. They call it in German...

Brick polisher.

No, it is a servant, a manservant.

[3:43:14]

Oh. Like a valet?

Ja. Something like this.

Military valet. His batman – in military terms.

Yes, yes. Something like this. And this was a twenty-year-old, who was a member of a dancing group. And they were doing in a group of soldiers, Russian soldiers. And they were doing performances for the Army, you know?

Oh, yes.

Ja. They were very good in dancing and singing. And this was good so we learned also songs from them. He was very nice. He was so happy to be with a family. Such a small village boy. Very normal, healthy boy. You know, such a- Not *intellektuell* something in his head. He was such a good boy. And so I had somebody with whom to talk...daytime. So I learnt from him, a lot, in the beginning. And then they moved away somewhere else in some other city. And then until the end nobody else came in anymore in this room, this small room.

There have been many accounts of the brutality of the Russian soldiers...

They were talking about it that there are...no. "*Wie sagt man das?*" I can't find the word. Towards the women... ja. They were talking so we were hiding the girls...

And how they would take possessions, belongings...

No, this they didn't take.

You didn't experience it?

No, they couldn't do anything with it. They couldn't sell it, they couldn't...where to go? No, they were not robbers. But there were stories they are taking advantage to women, something; who knows ...if the women were not interested. But where they were a little bit drunk or they were a little bit fighting and so on. But this Major didn't drink, and the young man also not - a dancer and singer. And it was a certain type who was drinking.

So you didn't experience...that?

[3:45:28]

No...no. We didn't experience. No. How we talked to them and so, he had respect. No. And then again, I was close to my sister all the time, so. And she didn't go out so much anymore. The girls of the house, all of them are...take care. So, it was calm, relative, we relaxed. But still not...we didn't feel still free, totally, you know? It was still a danger in the air. You never knew. But this was, the story ended...in...when the war was over, no. We were there until 13 March, when the Russians came. And then a few ...days later, the Russians were already occupied the whole of Slovakia, then we went. My father was in the city, and made acquaintance with a Romanian pilot. They didn't know that in Piestany is an - an airport. And my father spoke to them somehow in a coffeehouse again. And so, they connected, [laughs] and my father said he would like to go to Piestany, and they said, "OK, we take you. We are going there to the airport, but not by plane", luckily, by bus...Not bus – sorry – again, a truck.

Yes.

A truck. And it was already... somehow- It was still cold. It was... March. March. We survived this trip. And then we came to Piestany. And the people were so surprised to see us. The close neighbours when we met and so... We couldn't go back to our... flat, what we had there before. This was occupied by somebody. And we went into the hotel; we stayed in the hotel. And then my father went to the city and the City Hall gave us some empty Jewish property – flat - not as a present, but, to rent it. This was not expensive, what the city was renting. And so we got a very beautiful flat from... after the Jewish... old couple. They built a house...a very nice house when the season was to do a spa. And people were building at one whole street; it was very nice. In the time of First World War – pre-war time. And this house, they knew that he didn't survive the Holocaust because they were old people, and they were going straight in Auschwitz... into the... chimneys, so- They were not alive. And we got this flat, and ...because it was so beautiful, he...he had...ja- We... this was in March, 19...13th March...we came to... Piestany March...April maybe.

[3:49:18]

In April. We forgot to celebrate my birthday, because [laughs] we were so busy. Ja, and we had - I have there [clears throat] you know, somewhere not here, I can prove it that I was also working for the Russian hospital. My daughter, my sister was working, I told you this, she

was there. And so we left. And then we came to Piestany, my father looked for some work. My mother... Also we tried to buy also what – or get back some furniture, to furnish the new flat. Some people returned, interesting. Some people brought: “This is yours. I don’t want it”. It didn’t bring happiness, maybe. But otherwise... We were... talking to people who were coming back from the concentration camps. And... at the end of April... [thinks aloud] maybe beginning of May, I don’t know exactly. My mother was always asking. The telephones didn’t ...work – the telephone lines. And my uncle who was helping us to survive, he was still in Zilina. But during this time when we were in Zvolen, we didn’t – He sent us one letter; I read you the letter. And we didn’t – we couldn’t communicate, to ask them to come and so... No? It was a risk.

Yes.

They could have suspicion with him. How she looks, how he looks – who knows. So, and my mother was on the phone line often. But when we came to Piestany, a certain time... he didn’t call. And we thought, no, no it’s busy now, the telephones are not working and so on. And one day... came one of the boys whom we knew from Zilina. He came back from concentration camp. And they were in the last months only put there, so they were still alive. It wasn’t so bad for them; they couldn’t die from starving or something. And the gas chambers didn’t work anymore, and so. And they knew from the Red Cross that we are alive. We were registered in the Red Cross, in Bratislava, at the Red Cross. And that somebody wanted information, they had to come to Bratislava, with any trains or buses from the concentration camps. And they went to this Red Cross at the station, and they were asking if this and this people are alive. So they got our address in - from Piestany and they came. We gave them some food, and they stayed overnight and then they went to the ...railway station and were travelling home. They wanted to see who came back. Who is alive...

This was in Piestany, or had you moved to Bratislava?

[3:52:47]

No, no we were in Piestany. In Bratislava only the office from this Red Cross register. On this, at the station we had to register. And then we- They, they...ja. And one of the boys came, and this was my friend, my group. And... he didn’t know if his parents are alive or not

or something. I don't know his story until today. And, and my mother told him, "Listen, please go to my brother and tell him our address." Because they didn't have the last – some contact, and he didn't – he couldn't know where we are, when he had no idea that we are in a hotel or somebody else's place, sleeping or living, and so on. And, "Give him his, our address - now we have an address – we have a flat. And our regards, and everything." ...And... there didn't come resp... response, ja? And my mother was worried. There is no letter. It was difficult. No the letter - the post office didn't work so you had- Everything was starting again from the beginning. Too many problems were in the air. And... seven days later... came a letter... [Gertrud finds this difficult – breathes out] ...There was written, "I'm sorry to tell you, your brother was shot dead on 7th of April, 1945." And 8th of May, 1945 was the end of World War Two war. ...He saved so many people, and he helped so many people to survive the whole war. And at the end they got him somehow...maybe on a small something.

Mn-hnn.

[3:55:07]

Or...something else. And he was- he, he managed to send us the money. I have a suspicion maybe when he was at the post office... they got him somehow. They made a... *Razzia* or somewhere on this...outside. I don't know. And his wife also.

She was shot?

Yes. She was hiding already at a village. And maybe he went there, because in the letter he is writing he said, "...I will go there soon, where she is". And somebody of the villagers had some suspicion, and... I don't know. We don't know. We will never know it. Such a wonderful person. ...I was crying two weeks non-stop. [pause, this is a very difficult memory] It's late...

Take your time... [recording break]

Just to round off...

Yes.

Could you tell us please about your family's contact with Vrba?

With Vrba? Yes, I forgot to tell you this story. When we were in Zilina... [pause, Gertrud is still moved]

Mnn...

...My uncle, where we lived and, and there were some other young people his age – around forties – who lived in the same house and they were related to this German architect. And one of these men, he was such a good-looking, strong young man, around also forties, as I say. He was working with the transport; the... community asked him to do it. So he was doing it there, and he himself was deported at the end. I told it in the story. But his brother, with his wife, they were... still alive. And ...and what was the question? One second...

About Vrba...and how your family helped to feed him.

[3:58:05]

Ah! Vrba, Vrba. Yeah. Ja. And so they built a group so illegally, of good friends who went together for helping people - yes? So illegal contacts with other undergrounds. And Vrba and Wetzler were in a city called Cadca; it was north of Zilina. And there was a Jewish doctor who helped them. And then they needed a connection to Zilina, because Zilina is a bigger city, and from Zilina they could go anywhere if they have papers and so on.

This was after they had escaped from Auschwitz...

Yes, yes! And they were on the road, down, down, down. And they needed somebody...to hide somewhere, because otherwise they would get them again. No? They had enough, and they wanted to say [to] the world! What happens there.

Yes, because actually to escape from Auschwitz, and to be able to tell the world what was happening...

Yes! And the Hungarian deportations were in front...planned already. They heard about it. They noticed that somebody is coming - something is coming. Because there were- the SS were talking about it. He told me that the SS was talking among them, in front of them. "In a few days we will have a lot of drinks here. The people will bring with them- These new people will bring with them Tokai. Tokai wine." You read about it somewhere? Ja? And so they knew that the Jews from Hungary would come. And they wanted to warn them. Therefore, they were very... unhappy that they couldn't... come maybe earlier. And so the next stop was Zilina. And in Zilina they were hiding. And where? In the former Jewish school. The former Jewish school was... a, a home for old people. But during the wartime the old people disappeared. So, they made a school. I was in the school a member also, a certain time, under the name of my uncle. If there comes a *Razzia* so he was protected, nothing would happen- could happen to me, in a certain way. And... one day my uncle came to, before they left we went together in the morning, out of the house. He went to his work, and I went to school, and a certain way we had...common.

[4:01:01]

And this was very good for me; for him too, that he knew that nothing happened to me until I came to the point. And from there it wasn't very far to the school, so I could go alone. But never happened. And then he- One day he said to me, "Listen, I have – we have something here for you. I need you to deliver food to your former school. You go to the first floor, in the room..." ...This and this, where the teacher was, and something like this. "And you deliver the... lunch. And you won't talk to the people, and you won't ask questions of the people. You go there, say 'hello', 'good appetite', and go, come back. You will do it?" Of course, I will do it! I was curious who these people are. [laughs] So...They gave me the...such a – you know? Four pots in one...You know it? Such an *Essträger* ? to collect the delivery for food at this time. This is still very good, no?

Yes.

Metal. It was such a- Three boxes, I think. OK, so I took it and went there, and came on the first floor, knocked at the door and who opened? It was Vrba. And he said- I said, "I have delivery." So, "Come in- come in." And then there was sitting next inside, Wetzler, Fredo. And he said, "Oh, my God! And something like this still exists here?" Because he thought

such a young girl still exist, because he thought, they thought there were no Jews any more in Slovakia. It was very weird, what they said, for me, ja? Still exist? And then I didn't talk too much but they asked only so general questions. What they are doing, where I am and so... So I talked to them for a while. And they had a lot of fun, but then I left. And I was all the time thinking, 'They are hiding. This was OK.' I didn't ask from where they are, or something. But then, later... after the war. During the war I haven't seen them any more... [sound interruption].

[4:03:44]

I can talk? It was simple. They came to visit us again. They knew where we are.

Was that Vrba and, and [Vera?] his... Gerta Vrba?

No...and he didn't know her at this time, I think. They knew from Prague, later, after the war. Maybe before, I don't know the story. So. They - how was it? They came- ja, they came to Piestany - they were hiding in Piestany somehow. They got from Zilina connections in Piestany, to Partisan unit. They were with the Partisan unit, and they were not fighting any more nobody. There was no fighting. And so they survived. And after the war they came immediately downhill to Piestany and there we met them again, because my cousin - one of our cousins was with them. And he survived. Only one. He had two brothers; they did not survive. Such a tragedy also. And they came because they had nobody. And they were happy to see my mother and us, you know, a family. And... They were very unhappy, these boys. And so, they introduced us again, and I told them, "Do you remember I brought you the food?" So they remembered that. And then we were. And we had a connection that Wetzler married... from... my second degree... cousin... married her, the cousin. Ja. And he had a daughter, a very nice daughter. So we were in contact ...later, with Fredo. They were - at my wedding they were a witness. He wrote - he signed. I have an *Autogramm* from him. And Vrba was in Prague studying, so I met him in Prague again. And his future wife also.

Gerta?

Ja, Gerta. But I don't know why, but she didn't like me. Maybe because I was talking too much or so... I don't know. [laughs] Or she - she thought that who knows what I had with him.

I, I was not interested! I was so young at this time; I was not interested to have any connection with somebody, to have problems. I was happy. I had no problems. And therefore I didn't learn to cook and anything. Only in cleaning I'm perfect, because in Zilina, we were there nearly two years, so there was a strict program. My sister was cooking... for us, eight people. And my mother shouldn't do anything, but she was doing, she was doing what she could. And the laundry or something else. And I was cleaning the rooms.

You learned early?

[4:07:22]

Yes, and [laughs] then, and from all these eight people... cleaning the shoes. The shoes were - there was a big balcony next to the kitchen, and everybody put his shoes there. And I had to - all eight people...it was...But I did it very fast. I learned how to do it.

So when you went to university in Prague...

Yes?

What were the difficulties that you encountered before you were accepted, and what did you study there?

Ja, difficulties...?

Because by then you were, the whole of Czechoslovakia was under the Communist regime.

Yes. Yes. But the only difficulty was the exception, to accept[ance] the, the *examen* what I had. The examination, let us say. Ja? How they looked in the papers, what was your father doing, if he was a Capitalist or not. Or anti-Communist or not? And this was not in our case, so, when this was ...once solved the problem, they didn't ask any more.

Could you explain how the problem was solved. Because... your father would say that he worked, that he wasn't a Capitalist?

Pardon?

Could you explain why it was OK in the end, because your father said that he was not a Capitalist, he was working?

Yes. They accepted it! Ja, so they didn't say that they can't – I can't be accepted as a student.

[4:09:35]

And what did you study?

No, this medicine. General medicine first, and then I specialised in stomatology and orthodontics. And, and this was very good because it was something what I could do- not with a big group and I had my peace. Because not everybody wanted to do it.

And you specialised with children?

Yes. Yes. And the surgery - mouth surgery also. So, I had good nerves from the wartime. I was not... losing my nerve so fast. What was very important, because the patients were nervous and afraid always. And. For example, we opened in the morning the door or the surgery and in the waiting room you could see only the heads. There were so many people. We had daily sixty patients on average. Once we had ninety patients. This was a record, [laughing] but this was with no complications. You know? If you could pull a tooth, fast, normal, it was OK. But sometimes it was broken already or it broke, so to take out the roots it was complicated; you had to give more injections, and, and separate it and so on. And it wasn't so easy and or you couldn't – a small space to work was the worst thing. But I didn't need glasses and, and so I could see very well and it was not a problem. At the rest was very important- at the beginning, when the patient came in... the ordination, in the room, ja? So they set him in the chair, and then I came. I washed meanwhile my hands and then I came, and...[laughing] the patient said, "And where is the doctor?" I said, [laughing] "I'm sorry. But that's me. You must accept it." I thank you that you have ...I thank you, that you offer so much time – your time, to this wonderful ...occasion. To ...interview me. Because it's not so easy. You belong to the same group of the good people who helped us to survive. You are so wonderful to collaborate together.

[4:12:25]

That warms our hearts, I'm sure.

I hope my English words are OK.

They're beautiful.

Ja. And, and I hope that some people will learn of it. You can't wait for miracles to happen... by itself. You must help the miracles to... with your behaviour, with your saying, with your talking, to get realised. But wait! You can have... a prayer book in your hands and talk to God, help. You must help something, to get the help. To get ...peaceful – a peaceful way. And it depends on you, how you treat the people. If you respect the person, the person can feel it and is happy, then you mustn't be scared of anybody. It's on you. This is ...what we call "Love". Love is not sex. Sex is not love. Sex is animal behaviour. We must multiply; that's it. Love is respect of the other person. To respect somebody, to say something nice to the other person. To be grateful what the other person is doing for us: care for us, is loving us, is sharing with us. That's life. That's respect. That's love. It's so nice, with the children to be together, how innocent they are. How they show that they love the person. It's so wonderful, a very good feeling. And this is also nice when adult people are communicating. The way how you talk, how you look at them. How you respect them. That's love. This is my opinion. My experience, sorry. My experience.

I think that's a [Sound cuts out here; Jana- add what you said?]

[4:14:52]

[End of interview]

[Photographs]

[4:14:55]

So, this is on the picture, my grandmother, Rosa Friedmann. And her maiden name was Hertz. She was the mother of my father. She was a very, very good person. She was- had a

knowledge of herbs, medical herbs, and she taught us everything in the nature, what was interesting for children. And we were walking uphill and in the parks in the area of our city where I was born in Piestany.

On the right, is my grandmother and grandfather from my mother's side. My mother's parents, in Kežmarok. This was in this German area. The city where we were talking... [sound cut off]

On this picture, you can see the grandparents – my grandparents - and the parents of my mother. So, Josef Winter and Rosalia Winter, born Moskowitz. This was taken- They took this picture in Kežmarok, in the house where they lived. This could be 1930-35.

This is my grandmother, Rosalia Friedmann born Hertz. She is the mother of my father, Alexander Friedmann. And she was- she was living with us all the time, until her death when she was eighty-three years old. And she died very silent, nice way in Piestany in 1941. And this was luck for her, a good luck for her.

This is a picture where my parents met the first time. Piestany. This is my Mum, my Father, and Auntie Gisela. This was the sister of my mother. She was the dame guard [chaperone].

In Piestany, ja...1925.

[Ich habe vergessen] This is my Mum, Margit Friedmann, with her daughter and my sister Edith. She was maybe four years old when I was born, and me, Gertie, in 1929 born.

[4:18:06]

And when was this picture taken?

I can't remember. [laughs]

Something like, 1930 maybe?

When I, I was here not one-year-old, so, yeah, '30 could be. 1930.

Here on this picture is the Grandma Friedmann, with my sister Edith, and me, in Piestany. It was around 1930-32, could be. Ja.

Here we are again together with my sister. It was always a chance that you would be photographed when we had new dresses. We were dressed as twins always, until we were teenagers, and then it stopped. Piestany. Everything in Piestany. In the 30s...somewhere this...could be '34, '35. I remember '34, '35.

We lived in a different place. It's a different house here. ...This is my Mum, Margit Friedmann in '37, 1937. We were visiting my uncle, who was this professional photographer, and he did us always very nice pictures, in Nitra.

Here is my mother in Kežmarok when she came to visit us, because in 1939, we were living with Grandfather and both aunties, Auntie Gisela and Auntie Bertha, in Kežmarok, because the schools were better. And the parents had in, in- a program to move from this place where we were living until then. To move away. So we stayed there one and a half ...years in Kežmarok. And so we learnt very good German, and I think they enjoyed it also to be with children together.

[4:20:45]

This picture is from Kežmarok, in the garden. This was a very beautiful garden. And there is Uncle...my mother's brother, Uncle Max. He was a Professor of the Economics school in Trnava. And he came always, when there were the holidays to visit us. And he came home to Kežmarok to see his father, and see his sisters and brothers. This was very nice. He was a wonderful person.

This picture is also from Kežmarok, and this is the Uncle Micky, Micolás - Mikolaus in German - and he was the youngest of the family. And he was not married; he was single and he was maybe only twenty-five years old.

His profession, he was in, in, in...one second...fashion shop. Not fashion shop - *Textil* shop. Textile shop. And assistant, sales assistant. He was very young. He was learning it only. Maybe he was younger than I'm saying.

This picture's in Kežmarok, and there we went to school, in 1937 the first we started. And this on the picture are our aunties; they cared for us. On the left is Aunty Bertha. She was doing everything in the house and home. And on the right side, this is Aunty Gisela. She was... a secretary of a lawyer in Kežmarok. And we had a very good time with them. This is on the Jerusalem [inaud] *Berg*

On this picture we are together with Annitschka. This was a certain nanny type. She was working at the house, of my aunties. And she was doing everything what she wanted and she loved it very much, because she learned to cook things and to behave – and how to serve and, she learned a lot for the future. Not to be- They are coming – they came always from small villages, you know, in the households. And they liked it very much because they learned a lot, and then they could also marry somebody, not from the village, but somebody who, from the city. What the parents wanted that they have, special when they have more girls at home.

This is in front of our place where we lived in Piestany, 1940. And very close in the back, you can see there was the hospital. And we are marching very proud. Here is my sister Edith because she had got some new dresses, and wanted to show it. 1940.

[4:24:51]

This photograph is on the Cafeteria Ziha in Piestany, opposite where we lived. And this is my Daddy, and the lady, this beautiful lady is Aunty Böszi, the wife of the photographer, in Piestany, in Nitra, in Nitra. They were visiting us. They had holidays so they came to visit us.

This is the entrance of the bridge in Piestany, to cross the river Váh, and to get on the other side, to the island where were the most luxurious hotels. The gentleman is the husband of this lady, my Uncle, Samuel, the professional photographer in Nitra. They were very often visiting us; they loved it so much in Piestany. This was 1940. The girl, that's me.

There is again, on this picture, this man, who is [inaudible]. And on the left side the couple are my parents, and on the right side is Uncle Samuel with Aunty Böszi from Nitra.

This is my Uncle Armin Winter, with his wife Valerie?, born Büchler?. They were visiting us here in Kežmarok. And they were wonderful people. He helped during the wartime so many to survive. Among them, me and our family. Without him we wouldn't be here.

This picture is a house where we lived in Zilina during the Second World War-time, on the second floor. I'm on the second floor. It was exactly opposite the Jewish Cemetery. So therefore it was a silent area, because there were not so home opposite with many people. It was a small street anyhow, around this house. And there we survived two years, nearly. 1942-43. 1944 we left.

This is a picture of Firma Ritter in Zilina. Firma Ritter was producing Slovak whisky – this is the Slivovitz - and therefore they were very successful. And therefore they needed experts to be successful. And one of them is my Uncle Armin. He is sitting quite, the last person sitting on the right side of the picture. He was a wonderful man. He was managing this firma and he was also a professional accountant. And they were very happy with him and he liked his work there. And he was helping during the wartime, many, many people to get out, because he had access to this Slivovitz, to this vodka, what they were producing. And the Slovaks liked to drink, so they helped when they got something, to save people. And we were there with his family until 1944... ..before we left, hiding, until '45. Until the war was over. He helped us with fake identities. He helped us- he sended money, when we were, didn't have any income so we could survive. The tragedy is, that he, who helped so many people, has somehow, but I don't know how it happened, who did it. He got his... life, ...he...the Germans got him somehow, and his wife Valerie. And they shot him on 8th of April, 1945.

[4:30:19]

Here in this picture you can see the group of illegal Maccabi Hatzair, Zionist Youth Movement, what was in Zilina. And... we were also meeting at a big family, there is the boy on it, on the right side, in the corner, Bubo Pick. They had a beautiful big, old home, with a big garden. And there we could meet. Of course we didn't go in groups there. On Friday night for example, we were doing Oneg Shabbat. We met, and we were singing, and we were talking, and this was very nice, to- And helping, of course, everybody who needed help. So we came always one after other, not in groups there, so nobody was suspicious that we are too many. It was forbidden, meeting like this, during the wartime. And some of them

survived, the majority of this group, they are not all here... because we were- it was at the end of the deportations. In Zilina. No, '40...at the end. '44.

Here we were on a trip, and not far from Zilina, where there was a hill. This is the sign at the highest hill and we could see what the forest looked like, in the case that it's dangerous, that the Germans are coming. That we can run away, and hide for a certain time, and survive there. So we learnt about the surrounding. But it wasn't so easy and- to help to cover that the suspicion that we are Jews. So I was in the front, that I bought myself a, a cross, a silver cross. It was silver but otherwise not real silver, ja? It looked as silver. A big cross, and I had it on my T-shirt from outside. And then we were singing Slovak songs, and then when I came and somebody came in front- towards us, ja? - and there, the - some people, locals, for example. And they wanted maybe to know, who are these people, ja? So, not to be suspicious that we are Jews, I said always maybe, "Bless Jesus Christ"; this was the greeting to them. And they answered of course, "Forever, Amen". And then this was the visit card, and they were happy to know who we are, and continued to walk. Or, when I was talking, so I had, if there was something interesting, so I had the exclamation always, "Jesus Maria! Really?" In Slovak, you know? [slight interruption] And I learnt this so, it is fixed until today with me, that when I am in Slovak area, and speaking Slovak, and something happens to me, or touch myself a little bit, 'Oh!', you know? So I always exclaim, 'Jesus Maria'.

[4:34:17]

And I went once into the church also on Sunday. This was in Hiadel; this woman said, "Its Sunday! You don't go to the church?" And my mother said, "There is snow outside and we have only these shoes, we can't go. And then this..." And then she said, "And Gerta?" "No, Gerta can go." [laughs] So I went with this woman, a few kilometres into another village, to get to the church. The church was full, and I felt very good, only I didn't know how to cross myself. From left to right, or from right to left? So I was looking how they are doing it to learn. I was next to this woman. She cared for me. I copied her.

This is in Zilina in the garden of Doktor Pick's because the Picks were protected until then, before the deportation finished, because he was a doctor. And a doctor had an exemption from deportation. They didn't have enough doctors. There were many Jewish doctors, so

therefore they could stay in this house, and the garden, and nobody said anything of the neighbours, that we are meeting there or that we are playing there, and so on.

This is a picture with Aunty Gisela in the centre in the swimming pool in Piestany, of the spa. She was on holidays with us. So. This was very good.

Before the war?

No... '37... could be, '38, '39 could be. Ja.

This is a picture of Sklene Teplice. This was a spa. They had the mineral water also. And this, the left Zilina they came there. It was a good address, because we could spend the summer there... hiding at a, in a house with some... farmers and so the two months in the summer we could stay there. It was not a problem because there were holidays. Nobody asked, "What are you doing here?"

And when was this? When?

In '44.

[4:37:06]

This is a picture of Zvolen, at Mrs. Grendar and Grendar's family house, where we were living until the end of the war, until we were not liberated by the Russians in the 13th of March, 1945.

This is the house in Zvolen, Bottova 13, where we lived with the Grendars family. They were the owners. And we survived there until the end of the war. We had a room, here the room on the basem., on the ground floor, and on the top of the house, in the roof, it's a mansard, no? There, they had another room and they, she was renting it, the lady, the landlady. And there was a time – a few - nearly at the end of the war, were two SS men, officers, came and lived there. I think around eight weeks. So... this was how we survived until the end of the war here. They left, the officers, of course.

This, on this picture you can see my Uncle Samuel with his wife Böszi. Such a beautiful couple, in Nitra. He was a professional photographer and had a photo salon. And... they had no children, and luckily, and they wanted to prevent to be deported, so they left and wanted to, to go to Hungary. But somehow, what we heard later the story was that the taxi driver, felt that they wanted to run away ...of the country. Maybe he heard something, from the Uncle and Aunty when they were talking, and brought them to the Fascist Slovak, Fascist headquarter – the Hlinka Guard - and told them, “These people want to run away of the country”. And they arrested them. So he went to... Lublin. She was sent to Majdanek, to the worst concentration camp what it was. And they were separated. And after a certain time we got some postcards from them, where they were writing a little bit different so we could understand that they are starving, and they don't feel good, and they are unhappy. And they warned us, “Please take care”. And so on. Do something. Not. Resist (!), in these ...symbols. And they did not survive, these young people.

[4:40:33]

This is a postcard we got from Uncle Samuel, from – it's Lublin? ...from Lublin. What is on the other side? On the other side the text is very interesting.

So *Onkel* Sam wrote this postcard to my uncle, to his brother Armin because he knew that he is still there, protected. And in this postcard he is writing that he is happy to write him, and he hopes that he will get some...some news from his wife. She is not with him there. And...and that he - he is OK. And this OK means “*Es geht mir gut.*” The word *geht*, is this OK. And he changed the letters. It is g-e-h-t; he made of it g-h, and ‘gh’ is so wrong there. So, it means opposite; it's not good. It's not going good. It's not going good. And so we understood that what he wanted to say. And... we, we, my Uncle Armin tried to send him again also a postcard or a letter, to make him happy..... “*Was weiß ich?*”

This is the card- postcard of his wife, Böszi. She wrote and was asking, “if you have news from my husband Samuel”.

This is the text from the Aunty Böszi, what she wrote. She says, “Thank you for the card, what she got from Uncle Armin”.

[4:43:25]

This is my birth certificate, a fake document, but perfect made. Original paper, original stamp from office in Nove Mesto, what my father and my uncle got a con-tact to go there. So there was a young man working at the city, who was giving for money, but he was helping the Jews to get the fake documents. My uncle wrote the text so everybody of us, made himself either older, as my parents, so if there is something, old people are not going to fight or something like this. And we were younger.

This is the first picture of my family, the Friedmann family, as survivors, after we came to Piestany, after the war. It was the end of the war exactly. 1945. April – May. May, 1945. The day, I don't know.

This is the first picture of the group of this illegal Maccabi Hatzair group, of the survivors. We had a meeting. We wanted to - to exchange our experiences, and to help look after family members, of this, if they survive, and who is alive... and who not. And build some memorials for them. 1945. In Zilina.

So this is the last picture, what is from me in Piestany. And we were... having a meeting of ten years after leaving the school, after – of graduation. Ten years.

This is a picture from my working in Nove Zamky. 1950...57. 1957.

This is the picture of our wedding. With Mr Joe Lewkowicz, in April, 1964. In Piestany. This was the first and the last wedding, after the war.

[4:46:52]

This is the picture of the civil wedding, the official wedding. In Czechoslovakia is so important to have two weddings, if somebody is religious or not. And here are the witnesses. One of the witness on the right side, in the corner, is Mr Alfred Wetzler, one of this people that Wetzler and Vrba who escaped from Auschwitz in 1944 and came to Zilina. And then he married in, the daughter of ...and somebody of the family. The cousin of our cousin.

This is a picture with my daughter Bea. She was born in 1965. And this picture is in 1990.
It's the best picture ever.

This is the picture on the top of London Shard, having the view on whole London. This was birthday, and it's the whole family I have in London. It is my daughter Bea, then her husband Malcolm. Then, my *Enkel*...grandchildren. And this the first one, the oldest one is Alex, the next one is Julie, and then there is Benjy. And I love them very much and I'm very proud of them.

Thank you very much for this interview.

[4:49:19]

[End of photographs]