Name: Magda Mozes Herzberger (1926– )

Birth Place: Cluj, Romania

Arrived in Wisconsin: 1960, Monroe

Project Name: Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust

Biography: Magda Mozes Herzberger was born on February 20, 1926, in Cluj, Romania. On August 30, 1940, the northern part of Transylvania (in Romania, including the capital city of Cluj) was annexed by Hungary, an ally of Nazi Germany. Life for Cluj's nearly 17,000 Jews grew steadily worse over the next four years. On March 27, 1944, the Germans occupied northern Transylvania (Romania) and took large-scale anti-Semitic measures. The Mozes family, along with thousands of other Jews, was forced into the Cluj Ghetto. It was liquidated only a month later. Magda and her family were sent to Auschwitz, where most of them perished.

After six weeks in Auschwitz, 18-year-old Magda was shipped to Bremen, Germany. She did forced labor as the city was bombed by Allied forces. In March 1945, Magda was transferred to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Her job there was to dispose of thousands of corpses that had accumulated in and around the barracks. On April 15, 1945, she collapsed from exhaustion. Magda was near death when she was found among the corpses by a liberating British soldier.

Magda returned to Cluj late in 1945. In June 1946, she met Eugene Herzberger and the following autumn they married and she began medical school. Fearing persecution under communism, the Herzbergers fled Romania for Palestine in December 1947. The British, who severely restricted immigration to Palestine, captured her ship in the Aegean Sea and brought it to Cyprus. The Herzbergers were held in a makeshift prison camp until permitted to leave for Israel in January 1949.

In 1957, after nine years in Israel, the Herzbergers immigrated to the U.S. They and their two children settled in Monroe, Wisconsin, where Magda's husband practiced neurosurgery for 16 years. The Herzbergers moved to Dubuque, Iowa, in 1976 and to Arizona in 1994.

Magda has spoken extensively about her experiences. She has published two memoirs (Eyewitness to Holocaust and Survival), and several volumes of poetry and fiction. Also, Magda has published this interview in paperback with an audio CD. Go to www.magdaherzberger.com to order. Magda is also a former mountain climber, skier and runner. She competed in a marathon the summer this interview was conducted.
Audio Summary: Below are the highlights of each tape. It is not a complete list of all topics discussed.

Tape 1, Side 1
- Magda's reasons for sharing her story
- Family background
- Jewish life in Romania in the early 20th century

Tape 1, Side 2
- Schooling and anti-Semitism
- Annexation of Romania by Hungary, 1940
- Occupation by German troops, March 1944

Tape 2, Side 1
- Family and religious life in Cluj before the war
- Zionism and early immigrants to Palestine
- Growing anti-Semitism

Tape 2, Side 2
- Knowledge of Hitler and the Third Reich
- Oppression by Hungarian police, 1940–1944
- Increased anti-Semitism

Tape 3, Side 1
- Living conditions under German occupation
- Creation of the Cluj Ghetto
- Her family's imprisonment in Cluj Ghetto

Tape 3, Side 2
- Brutality of life in the ghetto
- Deportation to Auschwitz, June 1944
- Magda's first impressions of Auschwitz

Tape 4, Side 1
- Conditions at Auschwitz
- Selection of inmates for forced labor or death
- Description of crematoria

Tape 4, Side 2
- Life at Auschwitz
- Tortures and beatings
- A typical day
- Emotional and psychological condition of prisoners

Tape 5, Side 1
- Smuggling at Auschwitz
- German collaborators
- Futile acts of resistance
- Forced labor in Bremen

Tape 5, Side 2
- Bunkers and Allied bombings in Bremen
- Conditions in winter
- Transfer to the Bergen-Belsen death camp
Tape 6, Side 1
- Attempt to escape Bergen-Belsen
- Magda prepares to die
- Last-minute rescue and liberation
- Rehabilitation and repatriation to postwar Cluj

Tape 6, Side 2
- The fate of her family
- Magda returns to school, 1946
- Entering medical school

Tape 7, Side 1
- Meeting her husband
- His background and their courtship
- Their time in medical school

Tape 7, Side 2
- Deciding to leave Romania
- Imprisoned by the British in Cyprus for one year
- Immigrating to Palestine, Dec. 1947

Tape 8, Side 1
- Life in Israel, 1949–1957
- Immigrating to the U.S.
- Impressions of New York, Connecticut and Georgia
- Settling in Monroe, Wisconsin, 1960

Tape 8, Side 2
- No Jewish community in Monroe
- Magda’s first speaking engagements about the Holocaust
- Family life and children

Tape 9, Side 1
- Children and family life
- Relations with Christians in Monroe, Wis. and Dubuque, Iowa

Tape 9, Side 2
- Americans’ understanding of the Holocaust
- Magda’s social life
- Her daily activities and reading habits

Tape 10, Side 1
- Depictions of the Holocaust in the media
- Travels in Wisconsin
- Anti-Semitism and American Nazis
- Attitudes toward American culture and politics

Tape 10, Side 2
- Anti-Semitism in the U.S.
- Feelings on speaking out about the Holocaust
- Magda sings two of her musical compositions
- Score for Magda’s musical composition “Seduction”
- Score for Magda’s musical composition “Prayer”
About the Interview Process:

The interview was conducted by archivist Sara Leuchter on July 21, 22, and August 27, 1980. The conversations totaled 10 hours. Magda comes across as enthusiastic and charming. She had a clear memory for facts and a candid appreciation of the emotional and spiritual effects of her experience. In 2009-2010, Magda listened closely to the audio tapes, and, with the aid of Society librarian Michael Edmonds, corrected the transcript, inserted explanations in square brackets or as footnotes, and deleted false starts and repeated interjections. This work provided unique contextual information and researchers are encouraged to consult the transcript as well as listen to the audio files.

Transcript Details:

Interview Dates
- Jul 21, 1980; Jul 22, 1980; Aug 27, 1980

Interview Location
- Herzberger home, Dubuque, Iowa

Interviewer
- Archivist Sara Leuchter

Original Sound Recording Format
- 10 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

Length of Interviews
- 3 interviews, total approximately 10 hours

Transcript Length
- 207 pages

Rights and Permissions
- Any document may be downloaded or printed at no cost for nonprofit, educational use by teachers, students, and researchers interested in the Holocaust. Nothing may be reproduced in any format for commercial purposes.

- Magda Herzberger retains the copyright to this interview. She agreed to share it with the Wisconsin Historical Society for nonprofit, educational purposes or for private study or research only. No portions may be reproduced for any other use without her prior permission. She can be reached at her website, www.magdaherzberger.com

Pictures:
The following transcript is from the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. It is an unedited, firsthand account of the Nazi persecution of the Jews before and during World War II. Portions of this interview may not be suitable for younger or more sensitive audiences. It is unlawful to republish this text without written permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society, except for nonprofit educational use.

Copyright Notice: Magda Herzberger retains the copyright to this interview. She agreed to share it with the Wisconsin Historical Society for nonprofit, educational purposes or for private study or research only. No portions may be reproduced for any other use without her prior permission. She can be reached at her website, www.magdaherzberger.com

Key

| SL  | Sara Leuchter, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist |
| MH  | Magda Herzberger, Holocaust survivor |

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SL: First I would like to know something about your family background; where and when you were born and the names of both your parents and where and when they were born. Tell me about your family background.

MH: I was born in the northern part of Transylvania, which at the present time is Romania, so I could say I was born in Romania in the city of Cluj, and Cluj is the capital of Transylvania. I was born on February 20, 1926. My whole family practically was born in that city and in this area. My mother, and also my grandparents, and I heard that even my great-grandparents were born and raised in that area. I'm the only child, and my mother's name is Serena, and my father's name was Herman. Unfortunately I lost him in the German concentration camps — in Dachau — during World War II and I'm very fortunate that my mother is a survivor. As far as the background of my family, we were a very close family and a large family. Unfortunately, 80 percent of my family perished in the German concentration camps. My grandparents had twelve children and I had lots of cousins and we had a happy family. Indeed, I experienced a very happy childhood and I feel fortunate. I experienced lots of love at home. My father was a very gentle person. He encouraged me to have goals in life, to have a career. Especially, it wasn't easy to be Jewish, so he always thought, if you are Jewish, have a solid profession and then you can be a survivor no matter what, in the times of discrimination.
Because I did grow up with discrimination. I was very aware of the fact that I was Jewish since I was seven years old and I went into my first grade. At that time the Jewish discrimination was at its beginnings, in the 1920s; 1930s and the 1940s, naturally increased. But when I entered the first elementary school my father had a little talk with me and he said, "Well, you have to be aware of the fact that you are Jewish and because of that you might have to work twice as hard as anyone else in school, but it's always worthwhile to make sacrifices for knowledge and work for your goals."

So I went into school and I, in some ways, [during] all these years had to grow up like a Spartan, to study hard, to have the discipline, and also to have maybe the emotional strength to be able to accept and live with the discriminations through all my years of study.

I remember especially when I got into the high school, only seven Jewish students were accepted in each classroom and we had to have a very high grade average otherwise you could not study after your elementary school. So there was lots of screening and I think that if I would not have experienced that love and wonderful upbringing that was given to me by my father and my mother [it would have been hard for me to cope with it] — I have a wonderful mother and we were always close friends.

I am very happy that my mother is alive because many of my friends or some of the relatives who came back, they lost their families. Maybe that was in some ways a reward for my sufferance in the camps. Maybe that was the reward to the fact that I never wanted to extinguish in my heart the three strong candles of hope, faith and love.

I was fortunate that I came back. I have seen many of my fellow prisoners dying. I was fortunate to have a second chance and this is why I have a strong commitment towards the victims of the Jewish persecution. I want to do something for my people and for those I love and for all the innocent victims of persecution.

I am very happy that I have the opportunity to meet you, Sara, I feel very close to you, and I admire you and the people in the Jewish Archives in the Historical Society, that you are willing to do something for the Jewish people, that you try to keep the memory of those I loved and lost and the
memory of all the victims of persecution. I feel there’s a strong kinship between us. I think that we have the same goal, and I'm hoping that we are going to be successful to just do that.

SL: I want to go back to your family. What was your maiden name?

MH: My maiden name was Mozes, Magda. Magdalena actually is my full name. Magda is Hungarian, and Magdalena is the Romanian version of it.

SL: What was your mother's maiden name?

MH: My mother's maiden name was Daszkal, Serena.

SL: Daszkal was her last name?

MH: Yes, her maiden name.

SL: When was your mother born?

MH: My mother was born in 1903. Is it okay? [asks her mother] She is right here with me, so.

SL: What was the actual date?

MH: January 30.

SL: In Cluj?


SL: And what about your father. Do you remember when he was born?

MH: I think my father was born in Cluj, in the same city. Was he? Yes.

SL: On what day do you remember, the year?

MH: Mother, would you help me in this? My mother was born in 1903, and there were about six years [four years, actually] difference between you and my father.

SL: Do you have any recollections at all about your grandparents?

MH: Oh, yes, I have strong recollections. By the way, I wanted to tell you the name of my father. I said it before, it's Herman, I think I said it earlier. Oh, of my grandparents? Oh, how can I ever forget? I had a great love for my grandparents. My grandmother was a brave woman and a hard-working one, and she had a fine intellect and a big heart.
SL: Which grandmother was this?

MH: That was the grandmother on my father's side, and her name was Rose. If you want to hear a little bit about my grandparents, I have to just say a few things. My grandmother had two children — my father, who's name is Herman, and then my uncle, who's name is Jeno, Eugene actually. She was a widow. She lost her husband in the First World War. And then later on she met my grandfather, who was a widower. He lost his wife and was left with ten little children. His wife died in childbirth. If there is true love on this earth, I would say it was between my grandmother and grandfather. When she wanted to marry a man with ten children, everyone thought that she's absolutely out of her mind. She told me this story because I was very close to her always. I was her little friend and she was my big friend. She said, "You know what I answered? I said if I love a man then I take him with everything what he got." She was the mother for twelve children. When they got married they had a very modest income and they had to work very hard, both of them. My grandfather had a talent for business and he started with little investment. He became an extremely successful businessman, but this wasn't overnight. There were many hard years. So by the time I was born, at that stage, in 1926, they were very successful. And my grandmother, not only that she took care of the family all those years, but she also helped my grandfather in business. She was herself a very talented businesswoman. So I would say they two made a fortune for themselves. And they used to have a grain factory and an alcohol factory and then they had a farm and all the sons were involved. It was a family enterprise. Especially I remember that farm. One of my uncles, my grandfather's son, took charge of the farm. They had quite a few cows and they produced milk and cheese and then it was brought in and there was a little shop in the city where they would sell these products. And there was a wonderful custom. I can even cry, I get very emotional when I think back. I have seen so much family togetherness and I have experienced so much love and happiness. In our family there was always warmth. So in summer we would go out to the farm. Now, at that time there weren't as many cars as there are now so my grandfather had two coaches. One coach was for more elegant purposes and the other
one for transporting the milk and everything that [he] was bringing from the farm. But there was the special coach which would take me and my parents and my cousins out into the farm and then it was a family reunion, every single week through summer. Our summers were short — because Cluj had a cool climate and it was surrounded by mountains, so our summer was about six weeks long. But those six weeks and the joy of it lasted for me for a lifetime. Those six weeks and the memories of those sustained me in the camps. Sustained my desire to survive. So we would go out to that farm and I could see myself; I was about five years old. I got a little basket. I had my special basket for gathering the flowers and maybe some of the raspberries that were growing on the fields. I felt freedom, a freedom that later on helped me. The sensation of that freedom helped me later on to overcome the difficulty in accepting slavery and being trapped. When in the camps, even when I was so confined, I felt so trapped, I felt like no way out, then I would relive those moments of freedom I experienced as a five-year-old running on that farm on the hills with my little basket, and I would pick the beautiful flowers.

And then I would hear [the chatter and the laughter, and] I would look down and I would see the family preparing the big meal. I could see in my imagination the fire burning outside and there was a kind of — I don't know how you call it -- it was a special furnace which was outside and then you could fry all kind of things inside [it]. It's like a grill, really, but it was a different type of grill than you have nowadays. And I could feel the smell of that. Then I could hear my grandmother making the ice cream and I could hear the sound of the centrifuge she used manually in order to have the ice cream done. I could hear singing. My mother used to have a beautiful voice and my uncle on my mother's side and I could hear the singing and the laughing and the joy. I think those were my happiest moments.

I remember I picked the flowers. And I remember one particular day that I was so happy. Forgive me if I shed a tear or three. You cannot help but become emotional when you think back on the past because you lost all those people whom you loved, and how can you ever forget them? Excuse me,
Mother, could you bring me a handkerchief? I hope I don't inconvenience you. You can't forget those happy moments.

So it was a day when I had my little basket and I could feel the smell coming from below. They were frying corn. I love the fried corn. And I could see my grandparents and my father whom I lost and I don't think that I can ever forget him. He's always with me. I never feel really separated from him, spiritually or emotionally. I could feel his physical presence, because after all these years, over thirty years, I could see him as clearly as he would be here now. I was on a hill running up and I looked down and felt the happiness.

Maybe even when I was so young, I was a dreamer. I think all my life I'm going to be partly a dreamer and I think that saved me in the camps. You had to dream, under those terrible circumstances, of a better world or for a world that, if you would have the freedom, you would create to yourself. And there I was at age of five, creating my own little world. At that time, I loved fairy tales. But who doesn't? Sometimes I feel that there are fairy tales that come true in our own life. I considered [them] in the camp, I was thinking of a fairy tale that I'm going to come home and maybe find my mother alive, and that fairy tale became true. The fairy tale at that time [which] I was thinking [of] was the one that was told recently to me by my mother at night. She told me the story of Cinderella and the prince who came.

I think that I was a romantic. I was a romantic at a very early age. Actually my poetry, which I started writing in 1963, I would label it as lyrical poetry, and I have many love poems. At that time I was dreaming of a prince who would come and take me up on the horse and then I was roaming around and at one point I started running and running and the sun was there and I inhaled the fresh fragrance of those flowers. I think now that although so many years passed by but there is still that little girl in me.

Then as I follow the past of my grandparents, what happened later on, later on things changed. I think the best times for us, for my family and for my grandparents, the best times were when I was about that age -- three years old, four years old, five years old, two years old. Actually a two-year-old
memory is hard to recollect. At that time also my father was the happiest with his position he had. He was the chief accountant [manager] in a very large machine factory called Energia. I don't think it exists anymore. After awhile I think they closed up that place, but I don't know whatever happened since then, I didn't hear anything about it. And he had the most responsible job. He was a very responsible and very hardworking man and he lived for his family. He taught me about love. I think about love, the best part is by good example. I don't think that if you tell somebody this is the way you should love and gives all the instruction, that is of any value. I think instruction plus actions, your actions, are the most important things in a child's life. And he showed me so much love without words. Like a pantomime, you can express feelings with facial expressions. So he could express feelings with all the gestures of love. The little things. Coming home and thinking of bringing a rose to my mother. Coming home and knowing I love chestnuts in winter and coming [with] the pockets [filled] with little chestnuts. He knew I loved chocolate. I went to my bed, I opened my drawer, there it was [the chocolates]. He knew all the little things that were important for me and he gave me moral support.

At that time he was a happy man because he had a job which was behooving him. He was a very able person and very, very honest. He taught me honesty. When I was a little girl, he was talking to me at the time when the discrimination was on. He said, "No matter what fate is bringing you, try to stay the same person. Never change, never let adversity change you." And he taught me about love, forgiveness and tolerance.

No matter how hard it is for me to have forgiveness in my heart, I have to do it to a certain degree in order to be able to live with peace and love in my heart instead of hatred. I don't like hatred. Hatred is destructive. It would destroy me. My self would be destroyed if I would let hatred in my heart. [He] said not only that I would reflect it outward to other people, but it would sink within me and erode my personality. And this is what my father was talking about. Now maybe it took me many years to understand what he really meant.
Then later on, [when] I went into the grade school, the situation changed. They started making difficulties for Jewish people as far as jobs and positions were concerned. Now what happened really — I have to tell you a little bit. A little bit of history put in it so that you can see what really happened and why Jewish discrimination augmented, was increased, as the years went by, became worse and worse, because when Hitler came in we were strongly discriminated already. We sort of had a partial freedom but our persecution started way, way before that.

SL: Could I interrupt you again? I want to kind of make, keep track of this, chronologically. I still want to ask just a little bit more [about] your family.

MH: Yes.

SL: You talk about your father's side of the family and their farm. Where was that farm located?

MH: Well, that farm was located outside of Cluj. It was about twelve miles or fifteen miles. It was in the area.

SL: What about your mother's family? They were not from Cluj?

MH: Well, in my mother's family I never knew my grandmother because she died when my mother was fifteen years old. [To her mother:] Is it correct? And then how many children were [there]? You had sisters and brothers. Now one of the sisters you lost in childbirth, that was many years ago. Then she had a little baby. [To SL:] After her mother died, Mother was the mother of that little baby plus her family. [To mother again:] How many were you, Mother, when your mother died? How many were you children? [Mother: Seven little children.] With the child, it was seven.

So my mother had to be a really responsible adult at age fifteen. This is why she's a wonderful person. My mother is a survivor, she is a brave woman and I love her. And now she's visiting us from Israel, she's a citizen [there] since 1949. But they were seven, seven children, isn't it? And so I heard many wonderful things about my grandmother. What was the name of my grandmother, I don't even know? What was the name of your mother? [Mother: Malka. Malka].

I knew my grandfather on my mother's side. I was very young [then]. [To her mother:] How old was I when my grandfather died? You can answer better that question, mother. How old was I when your
father died? [Mother: Sixty.] He was sixty [when he died]. And I must have been about three years old. I was very small but I have a recollection of my grandfather. I remember one day, as far as the way he looked, he was a tall and slender man and I knew him and I loved him, but unfortunately I was very young. I think by the time I was four years old he died. I had much more contact with my grandparents on my father's side.

SL: So you had many cousins on that side.

MH: Yes.

SL: Your mother's family that lived somewhat out of town: did any of those cousins move into Cluj?

MH: Some of the cousins lived out of town, some of them were living in Cluj, some of them were living in Turda, which was about thirty miles, a smaller community, from there, and they were scattered around. A part of my family came to the reunions, and those who were a little further, they actually couldn't come so often. But we had quite a little family in town because my mother's uncle and aunt were living in town and then [two of] my mother's brothers were living in town with their families. Now I just have to [tell] you that all the children of my grandfather's, they were living, everyone, was living in Cluj, because they were working for him [my grandfather]. It was a big [business] -- everyone was in the business, so the sons were involved. And so I was fortunate really, because at the time that I was a young girl, most of my family, really, almost [all of them], I think all my uncles and aunts, were [living] in town. And then they had children and all my cousins were there. Later on things changed.

SL: I hate to interrupt you but we're going to run out of tape.

MH: Yes.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1
TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SL: We were talking before about the cousins that lived in Cluj that you grew up with. After the War, how many of them returned, survived the war?

MH: Very few. I think only two of my cousins returned, isn't it? Sanyi and Oscar? Yes, two of my cousins. And these were the children of my mother's brother. So they were on my mother's side. Those were the two cousins and actually, oh, yes, there were other cousins who returned. [To her mother:] Actually, both your brothers' children returned, so we had [a cousin] Magda. We have another Magda in the family, that was the daughter of one of my mother's brother and she's in Israel now.

Right now, presently, most of our family is in Israel, living in Israel. One of my cousins lives in Canada, he's a mining engineer and he is the son of my mother's brother. And then some [other] cousins live in Israel. So I lost many of my cousins. And then my aunts — how many aunts? None of them came back, all the aunts. And then all the little children in the family, all the babies naturally were gassed and cremated in Auschwitz.

So our family shrank quite a bit and that was a very, very hard loss. This is why when I talk about them I feel very emotional because the past is going to be always with me. I think people say, okay, past is past, forget it. You can't. Can you ever forget your father? Can I ever forget my uncle? I was very close to my uncle. And now this was my uncle, on my father's side, whom I lost in the camps and I can never forget him. You don't forget those you love. If you really love a person, there's no such a thing. Maybe the pain of loss is going to be diminished in the course of time, because it would be self-destructive, I mean, to cry all the time. But I don't cry now all the time. But whenever I think of them I do.

SL: Did you have any close friends or relatives in the United States before the war?

MH: Before the Second World War? Yes, we had relatives. Like, for instance, mother has cousins, a number of cousins, in Israel [Palestine] and those were spared from the Holocaust and they were Zionists. I have in my family, especially two of my mother's cousins, who are really dedicated
Zionists. They were establishing the new settlements, *kibbutzim* [in Israel] and they also were sent to organize the Jewish immigration after Second World War, that big immigration from Romania.

One of the cousins was sent out [from Palestine] and he helped us to get on that [emigration quota], to come out from [Romania], too. So we have some very dedicated Israelis in our family. The other cousin of my mother [Rose Krochmal, lives in Haifa, Israel]. She is a widow. Recently, her husband [Tewel] died. My mother and she are very, very close [friends]. [Rose and her late husband were Zionists. They left Romania a long time ago before World War Two, and emigrated to Palestine. She lives] now in Neveh Shaanan [Haifa, for many years]. I don't know if you were ever in Israel. [Neveh Shaanan] is not very far from my mother['s residence].

At the time when they [were living in Palestine], we heard from them that there were snakes and scorpions [there]. They were writing letters to us to Romania and telling [us about it]. [Cousin Rose] wrote in one of her letters about her little child [who] was put in the crib and a big snake came around the crib, and she was so desperate. They really have seen how Israel and the Jewish state grew and developed into such a wonderful independent state.

**SL:** What about your relatives in the United States?

**MH:** I have some relatives in the United States, they’re also cousins of my mother. As you can see, there’s a big family. And these cousins, at the time they were very young, they lived in Israel [Palestine]. So they never were exposed to the Jewish persecution. And then they came to the United States. My mother’s cousin, he’s a very successful businessman. He’s retired now and they moved from New York. He lived in New York and he was in the diamond business and they were just wonderful. When we came here it was such a good feeling. We had two relatives who could come to the airport and they helped us very much in the first months in the United States.

**SL:** What were their names?

**MH:** Salamon, one is Salamon, Alexander Salamon. Unfortunately his wife died recently, and the other one is Kishoni, her name is Mirjam Kishoni, and they are both now living in West Palm Beach in Florida and he’s retired [Alexander Salamon]. We have seen them a few years ago and that was
really quite a joy. It's nice to have some family members. And then I have that cousin in Canada, the one who returned from the camp, and I didn't see him for years. Though you have family in the country but you hardly see them, those that are so far away. But occasionally we do meet. I have seen my mother's cousin more than once.

SL: Could you describe for me your apartment or the home that you lived in Cluj? What is was like, how many rooms it was or what kind of community it was?

MH: And I forget to mention to you, excuse me, one of my relatives who were just wonderful to us and they live in California, the Berkes family. I can never forget all the wonderful things that they did. They were looking for us and they're just wonderful people. We didn't see them for ten years, and then we went down to Florida and they [also] came up [to see us]. And then there was a meeting in Las Vegas. They live in California now. They have an only child [a son], one of my [second] cousins, and he lives there with his family, so they moved there. They went back to Israel after they retired and they were for a while in Israel.

[Sari Berkes] is my mother's cousin, the one that I was talking to you about. [Sari and her husband] went to California [from Israel] because they want to be near their son. They are retired and they are older people, so they're very happy that they can be near the family. We have seen them. We went down to Las Vegas and we invited them to come because we wanted to see them so much. They are people who just have a heart of gold and I had to mention them really because it wouldn't be fair not to. But what you asked me before?

SL: Could you describe your house or apartment in Cluj? What was the community like?

MH: Oh, yes. Well, I have to tell you now about the places that we lived during my childhood. The place where I was born I can't remember, but my mother maybe can remember. Where was I born, what was the apartment at that time? [Mother: Three rooms and a little salon.] And bedroom. That was an apartment where I was born. It had a bedroom, living room, and kitchen. My parents were quite young at that time.
Then I remember the second place very well because at that time I must have been about three years old when we lived there and this was the time when my father had this important position at this factory. It was a big machine factory [Energia], and it was on the outskirts of the city of Cluj.

I have to tell you a little bit about the city of Cluj. The city of Cluj was really a cultural and historical city. Its population was at that time about 150,000 [maybe only 100,000]. I don't know how much it grew since then, but I'm sure that it's quite large now. It had the best universities in Romania. It had the best medical school. We had the best opera house. It had lots of culture and concerts. I would say it was a metropolitan city. It also had a number of historical buildings. Like for instance, it had the house where the King Mathias, one of the greatest Hungarian kings, was born. And, oh, it had wonderful restaurants, too. It had the greatest bakeries that you can imagine. It was a very pretty city.

The mountains were close by and sometimes it was customary on a Sunday to just get your knapsack and go for a little tour out in the country. At that time, as I said, there were not that many cars. There were bicycles. My father liked to bicycle. And then there were the horse and buggy, horse and carriages, and there was not that much traffic. So you could see people on the weekend, you know, going out and having a nice little outing.

Due to the fact that it was close to the mountains, we had a very cold winter. The snow fell usually in October and it didn't melt until March. You could be sure you could have lots of ice skating, and then on the mountains there was skiing. I used to ice skate, I liked it. We ice skated on the lake. You didn't have to worry about the ice breaking, because it was solid all winter long. And then we had definite seasons: cold winter, then it was spring coming in March. And we were so happy for the coming of the spring that in March we had little symbols, spring symbols, that you could attach on your outer clothing just like you would greet the coming season.

SL: A pin?

MH: Pins, different pins. They were selling it on the streets too. And then in April when the first flowers were coming out, then you would have the first flowers and you would pin it here [on the lapel of your spring coat], and the people were selling it on the streets. It was the jubilation of spring and then the
jubilation of summer. And the summer lasted until middle of August. By middle of August the swimming pool was closed. In September it was raining and getting really cold. But I think you get conditioned [to the weather].

As far as heating, we didn't have this heating system [like in the U.S.]. Naturally, I think that United States, although it's a younger country, but always [is] the most advanced country and you did not have all these comforts in Europe. We used to have those ceramic furnaces. They were very pretty, but you had to put wood into it. So you had to make the fire and sometimes it was smoking a little until things were settling.

But there was a tradition of culture and also a tradition towards sports and physical fitness. So as a youngster I was encouraged very much for gymnastics. My uncle [Jeno, my father's brother] was special; he was a true athlete. He also had an important position in the bank. [He was] the one I lost on my father's side. He was a Romanian champion of fencing. Actually I have here a little book, and I can show his picture. It's written in the memory of those who died and it's in Hungarian. I got that from New York and the names of my father and my uncle are there. And he [uncle Jeno] taught me fencing and I was very young [then]. He started [fencing] as a hobby and he became a champion. So in my background my father was fencing, too. I was fortunate that I was encouraged for physical fitness. That helped me survive the camps, too, especially in my second camp in Bremen, when I had to do forced labor and it was hard work carrying heavy stones and pipes. I don't think I would have come out alive if I would not have been trained for strength.

Let's see, what else can I say about Cluj? Yes, my place, that second place. So in the second place we had, those were our happiest times. As I mentioned, the factory [Energia] was on the outskirts of the city. Now as my father had a very important position [there], we got really a whole house to our disposition. We never could afford anything like that ever after, and we didn't have to pay any rent. That was a house for us. And the rooms were very large.

In Europe at that time the ceilings were high and I remember my mother's dream came true. She loves plants. You see why I have so many plants in my house? [At Energia] we had a terrace and
naturally you could keep on that terrace plants only as long as it was warm [weather]. She [my mother] had the most gorgeous plants. She had all these philodendrons and things. This is something that reminds me of my childhood. I grew up with all those plants in the house. Actually my uncle [Jeno] was teaching at that time fencing and he was teaching on the premises there. So that was the second home.

And I remember in that second place [Energia] there was always a porter there, because no stranger could come into the factory. Whoever came in, the door was closed and the porter came and you had to identify yourself, who you are. That was the score at that time.

And then we had the three dogs, or five dogs, and I just loved those. They were watchdogs, and I developed a strong friendship, especially for one, and his name was Caesar. And when my mother didn't look, I was feeding Caesar with stuffed cabbage. Until somebody discovered it and that was it. Caesar didn't get anymore the stuffed cabbage. But when I came home from school, naturally, I was more isolated. I learned to be very much by myself because I could [only] have occasional friends. Because they had to take the bus and the mother had to bring the child along.

So my friends would come more seldom, and then the railroad station was very close by. I remember I was five years old, we were still there [at Energia], and at five years old was the first time I was in contact with death. I was very many times in contact with death [later on], but this is why I remember my room and the house very well.

I had a habit, when I was about five years old. I loved to walk on the rails and my mother always kept a watching eye. We had at that time a maid. It was customary that the girls from the nearby villages would come and work [in the city], housework. At that time you didn't have the washing machine and everything had to be done by hand. So there were lots of chores. And the wood had to be stored in the basement and had to be carried up.

So I would go the kindergarten with the maid and then we would take the bus and then when I would come home I really drove sometimes the maid nuts. There was a little nasty devil in me at that time.
Maybe I had an independence to it [independent streak in my character]. I wanted to go on my own and then I wanted to run and I would go on the rails.

When I was in the first elementary school, I would walk by myself, and when I came from school I would walk on the rails. I could hear sometimes the train coming, and sometimes I would see my mother coming to the window. And then I thought, "I really will show off." And what happened one day that cured me for good? I have seen how precious life is and you should never take a chance. I came home one morning from school and I have seen many people there and didn't know what was happening but as I came [close] I was totally shocked. There was somebody [who] committed suicide and threw himself to the [tracks] — and there was this body mutilated and filled with blood. I can never forget that experience.

[That was] the last time that I ever walked those rails. I had a very strong imagination at that time and I remember I was alone in that room with the huge ceiling, and for the first time that I was scared in the dark. I would hear the whistle of the train. My window was just opposite the rails. And I thought, "Oh, my God, maybe the spirit of this man is going to appear every midnight there." And I really never was maybe behaving nastily with any of the maids, I was never again walking on the rail.

In some ways, you know, that brought me home something and just like when I was faced with so much death in the camps, it brought me home even more, it reinforced the value of life, that it's something to be cherished and respected. It hurt me to see so much disrespect for life in the camps. Life was so cheap, it was like garbage. It was a big disappointment for me but I learned many things from it. So this was an early recollection.

After that, the good times were over, then the Jewish discrimination augmented. We moved into an apartment again and at that time my father was not allowed to hold this position because, if he would have [done that], they would have punished the owners. There was a punishment if you kept Jewish people in those jobs. You could not be a manager, you couldn't be a chief accountant anymore. So we had to move in an apartment from there.

SL: What year was that?
MH: What year did we move to our third place? I was, I think, in the high school already. It was what year? Let's see, I was born in 1926. It could have been 1936. What year did we move into the third apartment, from where we were taken away? [What grade] was I? In the first gymnasium? Let's see, I started school at seven [years old]. [Mother:] Rudolph Street, it was [the third apartment]. I think it was already the late 1930s. Somewhere in the 1930s [when we moved to the third apartment].

SL: They took away your father's job?

MH: Yes, he couldn't stay so we had to leave from there [Energia]. [Mother: In a little apartment.]

SL: That was purely due to anti-Jewish legislation?

MH: That was purely due to anti-Jewish laws. And see, these were the anti-Jewish laws which were at that time. [They] came up [for teaching] positions also in schools. So at that time I was just about ready to go to high school, to gymnasium. We had gymnasium [high school]. We had four elementary [grades] and then we had eight gymnasium [high school grades]. At the end of the eighth gymnasium, we had a big exam called the baccalaureate and then we got our diploma, bachelor of art or bachelor of science.

But, after the fourth gymnasium we had a big test, a big exam, and you were screened so that if you didn't score well on that you were out. Not only that you were screened, but you also had to make a decision what you want to do. Whether you want to study sciences or you want to go into the arts. So I knew I wanted to study sciences. I wanted to go to medical school and I went into science. So that was in the 1930s. See, [anti-Semitism] was creeping up from the 1920s, in the late 1920s, and then in the 1930s, it was bad already. Times changed. If you were Jewish, we were not allowed anymore to keep the help in the house because … [of anti-Jewish laws]

SL: You could not hire a maid?

MH: No, you could not hire a maid because otherwise the maid would have been punished and they were scared. My father couldn't keep his job, we couldn't hire anymore a maid, and I had to score very high grades to get into the gymnasium because there were only six Jewish students accepted in the classroom.
SL: This was a result of the Romanian *numerus clausus*?¹

MH: That was the Romanian *numerus clausus*, yes. But in 1940, things got really bad because at that time my father had to keep three jobs to scratch the money together so that we can exist. There was no more place for help. I had to work [like] crazy in school to maintain a 9.6 [grade] average. The highest grade was ten. If you were Jewish and you didn't have 9.6, you couldn't study anymore and there was no way of studying privately because if you ever went to take an exam they would fail you. So you were faced with the fact that you had to stop your education, and I was so determined to go on that, especially when my father encouraged me, that I said I'd go through fire, I want to just work crazily but be in school and get my degree. So that these were very, very hard times already. And believe me this was four years before even Hitler occupied. Because Hitler came in 1944.

Now in 1940, there was a big change which really worsened. It just kind of tipped the scale on the other side, on the negative side for the Jewish people. What happened in 1940, that is of primary importance. In 1940, Germany gave the northern part of Transylvania, where I was born and raised, to Hungary, and that Hungary had an alliance with Hitler. And, you know, the Hungarian government was totally drawn towards Nazis and Fascists, while in Romania it was different, see? But I fell into this northern part of Transylvania because that's where Cluj was. So half of it became Hungary and for us Jews it was bad, because all the Jews from Hungary were taken to the German concentration camps.

So then the discrimination augmented; the difficulties in positions were even worse for the Jewish people. So my father took private work, you know. They knew him because he was an excellent worker. So he had to work privately. He worked many times until 3:00 in the morning [in order to provide] for us. He never complained. He never complained and he was never embittered. And this is why he gave me the good example: no matter what, you should keep the humanness within you.

So these were hard times.

¹ A variety of laws in different countries that limited the number of Jews in school enrollments, professions, government employment, etc.
And then what happened in 1944? Then Hitler came in, and this was then really, really bad. And now that I think if we would have believed, maybe, that the rumors that we heard about the Polish Jews were true, and if we would have known that that's going to come to us, we probably would have done something. But, we were doubting if that maybe happened [at all]. And this is why I'm so determined now to inform people, especially the young people, because they think, "Oh, maybe it didn't happen."

And when I was so young I thought, "Ah, maybe that's an exaggeration."

And I learned that it happened. I learned on my own blood and flesh and my grief and loss, and this is why I have a lifetime commitment to keep informed the young people here, of all ages. And do as much as I can so that people know it happened, so that people should be aware what it was like and learn its true nakedness, not prettying it up.

This is why I do so many of my public speaking, for now in the eighth year, in those schools and nursing homes and all kinds of clubs and organizations. I was having lectures in all the churches, of all denominations. I went into the [convent of the] Sisters of St. Francis and all these other religious organizations so that they should know, so that things like that should not happen.

SL: I have to stop here.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2
I wanted to ask you a little about your pre-war religious life. How often you went to Synagogue, what things, what traditions that you observed in the home and how your family dealt with religious ways of life.

This is a good question, Sara. [Mother: We were always going in the Synagogue, all the holy days, sometimes also on Shabbat, we are very religious.] Well, maybe I have many to tell you, that I am really fortunate that I grew up with lots of Jewish tradition, and, as my mother is from Orthodox family, and, she was very religious. She's religious now too, but the camps changed her, because you could not keep kosher at certain time. Now she tries to keep kosher again, but I grew up with kosher food. There was actually nothing else prepared in our house. We had two tables for… [Mother, “Also now at home I am kosher in Israel.”] preparing stuff, dairy stuff, and also we had for meat, and there’s a word, a Yiddish word, has vahalila [an idiom meaning, "For Heaven's sake"]. You know, if I would put a cup, a dairy cup, on the other table where you had to keep only the meat plates, then my mother would throw it out.

So you could see then, for instance, when Passover came, my mother went through such hard work. She put away all the dishes, and there is a word, kasharolni [purification of the home for Passover]. I don’t know how you say that, when you boil all the dishes and [clean] everything. We would have different dishes and we would keep those in the attic, [Mother — "Only for Passover."] only for Passover. My mother made the most delicious Passover meals that you can imagine. I am fortunate, Sara, here I go again, being very emotional, that I learned tradition and I knew about the Jewish religion, and I grew up with the practice of lots of faith. [Mother—"The whole family was religious."] And the whole family [was religious].

So there was fasting on the Day of Atonement and every Saturday we would go to the services. There were two temples: there was the Orthodox temple, and my mother belonged to the Orthodox temple. Sometimes we would go to the Neolog, we called it [a somewhat less conservative synagogue]. That would be [more like] Reform or whatever you call it now. [But] it wasn’t really the
Reform, because the Reform here, I belong now to the Beth El Temple, and this is Reform [synagogue]. And this is something completely different from the Conservative; so that [the Neolog] was a Conservative [synagogue]. We would go there because they had the most talented cantor that I ever encountered [Dr. Moshe Carmilly, the chief rabbi]. That man had an operatic voice. The services were so, that many people from the Orthodox Temple would come on Friday night just to hear him sing. Then when it was the Day of Atonement, in the evening, he sang the *Kol Nidre*², and I never heard, ever since, a *Kol Nidre* like it. It put you to tears. Then I remember, if I think back of my childhood, I can see now... I come to my father and I cannot talk about him without feeling pain of his loss. I could see him on a Passover night, he was performing the *Seder*³. I never have seen any *Seder* like that, ever. I was always asking the *Ma Nishtana*⁴, the questions, and he was hiding the *afikomen*⁵, and I was looking for it, and I got the present. We had the *Haggadah*⁶ and we were reading, and everything went according to the *Haggadah*. I can remember the pillow, with the white pillow case, elevated, and he in his white robe. He looked like an angel. [Mother—“And I also, now I am praying every Shabbat.”] And so, lighting of the candles.

I have seen my mother lighting the candles every Friday night. She got the whole traditional meal of Friday night, starting with the fish and she made the best *gefilte fish*⁷ that I ever ate. And chicken soup with [matzah] dumplings. I have all my mother’s recipes and she was so pretty. I remember she had very good handwork and she had beautiful lace [scarf]. She was crocheting her scarf for the Friday night candles, because you cover your head. At the Orthodox temple all the women had to

---

² Principal prayer on the eve of *Yom Kippur*, one of the Hebrew prayers of repentance.
³ Hebrew word meaning order. Ceremonial festivity recounting the freedom of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery, the father conducts the *Seder* from a reclining position with cushions on his chair.
⁴ The four questions asked by the youngest child in the family. He or she asks the father why the night of the *Seder* is different from any other night—and the father answers the questions.
⁵ A piece of *matzos* hidden during the *Seder* to be found later by the youngest child in the family. After it is found, the child gets a present.
⁶ A prayer book containing the story of the liberation from years of Egyptian bondage and the order of the rituals during the *Seder*.
⁷ Fish patties made of fresh ground fish mixed with vegetables cooked in gelatin base.
cover their heads with a little scarf. Here you go with nothing. For a man to go without a hat, I mean that was, that was not done.

And you see, [I always evoke] those moments. I believe in tradition. I think that tradition and faith acts are a strong pillar of life. When I was in the camps and I was suffering and I didn't know from one day to the other if I am going to be alive, and I was tortured and I have seen my friends dying, I have seen my friends committing suicide and [some] hanging themselves in the barracks, others touching the barbed wire fence at Auschwitz, and in those moments, I became a dreamer.

This is what I told you earlier, I was always a dreamer. I would transplant myself into another world. I was at home, I would see my mother lighting the candles, and I could even hear her saying the words of benediction softly. I could see her handmade scarf and then in those moments, I felt a tremendous strength within me. I had to come back. I wanted to experience it again, I wanted to see that again. I consider myself fortunate because I grew up with a strong faith and a strong Jewish tradition. In that sense, there is no such a thing as old fashioned or new. Certain values are true now, and they were in the past, and they will always be. And I think that faith is something that is going to give you strength no matter in what century you are going to be.

So, there was also in our family another tradition, what I grew up with. The tradition of Mitzvah\(^8\), of giving a good deed, making a good deed, and, I don't have to tell you Sara, this is a part of our Hebrew heritage. And every Friday night my mother would have poor people eating at our place. And I remember once, there were some beggars, some older people, they were poor, they didn't have anything. My mother never turned away anyone.

One day I complained, I said, “Mother, don’t you think we can get lice or something from them?” My mother did something that she would do, she hit me three times gently on my lips, and she said, “Never say that again. Did you ever think how that person feels who will knock on every door and is going to be turned out, and he walks hungry?” She said, “Can you turn away a person like that?” She

---

\(^8\) Hebrew for charity
saw, “You should never do that.” So this is what I grew up [with] and I have seen it in my family. The
Mitzvah, the tradition, and love, and strong faith.

We respected the holidays and we respected our Jewish traditions. [Mother: Also now I have my [in
Hungarian: poor people coming every month.] Yeah, even now my mother would not turn away, if in
Israel, somebody would knock on the door and would be a poor person. She would never [turn them
away] — and I was worried a little bit about her, because you can’t open the door to [just] anyone.

But you see, she grew up in that tradition, and I heard, from my mother and from the people who
knew my grandmother that she was the same way. So she gave my mother a heritage, and my
mother gave me a heritage. I tell you I do believe in the Mitzvah. I think that forgiveness is our, in our
tradition, too.

As you know, at the Day of Atonement, we have to forgive and she [my mother] can, because of the
European custom in the temple, so we don’t carry grudges. But the Mitzvah, interesting enough, the
great value of Mitzvah, I experienced. I had a very strange experience with that. And maybe I insert
you now this experience in a nutshell.

I mentioned that my mother would always have poor people in the house. Never was anyone turned
away who came in hungry or thirsty, to our house. She taught me as a child to have concern for
mankind and for your fellow man.

Now when I was in the first grade, there were two girls in the classroom [named Lily and Ilona], and
they were really very poor. It was customary there to bring something at 10 o’clock, a little snack.

And then we got the milk in school. My mother always prepared me a little snack, because in the
morning we did not usually eat very much, like I would drink a little coffee and we had a croissant
[roll]. And then at 10 o’clock, the children had a recess and then we would eat. I came with my little
snack, and I was eating it. I had a pretty good appetite as a child [and I still do]. I don’t like that now,
this is why I do so much long-distance running, so I can eat my cakes and cookies.

One day, I was just about biting into my little snack when suddenly my eyes fell on these two girls. I
could see two eyes staring at me. They were looking how I eat, and in that moment that bite got
caught in my throat, I just couldn’t swallow it. I thought, “Well, at home I get to have a good meal and I am not sure what these girls are going to get.” So, I gave them my bread, and I always had some sandwiches of meat, egg, or something in it.

Then I would come home and I would feel ravenous. I would be repeating from everything. My mother would say, “What did you do with your little snack, you seem so starved, like you didn’t eat anything?” So, I was hiding it from her, that secret. That was my little secret for a while.

Then one day my mother came to me and she said, “You have to tell me the truth. What do you do with your snack?” Then I confessed it to her. And my mother said, “Why did you have to wait so long? From now on you will take [something] every day for those girls.” So she packed every single day for those girls.

Now this time passed, and I was in the camps. And a strange thing happened. [Both] girls [Lily and Ilona] were in Auschwitz in the same barrack with me. And I was very pleased to see [them]. They were like old friends, and my former schoolmates in the grade school. And I remember that every week, we became [better] friends. I remember one night, we were 500 in these barracks and we could sleep only with crouched knees, because there was so little place. It was a torture just to bear the night.

And one night, it was in the beginning weeks in Auschwitz, I was very depressed in the first two, three weeks because I didn’t know if I will ever get out alive, and I was very shocked at all the things that I had experienced. I was only seventeen [Magda notes later: eighteen], you see that I was so young, I was very sensitive. I have seen every day somebody touching the barbed wire fence and committing suicide.

One night I woke up, and had such a heavy feeling and a terrible depression descended upon me, and [for] the first time maybe I was questioning if it [was] worthwhile really to survive. If it is a possibility to escape and if it’s worth to fight for. And I thought, “Well, I am going to find out, if I go out and look at the wire, see if I can touch it or not and end my life.” That was the first time and the last that something like that happened.
And I went out, I was crawling out, it was quite an art to crawl out of the barracks. In the front of the barracks, very close up, was the barbed wire fence, charged with high intensity electrical current. And I was standing [facing] that barbed wire fence. I don’t know what I would have done on that night. I was standing there and thinking, to touch it or not to. I really was pondering the question, “to be or not to be.”

And as I was thinking, suddenly I heard somebody coming, footsteps, and somebody putting a hand on my shoulder, and who do you think it was? My friend [Lily]. "Magda," she said, “What are you doing here? What kind of thoughts do you have? I woke up and I have seen you crawling and I was worried about you. Don’t you know that you are the only child and what you are going to do to your parents? What happened to you, did you give up fighting?” And she was standing. Finally we ended up both crying, but she never forgot that I helped her and she had a possibility now to help me. We went back together. That was the last time I was thinking of doing something like that. I went to Bergen-Belsen [with Lily and Ilona] and I never have seen [Lily] after [my return from the camps].

My mother says that one day she went to Tel Aviv and she was shopping in front of the [store] window, and she heard somebody calling her name. She recognized [my friend Lily]. She was so grateful [to my mother for helping her in the past]. Something like that you don’t forget. She remembered, she was telling my mother about this night [in Auschwitz]. You see, this is the Mitzvah. I think that what you give, you get it back. The things that you do now in the present are going to affect your future, and I think that the Mitzvah has its worth.

This is a very strong and a great Jewish tradition that is part of our religion, and I think if we would not have had our faith and tradition, what [would have] kept the Jewish people alive? What kept us struggling in Europe? This was one of the reasons. And I think that we should remember our tradition. That’s the way I feel. We should have a strong sense that we belong to Judaism.

---

9 Lily’s sister Ilona was murdered at Bergen-Belsen. This episode is described in detail in Magda's book, *Survival* (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), on pages 307-309.
SL: Now I have a question, a historical one based primarily on the area that you grew up in. That was Transylvania, switched hands many times as part of the Hungarian empire, and when you grew up as a child it was part of Romania, and that was only after the First World War. So when your mother was growing up in that area, it was part of Hungary.

MH: It was Hungary, yes.

SL: And you speak Hungarian between the two of you?

MH: Yes.

SL: I wanted to know how strong an attachment did you have to Hungary and the Hungarian way of life while you were growing up in Romania?

MH: I would say we were only partly assimilated. My father grew up during the Hungarians and then my great-grandfather and they trusted the Hungarians. Why did they do that? Because before World War I, and even a while after World War I, before the Jewish persecution augmented, there was a very good life there for people.

SL: For Jews?

MH: Yes. And there was not this strong discrimination. It was a different type of life. So this is why the Jewish people trusted so much the Hungarians, like my father trusted. They said, "Oh, the Hungarians are never going to do that to us." Then gradually he [my father] could see what the Hungarians were doing all the time after the political change. And then there were things done to Jewish people in Romania, too. There were some things under the Iron Guard\textsuperscript{10} [regime] that they were doing to the Jews. Some of the Jewish people were hanged in the slaughterhouses. They were doing some things there, too. I mean there was a strong anti-Semitism.

The first language I was speaking was Hungarian. We were aware that we are Jewish and we have the Jewish tradition, and I think that there was a very strong Jewish cooperation and unity among the Jews. So there was almost like your other Jewish people were a part of the family. It was a partial

\textsuperscript{10} An extreme right-wing, nationalist, and strongly anti-Semitic political party which was popular in Romania in 1938, until suppressed by King Karol II.
assimilation. And partially you lived under the Hungarians, and as long as they didn't start doing that [anti-Semitic laws], you were a citizen, you see? But there was never a time that you would call yourself that you are a Hungarian. You would call yourself a Jew. So that was clear that you were a Hungarian Jew. That's what they explained to you, you were a Hungarian Jew. But you would not say, like you say now, you are an American. I don't feel like I want to say here, that I am an American Jew. I feel American. I feel that I am a part of this country. But in Europe I would say I'm a Hungarian Jew. Here, if somebody asked me, I say I'm of Jewish faith. But I wouldn't say that I am an American Jew. You see? If somebody asked me my religion, I say Jew. If somebody asked me, I'm an American. See, maybe, that's what explains to you.

SL: You spoke Hungarian in the house? You speak Hungarian with your mother.
MH: Yes.
SL: You had to speak Romanian in school.
MH: Yes.
SL: Did your mother and father have to speak Romanian in their everyday communication and for job-related matters?
MH: Yes. You had to, while it was Romania.
SL: Did you know Romanian before?
MH: Yes. My mother knows Romanian very well.
SL: So that you grew up with Hungarian and Romanian as a child.
MH: Yes. [Mother: Yes.]
SL: What about Yiddish, did you ever speak Yiddish?
MH: [Mother: Yiddish I speak.] Oh, my mother speaks Yiddish beautifully.
SL: So that too?
MH: Oh, yes.
SL: And German?
MH: [Mother: German also.] Yes. And then Hebrew. My mother speaks Hebrew. She learned Hebrew.
SL: The Hebrew because then you moved to Israel, right?

MH: [Mother: To Israel, yes.]

SL: But, so then you grew up really in a situation where there were four languages.

MH: Oh, I speak even more. [Mother: In the high school we must learn German, the German language also.]

SL: You had to learn German?

MH: [Mother: Yes, in Hungary.] Yes, because it was an Austro-Hungarian empire.

SL: That's right. Did you speak German because you had relatives who spoke German?

MH: [Mother: Yes, I have relatives. They all speak German.]

SL: Many of them then probably came from Vienna at some point to Hungary?

MH: No, I don't think so. Did we have relatives in Germany really? [Mother: In Germany, no.]

SL: Or Austria.

MH: [Mother: No.]

SL: Were they in Vienna, any of your family?

MH: [Mother: No.] Well, it was Austro-Hungary so I don't know. Some of the ancestors were there. They might have [been]. We never went back so very far in our family tree. But that is what's customary, that many people, many people were speaking Yiddish. That was something that my mother grew up [with] in the house. Her mother was speaking Yiddish.

SL: Right. But you didn't speak Yiddish?

MH: I never learned Yiddish but I understand every single word because I know German. I speak Hungarian, Romanian, then French, German, then Hebrew and English, and then we learned in school, Latin. That's the background of English and the French and Romanian. So I can understand the Italian and Spanish very much because they are very strongly related, and I think that the Latin origin, the fact that I took Latin in school, that helped me learning English. And the other languages must be easier because the Hungarian language is completely different.

SL: Did you or your mother and father belong to any political or social clubs when you were growing up?
MH: No.

SL: Zionist clubs?

MH: No, I don’t think we — [Mother: Only Jewish clubs.] My grandmother was the president of the WIZO.\textsuperscript{11} Was it WIZO? Hadassah? [Mother: “No, inaudible”]. I know that my grandmother was the president of a Jewish women’s club. I think it was WIZO. And my mother, I think, was frequenting some of those meetings. [Mother: “It was also WIZO.”] Then I’m a member of the Hadassah here and of Sisterhood of B’nai B’rith. [Mother: “B’nai Brith, she was the president, my mother in law was.”] And then naturally some of my relatives who left Romania and they emigrated to Israel, they were in the Zionist [organizations] and they were very [idealistic] — I have a number of them.

SL: Were there Zionist youth groups in Cluj?

MH: There were. My cousin [Jonah Rosen], the one I’m talking about, who organizes settlements [in Israel], was involved [in Zionist organizations] when he was very young. And then he emigrated [from Romania] with his sister to [Palestine, present Israel]. And they are [in Israel] for very many years. Their parents did not [emigrate] and their mother was killed. She was gassed in Auschwitz. But they are still around [in Israel, in Kibbutz Maagan] and my mother said that they are very successful. One kibbutz settlement [Kibbutz Maagan] was organized [by Jonah] and he also organized other ones. He also was involved in planning all this \textit{aliyah},\textsuperscript{12} our Jewish emigration [from Romania]. [Mother: he was an Israeli consul.] At one time he was indeed an Israeli consul. Then the Jewish underground was helping our emigration, he was involved in that [the Mossad, the Jewish underground, is the Israeli government’s intelligence service], that cousin that I’m talking about [Jonah Rosen]. And my mother said that he’s very active. He’s a true idealist. You don’t find easily nowadays true idealists and he proves that idealists still exist, because he never changed.

SL: Okay, I am going to turn the tape over.

\textbf{END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1}

\textsuperscript{11} The Women’s International Zionist Organization was founded in England in 1920, and has chapters throughout the world.

\textsuperscript{12} Hebrew word for “to go up,” used to denote Jewish immigration to Israel.
SL: I wanted to ask you about the events leading up to the annexation of Transylvania by Hungary. First of all, what news did you get in the late 1930s of Hitler's rise in Germany?

MH: There were rumors that there is something happening in Czechoslovakia, and then we heard rumors about the signs of Jewish persecution in Germany. But we did not believe that this is true because we never experienced anything like that. And then in the 1930s — Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia in 1938 — so there were rumors that something is happening in Czechoslovakia and then that there's something happening with the Czechoslovakian Jews. Then in 1939 we were hearing rumors that something about to happen in Poland. And then after Hitler occupied Poland in 1940 [actually, 1939], we heard some rumors that something's happening to the Polish Jews.

But the communication at that time wasn't like now. If we would have seen all this on the television maybe, and everything, I think that probably all Jewish people would have done something so that we should not be just sitting there like a scapegoat. But there was no certainty. But what they did then, in order that they should prevent us listening to the news, all Jewish people had to turn in their radios. And so my father was so fond of radio and the news... But if you were caught that you didn't [turn in your radio] and you listened, you really could have gotten into big trouble. So that was one way of keeping us in ignorance. So we [only] heard rumors.

Now, in 1940 Hungary made an alliance with Hitler. They made it before, but that was an official one in 1940, and in 1941 then they participated in the Russian offensive. Now, in 1941 the situation was really bad, getting worse because they were really collaborating with Germany. And then for us Jews, it was more and more squeezing — then after taking the radios, we had to turn in gold if we had [any]. And gradually they robbed us from spiritual freedom and they started robbing us from our material things. So these were very bad times.

There were some people who maybe were smart enough and — I don't know smart enough, but they had money which we didn't have, that much money — who were going to Switzerland. And you had to have some money to do things; with money maybe you could get around. But we were so
many years there and established and with family that we didn't think that there is a reason that calls for running away from that. And when we had seen already that there was a strong reason, it was too late. We were already trapped there.

SL: Did you have any idea about Hitler's plans for the Jewish people?

MH: We had no idea that Hitler is ever going to do something like that. We had no idea. If we would have known that, I think we would have taken precautions. No. We thought that what Hitler is going to do in Germany [was] maybe going to be stronger discrimination. But then, "How is he going to come to Hungary and do that?" Or, "The Hungarians are not going to do that to us." But naturally we didn't know that Hitler is going to occupy [our city] and that we are going to be scoring just as the German Jews scored in 1935. We didn't know that. And we were maybe too naive. And we were not informed enough. We were not informed enough.

SL: Now immediately before the Vienna award of Transylvania, do you remember hearing about the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia and part of Romania in 1940?

MH: In 1940 what we heard [was that] there were lots of things happening in Romania. There were Jewish persecutions and we knew it at that time. There were people at that time who decided that they are going to convert and hide their Judaism because it's safer. Maybe there were some who felt that there are going to come bad times. But we personally, we never wanted to do something like that. Because a converted Jew is still a Jew, which was true later and all the converted Jews were taken to the camps. And then [if] you convert yourself [it] goes with humiliating your religion, and you end up there where the others. You lose even faith, not only in the eyes of the world, but you lose faith in your own eyes. So there were some people who did, picked up a different identity because they felt threatened. But we had maybe strong faith, maybe stronger faith in the Hungarian government than we should have ever had.

SL: Was the political situation less immediate for you than it was for Jews in the eastern part of Romania?
MH: It was a time when the Iron Guard was [in power], and we were not affected by that in Hungary at that time. There was discrimination as far as in schools, in positions, but we were not physically threatened as much as they were and we thought that, you know, this is a different type of event. We thought that the Hungarian government is not going to do that. But we should have been more suspicious. You see we were not suspicious enough, Sara. We should have recognized the symptoms. You know when you have a disease, and you recognize the symptoms, you act in order to prevent it.

If I look back now, and if I would have been back in time now, with the knowledge that I have, then I think that we should have looked at the symptoms. Maybe we have seen the symptoms and maybe we did not want to acknowledge it, because we didn't think that it's real. I think that we should have done something and I felt in the last moments, like when we were taken to the ghettos, and we were in the ghettos, suddenly I realized, "My God, we came in here and we are trapped."

I wanted to escape from the ghettos. My father was worried for me because you could be shot or put somewhere in prison and maybe shipped [who knows where]. Who knows what would have happened anyway to me? But I had a terrible feeling of being trapped. But then it was, as I said, too late. Then we have seen the Jews taken off from every street.

What could you have done there? You were surrounded. You were surrounded already. Like, I have a friend, I have a very good friend, she was a schoolmate with me since the first elementary grade. She's living now in New York. She's a psychiatrist. Her name is Eva Adler and they were well-to-do people and they thought [that bad times] were going to come. They went to Switzerland [with Rudolf Kastner's group] and so she's alive and her family [too]. Her father died now. There were [special] circumstances [for those who could pay].

My father wasn't a man who was hostile or having ideas of persecution. He trusted mankind and maybe he trusted too much. There's such a thing as trusting too much and not to see, not believing that it can happen. Not believing! How can it happen? You think it cannot happen to you. And just
like you see somebody having [some misfortune] in the family, and you think that's distant. But when it's coming to you, then you understand what it is.

Always, as long as it happens to somebody else [you don't pay too much attention to it]. Even though we heard rumors that it happened to somebody else, to those Jews, to that country, [we ignored it]. I think that we should have reacted differently. But, naturally, I couldn't go back in time, the way I am now, or the way we were then. We were indifferent enough to all the knowledge, you see? That's the only criticism I have to make, as far as looking back.

SL: After the Hungarian annexation of northern Transylvania, how great was the anti-Semitism?

MH: Great, very great. It was worse than under the Romanians, a lot worse. We were getting worse. And under the Romanians, even before the annexation was done, it wasn't very good either. But after that, definitely it worsened.

SL: Did your father lose his jobs altogether after a certain point?

MH: After a certain point he, in order that we should survive, he had to take work from the places that he worked before officially and he had to work unofficially. You know, there are people who have a heart and even they take risks. So they wanted to help my father. And you rely on those good people. It's nice that we have some good people who are willing to do that. Like look at Corrie ten Boom in *The Hiding Place*. Did you see *The Hiding Place*? So, they were wonderful people. They did what they could. They were hiding a few and saving a few Jewish people. So there were some very nice Christian friends who wanted to help my father. And without them I don't know what we would have done. You see you depended on that. You are not in a good position when you don't have any rights, and you depend on pity and you depend on crumbs that you get. You don't get the full loaf, but you have to beg for crumbs. That's not a good position. We didn't deserve that and my father didn't deserve that.

SL: Did you finally have to leave school?

MH: I never left school because I was always working to have my grade average. At no time did I have less than 9.6 grade average. I went through all my schooling with the discrimination and I was in my
eighth gymnasium\textsuperscript{13} when I was taken away. We had a short year at that time. I had a special exam because times were very bad and I had a feeling if I don't do that I'm not going to be able to finish my seventh grade and I had one year to go. That was before I was taken to the camps. So it was excellent because I finished in April, and in May already we were taken to the ghettos, in June [actually, end of May] we were already shipped to the German concentration camps. So my hunch was really good. And this is why I was lucky, I could finish my seventh grade, but I worked very hard to be able to do that and I had the good will of the people because I was a good student all those years.

Now when I came back from the camps, this is when I finished my eighth grade and I had to go to Hungarian school because there was no Romania anymore, and I finished in much shorter time because I took advantage of the special exams, so I had to prepare myself in shorter periods if I'm making two years in one year. So I had to make my eighth grade in half a year, and plus my matura\textsuperscript{14}. So I made my eighth grade and matura in half time [after the war], which was really hard work especially [because] I was out of the studies for almost three years. Because I wanted to go to medical school and you need that Bachelor of Science degree before you can even show yourself at medical school. So, that was the story.

I was fortunate. I mean, you create sometimes your own fortune because you have to work hard for it. I wanted to stay in school, and so there was no time when they could touch me in throwing me out of the school, and there was no time when my father couldn't scratch enough money that we can survive. But you had to fight for it, that's one thing. It didn't come for you on a platter. You had to create that situation.

\textbf{SL:}  After June 1941, the Hungarians began to fight on the Russian front.

\textbf{MH:}  There was a Russian offensive and they participated in it.

\textbf{SL:}  What type of war news did you get between that time and 1944?

\textsuperscript{13} Middle and high school; Magda was entering her final year of high school.

\textsuperscript{14} The baccalaureate, a written and oral exam needed in order to be accepted at the universities.
MH: Basically, we got some news but not much because gradually the radios were taken. We knew about the strong alliance of Hungary with Germany and we knew it because the discrimination augmented and more or less became, you know, anti-Jewish, anti-Jewish, anti-Jewish, all the time. So we did not realize one thing: we never thought that Hitler is going to occupy Transylvania. And you know how this came by. Probably you know.

SL: Yes, I do know.

MH: The Hungarians were still with Hitler, [but] they wanted to make a separate armistice [with the Allies]. When Hitler came in, they were collaborating with Hitler. The Hungarian government was collaborating with Hitler 100 percent. I don't think there was any other government collaborating 100 percent like that. And you know what happened? We were guarded in the ghettos by the Hungarian police, and they were very cruel to us, and by the German soldiers. And then, when we were taken to Germany, Hungarian police were escorting us and sort of turning us over to the Germans.

Then we came to Auschwitz. I can never forget that. My first impression of Auschwitz was horrible. I can never forget that. I have seen these barbed wires. I thought that there were insane people there, the women with shaved hair, looking badly, coming to the [fence] begging for food from us. They were greeting the Hungarian soldiers thinking that they came to pick them up. I mean, they did not realize that those were the Hungarian soldiers bringing us there. And they thought maybe something happened, they come to be liberated and transports were accompanied. I think this was 100 percent cooperation in that thing.

And then, we were totally robbed and the government took away everything, too. So they were sharing the loot with the Germans. The Germans were sharing it with the Hungarians. Now I don't want to put [down] the Hungarian people because there are good people all over, and there is trash all over, too. But as far as we speak now politically — politically, Hungary was totally, 100 percent, committed to Germany and this is why they went along with the Germans. And every single Jew from the hospitals and everywhere was taken out and went to the German concentration camps.
Now Romania, although they collaborated, but they did not take out the Jews there to the German concentration camps. What they did, they put them in the forced labor camps or they humiliated them, but they were not taken out, they were not gassed and cremated in Auschwitz and in Bergen-Belsen. There were not all the children killed and gassed and cremated. That wasn't happening. I would say that the Hungarians got badly out from First World War. They lost their provinces. Actually, Hungary and Romania, they were always in conflict and they just were on the throat of each other all the time. This is why all the changes. So Hungary felt that Romania got the benefit out of the war because they were given a gift, whole Transylvania. And they hated that. They resented that. So Romania was more of a winner, so they weren't acting like Hungary was, desperate to get [Transylvania] back and they were unscrupulous. They did not think, what things Hitler said is going to give them back; they didn't care what Hitler is standing for. "Hitler is persecuting the Jews, killing them? Fine." Hitler comes, they are going to sell out their Jews.

And I think that this was a mistake. Any country who does this, you know, it's a mistake because you pay for it in the future and Hungary did pay for it in the future. Look at the situation now, it's an island country. Look at the Hungarian revolution. People are very unhappy there, they can't even come out from there. What did I say? There's a punishment. I believe there's a punishment for grave mistakes. You pay a price later on. Now, Germany paid a price. I speak of the government, and the country was terribly destroyed, and so many innocent people were killed. Now this is a horrible price to pay for. And all the other countries who participated pay a price and they still pay for it.

So why did they ally themselves? In Romania, for instance, there was a growing interest for Nazis because they felt power. So then you go to that power. But I think that one has to reason, and you see what this power is going to give you. They were afraid of Germany. This is why they went along. They were afraid that Germany is going to swallow them. So, Sara, this is a very complex thing. You can't even explain that, say, "This is because of that," because there were many things involved. Just like human emotions. Some people are unscrupulous and they want to become successful, they want the gain, and they would ally themselves with the devil. But there are lots of people who would
say, "I don't care for that riches which comes with the devil. I'd rather live modestly." So it depends on your attitude, what you want to do. And then even you take the risk of maybe the devil is going to attack you and you are going to fight it back. So this is what politics got into your personal life. And this is why I say it is complex and it depends on the government. Like it depends on the individual, what you do. Not every government went along with it.

Look, the Czechs didn't went along. They were protesting, and many of the European countries were strongly protesting, and [protesters] were hanged because they were trying to save Jewish people, or trying not to go along 100 percent. They were actually hanging people in Czechoslovakia when they came in — Christians — the Germans. So that I think that Hungarians went along more.

That is why I'm telling you I would never go back to Hungary, and I think that you don't forget how you were treated, either. And this is one of the reasons that we emigrated, because we felt, first of all, things changed in Hungary after World War II and they saw a little freedom, spiritual freedom there. But we were just wondering, "Do we want these things to happen to our children maybe in the future? Don't we want for ourselves a better life?" I think we deserve [that], we have an obligation, we have a responsibility towards our children, the other generation. I was married. We wanted to create a family, and I wanted my children should have it better than I do and by no means should they be ever exposed to what we were exposed there.

And not only I was thinking in those terms, because 16,000 Jewish people emigrated [from Romania] and, believe me, that was a mass emigration, because they have the same thoughts [that I did]. If you are badly injured somewhere, right down to the core — [or] if you love someone and that person injures you to the core and breaks your heart, that love can die. That love, if you suffered enough pain, can die and you don't want to do anything with that person anymore, and it can be somebody who was close before. So, I just bring you comparisons, so that maybe I bring you a little perspective in that. And when you emigrate from a country where you lived so many years, you have to weigh a lot before you go [away], and when you make a final decision then you have to know that there was a strong motivation, there were strong reasons why you left that country.
There was a very strong motivation that we did not want to live under those circumstances, we did not want to have a totalitarian government where you have no freedom of speech, where you can't even think what you want. If you are a writer there and you think what you want and you write it down and you express yourself really, then you are going to end up maybe in one of those prisons and you don't want to live in a country where maybe you were hurt so much. And everything reminds you [of the pain]. I went to the streets after I came back from home and all my memories came back. Will I ever forget the things that were done with the people that were dear [to me] and I lost? That is something that is going to haunt me forever.

So I feel happy I don't have to walk down the same streets. I live in a different country where I have democracy, I can say what I want, my children never experienced this cruel Jewish discrimination, I didn't experience anti-Semitism. People are very nice to us, and I think that if you are a Jew here you can go as high as you want to, while it wasn't the case in Europe. If you were a Jew you could be very able and very intelligent. You could never in your life get into a government. That was even in the good times. Even in the good times you could never be in the government. In the bad times you couldn't even hold a job. What was it, that job? Just junk, what you got. What no one else wanted. And so they humiliated you. Maybe I speak out very strongly but I'm glad that I'm in the place where I can speak up and I can say what I think.

SL: We are running out of tape again.

MH: Yeah.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2
TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SL: I wanted to know what you can remember about the first days of occupation by the Germans in the spring of 1944.

MH: Well, the first thing I can remember is the sound of the heavy boots of the German soldiers and how they marched through the city. And I remember the feeling that we had, we were scared. I think maybe for the first time we were thinking of what happened to the Jews in Czechoslovakia and in Poland. We had a very bad premonition. I remember, though, my father at that point, maybe for the first time, was more skeptical about our future because now there were not only the Hungarians in but the Germans were in. My father was speaking German very well, but that was our luck because that was a [good] first impression [on the Germans]. But then, on the same night when it was occupied, I think it was about March 19, [actual date of occupation: March 27] when they came into the city. Definitely, we had, not only fright, but each one  was scared for the family members, not only for us, not only fright for us, but we were worried about our family. And the uncertainty about our future. How much worse can things get? We had no idea.

It happened, something on the second day of occupation, when I realize[d] how much afraid we were, and the fact that my father talked very well German really saved us from a very unpleasant experience. It could have turned out very badly. I think it was the second or third day after occupation and it was late at night, it must have been around 10 o’clock, we heard banging on our door. And we thought that they are coming to take us away. My father was very worried, and I and my mother were terrified, though my father had enough coolness to think really what to do. The first thing he said, to myself and to my mother, “Go into the bedroom and close the door [behind you].” And at that time, I think now, he probably was worried that we could be molested, because who were at the door but four German soldiers, drunk. So they finally came in, but they did not know at that point where the Jewish homes were and who was Jewish and who was not. Besides that they were also drunk, and so they opened the door, they were talking to my father, [in] German, they wanted to, that they should be given accommodations.
And my father was talking to them [in] German and I really admire his courage and his composure, he agreed to accommodate them. I think if he wouldn’t have, I don’t know what would have happened. So he talked to them and he agreed to accommodate them. They never even questioned if we are Jewish. And now that I think back, I see my father’s reasoning. If he would have refused and would have showed that he’s scared, they would have think maybe we are scared of them because we are Jewish. But the fact that my father accommodated them and talked good German, they had done nothing, not even suspected that a Jewish family would accept them in the house, like sort of accept a snake in the house. I remember this much; I was with my mother in the bedroom and we didn’t even dare to sneeze or cough. We had a terrible night. We were terribly frightened inside. If they would have entered our room, who knows what they could have done with us.

And so, in the morning they left and that was fortunate really. I think that it was fortunate that they left, and they were sober. They never thought that we are Jewish. And my poor mother had to clean all that, they brought in lice. They were coming from the front. Oh, she was working and disinfecting the whole thing. It was very, very unpleasant, but it could have been much worse. For the first time I was terrified of the Germans. And for the first time we were thinking of the things that happened, maybe could have been true. But we still thought that maybe now in our case it is not going to be because the Hungarians maybe won’t let, after all, the Germans do anything. So that was my first experience after the occupation. Two unpleasant ones, they were marching and we were afraid of them when they were actually coming into our house. These were the two experiences. But then, ever since then, those first days, we were scared. We were scared that somebody is going to knock on the door at night; we were scared that somebody is going to find out that we are Jewish and would persecute us. We never had after that a time when we were really relaxed. So they were not easy times. We felt endangered from the time that they came in, we felt that we are not so safe.

SL: It took you totally by surprise that they occupied?

MH: In some ways it did. We did not think that they are going to occupy. I think we were taken by surprise, really. We were.
SL: Now, how soon after the Germans came in did they establish the *Judenrat*?

MH: Well, the *Judenrat*\(^{15}\) actually was established in the ghettos. So when they came in, in the first month, actually very shortly after the occupation, they already wanted to find out who is Jewish or not. There was a list at the courthouse with everyone’s birth listed, also their religion. And all the Jewish people were forced to wear then the yellow star. A symbol like the Star of David. So we had to wear it on our outer garments. After a month of the German occupation, actually in the first month of the German occupation, we were wearing already the Jewish star. And then we were really frightened. I mean, then you are like a target going out into the streets with a Jewish star, and my father was very worried for me. So really we did not dare to go out too much on the streets. That was the first time when it came home to us. In what predicament we really are, when we had to wear that thing. So that is the most discrimination that you could ever experience. But still we didn’t think that it was going to be worse than that. But it was a gradual worsening.

And then, after another month, you see, we were taken to the ghettos. They [the Germans] came on March 19 [March 27]. In April, we were already wearing the yellow star, and in May already, we were in the ghettos. So in the April, the following month [after the occupation], they already got the list from the county courthouse and then they were going from house to house to take all the Jewish people. So things went very fast. And then the Jewish Council was established in the ghettos. I tell you, when the transports were gone, in some ways the Jewish Council was terrorized. They had to give out the number of people, what they required for the transport. It was at one point, though, I resented the Jewish Council. I have to tell you something that maybe I could never forget, or I have hardships to accept.

The deportations started. We were taken with the last transport. Somehow my father felt that the later you go, the better you are off. We even tried maybe to get out somehow, but it was too late.

There was no way of getting out. But you thought you have maybe a little time. What we noticed, [at]

\(^{15}\) Jewish Councils that served in many ghettos as intermediaries between governments and the confined Jews, administrating day-to-day affairs and assembling people for transfer to the camps
the last transport, there were some people who remained. And I have the impression that there were
some people who never were taken. My father noticed that, and he wanted to stay. He wasn't
allowed to stay. And the council knew what happened, and I don't think that they kept us informed.
And this was a thing what I think was wrong. They didn't kept us informed because they were scared
of their own skin. We were told that we are going to be taken into a forced labor camp and somebody
should have informed us.
I held this against the Jewish Council at that time. I really did. Because they should have had the
responsibility somehow. Because if we would have known, maybe more people would have tried to
escape or do something, not go just like the cattle into [the cattle cars]. I don't know. You know, it's
hard to put judgment on people. It's hard to put judgment. But on the other hand, I think that maybe
the strong desire to survive changed them [the Jewish Council] and in some ways they wanted to
save their own skin and for that they would even go to the point then not to tell us the truth. I don't
think that I'm wrong in that, as far as the Jewish Council is concerned. I have a grievance for the
Jewish Council. But they might have done good things, too. But this was inexcusable. I don't know
how you feel about it. How do you feel about it, Sara, do you have any comments on that?

SL: Well, if I can talk to you about that at another time when we aren't recording. I have done a lot of
reading and a lot of talking about it. I think that, you know, I could talk to you about my feelings.

MH: But you feel you were informed about these things, Sara?

SL: But I think that it was almost universal, that the Judenrats, throughout the ghettos, in different
countries, were being accused of the very same thing.

MH: That's why I really didn't have the whole respect for that Judenrat. If you don't tell the truth and, you
know, then you collaborate with the enemy, and I think it's inexcusable. Now I was wondering, is it
possible they didn't tell the truth, or they didn't know the truth? They knew. I have the impression that
many of the members knew the truth, but they didn't want that it should get out. So I resent that.
When we wanted to stay, they wanted to just [deny it]. No, we had to go. I can't forget that.
SL: I’d like to ask you a little bit about the ghettoization. You said that within two months you were in the ghetto.

MH: Two month and we were in the ghetto.

SL: Now first of all, was there an influx of Jews from smaller communities surrounding Cluj that were being brought into the city by the Germans?

MH: [Yes, from all over the northern part of Transylvania but not from the southern part of Transylvania, which was under Romanian rule].

SL: So they were…

MH: The ghetto was a place where they were concentrating the Jews.

SL: Well, where was it located exactly?

MH: Well, it was located in the outskirts of the city, and it used to be the site of an old [abandoned] brick factory in Cluj. And that’s where we were taken. And we had [very poor] accommodations, because we [lived only in very primitive] tents. We were out in the open, and I thought this was very cruel to do. We were just lying on the ground and we had very, very little food and very little fluids and they kept us under terrible hygienic conditions, terrible. I remember one happening that I can never forget. One day, it was in the ghetto, they were numbering us, and we had to stand in line there for a long time. And it was an older lady who wanted to go to the restroom, there were outdoor toilets [latrines], there were no [regular] restrooms. And she really had hardships in [keeping it in] and she went back to the Hungarian policeman there. It was a Hungarian Gendarme, we called them. She said she had to go out and he blurted out loud, “Well then make it in your pants! You are not going to get out.” I can never forget that.

You know, I can never forget the treatment that we got in those ghettos. They lied again to us, that we are going to be taken in labor camps, families together, and they threatened us that if anyone is going to be escaping,[they are] going to be shot or put in prison. Maybe it’s true, but I think that if I would have known where we go, I would have risked that. I would have tried to escape from the ghettos one way or another. I think I would have done it. And many of us, if we could have known
what is coming, we would not have stayed there and wait to be transported to the camps. You know, I am so outraged now when I think back.

SL: How did they get you from your apartment to the ghetto?

MH: They were the Hungarian police, and they were the Gendarmes. You don’t see Gendarmes like that. They were carrying little bells on their feet, [on the heels of their boots].

SL: Bells?

MH: Little bells, kind of. No matter where they went, you heard the sound of their heels. They were getting those big boots, and they had also a feather in their helmet. It was a special order. They collaborated 100% with the Nazi’s. I mean, they were no better than the others who came to take us from the house. They were no better. I couldn’t see any difference, whether they were Hungarian police or Gendarmes or they were German soldiers.

So they were coming in each house. At that time we had an apartment. We couldn’t afford a house, and there was another Jewish family underneath us. They lived there and his name was Cassirer. Actually, they are in Israel now too. He lost his wife — no his wife came back, but he lost his children. The children were cremated, gassed, right when they came to Auschwitz. He lived on the first floor and we lived on the second floor, so they were taking them. You see, they break into your house, they come in, and you have to walk out with a small suitcase, but when they came in, my God, how they treated you. They swear, they push you, to get [out], you were not allowed to take up anything from the house.

We were not told what’s going to happen, but they came in and they told you, you can take maybe two, three things from your apartment, like a change [of clothing]. That’s it, fast, fast, fast, you were pushed, you were terrorized. That was a part of their fun, to come to terrorize you. And if you didn’t move fast enough, you get a push. It was the first time, really, that I was treated brutally. I mean without any consideration like that. And then you had to walk out from your house. So they took our neighbors. They came in and took our neighbors, downstairs. And then they came up and took us.
At the time they came in, my father wasn’t home. He was working till the last day. He was with his bicycle carrying home his work, and so he was out, and you see how unexpected [it was], you never know who is going to be taken. And so he wasn’t home yet and I was terrified. I wanted my father should be there and so we’d go together, and I was pleading with that Gendarme to wait because my father is coming any minute. He was laughing. He didn’t care about my father, or whether it was important to me or not. I had to gather some things and we were pushed out the door and put up on those open trucks waiting in front of the house.

And then we went on those trucks and then I could see my father coming on the bicycle and I could see how frightened he was. He had seen what was happening, he was close to the house, he had seen us up on the truck, and we were yelling, hollering to come. All that my father did when he came, he pushed his bicycle to the house, and jumped up to the truck. And that’s it. That’s all the time that he had, that last minute, and we were gone. That was a very shocking experience. What right did they have to push us out of our home, to vandalize it and take out everything that we had? They robbed us completely.

When we came back [after the war], we found nothing in our house. And they took our [silver jewelry], you had to bring in any gold or anything what you had. The gold you had to give in earlier, so giving your radios and gold, that was already done. We were accustomed to that.

But what my father did -- We wanted to preserve a few precious pieces, jewelry pieces, and you have seen one of them from my great-grandmother, and this one what I am wearing today and my mother’s wedding ring, and this ring of my father’s, his engagement ring. A few meaningful things. So my father was putting those in a box, in a non-rusting metal box and we buried that near our house and so my mother then undug it [later, after the war]. She dug it out when she came to the house to look for things and everything was robbed. So that was the jewelry box with the few things that were saved.

Then we heard what’s happening. We knew that there were Jews [taken away]. We didn’t know exactly when you are going to be next. So some of the linen that had a meaning, something like it
was a heritage, an heirloom, let's put it that way, like the napkins that I served you today, these that I
put on the table when we had our refreshment today, and like some towels of my grandmother made
for me.

It was customary to make a dowry, when a girl gets married, and my grandmother started making my
dowry when I was three years old, and she was working on all the beautiful things which we never
have seen. I never got that dowry because it was taken away [except] those few pieces which we
gave to this Christian couple. They were friends with my father and actually the man used to work in
the same office. My father liked to play chess and [his friend] was his partner, so a few pieces that
way could be saved [from the dowry]. Otherwise we wouldn't have a thing. [It was the same] with the
photographs. I would not have a single photograph otherwise.

SL: You had given them those photographs to keep?

MH: The same photographs were given and some were left in the house, a few, which no one took
because it had no meaning for them. So a few things [were saved], this is why we have anything left.
Otherwise I wouldn't have anything to show to you.

SL: What was the reaction of your Christian neighbors to what was going on?

MH: Well, this is a good question, of the reaction of the Christian neighbors. I think that there were people
who I am sure didn't like what was happening, and they were scared to open their mouths or say
something. On the other hand, there were some who have seen that as a gain for them. I have to be
very sincere with you and very outright, very outspoken. [There were those] who have maybe seen
some gain [for themselves], maybe some positions opening for them, and having some of the loot.
Now, as I said, you have weeds all over and you have good grass. So there was lots of good grass
but there were weeds there too, not wheat, but weeds.

So this is -- there in Europe, you experience some anti-Semitism among the population too. There
was some existing. I would lie if I would tell you that there was none. It wasn’t true, it was because, if
there would have been none, I think that maybe this could not have happened on the same scale.
But [there were] some who got jobs when the Jewish people were thrown out, and then when you left
the house, some of the loot was distributed to the [Gentile] population. And it was happening that some of the people themselves were looting the houses. So I have a mixed feeling about that. And that was the right perspective.

SL: They never tried in any physical way to prevent you from being taken?

MH: No. No one tried anything, as far as my experience shows. Maybe, I don’t know, if there were some protests. I didn’t experience too much of a protest. If there might have been, I am sure that there were people who were protesting, but there was not a march like there would be here, to protest, to keep the Jews in. I didn’t experience anything of that sort. There were no demonstrations for keeping the Jews [at their homes]. There were some wonderful people who would hide, maybe, Jews, and those people really risked their safety, but there were people who were doing that. They were some very outstanding people, and there were people who went along with the crowd. I think this would be a more realistic appraisal of what was happening.

SL: I am going to have to turn the tape over.

MH: Yes.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1
TAPE 3, SIDE 2

SL: I wanted to go back and talk to you just a little bit more about the ghetto situation that you were in for a while. How many people do you estimate were crammed into that area?

MH: Oh, thousands, I can’t remember now how many exactly, but there were lots of people in there.

SL: Would it be a good estimate to say that at least the entire Jewish population of Cluj was there?

MH: Oh yes. That’s very accurate. It was every single Jew, whoever maybe did not escape or go to Romania before. There were some people [who escaped], but those were in minority, you see, but the majority I would say were crammed in that ghetto. There was no Jewish family left in their homes. If they did not go [away] before they took them, they were taken.

SL: Did they feed you at all or were you totally on your own as far as getting food?

MH: Well, the food that we got was very scarce. We got very little, and at the beginning the problem was that we personally didn’t think of taking along anything. There were some people who did think of provisions. They might have had a little more, but how much more could you take? You couldn’t, you weren’t allowed to bring that [much]. We had very poor nutrition. Absolutely insufficient.

SL: What would you do during the day?

MH: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Just wait, and the only people who were busy were the Jewish Council.

SL: The Judenrat?

MH: Judenrat. Yes.

SL: So then you said before that you had no place to sleep?

MH: No, we slept on the ground, and the conditions were very poor. And we had, actually, no running water, we had outdoor toilets [latrines], and you couldn’t clean yourself adequately, and you ate poorly. If you were sick, you were in big trouble, because you had no medical help. Once in a while, I think only once, twice maybe, somebody came out inspecting the camp, but it was very superficial. You didn’t see what you didn’t want to see. Really they were not interested in our health, because they knew
exactly what's going to happen to us. Most of us are going to be annihilated and gassed, so it wasn’t worthwhile for them to spend the money to give us a good time. It is a horrible thing.

SL: Was there a lot of death in the ghetto in that month?

MH: Well, there were deaths and sickness. The children especially, small children. It was very bad for babies, it was murderous. So you had many people who got sick, you had older people who got heart attacks because of the trauma, people who were sick and didn't get medication. It was an awful situation. It was awful that month in the ghettos, it was terrible. And this is why when we heard that we are going to be taken and live in tents [in labor camps], we said anything is better than that. But we had no idea that it’s going to be worse than that. So we were just hoping that we would be taken away from there, because that seemed unbearable at that time. But then we had no idea what’s going to come next. That was still better than what happened to us afterwards.

SL: So how did the deportations from the ghetto begin?

MH: Well, the deportations began. We were in the last transport and we were taken away in June [actually, the end of May]. So there was a certain quota everyday that the Jewish Council had to provide. And you were not told where you are going to go. You just were told that you are going to be taken in the latest transport. And then we were almost looking forward, some people wanted to be put on the list, going sooner than they had [to] because it seemed it's going to be something better. And strangely enough, my father was very suspicious. I think he lost his trust after the Germans came in, and he was worried, at that time he was worried, if that's the truth; and this is why he wanted to go as late as we could, to drag it out. So, then we were in the last transport and we were taken into the railway station. But you know, I should have escaped prior to that. Maybe I couldn't have, but maybe I could have.

We had to stay in line for water, and sometimes we had to take our water and we were going with it. And I had the impression, I had such an urge to go open that gate and do something. I don't know if I could have done that. I thought maybe I could get by unobserved, because we were so many. But there was the watchful eye of my father and my uncle there. I think they noticed that I tried to get
away. I thought this was unbearable. Personally, I was seventeen [actually, eighteen] years old and I had the least trust and confidence than anyone else. Maybe I had a premonition or I was so shocked by the way I was treated that I didn’t think that I can expect something better, just worse. And now, we realized [things] could become worse, when we were taken then into the cattle wagons. There were huge lines, many people, it was like a madhouse at the cattle wagons. Pushed into those wagons, so many that we could hardly move and finally we got into those wagons and they were dark inside, and then they closed the door, a hard steel door, and they locked us in from the outside. We didn’t get any food, we didn’t get any drinks, nothing. I remember after they locked the doors, my father said that we were fools. He said, “We are trapped.” And it was too late to escape. We realized, and he realized that, everyone realized that we should have [escaped before] we were trapped. The first time that we had maybe no hope for better, just we were expecting worse, when we were trapped in there, because there was not a humane treatment that we got. Can you imagine if somebody had to use the restroom? There was no restroom. [You had to do] everything there in that wagon, and the men had to turn away; and you had to do everything there for three days and three nights. They didn’t let us out, we were locked all this time and they didn’t give us any food. We were not allowed to go out, and what can you expect? We thought that we are going to be taken and annihilated. Otherwise why would you treat a person like that? We knew that we are not going to go into the place where we were promised to go.

And then when the train stopped and we have seen that we are in Germany. Then I remember as we were going, riding the train, we were so many you had to sleep just like sardines, next to each other, and I was sleeping, and I could feel tears [running on my face]. One thing which remains [is] that painful sensation, just like it would be now. I would feel the tears, the warm tears of my father falling on me, and I was silent. He was a very proud, controlled man, and I was silent. But I could feel that pain and he said, “It’s too late. It’s too late for everything. We were trapped.” He had a bad premonition at that point, and he had a bad premonition when we parted. When we were in the train, he talked to me as [if] he would know that he might not return. And he was hoping that the young
people maybe get better treatment. He was hopeful that I was so young. But his trust was really 
shattered.

Then when we arrived, [it was] terrible, some were exhausted, others cried, there was somebody 
having almost like a nervous breakdown there, and we were uncombed and unkempt and dirty, and 
feeling like cattle. That’s the way we arrived into Auschwitz. First thing, I can never forget that feeling, 
when the trains stopped and everything was silent, and it was just like, in those moments you know 
something is going to happen and you don’t know what exactly it is going to be. Then, soon after, 
you hear the voices of the German soldiers and boom, this thing [the door] opened with force.

Everything was [treated] in a shocking way, nothing was done gently. But in the moment [those 
doors] were opened, there came in the violence, like the monster of hatred and violence was coming 
after us. Then we heard the voices of the soldiers and they came in. They were really treating us 
brutally, pushing us, coming with the short rubber sticks. We had to go fast, if you didn’t go fast down 
from that wagon, you got hit in the back. And we had to leave everything inside and get out of there. 
And I could never understand; the first thing that struck us, [were] the huge flames belching from big 
chimneys, we could see them in the distance. But it was such a strange sickening odor of burning 
flesh. We did not know what that was at that time.

I had no idea that those were the furnaces, because no one could imagine such a thing. And then 
right there, you see the German officials and you had to form rows of five and then they look at you 
and they point you left, right, left, right. And you had horrible scenes, children being snatched, babies 
from their mothers. The mothers were running crazily after them and then you see the mothers who 
ran crazily after their children, they [were] put together and gassed. When the men were separated 
from the women and families separated, there was a painful cry, and there were people running, 
there were shots in the air, then people were beaten up.

I was so shocked that at the first moment I did not imagine that this was true. I thought I must be 
dreaming. This cannot happen to me and in those few minutes things happened fast. Many of my 
family members were pointed to the left, all the little children in our family, my uncle, all the uncles
and aunts of my mother’s were pointed to the left. We didn’t know at that time where they go. The ambulances came, and dragged off all the older people, all the invalids or people who were sick were taken in. Lying to us, they will be taken to the hospital. Little did they know that they were going to be taken right to the gas chambers. So they looked for help, they mounted those trucks; you never have seen them again.

And then in 15 minutes I was all by myself. I can never forget that moment. I looked and I was separated from my family. There I was standing with strangers and I was looking for a familiar face and I have seen my father, with my uncle walking. I looked back, and there they were. I never have seen them again. That was the last glimpse I had of them. And then what happened after that? After that the trains left. But what struck me when we were separated and I was actually there by myself, that was the time when I first paid attention to my surroundings. Because in those few [previous] moments I couldn’t even pay attention to my surroundings or where I was because there were so many painful things happening.

Then I paid attention and I have seen the barbed wire fence of Auschwitz. You see, they were poles connected with wires and at the top of each pole there were huge lamps projected at you, like big watching eyes peering after you at all times. And then I have seen people, women, coming to the fence begging for food. They looked like insane. I thought that this was the insane asylum, I really did. They were shaved, in rags, looked terrible, looked like insane people. And I had no idea that in a few minutes I would be there, just like them. So, I didn’t even think that I’m going to be there. And then the first thing that we did, we had to strip naked in the [middle] of the shaving room and we had to leave everything behind. I was seventeen years old [eighteen], I don’t think anyone had seen me naked, except my mother.

And I remember the shame I felt. I remember I was doing this [covering my breasts with the palms of my hands] and was hiding my breasts. We were naked and the Germans soldiers were lined up and laughing at us. Can you imagine that? I was hiding between the other women. I was covering my breasts. I can never forget that, such a humiliation, I felt so terrible, so terribly humiliated. I never felt
in my life like that; not enough to march naked, but they laugh at you. And then there was the shaving room, where they shave you in all places, all your places. First, they start at the head. And I had long hair, I had thick braids and I had the Gretchen hairdo; I had my braids turned twice around my head; but now, I have it only single here. But I had lovely hair. Naturally I was very young at that time, and I hadn’t cut my hair since the first elementary grade.

I go through such terrible emotions right now, because I remember the SS woman, the first time I have seen an SS woman. They were just as cruel and heartless as the men, and she was there in the shaving room, courted by an SS guard and they were laughing and making jokes when I came there. And then she put the shears [into my hair] and I was pleading, pleading, “Leave me please just a little [hair], like that.” I was so naive, so young, and she was laughing with her boyfriend. There I stand naked and they two are laughing, and she goes with the shears and shaves my whole head. And then I heard a little [noise], I was so horrified, I was in shock.

In the first hour at Auschwitz, I was in shock. I couldn’t cry, I couldn’t think that it was true, I thought that I am going through a nightmare, and soon I would wake up. I couldn’t accept that this was reality. And that’s why I think there were some people who got insane, because they never could accept that is the reality and they just touched the barbed wire fence. They committed suicide on the way to the barracks, because they could not accept something like that.

So then finally I could hear a little noise and I glanced back. You were not even allowed to move this way or that way, and I can never forget that my whole braid, my beautiful long hair, lay in one piece on the ground. And then, I just had sort of a glimpse, I was shocked, like you pause a moment, like you’ve been paralyzed, you don’t even want to move. It’s like a feeling that you don’t want to go a step further, and then I felt a brutal thing in my back, somebody, the guard, hitting my bare flesh with a green rubber stick and pushing me towards the shower room. And then in the shower room, pushed, fast, fast, fast, brutally treated.

And then [when you are] out from the shower room, [they are] throwing you some rags, really; all of our things were taken. I got a long dress up to here [reaching down to my ankles], twice as big [as
my size], no underwear, nothing; just that thing [dress, which was] like a sack that you got. And then I
got the wrong size shoe, like this, a high shoe [with an] orthopedic [insert]. I could hardly walk with it,
and from there I was pushed in the paint room. Then you are painted from here to here [from the top
to the bottom of the dress], all the way. The dress what I had on, the back of it was painted with a red
stripe like that [about two inches thick]. All of us were done that way, so that if you try to escape, they
can see you from far, the red stripe of paint. Then they pushed you out from the paint [room], and I
was so horrified when I came out, I was still in a daze. I still didn’t grasp that it’s true. I went through a
terrible thing. I went through three stages.

The first stage was the shock, and then as we walked there, some couldn’t take it, they touched the
barbed wire fence\(^{16}\) and they burned, they were charred. I could never do it, because I just didn’t
think [it was real]; maybe it’s not true, maybe I have to wake up. And then finally we got to the
barracks. And I have seen in the barracks my fellow prisoners eating grass, and we were pushed in
that huge barrack, 500 people, 500. We had nothing in the barracks.

There were no more bunks on bunks [stacked above one another]. Other barracks had just pieces of
wood where many people were lying. But we had nothing, just the barren floor of that huge barrack,
and we had to sleep crouched, like this, like when you are an embryo, that’s the way we had to sleep
through the night. And then five people got one blanket. So finally it was cold in the barrack and five
people [had to fight over a single blanket]. In that moment I think I have seen something that really
shook me as a person. People were fighting for that blanket, everyone wanted that same blanket. I
still wasn’t myself. We had nothing, we got no food, nothing. In the morning, after we had a black
coffee, and after that passed, and I laid down, it dawned on me, that this is real, it is real. There were
hours and hours passing by, and it was real.

And you know what I did first thing? I remember, I pinched myself until it hurt me. I tortured myself,
until I felt pain, and I told myself “I feel pain, this is real, it is not imaginary, it’s not a dream.” And
through the night I was thinking, “What am I going to do?” And there I put the question, “to be or not

\(^{16}\) The barbed wire fence in Auschwitz was charged with high intensity electrical current.
to be," very seriously. I had to weigh, why I want to live. If I want to, what do I live for, and do I want more humiliation? Do I want a life like this? Or should I fight it, or I shouldn’t? That was a very, very difficult stage. And after this, the third reaction was that I started crying, and crying and crying, all this coming out, out, out, and finally I fell asleep.

When I fell asleep I was at home and I was combing my long hair, because that was a terrible shock [losing my hair]. I was dreaming with my hair, and I must have slept a while and then it was around 4 o’clock.

Suddenly out of that dream I heard a word, it was dark in the barrack, I heard, “Heraus, Heraus,” and just like a raid coming in, like a madhouse, the guards were coming in, the SS with the short rubber sticks taking us out for zehl appel, to count us. If everyone is there, no one escaped, who is living, who is dead? So we had to go out, it was cold, we had no underwear. Standing in line, that was my first morning in Auschwitz. Standing in line for hours and hours as they counted us and after a while you really got tired because you were really emotionally exhausted. So, some started slumping a little. There comes the guard, hits you one in the face, you have to stand up. You do it to avoid that thing [the blows], if three times you slacked, you are punished. I had, the first day, in the morning, in Auschwitz — Because two people in our line were slacking three times, we were punished, and we had to kneel in clay and in stone for hours.

There was a physician next to me, who during the night tore up a little piece of her blanket because she was cold and put it around her breasts. While we were kneeling, one of the SS women observed that she’s fuller here [at the breasts], is hiding something. [The SS woman] took that thing out of her and she was slapping and slapping and slapping her. And I remember her face was getting red, and red, and she couldn’t [do anything] — she just had to stand [up] and [endure] slap and slap and slap. I have terrible memories. And after a while she just couldn’t take it [anymore]. She got up, like in a frenzy, [and] she started beating the SS woman. They took her away. We never have seen her.

---

17 German for “Get out, get out!”
18 German for roll call.
realized what happens to you if you just show any protest. That was my first morning in Auschwitz, waking up.

And then for three weeks, I had the most difficult period I think of my entire captivity, in the sense that I fell into a depression. I was so depressed that I didn’t want to talk to anyone, and maybe I needed time to collect myself and to think. I didn’t want to eat, I was very suicidal in the third [week]. I have to tell you, if I look back at my behavior, I think some of my fellow prisoners were worried a lot about me. But I was depressed, very depressed, and it occurred to me [that] maybe I was a little suicidal, but I kept control over my emotions.

I also had a desire to make it [to survive] for the sake of my parents. I felt that I have a responsibility, so I can’t conk out. On the other hand, I had that strong feeling, a sense of futility, [being] futile to try [to survive]. And I remember my fellow prisoners. Some of them died, but I didn’t forget them, because they really gave me moral support. So for three weeks I went through hell, as far as emotionally. Because in those three weeks I had to accept my fate, and I had to fight. I had to make a decision, how to fight for my survival, and I had to gather the strength, and all these emotions weakened me.

So there were so many things which were extremely hard to fight, which would be against me, trying to destroy me. And after these three weeks, one day I came to myself, and I decided that I am going to swallow [my food]. I am going to try to take better care of myself, in the sense that I have to eat that soup, with the two little rutabagas floating in it, which tasted like grass mixed with herbs, and I had to swallow that black coffee and that six-and-a-half ounces bread, hard as a rock, if I wanted to survive. So I closed my nostrils, I closed my eyes, and I was swallowing that horrible soup.

In that food, I didn’t know it at that time, but I’m sure they drugged us, because we had our [menstrual] periods [before], but after we came to Auschwitz, no one had periods for a year. I did not have any periods, and I think that we got something in our food that prevented that.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2
TAPE 4, SIDE 1

MH: [Auschwitz] was the largest extermination camp in Germany during World War II, and it was established in 1940. It was actually in Poland. In 1939 Germany occupied Poland, and this is where the extermination camp was established. Until 1941, the killing of the Jewish people was done in the forests in Auschwitz. The Germans thought that this would be unpractical, so they wanted to have more efficiency. It's a terrible thing to think that way in the term of life, but they wanted efficiency. And so they came up with the idea to establish the crematory ovens and the gas chambers. I have to tell you also that the crematory ovens were situated in Birkenau. In order that you should understand where Birkenau was, I'd have to tell you a little about the geography [of Auschwitz]. For instance, when we arrived there, the train stopped and then we were taken down [from the cattle cars]. I think I mentioned about a separation of the families, and I also mentioned to you that some of us were pointed to the left and right, either going to death [or to life]. I left my dear dad and left Birkenau. The railroad separated Auschwitz into two sections, Auschwitz and Birkenau. In Auschwitz were the barracks and the camp, and Birkenau had the gas chambers and the crematory ovens. When I come to this chapter of my life and of my imprisonment in the Nazi camps, it's going to be not only very hard on me but it is going to be hard on you, too, because I don't think that anyone got an insight, what it was like in Auschwitz. Have you seen the movie Holocaust? Well, the Auschwitz I have seen in the Holocaust [movie] was by far not as horrible as the true Auschwitz I experienced. Coming back to the geography of Auschwitz, and to the crematory ovens, I mentioned that when they established the crematory ovens, [these were] for the purpose of the quick disposal of the corpses and the quick cooling at the same time. So there were four [killing facilities] in Auschwitz and each consisted of an underground viaduct, the gas chambers, and the crematory ovens. What did really happen in Auschwitz? Maybe the best way to describe is to come back to the point of separation, where some of us were pointed to the left, and they were sentenced to death, and others to life. What sort of life was that? You are going to find out later. That life was not a pretty one that you would expect. You were really left alive, [but] it was just really a slow killing in some ways. Maybe
you didn’t die on the day when you arrived, but they were hoping that they are going to facilitate your death one way or another.

So who were actually the people who went to the left? All the infants and all the young people up to the age of fourteen. For instance, if a mother was with a child she was asked how old is the child and if he or she was under fourteen, automatically it was pointed to the left. Also the sick people went to the left, whether they were young or old, and I think I mentioned yesterday to you, that when we arrived, there were ambulances stationed with a red cross on them, waiting for the sick people. So the sick people pointed to the left were taken on those ambulances, and they rejoiced because they had no idea where the ambulances will be taking them. In Auschwitz there was a camouflage. We were fooled. It was a theater. It was a theater played with real life.

Who else went to the left? All the pregnant women. Also all the invalids. I was wondering if I should tell you what happened to them because I found out later what happened on the other side. Or would you like me to tell first what happened to me? I ask you a question now. How would you like me to do?

SL: I suppose that I would like to know exactly what happened to you.

MH: Exactly what happened to me? First of all, after we were separated, I was left alone. Did we come up to the point where I think I talked to you about my braid being cut off?

SL: Yes, you talked to me up to about the point where the morning after the appel, that you were punished.

MH: Yes, I was punished and I had to kneel in clay and in stone for hours together with the whole rest of the row, [although] I did not commit the mistake of not standing erect, but somebody else [did] in my line and that’s why the whole line was punished. Not only at that time, [but also later]. Let’s come back to that point when we were punished. For instance, not only did we have to kneel in clay and stones for hours, but we had to do it with the arms upright, and every time you lowered your hands you were beaten up. And I think I mentioned to you about this physician who couldn’t stand [the
beatings] any more, [and] who was lowering her hands and then she was beaten up. I think we went through that, too. They took her away and we have never seen her [again].

The main work in Auschwitz was in the crematories and in the gas chambers. For each crematory unit, 500 [male] prisoners among us were selected. It was called the Sonderkommando, and I have to tell you that the Sonderkommando was exterminated each four months, so that no one should ever be able to find out the truth what happened in those crematory ovens. I think this is the horrible thing. At this point, I just have to tell you what happened on the other side because my life is strongly connected with the lives of those people who went to the left. What happened in those crematories? I don’t think that many people know.

First of all, let’s come back to the people who were less fortunate than I and were pointed to the left. By being pointed to the right, I had a second chance. But I had very, very many close calls. I could have died every single day in Auschwitz. I could have been exterminated [anytime] in Auschwitz, but I was in Auschwitz for only 6 weeks. But in those six weeks, I could have died each day, and I had to take each day one at a time.

The people pointed to the left were waiting outside in the forest, in front of the gas chambers. They had no idea where they are going to be [taken]. I also have to tell you that the prisoners who went to work were accompanied not only by SS guards with machine guns, but by dogs, Dobermans and German Shepherds. As you can see the dogs in the Waltz of the Shadows. The cover of my book was done by my daughter. So that [prisoners] should not be able to escape, and if they did try, they could be killed by those dogs.

Those people in front of the gas chambers were waiting sometimes for three days or three nights out in the forest, because each day the transports from all over Europe came. Now, I know that each day in those gas chambers and crematories, 27,000 Jewish people were gassed and cremated. Even

---

19 One of Magda’s autobiographies, Waltz of the Shadows (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), is in the form of poetry, recounting her experiences in the concentration camps. At this point, Magda showed to Sara the 1975 version, whose cover features an illustration symbolizing Irma Griese, SS administrator, leading an attack dog before the shadows of the Holocaust.
though there were 27,000 Jews cremated in those ovens, we the prisoners had to dig the death pits, because not all the corpses could be disposed. I don’t know if you ever had the opportunity to dig in the clay ground. Auschwitz had lots of clay. [We had] to dig the holes, and then the [corpses of the] prisoners were put in those holes and incinerated. And that was not enough yet. The corpses from the gas chambers had to be piled up [on top of each other]. We called it the death pyre, it was like a huge pyramid pyre, [which was then] incinerated.\textsuperscript{20} But let’s come back to those chambers, and those people, the children and the mothers. There were many mothers who would never give up their babies. They didn’t know where they go because the whole place looked like a bath establishment, and the director of the camp was distributing soap and towels. It’s a horrible thing. Those people thought that they are going to go into a shower room, but instead they were pushed in 2,000 at one time [actually, 3,000] and there was an underground viaduct [where there were dressing rooms]. From the underground viaducts, 500 at once, each time, were pushed into the gas chambers. When the people were in the gas chambers, the doors were locked, and then an SS guard with the gas masks let out a little gas, it was called Zyklon B\textsuperscript{21} and it was mixed with cyanide. The gas chambers looked like shower rooms. They were equipped with shower-like caps, but on the ceiling there was an opening latticed with a glass window, and from this little opening, the toxic gas was let out. No one listened to the screams of the people inside and everyone was just blind to their suffering and death at the same time. It was a horrible thing. Finally, everything was over. It is just terrible for me to talk about these things. After it was all over, then the gas chamber doors were opened and people were holding hands in rigor mortis. You know, Sara, no matter whatever everyone thinks, I think that there is a love which does not stop by the grave. I think there is a love that never can die. When people die holding hands, they die with love in their hearts.

\textsuperscript{20} Magda worked at digging the trenches and gathering corpses to fill them. \textsuperscript{21} Lethal gas mixed with cyanide
And then the dead were never respected. It's not enough that they were put through such humiliation. If any corpse had golden teeth, they were checked, the golden teeth were pulled out, artificial limbs removed, the hair was shaved and used for pillow cases, and some of the skin was stripped and used for lampshades. The most horrible thing was that even the ashes were not left intact, because the ashes from the crematory ovens were thrown on the fields and the gardens and used as fertilizer. And I know that [maybe] some of the ashes of my father were used as fertilizer. Some years, for a long time, I was very disturbed by the fact that he wasn't even buried really, and I wanted to bury him so badly. I wanted to bury and erect a memorial for all the innocent victims of persecution and I didn't know how to do it. One day I buried them and I erected for them a memorial in my heart. That's the only place that I could bury them because I loved them and I will never forget them.

I wrote a eulogy for my father and I wrote a memorial poem [for all the victims of the Holocaust] and recently I wrote a requiem for them. I started writing music in 1975, and I am working on the music of the requiem. It might take me a while, but I want to do it for them [the completed musical score is included in the second, 2006, edition of *The Waltz of the Shadows*]. And one day I want to see here in the United States a memorial erected for them. I think that they deserve it, and this is the way that they are going to be remembered [the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum opened 13 years later, in 1993]. If I would have a way of participating in that, or maybe if I would have a way of helping this project, I certainly would do that.

Coming back to the [crematories], I think that I have to talk to you a little bit about the crematory ovens and then afterwards, I really would like to share with you my memorial and my eulogy [to my father]. And from there on we could go on and talk more about Auschwitz.

I don't know if you are aware of the fact that there were 120 openings in the furnaces in Auschwitz. In each opening, 3 corpses were put in, first went the babies as kindlings, the emaciated bodies and then the larger bodies. I also have to tell you that I have seen the flames of those ovens belching from those chimneys day and night. I could even see those flames through the cracks of our poor
barracks. The air was constantly filled with the strange sickening odor of burning flesh. I think if there is a hell, Auschwitz was a true one. Also the corpses had to be [separated], they used hooked poles for pushing the corpses in the ovens. And also hooked poles were used in the gas chambers in order to separate the corpses, because they were so pressed together in rigor mortis. I think that at this point I would like to read to you my poem "Memorial," if you think it is appropriate.

"Memorial" 22
Death was lurking constantly
In the concentration camps
Of Germany.
So many times
I could have been selected
For the gas chambers
To meet the horrible fate
Of all the infants, the children,
The young, the old,
The sick, the disabled,
Who were executed
In the mysterious
"White House" of Auschwitz,
Whose naked bodies were thrown
To the furnaces
Of the huge crematoriums,
Whose ashes were used
On the fields and the gardens.
Day and night
The great flames
Of the ovens
Belched from the chimneys.
The air was filled
With the strange,
Sickening sweetish odor
Of burning flesh.
I mourn you, innocent victims,
Members of my family,
My fellow prisoners,
Who were silenced forever
By the Nazis.
Your wailing cries
And your terrible contortions
Met deaf ears
And blind eyes.
I was destined to live,
To bear my misery.
God chose me to return,
To remind the world
Of your agony.
Erecting tombstones
In your memory ———

22 The poem "Memorial" is included in The Waltz of the Shadows (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), second edition, on pages 33-34.
MH: I wrote a eulogy for my father. Or maybe I should read to you after that my Requiem which I wrote recently. I don’t have it in the book.

“Eulogy” 23
My dear father,
You left us forever...
You had a heart of gold,
You were kind and clever...
Why didn’t you survive?
I am heartbroken, but alive ——
Back from the German
Concentration camps ——
But you are buried there...
I will mourn you forever.
Why were you treated so brutally?
Only because you were a Jew.
What was our sin?
Our religion.
We were condemned
To persecution.
Your last words
Still ring in my ears
After so many years ——
“My child, my dear daughter,
Soon we will be separated
From each other.
I may never return ——
Be strong, don’t cry.
Let the candle of hope burn
In your heart ——
Take care of your mother,
Cherish and respect her ——
Don’t forget your loving father ——
Remember to follow
The broad countless streets
Of knowledge,
And beware the dark
Narrow alleys
Of ignorance ——
Practice the art of love,
Forgiveness and tolerance…”
Father, my dear father,
I can never forget you ——
Your words are deeply carved
Into my memory.
Beloved father,
Rest peacefully...

23 The poem “Eulogy” is included in The Waltz of the Shadows (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), second edition, on pages 73-74.
“Requiem”  
My eyes shed drops of tears
Into the pools of years
For those I loved and lost
And like a haunting ghost
My spirit roams around
Searching for their unknown
Burial ground——

They were the victims
Of their faith,
Sentenced to death
Without a sin,
For worshipping
The only God
They believed in——

They died without protest,
With no rebellion,
Together with the rest
Of six million
Innocent Jews
In the Nazi camps
Of Germany——
O, Lord, please help me
To keep alive their memory——
They died in vain,
I witnessed their agony
And pain,
I heard their cries,
O Lord, our God
Open for them
The gates of Paradise——
Let their souls
Rest in peace...
Forgive mankind’s atrocities...

MH: I think I was telling you about the food that we received.

SL: Mrs. Herzberger, I hate to interrupt you but I am going to run out of tape. Can I just turn it over.

MH: Okay, yes.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

24 The poem “Requiem,” along with a musical arrangement for voice, piano, and chorus, is included in  The Waltz of the Shadows (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), second edition, on pages 135-136.
TAPE 4, SIDE 2

MH: There is also another side of Auschwitz that I would like to present to you. Not only that we got very poor food and I described the type of food that we received, but also we were sometimes tortured with lack of fluids so that we would not get any fluids for some days, and then our tongues would break out with wounds. It was due to vitamin deficiency and dehydration.

And then another addition, of the thing that we had to face, was that three times a week there were the constant selections [Magda added in 2010 that the selections were also conducted once a week or at random]. The selections did not finish with our initial selection. But if you showed signs of weakness, maybe you were not good enough for work anymore, then the SS physicians [selected you for the gas chambers]. At that time [the doctors were] Dr. [Fritz] Kline and Dr. [Joseph] Mengele.

I think you must have heard about Dr. Mengele. So we had to march naked and they looked you over and you were pointed to the left or to the right. Maybe I was fortunate that I wasn’t selected for some very humiliating purposes, which some other seventeen-year-old girls were selected to.

And maybe I was very fortunate that I was not selected for the horrible experiments which were done in Auschwitz. You could see in the crematory ovens and in the gas chambers, some horribly mutilated bodies. They were doing vivisection in Auschwitz, also skin grafts, with horrible mutilations, without aseptic care. Some of my fellow prisoners were chosen to be used as guinea pigs in dreadful experiments. I was saved from that.

I think that God was watching over me, and maybe I had to come back to keep the memory of those I loved and lost and of my fellow prisoners. I feel a very strong commitment, not only for my father, whom I lost, and my uncle, but I feel a very strong commitment for all my fellow prisoners, because we shared the same fate. I was fortunate that I survived. But there are many of us who did not. In order to get you an insight into the type of treatment that we got in Auschwitz, I would describe a day in the Holocaust.

On that day, I almost died. I think it was one of my close calls. I had many close calls in Auschwitz, but this was one of them. I will never in my life forget that day, and what happened. At that time, I did
not even dream that I am going to have a chance of ever telling that to anyone, but I am glad that I came back so that others could hear it.

I mentioned to you earlier that I started writing poetry in 1963, and I am sure that my spirit is [still] in the camps. My suffering and agony and all the emotional shocks that I got [there], prompted my writing. There were some things which were buried within me and they gave birth to something that was developing. It was like the seed that you are planting and it had to come out. Maybe it was also my desire to tell what happened. *The Waltz of the Shadows* was my first published book and I did write it for the request of the Monroe Public Schools [who published the first version in 1975]. That's what I started doing when we were living in Wisconsin. I started also my public speaking [there] and this was really [what gave] for me [the inspiration] to compile this book.

I think that in Auschwitz, not only did you have to take the humiliation, you had to take the work, you also had to fight not to become insane. And it was very hard [to do that] under those circumstances. I have seen many people who became depressed and touched the barbed wire fence of Auschwitz. They committed suicide, and it was very hard [to witness that]. Or [when] I have seen my friend who died emotionally disturbed. She was absolutely all right, perfectly well, when we came there. She was a very nice girl and she did have a mental breakdown in Auschwitz. You could not afford having mental breakdowns.

In addition to all that, there was scarlet fever and typhus raging. If you did get the typhus or scarlet fever, and you were checked three times a week, it was your death sentence. I can say that it was a miracle that I did not get the disease because otherwise I wouldn't be here today. You were ultimately taken to the gas chambers.

I don't think that anyone had the experience, and I hope no one is going to have the experience, what it means to drag a corpse, holding it by the wrists and pulling it. I have seen people being beaten to death because they couldn't pull anymore and they were hit, hit, until they collapsed and then they were pulled by the one who was still living.
Sometimes I thought that I am in a nightmare all the time. It could not be reality. This is why I had nightmares. I had nightmares in the camp and my nightmares were always encompassing [fear], they were always around two main issues, [first] of suffering and being helpless, and second, of getting insane, the fright of insanity.

I think I will describe you this [particular] day in Auschwitz and then also my nightmares. These nightmares I had for years, and even now, occasionally now and then, I have a nightmare. I just mentioned to you [that] I had a nightmare before you came in, Sara, because knowing that I am going to talk about the camps, somehow my subconscious brought me back in time. I was again in the camps and I was arguing with these SS soldiers [who came to take me away, telling them] that I was two years in the camp, wasn’t that enough? I didn’t want to be trapped again and [experience] the close, trapped feeling. I have seen a movie about phobias on the “60 Minutes.” If you had a phobia of confined places, you would have died in Auschwitz because you were confined at all times.

Actually, we were surrounded by the [S.S.] guards with machine guns and you could not [get away], you were supervised, and looked [upon] at all times. You couldn’t do this, you couldn’t do that, you couldn’t even move after a certain distance because they had the right to shoot you automatically, and this was because they did not want [you] to go far away. They kept you always at a [certain] distance so you could be supervised, so that you should not escape. And who could escape from Auschwitz? You had to be insane or very best suicidal, if you [were to] embark onto something like that.

“Holocaust” — I mentioned to you before that we were clad in rags and very poorly dressed.

“Holocaust” 25
Clad in rags
In the midst
Of the German concentration camps
In Auschwitz,
I addressed, in my despair,
An SS guard
Carrying in his truck
A tank of fresh water ——

---

“A drop of water, I implore
And nothing more!
Each day on my tongue
New wounds burst,
I am dying of thirst——“

My fellow prisoners
Who shared my misery
Were crying out loudly——

“Water, water, please,
Our sores we want to appease,
We are dying of thirst!
Have pity on us!
Our tortures must cease!”

But our voices hit the hard stones,
Our bitter outcry
Met only cruelty——
The SS guard reached
For his thick and heavy
Rubber stick briskly
And started beating us savagely——
The harsh blows
Cracked the skin on our backs——
We were bleeding,
Revealing the bare human flesh——

“Get out of my way! “
He shouted.
“I don’t care if you live or die——“
From this water you will have no share!
Blows I can give you plenty,
So don’t provoke me!”

He placed his foot
On the gas pedal
And speeded up his vehicle,
Leaving everyone
With painful, ugly scars——
Some of us were raging,
Our parched lips were craving
For water——
Those who tried to follow his truck
In order to catch the moisture
From the exhaust pipes
And the few drops
Dripping from the small opening
Of the shaking tank
Were savagely massacred
By the rolling tires——
The driver was madly running over
Their emaciated bodies
With that heavy monster of his ———
Finally, he left
And I looked at death’s
Horrible aftermath
Stretched out in my path.
I let out a cry
In the silent
Chambers of my soul:
"Oh God, don’t let us die!
What became of human dignity?
Where are the limits of cruelty?
Has kindness become unknown?
Are history’s barbarians
Rising from their graves? ———
To bring disaster and slaughter?
Oh, where are you Justice?
Come on your wings
And save us from the gutter
Of hatred, crime, and prejudice.
Chase away these human deformities
And bring us decency.
Grant us peace!
Oh God, don’t turn away from us!
Upon you I call.
Almighty Ruler of the Universe,
Don’t let us fall.
Give us strength to bear
All this humiliation
And degradation.
Let your people survive
The trials of torture
And extermination————
I pray for myself,
For my family,
And for my fellow prisoners————
Oh, Lord, send us hope and courage.
Don’t let us stagger.
Don’t let death
Thrust into our hearts
Its poisoned dagger————
Send us courage
To control our fears,
And hope, to wipe our tears————
Grant us faith to fight
And to ignore the pain————
Almighty God, guide us well————
Don’t let us sink
Into sorrow’s deep well!"

MH: Those were my daily prayers in Auschwitz.

"Nightmare" 26
Behind thick clouds
Of false illusions
Dwell the phantoms
Of delusion,
Spreading chaos and confusion
Over the distorted world below,
Letting their tears of madness
Flow
Amidst a weird creation
Of wild fancy and imagination...

It is raining in my heart.

26 The poem “Nightmare” is included in The Waltz of the Shadows (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), second edition, on page 39.
Drops of sadness fall
Upon my sick and suffering soul
Drowning my joy...

I crumble like an old
Discarded toy.

For sanity I pray
While my spirit turns slowly
Dull and gray...

MH: And it is a really frightening thing that in the course of time in order to stand the pain [in the camp], you wanted to desensitize yourself. And then the fright of becoming [psychologically numb], of not feeling anything anymore. If you don’t feel anything anymore, then you don’t care for anything anymore. These were the signs of depression. And I mentioned to you that in the initial three weeks [in Auschwitz], I was very depressed and I was questioning if there is any sense in living. [The following poem] you could place to that period. “Delusion” — It was a nightmare which followed me through the years.

“Delusion” 27
I am lying in my bed,
Feeling a dullness in my head...
Somebody cries.
I open my eyes...
I feel a sharp pain
In my chest...
A stranger is boring a hole
In my breast...
Reaching for my heart
To tear it apart...
Leaving in its place
And empty space...
With horror, I realize
That my hands and feet are tied
And all my movements are denied...
I try to shout for help
But no sound leaves my throat,
My vocal chords are caught
And squeezed by terror...
Fresh blood is staining
The pure color
Of my sheet...
Then, I see a white hand
Wiping everything clean,
And there is no trace of me
Or of the place
Where once I have been...
Could this be real?
Or is it a fake?
Am I dreaming?
Or am I awake?

MH: You see in my nightmares this reflects the thoughts I had in the camps. Sometimes I was really thinking, am I dreaming or am I awake? And I was horrified by this.

SL: Can I ask you a few questions about specific instances in Auschwitz that I want to clarify? We talked about your daily routine. You did work with the Sonderkommando?

MH: Yes [in the sense that I was in a corpse-gatherer and grave-digger kommando].

SL: You talked about the food, what the barracks looked like, death. There are a couple of other points that I wanted to ask you about. First of all, were you able to establish any kind of friendship with any of the women in your barracks or on the job?

MH: Yes, I think that under those circumstances you shared the same fate. No one of us knew how long we were going to be around, and I think that brought us closer. Naturally, like in any environment you have people with whom you feel that you are closer and you develop deeper friendships than [with] others. I did have two friends in Auschwitz [Ilona and her sister Lily, my former schoolmates] and I become very emotional about it again, because we were together through Auschwitz, Bremen, and Bergen-Belsen. Ilona died several days before liberation in Bergen-Belsen. She was close to my age, she was a little older but we were close, and she was a very gentle person. I am just surprised with her fragility how she could survive [for a while], but many times we encouraged each other. I also had [other] friends, some women who were quite a bit older, and yet, under those circumstances, I learned something, that there isn’t really such a thing as a generation gap. Those things are artificially created, because I did not think that we were concerned at all with our age. And there was another thing. We were not concerned, maybe, with so many superficial things as you are under normal circumstances. Maybe there [in Auschwitz] we came back to the basics and we have seen what is more important. A friend was of utmost importance. If I wouldn’t have been

---

28 Magda was not a member of the Sonderkommando. "Sonderkommando" refers to male prisoners who emptied corpses from the gas chambers and moved them to the crematories. At first, Magda worked on work crews (kommandos) that gathered corpses from the electrified fences and from the barracks and grounds. Later, when the crematories were over-taxed and could not burn all the bodies, she loaded corpses outside the killing facilities into open trucks to be incinerated in the giant death pits. She describes this work on pages 182-187, 200-202, and 223-228 of her book, *Survival* (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005).
encouraged by my friends during these three weeks of utter depression, I don’t know what would have become of me. When I came out of the depression, I tried to encourage others, because we could see in each other the signs [of deep depression]. Now, some could be encouraged and still could not pull through because you had to do it yourself.

There was another friend I had, and she was 27-year-old woman in Auschwitz. She was the one who became mentally insane. Maybe at this point, I have to tell you how did it happen. I really liked her a lot. We talked and we encouraged each other.

What happened to her? She was a very, very pretty girl, too, and a very nice one. She was not only nice looking [superficially], let’s say a face which is nice-looking and rotten inside. [To me,] pretty is something which is integrated in body and soul. I don’t think that you can separate [them], really. That’s the whole human being, it has a body and it has a soul. You don’t just have an outer shell [but also an] inner [heart]. What you have inside is most important and she [my friend] had excellent qualities inside. I liked her as a person. I mentioned that our barracks were very poor. We were 500 in each barrack. [In] the barrack where I was, we were 500 [women] in one [side], then there was a little door in between, and [in] the next [barrack] there were 500 other people.

Due to the fact that we had so many cracks, as I mentioned to you, that we could see the flames of the crematories through the cracks. When it was raining, the rain was coming into our barracks to such an extent that we had there pails and we had to take out the water with those pails. It was tragic in some ways, because we did not have any other pair of shoes, we didn’t have any change [of clothes], so if you got wet it was very bad because you were cold and unpleasant for a long time. So everyone was trying to get out [of] the water.

One night, it was a torrential rain and the water was just coming into the barracks very strongly. So what happened? There is such a thing as a mass hysteria under [those] circumstances. Usually when you have too many people and especially confined, everyone is [tense]. You have more irritability and being on edge. So if somebody starts something, it can take over the whole barrack.

So somebody on the other side started something, saying that we had [a better situation], claiming
that they have more water in their barracks than we do. So they tried to break down the door to come in, and they indeed succeeded, and it was like a stampede coming in.

And my poor friend was standing by the door and in self defense she tried to strangle people and hit them. I don’t blame her because she could have been trampled to death. But a strange thing happened. I think it was a mixture of [confusion] with her. That particular night, did something to her, because afterwards every time that we had a rain and water was coming in, she got into a hysterical fit whereby she tried to strangle somebody. She had a mental breakdown. I think that the pressure, the stress, was getting to her and if she would have gotten treatment, like under normal conditions, [she would have recovered]. I don’t think she was really insane, I don’t think she was psychotic. I think that she just couldn’t stand the other things in the camps and then she manifested all her rage and everything in these outbursts. Because if you are helpless, you want to hit someone. You feel terrible, you feel that you are ready for hitting back and then you can’t move. This [feeling also manifested itself] in my own nightmares; you just had to stand and take the beatings, and I think that’s what happened to her. We never have seen her, she was taken away because she was a bother and I am sure that she ended up in the gas chambers. I had other friends, too. There were two ladies who were from our city, from the same city [Cluj].

But at the same time, for instance, it was different how people reacted in the camps to all this [trauma]. There were people who had less self-control, and I tell you, losing your self-control under those circumstances, you cannot hold against anyone, because any normal person can break down under those circumstances and can lose their self-control. Some people were so hungry, but it was the same hunger for everyone. Some were [un]able [to control it], and it was happening in the camps that they were stealing your bread.

Like, for instance, if you didn’t eat your bread in the evening... Once a day [in the late afternoon] we got that. If you didn’t do that [eat it right away], well, suppose you wanted to hide it under your head [while sleeping], or I don’t know where [else], somebody would pull it out and take it away from you. Now, I personally could never do that because you really shorten the lives of your [fellow] prisoners. I
thought that if I would have had a big casserole of food, I would not have been able to eat it by myself. Maybe I would have given a bit to everyone, but I grew up with lots of sharing and there were others like me. And there were others who changed, who were like me when they came in [the camp] and when they came out, they were different people. It is unpredictable. Human emotions are very complicated. But I would say that it was a friendship, and on the other hand it was lots of suspicion. It was lots of distrust because if you didn’t eat your food, it might have been stolen. You had to watch out for your friends, even. And then in Bergen-Belsen, I experienced it even worse. There you didn’t get any solid foods anymore, and while you were walking with that little miserable soup with less and less rutabagas floating in it, and sometimes you didn’t get that even for four days. Then, as you got your soup, you were practically attacked and your soup was stolen. That happened to everyone, that happened to me. That happened normally, and I remember one night when we arrived in Bergen-Belsen, we were attacked at night by prisoners who did not have any shoes and we had those dilapidated shoes, and I could feel how someone was pulling down my shoe. So you put the questions of friendship. There was a bit of everything. It was depending how the person behaved and reacted, but there was togetherness; they tried to help, on the other hand there was lots of animosities because of the desire to survive. And then everyone thinks [only] for himself or for herself. It’s a very unusual situation, when somebody who would act absolutely normal here [under usual conditions], maybe would act insane over there [in the camps]. It was depending on your tolerance for stress, and on how you acted, and how you were to your fellow men [or women], whether you developed friendships or whether everyone was staying away from you because you were a menace to them. Generally, I think we felt that we shared the same fate. There was, in that sense, a friendship, if you call that friendship.

SL: I have to turn the tape again.

MH: Yes.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2
SL: I suppose another thing I wanted to ask you about. In Auschwitz, specifically, you were confined in barracks according to the fact that you were women, women in certain barracks. Did you have any contact at all with the men prisoners?

MH: As I said, across [from] our barracks there were some Polish [male] prisoners. We could not talk to them or have any contact with them. There was no way. Sometimes, you know what the women did? And I remember it. The scene is so fresh in my mind. Some were begging food from them across the [electrified barbed] wire [fence], but [the men] didn’t have much. But I would say, if they [would have] had something they would throw [it to them]. But who had anything to throw across? No one had. The Polish prisoners, some of them, had more than other prisoners because, you see, Poland was occupied in 1939, and then they really had to be survivors to stand four years of that. So I think the Jewish people have lots of enterprise. You put them on an island, [for example]; after we emigrated [from Romania after the war], we were in Cyprus — I mentioned to you [earlier] that we couldn’t emigrate from Europe right to Israel [Palestine, under British mandate]. Our emigration at the end of 1947, was organized by the Jewish underground [Mossad]. Now, for instance, we were for one year on the island of Cyprus and we were prisoners of the British, because they didn’t allow free emigration. Pretty soon, we were taken there, to this island. We had the sea, the sand, and the tents [in which we lived], and within a few months there was a Jewish enterprise [there] You could find this, and you could find that, and you could find this, and you could trade this, and you could trade that.

So, you had to be a jack-of-all-trades to survive in Auschwitz. If you were working at the crematory [in the Sonderkommando], there was no way that you could survive, [only] up to four months. Or maybe there was a way, if you found connections, I don’t know what connections, if they maybe got some cigarettes or get hold of something to bribe the guards -- maybe the man had more of this [opportunity] than the woman did.

SL: Were you aware of the organizing, swindling, that was going on in the camps?

---

29 Cyprus is an island state in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.
MH: Well, I think that there must have been something going on in the camps; and I think that there must have been also in the forests in Auschwitz. There were rumors that there were Russian guerrillas there, so I was wondering if those weren’t the ones who were bribing actually some of the guards. They were only rumors, but I am sure that they were there. I am sure that there were some things that I don’t know about because… Like if somebody survived four years of Auschwitz, I just don’t know how it was possible, to survive four years there. I can’t conceive that I could have survived four years in Auschwitz. Now in order to survive, you must have a way, not the regular way, but you must have a way out. I can’t tell you about this because I don’t know. But I am sure there was some bribery. For instance, when we arrived to Auschwitz, all our belongings were taken out to the big Canada warehouses. Now the people who worked in the Canada warehouses were the Polish prisoners, the ones who carried the clothing. So I don’t know, maybe they had some more access to clothing and things and maybe they could bribe some of the guards. Not all of them, I am sure very few could be bribed. I don’t know. You find a way of staying alive. But I never learned which way that was. This is my personal opinion, but I think there is a lot of truth in that, I am sure. Perhaps, I am very sure, because there were some prisoners who didn’t look so badly and I didn’t see how [that was possible]. They [must have] had food, you see. Now, I have to tell you something, that in Auschwitz there were also some prisoners who were collaborating [with the SS]. I would say Jewish prisoners who wanted to survive and they were unscrupulous. Like, for instance, there were the Blockaltestes, that [was what] we called them. Now the Blockaltestes, those were people who were ruling over our barracks and there were the Blockaltestes who could be ruling over -- I don’t know how many [other] barracks they were assigned to. Those were women, [in the] camp for women, and I had a photograph, I had a slide with a photograph, of one particular woman who was in charge of my barrack and of some others around me. You see, the barracks had [lettered] names like “C,” they had letters according to the place where you came from; like there was a French [F] and the

30 The warehouses in Auschwitz were nicknamed “Canada,” where possessions stolen from Jewish deportees were stored before being sent to Germany or used by the SS.
Hungarian [H]. And so these Blockaltestes had lots of power. They were very cruel, they would beat you up with no second thoughts. They followed instructions from the German SS women. They wanted to survive, so they got extra portions. They looked good, they were dressed well. And they were just as bad. So there were some who assimilated, they forgot that they were Jews and they acted just like Germans. What happened? For instance, we had two of them in Bergen-Belsen and I know one of them after liberation was actually killed by the prisoners. They got hold of her. [Some Blockaltestes], when the going was bad and they knew the Allied troops are closer, they started to put on prisoners’ clothes to [disguise] themselves. But one particular one was caught. And if you were caught by the prisoners and you had done those things to them before [beatings], you could be sure that you are not going to survive, because there was lots of hatred pent up, a mass hysteria. One starts [the beating] and the others [follow], and they beat her. I know one was killed, she was beaten to death by the prisoners. So, these were the people who wanted to survive at all cost, and they did not think of the consequences, or how they are going to face their conscience, and how they are going to stand up to the consequences of their actions, because you can’t take an action without thinking of consequences. I would have rather died, like in my dream [than collaborate].

Remember I had that dream, about the SS guard [who wanted to take me along], in the nightmare? I was telling him that, “No, I am a poet and I want to write.” And see, in the camps if you were caught with a pen and a pencil, you were executed, you were tortured, it was a horrible thing. Each day they were checking you, especially in Bremen. You remember, where we worked on the streets? And there we had some [chance to find pen and paper in the bombed houses]. I want to talk to you about Bremen later. There [in Bremen] we had some cots, and every day after we left [for work], our mattresses, everything, was practically vandalized, just so they should see if somebody hides a paper or a pencil. So, in my dream, I was asking the SS guard, for letting me out because I want to write. And then he said, “Well, why didn’t you tell me you are a poet? You can make up advertisements for the Reich.” And I said, “Advertisements for the Reich? I would rather stay here and die.”
Now, that's what they did, [the Blockaltestes] they were once making advertisements for the Reich. But then how can they face the consequences of their actions? How can they live with themselves? So, there were some of those kinds. And I think that you had to maintain some of your humaneness and not become a monster. Because why do you survive and [then] become a monster? And how is your conscience, knowing what you did to your fellow prisoners, and you collaborated with the Germans? You participated in the killings. You participated in the torture, you participated in the cruelty. What sort of a Jew are you? I mean, I have to tell you this now. As you see how revolted I am now, after years and years.

The men’s work [was to dig trenches]. We [women, also] had to dig trenches there all the time in Auschwitz, and this was because they needed the corpses to be buried. And there were some [other prisoners], some were working in factories. There were ammunition factories. We were considering [them] the lucky ones, because we thought they were outside [of Auschwitz]. But they had to work very hard themselves, but maybe I think they were the lucky ones, because it was a better place to be than the other thing [inside Auschwitz]. Although there was no guarantee that you survive, anywhere.

**SL:** Do you recall any resistance that may have taken place while you were there? What was your feeling on resisting?

**MH:** Now, as far as resistance, in order to have a resistance you need weapons. I think if we would have had weapons, there would have been a resistance. Now, I don’t know what happened in the other camps because, you see, between the camps there were gates. You could not go out by yourself through the gates. The only people who could go out through the gates were the ones who were carrying the food. So if you were not in that group, you couldn’t go. Even if you carried the food, you were accompanied by guards. I mean, what can you do? So if you didn’t go out, how could you get access to any weapons? In order that we should not have any weapons, do you know what [utensils] we had for food? Did you ever see the things that the army has here? It was a natural [metal] container and it was square, like that, and then you could attach it to your clothing [with a string].
don't even know if we had a spoon. No, we had to drink our food from the container, so that you did not get any utensils, like a knife. Who would give a knife? If we would have [had] knives, I think we would have made a revolution, even with a knife.

But we knew that the only way to survive in Auschwitz was, if you keep your mouth shut and you take everything, because otherwise you were dead. If we would have [had] weapons, we would have started shooting. Probably I would have started shooting. I don't know how I would have reacted, but who knows, if you have a weapon?

For instance, when I was in Auschwitz and I tried to keep my sanity. How did I keep it, after the initial stage from deep depression? And that was terrible, all the things that you had to take there, you feel that you have no way out. As long as you feel that you have no way out and you are trapped, you are depressed. If you don't shake off that feeling, then you are going to die there.

So it was very hard on the other hand to shake off that feeling, because that was the reality. So there again, it was my imagination. I had to live in a kind of a fantasy land, and this is what is nice about spiritual freedom. That was the only freedom we had there. No one could control my thoughts, and thoughts can be very strong. Thoughts can change your attitude.

So, I had an idea. I said to myself, “There must be a way of escaping from here.” And naturally the only weapon you had was this metal thing [lunch container]. But I thought, "Why can’t I take down this metal thing, somehow go nearer to the guard, hit him on his head, [dress] myself in his clothes, take his gun. I never was using a gun but I was bold. But they would have caught me in no time, you know. But I thought I can take his cap and escape.

And I was so preoccupied with that [fantasy], that it really helped me, so that I don’t feel the pain. Just like, for instance, [when] you are involved in something and you forget about time, or for a moment you are so much involved that you can take even pain. And I carried this idea and I was looking at the camp, [thinking], how would it be possible [to escape]? And that [is what] was going on really with me. All the time that I was in Auschwitz I thought I must plan my escape, there must be a way.
Because if I would tell to myself there’s no way, I would die, and I would lose my desire to fight, my desire to live, under those circumstances.

So there were very few cases that [prisoners] could [escape]. I don’t think [there was any] resistance. I didn’t experience any revolution in Auschwitz while I was there. I don’t know what happened in the other camps. There were instances when people tried to escape from Auschwitz, and then it was a big thing. [If] somebody was missing, then we had to stand in line for hours. They were searching, the dogs went there, it was a horrible thing.

I was thinking, my God, if they catch the person [men or women prisoners, and] sometimes they did, they were hanging [them] in public, they were beating them. All were beaten to death. It was horrible to escape. When you have seen that, I think they made their point, because it just proved to you that if you escaped you are going to be mutilated or die, and [be] tortured before that even, just to give a good example. But I heard that there were instances when really, very rarely, somebody did escape. Now [they] must have had inside help. Without that, there was absolutely no chance. How many people had access to inside help? So it was a situation where really there was no way to resist. Then another thing. Not only did you need weapons in resisting, you also had to have the strength. And we were not that strong maybe, physically; or maybe physical strength means you are strong mentally, that you have physical strength. But so many of the people were sick. They had scarlet fever, you know, and typhus, and were dying, and others had to work and dig there and drag corpses, and being beaten and pushed around. Having no weapons, I don’t see how you could make a revolution in Auschwitz. I don’t know what happened [in other places], again. But you see Auschwitz was a terrible camp. I don’t think I could have escaped in my second camp either, or in my third one. I didn’t see any way. It was suicidal. I don’t see how I, personally, without any inside connections, without any weapons, could ever have had the resistance. And the others were in the same predicament. So that’s it.

SL:  I’d like to move on to talk to you about Bremen, since you spent much more time there, really.

MH:  Yes.
SL: I'm interested, though, because you worked in the *Sonderkommando* and because as you said, every four months the *Sonderkommando* was executed.

MH: Yes.  

SL: How was it that you were transferred to Bremen?

MH: There were selections. There were selections each week, [sometimes] three times a week. You had to strip naked and you were selected. Now at one of the selections, I was chosen with 500 other Jewish [women] prisoners to be taken away for forced labor, for slavery really.

SL: They told you that?

MH: No, we had no idea. You never knew what was happening. The selections were automatically, every week, three times a week, you had to march. And if they felt that they want to pick you up here and put [you] there, they could do with you anything they wanted. They wanted to put you to the quarries, they could put you to the quarries. [If] they decided one day that they were fed up with you, they were pointing you [to the left, to the gas chambers]. There were people pointed to the left who had nothing [for no reason], [but] they [the SS officers] just felt like, a whim, they wanted to get rid of you.

SL: So when you were selected...

MH: So, I was selected with 500 other Jewish prisoners for my second camp. I did not know where I am going.

SL: Did you feel they were going to take you to the gas chambers at that time?

MH: You know what I felt? My mind crossed many things. I felt that somehow it was unbearable that way. I thought that this was unbearable, my life there, and I thought anything maybe is better. That's it. I wanted to get away from Auschwitz very badly and I thought there was no way out. When I was

---

31 Magda was not a member of the *Sonderkommando.* "Sonderkommando" refers to male prisoners who emptied the gas chambers and crematories. At first, Magda worked on work crews (kommandos) that gathered corpses from the electrified fences and from the barracks and grounds. Later, when the crematories were over-taxed and could not burn all the bodies, she loaded corpses outside the killing facilities into open trucks to be incinerated in the giant death pits. She describes this work on pages 182-187, 200-202, and 223-228 of her book, *Survival* (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005).
selected, I didn’t know where I am going, but then we were taken into the train and I could see that we leave Auschwitz, we knew that. And I thought that anything is better than Auschwitz.

I had no idea how Bremen is going to be, because I could have died a hundred times in Bremen. Now, in Bremen I was very lucky that I could stand that hard labor for almost a year really, and I just don’t know how I could do that because the winter caught us there and it was really hard. After about six weeks [in Auschwitz], I was taken with 500 Jewish prisoners to Bremen. Now I have to tell you something about Bremen. You will never get that insight, Sara, from anyone.

Bremen was the second largest haven [harbor] in Germany and it was situated near Hamburg, not far from Hamburg. And I have to say that Auschwitz was 30 miles from Krakow. I didn’t mention that to you. It was in Poland. But when we arrived to Bremen, we had no idea where we are taken. You had only considered that they are going to execute you somewhere. [But] you were not rejoicing because you never knew where you are going. That was a horrible thing. You did not know from day to day what you are going to do.

SL: Was it the same type of trip that you had made, as far as the train cars that you were in?

MH: Yes, cattle cars, packed in.

SL: Packed in? No water, no food?

MH: I mean, no. In the transport, they didn’t care for you. You didn’t get any special attention, as you might say, and [it was] very crowded, naturally. And then we arrived to Bremen. When we arrived to the city, in some ways I was thinking, “We are out [of Auschwitz].” We didn’t see the prison camps [anymore], and I thought, “My God I must be lucky because I am out of there.” I thought I was going insane one day there. It’s a very terrible thing. Even one day in Auschwitz is enough to drive you insane.

So we arrived at night [in Bremen] and it was pitch dark. At that time, you know, with the war, there were no lights. The strange thing was, that we went to the streets and there were walls sticking out, like tombstones -- no buildings, ruins, ruins. Bremen looked so bombed out. I think after we left Bremen, I didn’t see a single house which wasn’t touched. And then we were taken from the cattle
wagons and put in open trucks and we were taken to our barracks [outside the city]. Now, when we came to our barracks, I thought this was plush, we had cots. We had cots, and my luck was that I was pretty strong.

As I said, I did lots of sports and I did fencing since I was six [five] years old. I was training for competitions. I don’t think I would have survived all this [otherwise]. And my uncle [Jeno], who was the Romanian champion in fencing, encouraged me about the importance of the physical exercise. This is why I am doing all this long-distance running and everything, because I really believe that you have to be strong physically in order to survive. It is not enough [to have] mental strength, but you [also] have to have physical strength. So I still looked like I was physically good for that work.

So you know what they did to us? Like, for instance, [German business owners could] take out prisoners. Like you have a firm and you don’t have to pay any money, you just take out prisoners and they work for you for nothing. So we were taken into Bremen for that purpose. But what we had to do, was to clear the ruins from the city and then we had to drag the corpses [of aerial bombing victims], the charred corpses, from the streets. [Because] some people didn’t have time to reach the shelters. Sometimes those planes were coming morning, day and night. I never have seen so many bombardments in my life.

So we could have died from the bombs, every single day. And it was a terrible stress, when you heard the sirens and you could hear the zooming of those big heavy fighter planes. And they were glittering, they were like silver on the sky. And we knew those are [planes of the] Allies. And believe me we were rejoicing. We said, “Finally these are our saviors.” We didn’t think even that we can be hit and die in the process and be sacrificed there.

So we were [in our barracks], and there we had, for instance, those cots, it’s true, but the food was a continuation of the food in Auschwitz. The labor was extremely hard. We had to lift heavy stones, pipes, drag the corpses.

What was a day like in Bremen? We were wakened up at 4 o’clock with the same thing, “Heraus, Heraus!” And then if you didn’t move fast enough the guards came in with those rubber sticks and
they were [hitting us]. They didn’t even see where they hit, but they were hitting you. You had to be within minutes ready. [Then] you had the black coffee, [tasting] like dishwater, and then you were taken to your working place. You were taken with the trucks, partly you had to go on foot, and partly you were taken with open trucks.

And then you had to work on the streets and carry those [heavy stones and bricks]. Sometimes we had to go in all the holes, most of the time, because, you had to pull out everything that you could save, the whole bricks and the pipes, so they can re-use them. And sometimes there were incendiary bombs which exploded later, and if you stepped on them [you blew up] -- one of my friends stepped on them and she lost a foot. And if you lost a foot there, you were done with, because you were no good anymore. They brought you to the so-called infirmary. If you stayed long enough in that infirmary you were taken to Auschwitz [and gassed].

The horrible thing there was the hard labor, poor food, [and] we didn’t score any better. Then there were the bombs. So there it was. I remember one day I almost died. Because they had two [kinds of] bunkers, those were the shelters. And they had those that were underground and they had two entrances; and [also] you had big ones that were several stories [tall]. The big ones were the safest ones because even if it was hit, maybe, if you were on the lower level, you still made it. But if you had a hit on the underground ones, you were gone.

SL: I’ve got to interrupt you because I have to turn the tape.

MH: Yes.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1
Okay, we were talking about the bombs.

So one day there was a huge bombardment. The Allied troops were bombarding Bremen morning, noon and night. We spent half of the night also in the bunkers, in the shelter by the barracks. Many times, we came home from hard work as the sirens were going on, but anyway, I never forget that day. We were working by the railroad. That was the worst place that you could work because, first of all, they [the Allies] wanted to cut the communications. So the railroad was hit, and that was a very dangerous place to be.

So what happened on that day? The guards went away to the big bunkers. They would take us to the small ones and close the door on us. There was no way of getting out. We could have been buried alive there. There was only one *Wehrmacht* soldier. See, there was the SS and there were the *Wehrmacht* [Guards]. There was one man, a *Wehrmacht* soldier, who showed that there is a humaneness. He was our best guard and, whenever he came, we really enjoyed that because he was the only one who had some compassion for us. And he was the one who, when it was time for going into shelter, he went with us in the small one. He said he wants to be there where the Jews are, because it seems that the bombs don’t hit the Jews. So he was more of a man than anyone else. So on that day, suddenly, it was a huge [bombardment]. I hope you never hear the whistling sound of the bombs as they fall and there is a big detonation. It’s horrible. I had nightmares about that for years. I was so frightened… And sometimes I was so frightened, and other times I thought, “Maybe the war is going to be over, and we are going to get out somehow.” You had mixed feelings about it. And suddenly that shelter was shaking. The doors of these bunkers were heavy concrete, really heavy. And suddenly the light went out and that heavy concrete door opened up from pressure, and I remember I was praying and I just said, “Oh God, if I have to go, please help me to go fast, I don’t want to become a cripple.” And I was prepared.

---

32 Regular German armed forces.
33 Schutzstaffel, a military organization of the Nazi party. It consisted mostly of volunteers dedicated to the Nazi doctrine.
After this everything stopped again, the planes went, and then we got out. I couldn’t believe my eyes. Half of our bunker was hit. There were Russian prisoners there [and] there were no survivors. Our place, our other half, where I was, was intact. I came out. It was horrifying to see how the streets looked. There was a car, before we went into the shelter. It was in shambles, in rubbles. So that’s what you had to face in Bremen.

The situation got worse when winter came. We were poorly clad, we had no shoes except those wooden Dutch shoes. If you ever had to go on ice on wooden Dutch shoes, and slipping in all directions, and yet you are pushed to go faster, you are in a sweat just not to fall and break something. And we had a guard who was a sadist. There were some guards that I remember. [One of them] wasn’t happy if he didn’t give you a push. Did you go fast enough? Too fast. Did you go slow? Too slow. Never was good. And the other one we called the Raven. She was the devil, devil’s wife, a woman devil, she was one.

She was so cruel. If we found a rag to put around our hands because we did not have any gloves, not to freeze, she would take it away. She said “You work faster if you are cold.” If somebody found on those streets a potato peel and was maybe hiding it and saving it, she would check us. At noon there was a checking, and if she found you with something that you found, that was on you, then she would beat you up. At night they were punishing you. If you had hair, it was shaved, [or] you were put in the punishment cell. She was a terrible thing. I think she was a true psychopath. I am sure she was.

And I remember one day I encountered one of the guards who was a sadist, too. We had to lift a heavy pipe and we thought it was impossible. We were there quite a few women, [but still] we couldn’t do it. And he came over and he said, “Are you having trouble?” I spoke German, I learned some German in school. And he said, “Do you have trouble? Can’t you lift it? I want to help you. I want to count to three. If you didn’t lift it up, I am going to shoot you all.” And we knew he can do it. And we lifted it. I never was free of pain in Auschwitz [or in Bremen] We could hardly turn on our cots. I thought I am going to get away with a broken spine from constant lifting.
Then, one thing I think what saved me, and everyone thought I am nuts [by doing that]. While I was working [in the cold], I tried to [constantly] move my feet, almost like running in place. And [yet] when I came home I was treated a whole year for frostbite.

When I came home from the camps, my hands were constantly swollen and my feet [toes], and sometimes they would get infected. I really had trouble with it, and even now, you can see, [Sara], they get bluish easily. In winter I have to watch, I can get frostbite very easily. So we had to work in the bitter cold. We got up early in the morning, then we had to go on foot in snow and ice, being driven. Then we were taken in open trucks with the wind blowing on us. And then, where did we end up to start our day? On the streets, in the cold. I can’t tell you, Sara, I don’t know how I survived all this. Now that I think back, I don’t know how I could have the strength to survive, maybe the physical and moral strength. Then, as far as our heating, we were not allowed to heat in our barracks. The only thing they did [allow], we would heat two hours in the barracks. We could make a little heat on Sundays. That’s what we had, but no other day, and we were shivering. Can you imagine in cold, in winter, shivering in the barracks? We got very poor blankets, you had one blanket, you were shivering all over with it, and then we were shivering on the streets. Poor nutrition and as time went on, they knew what they were doing with us, that we are going to go down, down, down. How long can you resist such a thing? And some of us got lower sooner than others, others got disabled maybe later. It wasn’t to save us, it was just to take all the juices out from us, and when we are ready, then they want to get rid of us. And we were just hoping that the war will end and somehow miraculously we are going to be liberated some day. But sometimes, there were times when I was asking myself if I would ever get out of there. And I remember, some of my feelings, like one day, and that was in fall, it wasn’t in winter, we were working by the river. [It was the] worst place, it was cold, it was raining, and it was kind of humid, a cold that goes through you, and then we had to form a line. I remember that day. We formed a line and there was a deep truck. We had to load this truck with bricks that were intact. First of all, we had to fish them out from all the holes there, and then we had to stand in line and load that truck. We had no gloves, and then the bricks came, those cold and
rough bricks, one after the other, one after the other for hours. My palms were bleeding with wounds when I got those things [bricks]. My tears were flowing. I thought if my parents would see me now, they wouldn’t believe it. I think that I was never so sad in my life like on that day. I was thinking, “How long am I going to take this?” And little did I know that I am going to be there through winter and I am going to take the harsh winter. So what happened? It was the end of winter, it was actually the end of March, when we really lost quite a bit of weight, we didn’t look good, and we were very much weakened. So they decided that we are not good anymore for that type of work. Besides the allied troops were coming closer and closer to Bremen. They did not want to give us the joy of being liberated, see? So what happened? They took us to Bergen-Belsen. This was a pilgrimage I never want to forget because we did not go by car or truck but by foot. Now can you imagine, poorly clad in rags, with little clothes? There were many of us who never reached Bergen-Belsen because they could not walk anymore [and were shot]. We were driven. But they [the SS guards] were dressed up with boots and warm gloves and everything and we were with the rags being pushed, faster, faster. We walked, I think, 30 kilometers. Bergen-Belsen was not that far from Bremen, I think either 30 or 40 kilometers. Can you imagine what that meant, that march? I call it the death march because [half] of us were left behind [being shot by our SS guards]. I never forget it. And on top of it, who was one of our guards, [but] the Raven. I remember one night they closed us up in a small hut on the road. It wasn’t even a hut, the right name for it. Like a storage room, it just had a roof and sides. They closed us in something like that and I heard later, there were rumors, that the Raven was planning to put us to fire and burn us there alive, but she never really got to do that. We had the worst guards who were coming and chasing us. Finally, those of us who arrived, and I don’t know how I made this journey I was totally exhausted. Can you imagine how? I can never forget that. And if I think back… I don’t know… I have a strong faith and I think that only God could have given me that strength. I think that God was watching over me and I had a purpose, it had a purpose.

34 Magda says now (2009) that recalling this day in 1963 prompted her to begin writing about her Holocaust experiences.
I had to come back alive, and yet I had to taste all the suffering and all the pain and all the agony which my fellow prisoners tasted. So when I came back, then I could convey authentically [what the Holocaust was like]. I had to suffer it, I had to feel it, so I can tell you this is what it was like. It’s not that I heard about it. So I think that I was tried and tested and I was assigned to do something [about it]. I was given a second chance for a purpose, because only then could I survive all this. I was very young. By the time I was liberated I was close to 19 [actually, past 19], and those two years [1944 and 1945] were like a hundred years of my life. Almost two years, not quite, but then each day was like a hundred years under those circumstances. Finally we arrived at night to Bergen-Belsen.

But if you want to, I can insert here a poem about the streets of Bremen before we leave. In your imagination you can be a witness, and you can be there through my poem, “The Streets of Bremen.” I express there everything I want. I also have seen the ravages of war, and I felt compassion for the German people who were innocent. What did a child do, had to do with that, those children who died? Oh Sara, I have seen some older people who were left without a house, without families, they were begging on the streets. I have felt that Hitler, that mad man, should have been recognized because he killed his own people, too, not only the Jewish people. Certainly I can never understand how he could ever take such a power and be able to do something like that. I sometimes wonder, where were all the people to prevent that? Something must have been done, I don’t know what, but he should have been recognized. He should have been [recognized] for what he was. I just can’t understand how something like that could happen.

And I bring you back now to “The Streets of Bremen.”

“The Streets of Bremen” 35
We were five hundred
Jewish prisoners,
Women with lost identity,
Captives of the Nazis,
Transferred from Auschwitz
To the port of Bremen,
To clear the ruins

35 The poem “The Streets of Bremen” is included in The Waltz of the Shadows (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), second edition, on page 47-49.
And the charred bodies
From the devastated streets
Of that doomed city.
We were in the sharp claws
Of the cruel SS guards.
They afflicted us
With insults and blows.
They tortured us with hunger,
Thirst and misery.
We were exposed to hard labor,
Condemned to unjust slavery,
Forced to carry
The heavy remains
Of the shattered buildings
and destined to be annihilated
After our last drops of strength
Were extracted.
Wearing wooden Dutch shoes,
Our feet wrapped in rags,
We dragged ourselves
Through the deep snow.
Icy winds freely cut their pathways
Through our lightly covered
Shivering bodies.
We were tired, weak and weary;
Yet, we maintained our faith
And pride,
Waiting for the Allied Forces
To set us free.
The dark clouds of tragedy
Were hanging over the forsaken city.
I felt sorry for humanity.
The earth was shaking,
Bombs were exploding,
Funnels of black smoke
Were twisting in the air,
Poisoning the atmosphere.
I remember a young girl
Caught by the fire,
Fleeing from her burning home.
Her slender body was trembling
From fear and pain.
She was crying desperately,
“Please save my family —
They are trapped inside”.
But all efforts of rescue
Were in vain.
Encircled by the raging flames
Her house was rapidly collapsing
To the ground —
Her parents were never found.
She wasn’t the only victim
Of the war.
I have seen so many more
During my captivity
In the second largest haven
Of Germany.
Daily caravans of German citizens
Were moving away,
Seeking refuge,
But we had to stay
And bear with dignity
Our solemn destiny;
We were marked for death
And stripped of liberty,
While the world and mankind
Were robbed of beauty,
Peace and harmony —

MH: I feel really that the world was robbed, not only we, and I think that maybe that could have been prevented so that nobody should be robbed. Sometimes I feel that way. If we have a few minutes on that, I would like to read to you “Futility.” It gives you the insight into the victims of war that I was talking in that poem. I remember this little old lady, it’s a true happening on the streets of Bremen.

“Futility” 36
A frail and feeble old woman
Was digging a hole —
Poor soul!
Her face was wrinkled,
Her skin looked shriveled,
Her spine was bent,
Her hair lost its color and shine,
It was as white as snow
At Christmas time.
She wore a pair of old brown shoes.
A shabby gray coat
Covered her thin body.
A wornout black velvet hat
Trimmed with purple lilies
Rested on her head,
Reminding me
Of a faded funeral bouquet.
Her knotty fingers
Were grasping firmly
A small shovel,
Plunging it continuously
Into the hard ground.
She kept on working frantically,
Gasping for air
Now and then
In despair —
As I watched her,
My heart was filled
With compassion and pity.
I asked her kindly,
“Dear Lady,
What are you looking for?
Please save your energy,
Don’t work so hard anymore.”
She straightened and looked at me.

36 The poem “Futility” is included in The Waltz of the Shadows (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), second edition, on page 50.
Her eyes were dull and sad. 
Tears ran down her pale cheeks, 
And pointing to the piles of crumbled ruins, 
She said, 

“This is what’s left 
Of my house—
There is buried my family, 
I am looking for my silver box 
Containing my golden jewelry. 
I could sell it, 
And get some money 
So I could eat 
A few warm meals occasionally, 
And I could have a bed 
To rest my aching bones. 
To hell with wars!”

She shouted—
And she grabbed again her instrument, 
Thrusting it deeper and deeper 
Into the earth, 
Hunting for her lost treasure 
And hoping to find the small remains 
Of a lifetime —
But the hole was empty and hollow, 
Lost was the past, the present, 
And the tomorrow —
I turned to her and exclaimed, 
“Please, tell me your name, 
You and I 
Share a common destiny, 
We both are caught 
In war’s ugly, cruel 
And bloody game—”

MH: And this is the chapter on Bremen. I have seen the ugly face of war and I hope that I never will see it anymore. I felt compassion for mankind, though I wasn’t sure that I would survive. But I felt pity that maybe mankind did not practice more wisdom, because, after all, we don’t live forever. And how nice it would be if we would treat each other with concern, with tact, and with love, rather than trying to annihilate each other. And so are my thoughts now. As I came back from the camp, I don’t want to feel disharmony and hatred in my heart.

SL: I would like to talk to you about Bergen-Belsen. You arrived there at night.

MH: We finally arrived to Bergen-Belsen at night. As we entered the camp, it was totally dark and I could feel in the air a terrible smell of decay. I couldn’t place it, from where it comes from. I had a horrifying experience on the first night. I had a friend, you asked me about friends, her name was Ilus. She could have been my mother in age, close maybe, not quite. She was a woman who was a true survivor. She somehow felt sisterly, or maybe even like I would have been her own daughter. She
felt that she wanted to protect me. She was really a great help. She came back [from the camps] and she is at the present time in Israel.

I had no idea how, [but] Ilus got hold of a candle and matches. She must have found them on the streets of Bremen. We were together in Bremen all this time. I met her [in Auschwitz] and she became my friend. In each camp I acquired a new friend. And speaking of friendship, she was a dear friend to me. She was of great help to me. She also was a very intelligent woman. She was the type [that, if] you would put her in a situation to solve a problem or closed her into a place, she would try to go around it or find a way that she can open a door without a key. Ilus was very suspicious and we were wondering from what the smell comes.

Now the way we were treated in Bergen-Belsen, the first impression horrified me, too. We were thinking that we are going to be taken there to be executed. Those were our feelings, the way that we were treated on the road and then as we were treated there. We were pushed into barracks which were filled and people were stepping on other people who were screaming. Fortunately we were at the end of this line, which was pushed in a barrack which was full to capacity. So there was no place, fortunately, for us to go into that barrack and we had to sleep outside.

I never slept in a barrack in Bergen-Belsen. I was outside, on the ground, all the time. I was for three weeks in Bergen-Belsen and you couldn’t survive more than that time in that camp, because we were brought there to be killed with starvation, and typhus was raging. I didn’t know where I was exactly, but I knew on that night that we were not in a very good place.

So Ilus said, “Look here, there is a tent.” It was dark. “Maybe we go in there, so it would be a little warmer.” I had no idea that Ilus had a small candle and a match. I had no idea that she could take the courage to go into that tent and light it up. She came back within three minutes and her face was all white. I said, “Ilus what is that?” She said, “Do you realize what is in that tent?” She said, “It’s piled with corpses.” We were sure, Ilus and I, that we are going to be shot and then stored in those tents.

What else?
When morning came, we had a view of the camp and we have seen the first prisoners. They looked like walking skeletons, in the last stages of starvation. Their eyes were sunken. I have never seen anything like that in my life. Sunken so deeply in their sockets, they looked like dying. I can recognize when somebody’s dying. And that’s what horrified us most. Now you can’t believe it, Sara. When I come back to those [images], I have horrible memories from Bergen-Belsen. I have seen dead bodies on the ground. It was a barren ground and it was littered with bodies. We had to sleep next to those dead bodies. The stink was terrible. They did not give us fluids, [only] once in four days. This is when people would take anything from the other prisoners. You got a little soup with a rutabagas, you had to kind of swallow it up in minutes, otherwise it was taken away from you. At night, I told you, those [Russian women] prisoners, they tried to take down our shoes. It was a horrible place. I have never seen, I mean, anything like that. The corpses were in the last stages, some of them, in decay. It was like a nightmare. I couldn’t believe it was happening. Then I was in the second [week], a week passed and we were getting weaker and weaker and weaker. This was the second day, of the second week, when I thought, “If I don’t escape from that camp, I’m going to be killed. I am not going to survive.” And I didn’t care. It was suicidal, but I thought, “I am going to take a chance, because at least I can say I tried.” I tried to escape twice from Bergen-Belsen. The only people who had access to go to the gates were the ones that, like in Auschwitz, were carrying the food. I smuggled myself [among Polish prisoners], I don’t know how I had that courage, to smuggle myself. I could have been shot if I could have been observed among Polish prisoners. How unfortunate it was that I did not know one thing. When you get to the gates you are checked. The SS woman came out and asked the prisoners, “Is there any stranger among you?” They were very frightened because they thought she noticed there is a stranger, because they knew who was working, but I had no idea. So I was picked out as somebody who didn’t belong there, and I was beaten up [by the SS woman] from the gate all the way to my camp. My friend thought I am going to be beaten to death.

SL: I am going to stop you, I am running out of tape.

MH: Yeah. END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 2
TAPE 6, SIDE 1

MH: So, unfortunately, I was caught, and I had such a wild desire to escape that I tried it again, with the French prisoners. I smuggled myself in. I was really unlucky that the same SS woman came to the gate and she recognized me. She pulled me out. I was never beaten like that in my life. Back to the camp. And she said, “I'm going to shoot you if I ever catch you, [you will be] instantly shot.” But you know, I often wondered [that] for such an offense, how come I wasn't beaten to death or I wasn't shot? So, you see, there was a purpose [in that]. I had to experience almost being killed, and I had to experience to be beaten up, to bleed, everything, so that I know how it feels like. I had to taste all the bitterness. I realized [that] I can't do it [escape]. I looked pretty badly at the end of the second week. Actually, I was able to walk, but my walking was affected. I could feel a difference in my motor reflexes.

And then one day, they [two women SS guards] gathered us, those who were sleeping outside, and they said they are going to bring us into the barracks. I was very suspicious. We thought that we would go to our execution. That was something that I never forget. There were certain pictures that will haunt me for the rest of my life.

We were taken to the other barracks, and then I could see the barracks as we came closer to it. And suddenly, I have seen a woman being thrown out of a barrack like a piece of garbage. She had the typhus and her cheeks were red from fever. In some ways, it was the last color, when you burned up before you die. And her eyes looked glassy.

And then, there was an SS woman, we called her the “Angel of Death.” She was [of] extreme beauty, and that's where I learned that beauty, if you are rotten inside, it's ugliness. She was ugly, although her exterior was beautiful. And she had a little handgun, she was keeping it here [on her hip], attached to her skirt, and she was wearing boots. She tried pushing us in. I had the same experience as upon arrival, pushing us into a barrack that was filled. And when I came to the barracks, they had cots, but there [the] people [were] infested, that was the typhus barrack. They brought us in so that we get the disease and die. And this was the closest call to death for me.
[The SS woman] looked at me, pointed, and said, “You,” she said, “You go up there.” It was the third cot and I had seen the typhus woman dying and I knew [that] you get it from lice. The lice carries [it] and it’s a terrible disease [manifesting in high fever and hallucinations] and you are in delirium. After liberation, I was in the hospital helping the typhus patients, after I recovered. It’s a horrible disease. Very many died. Our resistance was low. I felt that if I go up on that cot, I am going to die. That’s why, I tell you, I follow my intuition. Whatever I feel is right for me to do. I had a feeling that I shouldn’t go up there and I should run. I started running through that huge barrack, elbowing everyone, just like a madness and I was heading toward the end of the barrack. What brought me to the end of the barrack, what power pulled me, I have no idea. The SS woman was running after me, but there were so many people, she got herself caught in that. At the end of the barrack, it was an open window, and I jumped out of that. I was hiding through the night. They never caught me. I can never forget it. If I would have been caught, I would have been shot. That is 100 % [certain] that I would have been shot. And do you know when happened this [incident]? [It was in the second week] before liberation. In the meanwhile, another week [passed]. It was the end of the third week. I was getting so weak that I could not even go [move] anymore, so I felt confined. I was lying among the corpses. I remember, next to me there was a woman who was dead, and I don’t know from where she had it, but she had a scarf on her head. That was her only treasure, and she was lying there. And I could just crawl. I couldn’t get up. I felt those rags [on me] were [like] fifty pounds. I looked at myself. I was shrunken, I could see every single bone, my ribs. It was terrible. And yet, you know, I had a strong desire to live, and on that day I felt that I have to prepare for death because there was no way out from there. I have to accept [it], finally. I fought that, I fought that, I wanted to live, but that’s it, [I thought.] “Maybe I am destined to die?” and I couldn’t accept that. I was looking for a symbol of life, and I could see only those dead bodies. You know, in some places you had pyramids of dead. Dead bodies piled up in pyramids. When they came --- the British [liberators] came -- there were pyramids of dead bodies. If somebody died, [we prisoners] stripped their clothing, and put up [the corpses] on a pile until they were going to be buried. There were 10,000 unburied corpses [actually, many more] when the British
came in. And then, I was just looking for a living thing, and I love nature, I love trees. I feel that we are all a part of the universe. Maybe a tree has a different outer form, but it is as living as you and me. I felt a kinship, a friendship, towards a birch tree I had seen in the camp. And my eyes fell on it, and my goal was to reach that tree. I wanted to reach that tree. And I could see that it was April, and the first new buds [had appeared] on that tree. And I was dragging myself on all fours until finally I reached that tree.

I can never forget that moment. I practically embraced [it]. I felt love for that tree, all the love in me I conveyed. And then I closed my eyes and I was really ready to die. I felt that this is it, the end of my rope. And I felt at that point, I felt an apathy, from weakness. I felt apathetic, I felt no joy, I felt no pain any more, I felt no hunger any more, nothing any more. I closed my eyes and I was thinking. I revised my life and I thought that if I would have a second chance, I would do things maybe differently than I did. If I would have a second chance, I would live life fully and try to make the most of it. I looked back through most of my childhood. I followed my life, just like somebody who is going to part and looks at the house where she grew up and says goodbye. That’s the way I felt. And I felt such a sadness that we were sentenced to death only because we were a part of the Hebrew generation. What crime [did we commit]? We were innocent people.

And it horrified me, the fact that I am going to be put on that pile [of corpses] and maybe pushed into a mass grave or maybe cremated. And nothing is going to remain from me, even my dust is not going to be respected, because I knew what’s going to happen with my dust. It was a horrible feeling. I was wondering what it is like to die. So I closed my eyes and I sort of gave myself to death. And believe me, Sara, there was a great miracle.

I heard a commotion, I didn’t know where it was coming from. I thought I am hallucinating or sensing that’s the way death is coming. I opened my eyes and I have seen the big elevated [towers]. We had elevated towers in Auschwitz [Bergen-Belsen] and in those elevated towers, there were guards with machine guns. I have seen the guards disappear and the British tanks coming in to our camp, and I realized it is liberation day. I couldn’t believe that it was true.
I was so weak I couldn't even get up and run. The people who came later than I, they could still walk but I couldn't. I just was lying there and I didn't feel any joy. I was frightened. For the first time I realized maybe my parents didn't make it. What's going to happen? And then I looked at the barren ground of Bergen-Belsen. It was covered with the dead, the sick, and the dying. I was thinking that many of us were crushed by the unkind hand of fate, really. And I felt many times that the bells of victory would be too late for them, they are not going to hear it anymore. At the same time, in that minute I felt that myself and those who survived will mourn forever all those left behind.

And this is why, this is where, I made myself a strong commitment: I am never going to forget them, and as long as I am alive and I have a second chance, I am never going to let them be forgotten. The only thing I can keep alive is their spirit, so that the world, the people, should know that there were great martyrs here who died innocently because they were of the Hebrew generation, they were Jews. I thought, if it's going to be in my power, I am going to stir up mankind's respect for them, so that it should never happen again. And this is where my commitment was born, on the day of liberation [April 15, 1945]. Naturally, after liberation, we were quarantined because there was [an outbreak of typhus]. What was the day of liberation like? My poem is going to express it. But what happened in the first hour? Those who could run were raiding the warehouses. They were pulling out dishes, making fire outside, cooking potatoes. Many died because you are not supposed to start eating like that, you can't take that. I couldn't even eat. I didn't even have hunger. That saved me in many ways. They [the prisoners] came out with clothing. I couldn't even carry anything. I couldn't even run. So we were stationed [in former SS barracks]. Two sick women, they had typhus, and then eight of us others who looked like we were pretty weak. We were put in one room, ten women, and there were only two beds, which were given to the ones who were gravely sick. They made it [recovered], they made through the typhus. And naturally the lice [was a big problem], we were lice-infected, it was terrible. It took me three months to look like a human being. It took me a year to get rid of the bloating after I came back. I had abnormal bloating, and when I came home, my mother was surprised that I looked bloated. That wasn't normal. It was the effect of starvation. First of all, I
was for half a year in Bergen-Belsen after liberation, and it took me almost a year at home to get rid of all the after-effects -- my frostbite and everything, after I came back.

After about three months [after liberation], I started coming to myself, and then I wanted to volunteer to work in the typhus hospital [at Bergen-Belsen]. And people thought I must be crazy, because I should be lucky that I didn’t get the disease. And I am going to [expose myself to] it voluntarily? But fortunately I didn’t get the disease, and I am so glad that I did that [work at the typhus hospital]. I also was cleaning rooms for the translators because I could get a few extra cookies. And I am glad I did that, I am glad I helped some of my fellow prisoners. They shared with me their lost souls, their last dreams, their last desires before dying. And I promised them, I said, “I am not going to let you be forgotten. If I am going to go back [home] maybe one day, I am going to tell [your stories].”

Do you know how many years had to pass [to keep that promise]? The first time when I told [about the Holocaust] was when I wrote my book [The Waltz of the Shadows] and when I had my first speaking engagement; it was seven years ago [1973]. Until then I was silent, but I was writing. I was writing through ’63, but I was silent. And I think that maybe [I had to be silent until] the time when I healed enough so that I can do justice to it. Because if you hurt too much you don’t want to [talk about it]. You could bleed to death in some ways [by talking about it]. So you have to be strong enough, so if you bleed you still don’t bleed to death, when you talk about it. It takes a long time. You never forget it. You heal, the wounds heal, but the scar is always left behind. That is going to be just a reminder that never disappears.

I was wondering if you would like me to read to you my poem. I have two poems that I would like to conclude the camps with. It’s “Anguish” and “Liberation.”

Anguish was my first reaction, my struggle to survive and my unsuccessful attempt to escape, and I thought that I am going to be in the grave. And then on liberation day I was already disintegrating and I thought I am going to die and I had to accept that, but I was liberated. I think this would be the best thing to conclude the camps.
“Anguish” 37

In the silence of the night,
My heart is filled
With sorrow and fright.
I am wide awake,
Repeating over and over,
“Why didn’t I escape?”
I am a victim
Of persecution,
Locked in this horror camp
Of execution,
Destined to perish
By starvation.

I am falling slowing
Into a mental stupor,
What am I guilty of?
My crime is my religion,
My faith in God
And my belief
In love and compassion.

In the hands of the SS monsters
Is my fate
O Lord, give me strength
To bear the strain,
Don’t let my mind disintegrate
Help me to restore
The broken pieces
Of my shattered life,
Cure my sore,
Ease my pain,
Liberate me
From the devil’s domain.

I feel so weary, so strange...
King of the Universe,
Only you can change
My destiny.
Please listen to my laments,
Hear my cry,
And don’t let me die

“Liberation” 38

The putrid and sickening odor
Of decaying bodies
Fills my nostrils
I lie on the bare ground
Next to the high piles
Of stripped naked
Decomposing corpses
In the midst of the German
Extermination camps

38 The poem “Liberation” is included in The Waltz of the Shadows (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), second edition, on pages 63-65.
Of Bergen-Belsen,
Waiting to die ——
I watch the walking skeletons
Passing me by;
They are my fellow prisoners ——
I listen to their cries,
Their sunken eyes
Resemble mine.
We are the innocent victims
Of the mad demons
Of history.
I feel the cold touch
Of the gaping earth below,
And I know
That soon I will go
To join my dead companions
And all those I loved and lost ——
Soon, into eternal darkness,
I will be tossed.
I look up to the blue sky,
Saying “Goodbye” to life,
Asking in desperation:
“Why are we condemned unjustly
To torture, to death,
To starvation?”
We are punished
For our faith in God,
And for being a part
Of the Hebrew generation.

The old birch tree
Next to me
Is witnessing my agony,
With my thin shivered arms
I struggle to embrace
The wrinkled trunk
Of my silent friend,
Whispering faintly,
“Come Death, and take me”.

But suddenly a warm current
Is passing through my body,
I see the bright light of Life
Chasing away the dark night
Of Oblivion,
Saving me from Death’s pavilion.
A loud voice hits my ears:
“Drop your fright and fears,
We defeated Germany!
We are British fighting soldiers
Bringing you the news of victory!
YOU ARE FREE!”

I see the advancing
Heavy British tanks,
And to God, I say my thanks ——
Then I look around,
My eyes follow
The sick, the dying, and the dead
Stretched out on the hard ground.
My heart fills up
With awe and sorrow ———
Many of us were struck and crushed
By the unkind hand of fate.
For them the bells of Victory
Ring too late.
And others, like me,
Who survived,
Will mourn forever
All those left behind ...

MH: [My poem] “Departure” [describes] the lonely months I spent in Bergen-Belsen, almost six months before I came home, where I put the question, “What am I going to do if any of my family members are not alive? Who am I going to find home?” And there was a nearby birch forest where I was walking and I had a love for the forest. When I left Bergen-Belsen, I looked back and I said goodbye to my forest and that’s where I cried, when I cried, because those [birch trees] were my silent friends.

“Departure” 39
After my liberation
I spent six months
In Bergen-Belsen,
Recovering slowly
From the harmful effects
Of starvation.
During this period of waiting
And desolation,
I would walk daily
To the nearby birch forest
In search of peace
And consolation.
The tall slender trees
Listened so often to my cry
Witnessing my loneliness.
There I would express
My gratitude to God
For not letting me die.
Surrounded by the beauty
Of his creation
I found solace
And a few moments
Of joy and happiness
In my isolation.
Then, one day I was ready
To return to my native country,
Hoping to find survivors
In my family,
Beseeching the Lord
To grant me courage,
Strength and tenacity

To face reality.
With deep sorrow
I left behind
Those I loved and lost,
And all the innocent victims
Of persecution,
To follow my unknown destiny
With the “Ghost of Memory”.

MH: And this is why my book is titled *The Waltz of the Shadows*. These are the shadows who are going to be with me forever. The shadows of the German concentration camps, the shadows of the Holocaust, and I don’t think I could find a better way to close up [the chapter on the Holocaust]. If you would like me to share some of my songs along with you, I would gladly do.

I just have to tell you that after I was ready to go home, as we were repatriated [to Cluj, Romania], the Joint\(^{40}\) organization and the Red Cross were of great help to us. And [when] my time came to go, my quota came up, I had a great conflict. I was wondering, should I emigrate to the United States? Because I could have done it. The Joint organization helped young people. [Or] should I go to Israel [Palestine], where I have some [relatives]? We have some relatives [there] who are Zionists and who were there for a long time. Or should I go home? I followed my [intuition]. I looked into myself and I was wondering, what do I really want? And I ignored everyone’s advice against it. I wanted to go home and look for survivors. And I am glad I did, because I did go home and I found my mother.

That gave me a lot of strength, and I found a home. I found my liberty, I found love, I found all the things that I was dreaming of, and then I went back to school.

[During] this hard time, we were totally robbed. My mother worked as a cashier in a restaurant. We had very little money, but I felt we had a lot. We had each other, and I went back to school and I got a scholarship for myself. I went to medical school and I had a love for medicine. Unfortunately, I couldn’t finish because of circumstances. We emigrated [from Romania], and then we had hard times.

---

\(^{40}\) The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)
And I am glad I did [go to medical school], because I met my husband at the [university], who was in his last year of medical school at that time. I am glad that I had the opportunity, at least, to have one year of medical school. At least part of my dream came true.

And then we left Europe and I told you earlier, that we wanted to emigrate to Israel [Palestine]. At that time there was no [country of Israel]. It was Palestine [under British mandate] and no free immigration [was allowed]. Then we were caught by the British [and held in captivity on the island of Cyprus for a whole year], so we had the story of *Exodus*, which is another story. By the year of 1949 we entered Israel and both my children, Henry and Monica, my son and daughter, were born in Israel. My son was born in 1949, about two weeks after [our] arrival there [actually, three weeks]. Five years later my daughter [was born, in 1954]. Then we were 10 [9] years citizens of Israel before we came to the United States.

I am glad we are in a free country and in a country where we won’t ever experience discrimination, and where we hope our children will have a better chance. Things like that [the Holocaust] in a country like the United States, never happened. I hope it will never happen, and I think that if we are going to watch for the democracy, then this is not going to happen in this country, where you have many people who emigrated from all over Europe, and actually the Pilgrims were Europeans. So that’s the way the country started and we are very happy here.

**SL:** Actually I am going to be asking you about all that time. I think it would be a good idea to stop now and take a break and come back later.

**MH:** Yes. And then maybe I can share one poem. And I think we are friends. I am glad you have allowed some poetry, and maybe in the second half I would like to share a little with at least one poem from my second book.

**SL:** Okay.

**MH:** It is just a little more elating and it’s again about love and the collection of poems which I wrote for my husband. So maybe that’s what we are going to do. Thank you.

**END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1**
SL: I've gotten you up to the point where you've been liberated and you spent that time working in the typhus hospital and I think that, just to expedite things a bit, you had a recovery period and you stayed in Germany and you were talking about the fact you had to make a decision.

MH: Yes, a decision.

SL: But you did then decide to return to Cluj.

MH: Yes.

SL: What was that like, how did you make the trip, and what happened before you got back?

MH: I see, you mean you would like to pick up from where I found out that my quota came [repatriation quota from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, permitting me to return home] and I made my decision and I was ready to go?

SL: Yes, how did you get back, what was…

MH: How did I get back. Yes. Well, my quota came and I had to make a decision because I wouldn't have had another chance. This was the last quota. I pulled it out [had delayed the decision], so that I knew that if I don't make my decision, I won't have a chance to get back. So, I [decided to go] back, although I was very uncertain if I am going to find any survivors. But all this time in the camp, I was struggling to survive, not only for my sake but for the sake of my parents, because I was their only child. I felt a great responsibility towards them, and so I wanted to see if my father and mother did make it.

The trip home was very uncomfortable again because we were taken in cattle wagons, because there were no other passenger cars available. After the war, the communications were very bad and it took us about two-and-a-half weeks, or something like that, to get home, because [of] the slow-moving cattle wagons. It took an eternity to get back. And then we had to stop. We had so many stops. We had to wait again for connections. So it was a very tiresome journey.

Again the Red Cross was very helpful because they helped to accommodate us. We had absolutely no money, we had no way of providing accommodations for ourselves. And then, in all the stops in
different places, we went to different cities in Germany, and I could see how Hamburg looked. They were totally bombed. I tell you it was like coming through a cemetery, so much destruction. And finally, after about two-and-a-half weeks or three weeks, I can’t recall exactly, that it took us to get there.

I had mixed feelings on the way. I was wondering as we were going closer, coming closer and closer home, if I did make the right decision. When we were very close, we were in Budapest. And Budapest, it’s 200 miles or more from our city [of Cluj]. It is not much distance. It is not a big distance. And I knew that from Budapest to our place there would be no stops, so within a short period of time I’m going to be home. For the first time, I really felt great anxiety, because I did not know anything about my parents or my family. It was a strange happening. I tell you, people say there are no miracles on this earth, and I contradict that. If you believe in them [miracles], tell me that, because it happened just like it was a miracle, my liberation and my survival. It was a miracle, for finding my mother at home and hearing news about her when I was in Budapest, so close. I didn't hear a word until then.

I heard the first news about her in a very strange way. We were supposed to get the next connection in the morning from Budapest to Cluj. Again the Red Cross gave us accommodations, very simple ones. Then it was afternoon, and we were supposed [early that afternoon] to pick up a package from the Red Cross and we had to walk there. Naturally we had no transportation, and it was a few blocks away. It was the first time that I ever was in Budapest, and I was enjoying a little bit my walk. We went in a group and I got my package and we got a little money, very little, but it was very helpful. On my way back I don’t know what got into me, I had an intuition. You see, I believe in intuition and that sometimes you should listen to your intuitions. I thought, “Well, I never was in Budapest, why don’t I just go a little bit on my own and inquire where was the big bridge over the Donau [River]41?” - a famous bridge and I never had seen that, and that was kind of an unusual thought, too. Why did I want to go in that direction? I had no idea. So I started and my friends left and I said, “I want to

---

41 The river Danube
browse a little bit.” After I went a few blocks, I wanted to explore a little bit and I [thought that I] can find my way back. But you know, when you are in a city for the first time, and Budapest was considerably bigger than Cluj, I didn’t realize that I can get lost. At one point, I knew I was [lost], because I had no idea where I was, and so I tried to find my way. After a while I realized that I just have to ask for directions.

I went into one of those side streets, and I have seen a gentleman coming, and [I thought,] “He is the first person I am going to ask about directions.” And as he came closer, I had a strange feeling that I have seen him somewhere before. He came closer and closer and finally he stopped, and I stopped. We looked at each other, and to my great surprise, he was our next door neighbor [from Cluj].

I can’t explain to you, Sara, how did this happen, that I had to be at certain time at a certain place? I believe in fate and destiny. He was surprised, he didn’t think that I made it, neither did I think he survived, and we kind of rejoiced, like meeting an old acquaintance.

The first thing he was telling me, the first question he asked, “Do you realize how happy your mother is going to be, seeing you coming home?” And I said, “My mother? Did you see my mother?” And he asked me, “You didn’t hear anything from your mother? Surely, I have seen her.” I said, “Where did you see her?”

He moved from Cluj to Budapest. He lost his entire family. His wife was dead. He had, I think, two kids, they were dead, and he moved away from there. I came at the end of fall, and he said that in the summer he was in Cluj and he was on the square. We have a main square, and he met my mother on the square. They were talking and my mother said where she lives. I got the address from him. And I was so flabbergasted, I couldn’t believe it was true. He looked at me, and he said, “I can see that you don’t believe me. I have seen your mother, it was your mother.” Finally, I believed him and did not dare to rejoice because I thought, “What if he is wrong? What if he changed in the camp and is telling me a big lie?” I couldn’t believe it.

I was very excited [about it] and when I came back to our accommodation [with my old neighbor], I said to everyone, “I found my mother’s address, I can’t believe it.” So, when I finally arrived to Cluj, I
was with a friend, one of the other women who were coming, too, from Bergen-Belsen. When we arrived, this friend of mine said, I looked so pale and she was worried about me. She said, “Would you like me to go over with you there [to your mother's place]?” Unfortunately, she lost her mother, and I said, “Yes.” So she came over with me, and I can never forget that.

Sara, it was just like I would have re-lived it today. We couldn't afford the apartment we had before, because it was too large and there was no money, so my mother [had] moved in a smaller place. And she came [down to meet] me. It was an apartment house and you had to ring the bell before you can get in, you couldn't just walk in. Most of the time, in those apartments you couldn't just walk in.

There was a little door[bell] that you had to ring, and so I rang the bell. Then I saw the place had two stories. Then I have seen a window opening up on the second floor, and I heard my mother’s voice [saying], “Who is there?” I thought I am going to faint there. I always try to practice self-control, to exert self-control, but when I had seen my mother popping out of that window and I heard her voice, I broke down into hysterical sobs, crying, crying, crying. I couldn't help it. I am not a hysterical person. And then I remember my mother was practically running down the stairs, and I was running to her. I couldn’t believe it, my mother was terribly thin, she looked sick. I thought she was starving, she was very ill. It was a miracle that I have her, and I do appreciate her. She was very depressed. I heard she worked, but she went everyday through winter with a little photograph, as she heard that people are coming home [from the camps] to ask, “Did you see that girl? Did anyone see [her]? Were you in the camps with that girl?”

The survivors who came back and my neighbor said, “Your mother would have gotten insane if you didn’t come home.” You see, it was a call for me, I had to come home. I felt that I have a responsibility all this time in the camps, and I did not want to leave my commitment to my parents and my responsibility. So we finally [were reunited]. I was so happy, and I think my friend envied me because she wasn't that lucky, to find her mother.

Then we went in [to her apartment] and the first moment I can never forget. For the first time, Sara, I went into a home and I recognized old pieces of furniture. There it was, our dining room table.
Mother could save that. And then our bed, a heavy bed. And it was such a modest place. We had one room and a little kitchenette and the bathroom was even outside [in the hall]. But in that room, there was the touch of my mother, the neatness, the cleanliness. The one thing that struck me right away was my piano. My God, I was fond of music. What I did, I went to my piano and I kissed it. I kissed every single piece of furniture, like welcoming a friend. And my mother kept on saying, “Are you all right? Are you okay?” I was crying and kissing my furniture, and I said, “Mother, these are tears of joy. I am home.” I couldn’t believe it.

I have an unusual mother who would sacrifice herself for me. If you would ask her, “[would] you sacrifice yourself for your daughter?” she would do it for me. All the wonderful things that she did, always for me. She knew I loved chocolates and I loved candy. She was piling up chocolate and candy just in case I came home. She had secondhand clothing that she thought it would fit me, just in case I come home. Everything was “just in case,” and as I was looking at [everything], I was thinking, “My God, what would have happened to my mother if I didn’t [return]?” I felt I did the right thing.

We had so little, but we had so much. Just having electricity, going into a bed with white sheets, it was such a luxury. And what did I do? It was [such a] joy. We were talking through the whole night, we couldn’t even close our eyes. We were cuddled together in one bed, I didn’t even want to go into another bed because I wanted to be as close to my mother as I could. And I missed [her] so much, that tender touch of love. I missed that a lot. And from whom else can you get that in a sincere way but your parents?

Then, the first weeks at home. If you would ask me what it was like, I felt many times that I walked with pain but this was a different pain, it was grief and loss. And the first time that the loss really came home to me was in the first week I was home. It was the first day, great joy in visiting with my mother, and then it came the Friday night. I don’t have to tell you about Friday night and the lighting of the candles. As I said before, my mother would do this religiously every weekend. She did it after the war and she fixed a nice meal, and it was nice to eat with a fork. She lighted the candles and I
looked at my mother and I looked at the empty place of my father, and I was absolutely heartbroken.

I can never forget that feeling of loss I felt. I was wondering, how will I ever get over that? Naturally, my mother had the same thoughts and we both were crying. I was thinking back how many times I evoked that picture in the camps, when the going was so bad that I felt my struggle was in vain, and I evoked the picture always from home. I would evoke my mother, my father, and the Friday night evenings, enjoying the meal, my mother benedicting the candles and kissing me and my father. And there it was, but things were not quite the same.

I think that I could insert at this time, I want to read to you this little poem, which is for my mother, and my mother is here now visiting. I wrote this especially for her and quite a few years ago. This is in my book, and I sent it for her for Rosh Hashanah\(^\text{42}\) as a gift from me. This poem is titled “Shabbat Lights” and it has three parts, really; the past, the present and a little glimpse of the future.

**“Shabbat Lights” \(^\text{43}\)**

Every Friday night  
My mother would pray  
By the candlelight...  
I remember her slim figure;  
Her shiny black hair  
Was lightly covered  
With a dainty lace;  
She wore a happy smile  
On her pretty face.  
In a soft voice,  
With closed eyes,  
She uttered slowly  
Her words of benediction:  
_Blessed art Thou,_  
_O Lord, our God,_  
_King of the Universe,_  
_Who has sanctified us_  
_By thy laws_  
_And commanded us to_  
_To kindle_  
_The Sabbath light_

Then, she kissed me,  
And my father,  
With affection ——  
I saw the white bread  
And the red wine  
On the table.

\(^{42}\) The Jewish New Year.  
\(^{43}\) “Shabbat Lights” is included in _The Waltz of the Shadows_ (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2005), second edition, on pages 71-72
The plates, the glasses,
And the silverware
Were neatly spread
On the handstitched cloth.
I looked at my parents,
Feeling such a deep love for both.
I was only seventeen years old,
But I knew by then
That love is more precious
Than diamonds or gold.

I saw my mother
Two years later...
Still lighting the candles
Each Friday night.
But tears and sorrow
Shadowed our weekly ritual —-
We’d learned my father had died
During his captivity
In the extermination camps
Of Germany.

And now, so many years later,
I have a family of my own
With children who are fully grown.
My mother still lights
The candles in her home,
But she is all alone...

MH: Sometimes, the pain was almost unbearable, really. I would say there were very depressing three weeks at home. I talked to you about the depressive three weeks in Auschwitz. The aftermath of the joy of coming home was the three weeks of solitude that I wanted to have. Solitude to think, solitude to mourn. I was mourning for my family. I went to my grandparents’ yard and their orchard was there, my old favorite pear tree, but so many of my loved ones were not there. Every street I went to, I remembered my friends. It was a torture. I decided I am not going to go out on the streets. I was sitting at home. It was cold weather because in Cluj fall is very cold, and rainy, lots of rain. That was gloomy weather and also you have snow very often in October, and in November you have quite a bit of snow.

I was just sitting on this cold fall day near our ceramic furnace and thinking, mourning, grieving. It was three months spent in contemplation and I think I needed that time for recovery. I had the chocolates, and I had a great time eating chocolates and reading my book, being near the warmth, being with my mother. My mother would have to work pretty hard, and sometimes she had to come [home] at 12 o’clock [midnight], the restaurant was open so late. So towards evening I would walk
over so that my mother doesn’t have to walk by herself at night. We didn’t have any car or anything so we walked together.

And after the third week, my mother was watching me and she said, “Well, don’t you want to go out a little bit? You used to like to go out for a walk. [Do] you want to see some friends, maybe look around?” I said, “What friends? Do I have any friends who returned?” And I didn’t need any. And so Mother said, “Well you have to get out a little.” She was very worried for me because I was, I was mourning, I knew I am all right, I just needed that time. And then finally my mother asked me a question. “What do you want to do now? You, a Jew, do you think you can go back to school?”

Suddenly, it was just like an awakening to me [when] my mother mentioned, “Do you want to go back to school?” Suddenly I remembered my father. He always tried to help me, and during the discrimination he always said that “Knowledge is precious. You should never give up knowledge for anything. You should try to get as much knowledge as you can and have a profession, especially as you are Jewish. Have a practical thing, be somebody.” I remembered, and I said, “I want to go back to school. I promised my father [that] I am going to follow the broad countless streets of knowledge.”

So I went back to look for friends, if I find any survivors, and to inquire about school.

So I went out to the gymnasium [high school]. I mentioned to you that I started my 8th grade [of gymnasium, equivalent to the final year of high school] after I came back. So I went up to inquire and I found out that I could make [complete] that in a shorter time if I am willing to participate in [some] special exams.

It was really good that I went up to inquire because my heart leaped with joy, when in the office I met one of my friends who returned. There was Martha, her name was Greene Martha, and she was always a very good student, and we were six Jewish students in the class. It was a great joy finding somebody with whom I spent so many years together, and she was so happy to see me.

So we decided that we are going to start going back to school, start buckling up and learning together so that [the exams were] going to be easier for both of us this way. She lost her mother and she felt a great love for my mother. My mother is a very affectionate person and she liked Martha,
and she was very sorry for her that she lost her mother. I don’t think she [Martha] ever could overcome that, just like I can never really overcome the loss of my father, either. So Martha practically moved into our place and she was about six months with us. When she left, it was like losing a sister. We always were good friends, but we got to be really close friends during that period of time. And this was the best thing.

I think I feel now, looking back, that investing my time and throwing myself into my studies helped me to overcome this very hard period of grief and loss. It brought me back to normalcy, it helped me to accept the things that I cannot change. I could not bring my loved ones back to life, so I had to do something whereby I say, “Well if they would be alive, they would be proud of me that I am doing this, and did something for my own sake.”

So after six months, I finished my 8th grade [completed gymnasium] and I got my special science degree so I could go to medical school. It was hard work. We [Martha and I] really practically were studying there day and night, and when we got tired or sleepy we were sprinkling ourselves with water so that we wake up. My mother was cooking for us coffee to stay awake, and we finally made it. We passed our 8th gymnasium year. We got our bachelor [degrees], my science [diploma] and my friend got the bachelor of art [diploma]. She went into art, into literature. Do we have some [more time on the tape]?

SL: We’re just about to the end.

MH: So it was really good for more than one reason that I did finish my schooling. It gave me also a good feeling that although I was deprived of my education, I could still get it one way or another. And then it was my dream, my big goal, to get into the medical school and get a scholarship. I did that, got into medical school with a scholarship, and it wasn’t easy going. I didn’t even have money for books, so I was borrowing the books. That’s the way I was learning.

After I got my bachelor of science [degree], there was an entrance examination to the medical school. It was called King Ferdinand Medical School. It was one of the best medical schools in the country and it was a fight getting in there, especially after the war [when] many people wanted to go
to medicine. There were only 150 places and there were 900 applicants, so it was a hard thing. I thought, "What will I do until I can apply there?" I had a goal to be in the school at the university in the same year. I thought, "Well, if I have to wait, maybe I will take some literature courses or something [since] my friend went into literature." So I went into a literature course at the university.

So, I met my husband [in a lecture hall at the university] and he really encouraged me greatly [to go to medical school]. He also was in forced labor camp together with my father-in-law, but he was from Romania, from Timisoara. I explained to him how [much] I would like to go to medical school and [that] originally it was my dream. But I didn’t know how to go about it.

Then he helped me. He said, “You buckle up and I am going to help you, provide some books. Because I didn’t have money for books, either.” He was in his fifth [final] year of medical school. He said, "You can figure it out [but it's going to be very tough,] so you have to start buckling up right now." Then he was a great help. It was three months that I was learning, and he was helping me.

After three months we got married, after I took my entrance examination. We got married on November 21st in fall [1946]. All the big things with me happened in fall.

SL: I am going to have to stop.

MH: Yes, I think this….

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 2
Mrs. Herzberger, the last time that we talked, you got as far as your returning from the war experience and trying to settle down in Cluj and start your life on a different track and you decided to go to medical school. Was it sometime in that summer then that you met your husband? How did you meet him?

Well, I met him really accidentally. I was telling you that I intended to enter the medical school. But the problem was that I had to have an entrance examination in order to be accepted. At that time, especially after the war, very many people applied for medical school, actually there were about 900 students. I found out later that there were only 150 places. So it was really a fight. I also had another problem, that we didn’t have the money for the tuition and in January we had so little money that I didn’t have even money to buy books.

So I had to have a stipendium, a grant, a scholarship, in order to be able to go on studying. And this presented quite a big problem. I talked it over with my mother and I said, “Well, if it has to be, it has to be. I am going to try to prepare for this entrance examination.” But what would have happened if I would not have registered in that summer [for literature]? Actually it was in May, that I registered for literature.

In 1946?

That was, let’s see… I came back at the end of ’45, yes, that’s right, that was in 1946. So, I was so desperate, that’s the right word, to get to the university as soon as possible because I resented the time that I lost due to the camps. What made it even more aggravating was that after I came back, I met one of my friends. We were together in elementary school. Actually, I have with her a photograph in the kindergarten with me, that I might show you later. And we practically were all this time together, and through all the hard times and Jewish discriminations in the gymnasium. I met her and she told me that she is already in medical school. What happened to her [is] that they [her family] did flee to Switzerland, so they were not deported. They were very well-to-do people. They were actually quite rich. I don’t know how they arranged that, maybe they had the foresight and they
had the money, they had two things that was necessary. And the third thing, they had the
connections, which is so important.
After I came home, after meeting her, I told my mother, “This is it. I have to be in medical school this
coming year, no matter what.” But I found out that it wasn’t possible, so I had to wait until fall. And
that was in May [1946], so I went to the literature and I registered myself in literature. Besides, you
don’t know for sure if you get in [to medical school]. That’s another question. You might not pass the
entrance exam, but I wasn’t sure. So just in case that something goes wrong, then maybe I would
have to change my plans, so I registered to literature. Then it was a lecture at the university which I
attended and I had a friend who knew my husband.
Actually, my husband was sitting about two rows in my back [behind me, in the lecture hall]. It was at
intermission [that] my husband said he wanted to meet me, anyway, because he kind of liked me. I
didn’t notice [that] he looked at me, I didn’t realize that, but he did. So, he came to [me] and then he
introduced himself and so it started. Then, actually, I have seen him the second time [at the end of
the lecture], and then we were talking and we had a very nice time. He invited me to a movie. So we
went to a movie and that’s the way it started.
Then we met at the swimming pool [actually, at a lake near Cluj]. There was a special outing [for
students] and I remember that we had transportation [in] an open truck. It was a nice place, a nice
swimming place. We had lakes and swimming places [around Cluj]. We had a very rich-looking
vegetation in Romania and Cluj was especially nice because [the] mountains were not far away from
us.
So at this special outing, I met him again and we were a group of young people. I had some friends
and we had a terrific time. They were swimming together. I remember very well [that] I wanted to go
to swim. There are certain things in life that are strange. You want to go to a place and you never
know why. My mother said, “How are you going to swim, you don’t even have a swimming suit?” And
true, I didn’t have money for a swimming suit. So I said to my mother, “So well, I go anyway, I am
going to be outside, if I can swim fine, if I can’t it’s fine, too.”
So my husband wanted to go to swim and I, very embarrassingly, told him [that] I don’t have any swimming suit. He said, “That’s no problem, we can rent one.” I don’t know if you have here this arrangement, but there we could rent a swimming suit. Here, you wouldn’t rent a swimming suit. So we rented a swimming suit and I remember that it had a little hole in it. After I put it on, I noticed the hole, and I said, “Oh my God, it has a hole.” I came out and my husband said, “You look great, you look great, that’s fine.” [He encouraged me to ignore the hole]. I love to swim. I did it because of my love for swimming. [Later] we were sitting together [and] we had [a good time]. I can never forget it. We were singing and it was a whole group of young people.

On the way back we were talking. We had really a whole day to talk and this is when my husband asked me what my plans are, and if I want to stay in literature. Then I conveyed to him that I registered to literature out of necessity and that it was not my true desire, because I want to go to medical school. So he gave me wonderful advice. He said, “If you want to go to medical school, you better start studying right now because it is going to be a tough competition.” So I told him, “I don’t have even books and I don’t have the money to buy any.” He said, “That’s no problem, I am an expert of borrowing things.” Because they [his family] were ruined themselves due to the Jewish discrimination. So he brought me some books.

Naturally, due to the fact that I was one [and a half] years out of school, and due to the fact that I had to compress my studies very strongly, I wasn’t so well prepared. Like in [organic] chemistry, you really have to be well-prepared in chemistry, and I had my shortcomings. I was really pleased that I could take, at the time when I came back, the special exams. But I had many gaps that I had to fill if I wanted to get to medical school. So he said that he would be very helpful to me, if I would like to [accept his help]. He could point out to me the things that I should especially pay attention to. He was in his last year of medical school and I was just at the beginning of it.

SL: What is his name?

MH: Eugene.

SL: And where was he born?
MH: Well, he was born in Russia, in Sochi. And he was about three months old when they came back to
Romania. You see, my mother-in-law is originally from Russia. Because my father-in-law was in
World War I, he was a prisoner there in Russia. How should I say it?

SL: Prisoner of war?

MH: Prisoner of war, yes, it was during the war. So she was there and that's where he met my mother-in-
law. After the war was over, I know that they did get married, and then my husband was born in
Russia. Then they came after three months [to Romania]. They had quite a tortured way of coming,
because remember, the Russian Revolution and all that.

SL: Where did they…

MH: It was really very, very hard time. They had some hard times.

SL: Where did they eventually settle then when they got back to Romania?

MH: And then they settled in Timisoara. My father-in-law was originally from Timisoara, a city in the
southern part of Transylvania. See, I was from northern part of Transylvania, from Cluj. And
[Timisoara] is in the southern part [of Transylvania]. My father-in-law had his relatives there, so after
the war ended he wanted to go back home. So my husband really grew up in Romania. He went to
Romanian schools.

SL: And how… What was he doing when the war broke out? Was he in medical school?

MH: You mean, the Second World War?

SL: Yes.

MH: Well, when the war broke out, then what happened [was], he got to medical school. But then he had
to interrupt his studies [due to anti-Semitic laws], and he was really very sorry about this because he
was an excellent student. He had scholarships all the way and he was an outstanding student. And it
was painful, but they were taken to forced labor camps. Here, as you were reading the article, you
noticed [what] my husband was talking about, [that while] he was still only a medical student, he was
helping the sick. Then when he came back [from the labor camps], he was very, very determined to

---

44 A famous resort city in Russia, on the Black Sea.
go back to [medical] school. He had no trouble being accepted, because he had excellent grades all the way. I mean, he was a straight A student all the way, all the time.

**SL:** What type of medicine is he in now?

**MH:** He’s a neurosurgeon and presently he has his offices at the Mercy Hospital [in Dubuque, Iowa]. He also services three hospitals, really. Because he is also working at Finley [Hospital]. He has some patients at Finley, and then he does surgery there, too. But his main surgery he is doing in Mercy, because really Mercy is a very well-equipped hospital, the largest, naturally. And it is also the Trauma Center [From 1976 to 1980, Dr. Herzberger serviced three hospitals -- Mercy, Finley and Xavier -- working or being on-call seven days a week].

**SL:** Is he the only neurosurgeon in Dubuque?

**MH:** No, he was the only neurosurgeon until, I think, just a short time ago. I was wondering, was it half a year ago? I have to ask my husband when Dr. Wallace came. He [Dr. Wallace] is employed by the Medical Associates, so that he is the second neurosurgeon. But my husband was the first neurosurgeon in Dubuque. And this is why, really, the Mercy Hospital did become now a trauma center, because you have to have this specialty in order to get the approval. So when he [Dr. Herzberger] came here, he was for a number of years, for over three years, he was the sole neurosurgeon here. And although Dr. Wallace came now, my husband is very busy. He has really patients from all over. He has patients from Florida. Right now, he has a lady from Hong Kong who was visiting here and she got some pain, back pain, and my husband is going to perform back surgery. He’s a neurosurgeon and he’s [also] doing back surgery. He has many years [of experience] behind him. [I praise him] not because [he] is my husband, but he has quite a reputation here in Dubuque. He receives patients from Monroe and from all the areas of Wisconsin. Now he really receives quite a few patients from all this area and from Madison. He is very dedicated to his patients and to his profession. He has a true love for it and I do respect [that].

**SL:** When was it that you got married?

**MH:** We got married in 1946.
So you didn’t wait for a time?

I didn’t, really. It is strange. I came home at the end of ’45 in fall, and it was the following year in November [when] I got married. I came back [from Bergen-Belsen], I think it was about the beginning of November or middle of November [actually, late October]. I got married the following year on the 21st of November [1946]. So I consider myself lucky that I met the right man, and I thought maybe I was rewarded for all my suffering, that I found a wonderful husband. And we were friends [from the beginning] and we are [still] very close. I really lived more years with my husband married, than unmarried. It is going to be our 34th wedding anniversary in November, and I am really looking forward to it so [much]. You know, I can’t help it. We said that we are going to try to keep on with the questions but at this point, if you allow me, we are going to talk about 34th wedding anniversary. Speaking of my husband, my second book, which is titled, Will You Still Love Me?, is for my husband and I wrote this book for our 28th wedding anniversary [in 1974]. I gave the title Will You Still Love Me? I had no doubts [about that], but I still put the question [for him]. My husband didn’t see this [before]. I wrote these poems for years, the love poems for him. Then on our wedding anniversary, I put it on the table and I made a nice dinner with candlelight. I put on this rose, which is preserved in a life-giving fluid [shows it to Sara]. [Will You Still Love Me?] was a homemade book, I made it myself. It was typed and there were four roses drawn on it with a magic marker. The artistic work was my mother-in-law’s. She is an artist and she has many wonderful oil paintings, and she did that for me with a magic marker. It was very simple, that’s the way it looked when I gave it to him. He was very touched and he encouraged me to copyright it. Our wedding anniversary was in 1974, this is when I compiled it. Then I had no idea that in ’77 the American Poets Fellowship Society was going to give me a poetry book grant. It was a $2,000 poetry book [grant] on this little manuscript. My husband encouraged me to send it in when they wrote me a letter, that they consider me for the grant if I have something ready.45

45 Presently, Magda has another book of love poems, If You Truly Love Me (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2008), published in celebration of their 60th wedding anniversary.
I would like to read to you three poems from it because these are special, and this is like the introduction to the book. One is the question, “Will You Still Love Me?” The other is an answer [“My Love for You Is”] as far as my love is concerned. And the third poem [“Fidelity”] expresses really the fact that true love does not die, maybe even after the grave. If you want to be more romantic, it just transforms into something else. But I feel as long as I live, this love is going to be with me. And if one day I am not around, I still think that it is not going to die. I am going to come back in a different form.

“Will You Still Love Me?” 46
Will you still love me
When I grow old and gray?
Will you still recall
The young girl
You carried away
As your bride
On a rainy day
In fall?
Will you still hold me tight
Like on our wedding night?
Or, will you forget
The first day we met
In summer
When roses were blooming
And birds were singing?
Will our cheerful laughter
Still be ringing in your ears?
Will you still remember
All the happy years
We spent together?
Please keep the glowing light
in your heart, for me, forever.

“My Love For You Is...” 47
My love for you
Is like a mountain stream,
A constant, uninterrupted flow.
My love for you
Is like the sun’s eternal glow.
Or like the sea,
Never at rest,
Gentle and forceful waves
Crossing endlessly
Its open breast.
My love for you is like a tree
Rooted in the heart.
True love belongs to eternity

46 “Will You Still Love Me” is published in If You Truly Love Me (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2007), on page 6.
47 “My Love for You Is...” is published in If You Truly Love Me (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2007), on page 47.
And never falls apart.

“Fidelity” 48
Winter’s dreary hands
Touch my hair,
Weaving white filaments
Into my dark strands,
But I don’t care.
My mind is still engulfed
In Summer’s heat.
My strong heartbeat can tell
That flames of passion still dwell
In my heaving bosom.
My love for you is pure and fresh,
Like a new blossom.
Death will still my breath one day,
But my love for you will never die.
It will take root in the earth,
Giving birth to a fiery rose.

Come then, close
To my velvety head.
You will hear me
Whispering in your ear,
“I am yours, from here
To eternity.
Drop a tear
On my soft petals
To revive my heart.
No one can take me
From you ever apart.”

MH: I had to read to you these poems because I think that these give the whole spirit to my book.

SL: I’d like to be able to move on to some more questions.

MH: Yes.

SL: Then you did get into medical school?

MH: Yes [in November 1946]. [My husband] encouraged me and on this summer I worked very hard.

Practically that was really the first summer that I was home and I threw myself completely into my studies. I had to study chemistry, anatomy, and physiology [and more]. Then my husband was helping me if I had any [difficulty, which I seldom did]. Actually, he was helping me very seriously because he wanted me to succeed, too, because he knew how much it meant for me. It was three months, and [then] I went and I took my [entrance] exam [for medical school]. I was very scared, I

48 “Fidelity” is published in If You Truly Love Me (Austin, TX: First World Library, 2007), on pages 17-18.
didn’t know if I passed. At the end of the three months, he asked me to marry him, and I said yes without even thinking because I really cared for him a lot. If you believe in true genuine love, that’s what it was, and that’s what it is, and I hope that’s what it will be always.

So, I was really [worried], after we got married and I didn’t know what the results were [from the examination]. I was confessing to my mother. I said to her, “I’m worried, what happens if I didn’t pass?” Well, she said, “He’s not going to divorce you.”

Then I went and I found out that I had passed. I was dancing in circles. Sara, I can remember, it was so many years ago. I was so happy, finally I said to myself, “My dream came true.” I was thinking how happy my father would have been to see that after all this time, and after all the struggle what I had, [that] I still succeeded in my dream. I had that dream from the first grade of gymnasium, as I think I talked to you about it. And I knew I wanted medical school. If I would be again that age, and I would have the possibility, still I would say medical school. Because I think it is the most interesting profession, because you get an insight into life, into the functioning of our body and of our brain, and it enlarges our horizon. So I was very happy and I started medical school.

We had very little money. I didn’t have money to buy books so I made notes. I had my notes during the class, and then I would borrow books for a week and look through them and give them back.

Before my exams, I would take the book and then I would give it back. My first book which was my own was in my second year, when I registered for my second year. My professor of physiology gave me a beautiful gift. He gave me the book for the next year, because he knew I didn’t have one, and I thought it was a beautiful gesture. I was very happy in medical school. I remember every day I came back [from classes], I felt grateful that I had that privilege.

We were studying very seriously. My husband was in his last year [of studies]. We had a routine whereby we would get up early in the morning and I had to make a little completion for our food. I had to make some bread [dough] and then I had to take the bread [to be baked in the kitchen of the neuropsychiatric institute where my husband worked as an acting physician], in the morning, before I went to my courses. I usually started with dissection in the morning in anatomy. Then at noon we
would have our food. He would bring home whatever he got [from the institute cafeteria] and I would bring something from the student canteen. We did not have much materially but we never missed it, because we were so fulfilled and so happy that we had an opportunity to develop ourselves and to become physicians.

So we were studying regularly, usually in the evening. That’s when we were studying until 1 o’clock [in the morning]. That’s when we put down the books. I had a love for medical school. I had to get my scholarship for the second year and I registered into the second year under the scholarship. Then what happened, really, my husband became a physician and during that period of time…

SL: I have to interrupt you because I have to turn the tape before you start. I want to do it now before so I don’t interrupt in the middle of the story.

MH: Yes. Okay.

END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 1
SL: You were talking about medical school.
MH: Yes, yes, I said that we were very fulfilled and I registered in my second year. There was one thing which was bothering us -- we could see that in the course of time there might be a totalitarian system [in Romania]. As you know, the Russians [liberated Romania and the northern part of Transylvania from the Nazis. After the Russian army left, gradually a totalitarian government was established by the Romanians, who] started making difficulties as far as freedom of the press, and you also had to watch what you say. If you said something against the government, you could have been punished or maybe deprived of jobs. We felt that gradually there is going to become a system whereby your spiritual freedom is going to be totally killed. I felt, myself and my husband, that we could not live in a system like that, because we like to say what we think and we might maybe end up one day in a prison if we keep [that up].

The type of people that we are, we cannot tolerate somebody infringing upon our spiritual freedom, and especially after what we went through. The only freedom we had in those hard times was the spiritual freedom. Now coming back and somebody tries to take this away, we knew the importance of it.

We were not the only ones who felt that way, but there were [also] 16,000 [other] Jewish people [in Romania]. Also, we were afraid that these things [that we experienced before] might be repeated in the future. After all, when we came back and we felt the loss, maybe really we were sore [in pain].

Why did it happen to us? If one day we have our family, surely we don't want to expose our children to that. Because maybe anti-Semitism can grow again and can raise its head, and then our children are going to be hit. So there were very serious considerations.

And there was another thing. As I said, 16,000 Jewish people wanted to emigrate from Romania. It was really a time when a mass emigration was taking place. Now there was something else which prompted us to [leave Romania]. We got letters from Israel [Palestine] from the relatives of my mother. On my mother's side, some of our relatives were real pioneers in Israel [Palestine] and they
were great Zionists. They wrote to us, after they found [out] that we survived, “Why do you want to stay there? And why don’t you come here?” And at that time, it was a British mandate, but the Jewish underground was interested to get people out [from Europe], to immigrate to Israel. [Palestine] So it was really an underground thing [organization], and they were secretly planning to organize this aliyah, this immigration.

And strangely enough, it happened that at the time that this was in plan, who came up [to the city of Cluj, Romania, from Palestine]? It was my cousin [Jonah Rosen], who was one of the people who came to organize the Jewish emigration from Romania to Palestine. I have two cousins in Israel but [Jonah was the one who] organized many of the kibbutzim in Israel. My mother said to me now [in 1980] when she came back [from Israel], that he has a very high position there. He was an idealist all his life. I really respected him.

So what happened, while this was going on? He came and then another cousin of my mother [also] came. So there were two people who came who were part of my family [participating] in this [emigration effort], and they said, “You should come, and you make the decision now. If you don’t make the decision now, when are you going to do it? And we are going to help you.”

What prompted us that we really made the decision that they were talking [about]? They were talking that the government is not going to allow in the future [for] physicians to get out of the country. And this really did it. Because my husband said, “If we don’t go out now, we are never going to be able to get out of here.” Which is true, which is true.

One of the friends of my husband’s, he [also] wanted to get out of there [but didn’t]. He was years and years there, and he couldn’t [get out]. And that’s a sad situation. So there was lots of pressure from the two cousins, and they said, “You have [to come], somebody has to come to the Jewish state. It has to be represented, and why stay here?” My husband said he doesn’t want to stay there.

---

49 Magda refers to the Jewish underground, called the Mossad. It became Israel’s Central Intelligence Service.

50 Jewish communal settlements in Israel.
anymore [in Romania] and he doesn’t want to be in the position that we are stuck there, and when we want to get out, we can’t.

And then with all the memories that were haunting us and all the loss that it was, [we] felt there was really also resentment. But it wasn’t just resentment, you see, because it was a combination of things. Usually when you leave a place, it isn’t just one or two things, but a combination of things that finally make you decide to leave. This is very interesting -- because you will get first-hand information what happened in that year.

That was when we left Romania, at the end of 1947; it was actually December 1947. So the plan was, the Jewish underground plan, to organize an aliyah consisting of 16,000 Jewish people. We had two ships to our disposal. These ships were not passenger ships, they were cargo ships. So we started our journey. You are interested in this?

SL: Well, I am but I really don’t want it to take up a whole lot time.

MH: Well, maybe I just tell you in short. We started our journey from Bucharest. From there on, we went with the train to Bulgaria and the train ride was terrible. I tell you, people were fighting to get up the train. When you have so many people you can expect that everyone was scared, maybe there is not going to be a place for them, and they were kind of hysterical. We went from Bulgaria to Varna.

That’s where we took the ship, Varna, Bulgaria, and we went to the Black Sea. The accommodations were very, very poor. We had just boards [to sleep on] and I remember the ride. We were so many on these wooden boards. My husband is a pretty good-sized man, and we had to sleep next to him -- my husband, myself, my mother -- and when one turned, the other turned [too].

And I remember one thing -- there was a family up on the second bunk, we called it bunks but they were really wooden boards, which reminded me of the places in Auschwitz, those boards. There was a family with young children and there were cracks [between the boards]. We felt sometimes water dripping from those cracks, but it was a long journey.

---

The ships were called the Pan York and the Pan Crescent, each carrying 8,000 passengers.
I was very seasick, and finally we were in the Mediterranean [where] we were intercepted by [seven] British warships, because it was not allowed, free immigration. Both ships [with 8,000 people on each] were intercepted and that was really the story of the [book and the film] Exodus, in many ways. It was the story of the Exodus. After I survived the camps, I had to survive the Exodus too. The captain of the ship was told [by the British that] if we would not go willingly to the island of Cyprus to be exiled there, then there are going to be sacrifices and there are going to be fights [the British warships would attack us]. So our ship’s captain decided they were going to go voluntarily, because there were very many young children on the ship, and he felt it was a lost cause anyway. What can you do with British battleships?

So it happened on January 1, [1948], exactly on the New Year, [when] we arrived on the island of Cyprus. I don’t know how far we were from Famagusta but it was in the vicinity of Famagusta. It was some distance from there.

We had tents; we lived in tents. They put us in tents on the seashore. It was a very rugged seashore. We had the sand and the sea. I got to love the sea. I felt that it was almost like a part of us. We lived so long by the sea, a whole year. It was very rough. We had no experience in putting up tents, and I remember at the first rain and storm our tent went up and we got really wet. Then we had to put up with the field mice. They were chewing on our clothes. There was no drinking water, so we had to stay in line to get the water. The food was very poor. We had very much oatmeal, I can’t look at oatmeal, every day [it was] oatmeal. We got a very small ration of meat, it wasn’t every day. I think it was once a week or twice a week.

My mother came with us. I didn’t really want to leave her behind [in Romania]. It was very rough on her. She was doing the cooking in that little tent with one of those wooden boxes that was our table, and we had a kerosene [burner for cooking]. I don’t know if I can forget that. It was a very, very primitive life. The worst part was the insecurity. We didn’t know what’s going to happen to us. I tell you, I think that our people, the Jewish people, are survivors. Israel is the best example to tell you —

52 A seaport on Cyprus.
the way the state was born [from] a small group of people fighting with all the Arab states. I think it is just a miracle. This strong desire to survive was reflected in the camp. It was reflected in Cyprus.

SL: What type of work were you doing there?

MH: Well, the biggest trouble was, was that there was no work. So people were just hanging around there in the tent, and we had barbed wire [fences] and we were guarded [by armed British soldiers].

SL: So could you swim in the sea if you wanted to?

MH: No.

SL: You weren’t even allowed to?

MH: No, no, you were not allowed and if you would swim, you could be shot. Because that means you could swim to a ship or something, and there were ships back in the sea. And one of our pastimes was really to go and look at the ships, and my husband would say, “One of these days, one of these ships is going to take us to freedom.” So because it was no activity, but inactivity, I don’t think people could take that. So they started enterprises, selling the cooking rations, putting up tool shops of all kinds, trading things, it’s just amazing, you know. So pretty soon you had some activity going on in the camps. We didn’t get any books.

In our case, we couldn’t say that we weren’t busy because my husband was terrifically busy. There were very few physicians, and our camp had 8,000 people and so if you were a physician, you had to do just about everything -- ears, nose, throat, small surgery. The surgery is, as far as this was concerned, any major surgery had to be taken to Famagusta [Hospital], because under those conditions you couldn’t [do it]. Like for examination room, we had a little hut put up with a tin roof, so very primitive. That was the most luxurious place, the so-called hospital.

My husband was working there really very much and they needed nurses very badly. Actually, I have my nursing certificate [from Cyprus]. I was just looking at home in my old documents and I had the certificate from Cyprus. I have to make copies confirming that I worked there for a year as a nurse.

So there was my husband working creatively there and the only surgery he could do were the infections; the carbuncles on the neck and then these little things [procedures] that could be done
[there]. But any major thing [surgery] had to be taken [to the Famagusta Hospital]. But anyway, those people needed help. If you were a physician, you had to do whatever it was required to help the people.

Maybe [after] about three weeks, I couldn’t take that, just staying there inactive. So I went and talked to the head nurse. I was asking her if there is a possibility for me to work as a nurse, because I have the one year in medical school. She said, “Well, do you know how to give injections?” I said, “Yes.” That really saved me, and so they put me to give the injections, the anti-typhoid injections for the people, because they were afraid that an epidemic will break out due to the conditions. So they were inoculating everyone.

And then I was in another tin hut of special design for this, for the inoculation. I can remember how I really worked like a horse there. There were so few nurses, I didn’t get an aide, so I had to boil the needles [to sterilize them]. I had to disinfect the people and administer the injections. They were standing in line all day, all day coming, coming. It took about two months, I think, to inoculate all the people who were there.

And later on in the second month the head nurse felt that this really was a big pressure on me, but I was working, I didn’t complain. I was so happy I could work. So I got somebody [to help me, so that there] should be] a way for me of keeping that place going. She told me that if she is going to be satisfied [with me] and everything, and if I last through all that, [then] at the end of this, she promises me that I can work with my husband. And that’s exactly as it was. So at the end of this, I could work with my husband.

By the end of this, I felt [that] I was pregnant, in Cyprus. And [so] by the time I got to work with my husband, I was pregnant. {It was] exactly at the beginning of my pregnancy, when you feel the worst, but I didn’t complain. I did not want anyone should know [that], because I was scared they wouldn’t take me then. And so I worked with my husband and I was his secretary, keeping the files, then we had ear, nose, throat [treatments]. I helped him, and I was holding the things for ear wash and washing [sterilizing] and preparing the instruments. Then I was his surgical nurse in small surgery.
would boil all the instruments, I would assist him in surgery, and then I would clean up everything. That was the morning until early afternoon program, which was quite heavy.

Then in the afternoon we were treating venereal diseases which broke out there, too. It is amazing, you can’t imagine, having even that problem there. I don’t know, was it due to the conditions, or were people already infected when they came there? So I would do that [work], and I didn’t particularly like that. I had to sterilize those things [instruments] and so I assisted my husband in the treatment. At that time, it was treated with injections. Now we have penicillin and it’s different. But at that time, it was very hard to treat this. Especially syphilis was very hard to treat. So we had to do that treatment of venereal diseases.

I worked in Cyprus for a whole year, almost. I started really working there practically very shortly after I arrived. And the reason why it was such a shortage of physicians [was] because the older physicians, with more experience, were taken out of there. Especially, when it looked like it going to be a war situation. So Israel was interested to take these people out and it was really necessary, because as you know, there was the War of Independence and they needed [the physicians]. We came [to Israel] at the end of the War of Independence. So, when the War of Independence broke out, [some of the older] physicians were taken out [from Cyprus], so there were very few left in the camp. [Some of] the nurses were [also] taken out. Those who were left in the camps had to do anything that was required. The nurses also had night duties every week. There was not much rotation because we were not that many.

But I am really happy that I did that, because I got so submerged in my work that I wasn’t thinking [about our situation]. I didn’t have time to fret about the situation and what is going to happen to me. So it was a very rough year. Then we heard the independence war broke out, and we were very worried what will happen if things don’t work out the right way. What are they going to do with us? It was a very strenuous time really. But due to the fact that we were working, time passed and we also found out that we helped the people who came to us with something.
Then also we got a little extra rations which was very helpful, a few extra cookies, and also some extra clothing. Everything helped. Maybe two pieces more meat, that helps. That was all that we got because we did not get any money at all. So that's all what we got as a benefit from our work.

We worked for a whole year in Cyprus, really. We [lived there] actually a little more than a year because we arrived in Cyprus on January 1st [1948] and then we arrived to Israel [at the end of January] 1949. We left [Romania in] December '47 and on January [1st] '48 we arrived to Cyprus. And then we arrived to Israel [three] weeks before Henry was born [Feb. 21, 1949].

SL: So you went by ship then from Cyprus?

MH: And then from Cyprus we had another ride in a similar cargo ship. We never had a good ride in a ship. This is why I never want to go with a ship. I really had [a hard time], and I was terribly nauseated because it was [three] weeks before Henry was born. I was sore, and I couldn’t eat. I looked terrible when I arrived. I was very sick, I couldn’t even get up, because I was so sick and the accommodations were very poor, those hard boards when you are pregnant. It was very hard, so I still remember that ship trip very well.

And then we arrived to Israel. Now, my husband was really fortunate in some ways because they really needed badly people in the neurosurgical department. My husband wanted to become a neurosurgeon, and he was trained by Dr. Ashkenazy, who was the first neurosurgeon in Israel. The strange thing was, how did my husband know him? Because he emigrated himself and he was on the same ship, and they got to be very good friends. He was the best neurosurgeon in Romania, he had quite a name. Actually, his training was in France, and he was trained by Dr. Clovis Vincent, who was one of the outstanding neurosurgeons. Then he [Dr. Ashkenazy] also was here in the United States. I don’t know. Did my husband mention where he was? I can’t recall where he was. Was it the Mayo Clinic? Or where? I can’t remember exactly. But he was also here in the United States, or part of his training was in the United States [but] he was really trained in France. So he was an exceptional surgeon. My husband was really lucky that he had him, fortunately.
You see how interesting -- how things are interwoven. My husband’s dream was neurosurgery and it just happened that he was on the same ship [with Dr. Ashkenazy]. He could have been on another ship, but [he was] on the same ship. When we came to Israel, my husband practically right away went to the Beilinson Hospital, where Dr. Ashkenazy had his neurosurgical department. That was the first neurosurgery set up in Israel, and he was extremely busy.

SL: Was this in Tel Aviv?

MH: Yes, it’s near Tel Aviv. Beilinson is about, I would say, maybe 15, 30 miles away from Tel Aviv, or not even that much really. It’s very close to Tel Aviv. They took him [Dr. Ashkenazy] out much earlier from Cyprus, and he was working already in neurosurgery quite a while before we arrived. He was taken out very shortly from there [from Cyprus, because] they needed somebody like him. They probably convinced him to come because, you see, even a person like [him], who had such a terrific practice [and] was the most outstanding neurosurgeon in Romania, [yet] he wanted to leave.

Now, you see, it is more than just our desire. If 16,000 Jewish people [were also] leaving [Romania], there is much [more], it was felt by all of us. We were not happy because of all this -- what they did to us and because of what is going to come, the totalitarian state. I think everyone was happy. I am really happy that we did that [emigrated from Romania]. Dr. Ashkenazy had for many years [practiced neurosurgery in Israel]. Unfortunately he died about, I think, two, three years ago. He was in the United States twice, and my husband met him at some of the meetings. And he was just terrific, he was very much respected.

SL: What was his first name? Dr. Ashkenazy?

MH: Dr. Ashkenazy, yes.  

SL: His first name, do you remember what it was?

MH: I don’t know, I can’t remember his first name. But I can look, can you close for a moment?

SL: Well, I am going to turn the tape over anyway.

END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 2

---

53 His name was Dr. Harden Ashkenazy.
TAPE 8, SIDE 1

SL: You were talking to me then about your husband beginning his practice as a neurosurgeon in Israel. And how long then did you remain in Israel?

MH: Well, I wanted to tell you something before that, about Dr. Ashkenazy, I really want to mention that he was trained under the founder of French neurosurgery and the founder of American neurosurgery. He was very outstanding, so my husband was very fortunate to be trained by such a qualified person. And that neurosurgical training lasts five years. I think it’s a longer training period that’s needed. So he was working with Dr. Ashkenazy when he was trained as a neurosurgeon. Then, really, right after he finished his training, he was offered to be chief neurosurgeon in Tel HaShomer Hospital, which was a hospital of 850 beds. He was 33 years old and he was the youngest chief of neurosurgery, and generally, I think [when] he became the chief of neurosurgery at Tel HaShomer Hospital, [he was] the youngest chief of any surgical department there. I have to mention that, because I feel that it was a great honor for my husband. So this neurosurgical department was created for him, and he was extremely busy. With the Sinai War [in 1956], he had a tremendous practice. And my husband had a love for his profession, because as far as earnings for physicians in Israel, it wasn’t much. Many times a truck driver earned more than a physician. But he was always very dedicated to his profession and also to his patients. The patients loved him. So his work was very interesting. But you let me talk now. You wanted to ask something. So you talk now.

SL: How long did you remain in Israel?

MH: Well, we were in Israel for nine years, over nine years, really.

SL: Were you working?

MH: We were. We came to Israel in 1949 and then we came to the United States in 1957, so...

SL: So, eight years, and five of those years...

MH: It’s more, because we came to Israel at the beginning of 1949. We came to the United States at the end of 1957, because we came in November. Everything happened in November, so that was really nine years almost.
SL: So, your husband then studied for five years and then was…

MH: And then, for [four] years, he had the neurosurgical department, he was chief of neurosurgery at the Tel HaShomer Hospital.

SL: Were you doing any work at that time, or just you were staying with your children?

MH: Well, you know, at the time when we arrived I wanted to work as a nurse. I really thought [so], because for me going back to the medical school was impossible. For me the greatest sacrifice in coming to Israel was abandoning my studies, and that wasn’t easy. When you have a dream [for] so long, you attain it, and then you have to let it go. But I had to be realistic. For me it was impossible. First of all, the university at that time was a medical school in Jerusalem, and they opened only the third year [of medical studies].

So I didn’t master Hebrew, I didn’t have the money to live in Jerusalem and pay my tuition. [In Romania] I was [in the middle] in my second year, so the third year was absolutely impossible. Then, when they opened the second year, first and second year, it wasn’t possible either because I couldn’t just abandon my family.

There were very hard years in Israel. After the war, there was a great economical depression; not depression, difficulty. Everything was on rations. Being at home and not working and just taking care of my family involved the whole day. Because I had to start getting my food in the morning, so I had to stay in line for meat, for vegetables, for bread, for everything. We had these little [ration] books and we had, like stamps, that’s what it was. There were no supermarkets, so I had to go in separate stores and stand in line here and there. By the time I came home I was exhausted, and then I had a little child. What helped me in the beginning [was] that we did receive food [from the hospital cafeteria]. But still I had to cook and there was no baby food. I had to cook my own baby food. Then, there were no [dryers], I didn’t have any washing machine, or anything.

We had accommodations at Beilinson Hospital at the beginning. I speak about the first few years. And then also, in the other five years, there was not an easy life in Israel. And we never had enough money so that I could go back and study. So I stayed home and I took care of my family the best I
could. Then my in-laws came, [when] we were two years in Israel. Oh, no, Henry was yet small when my in-laws came, maybe two years [old]. We had a very small apartment and I had to accommodate my in-laws.

SL: This is your husband’s parents?

MH: My husband’s parents.

SL: They came from?

MH: They came from Romania, yes. Shortly after we came, really, not very much later. Let’s see, when did they come? [sometime in 1951]. We had yet very little [income], and then they wanted to find some jobs, and they were with us for a whole year. We were together in a small apartment. So then finally my mother-in-law found some work at the hospital and they wanted to be on their own. [Until] then, I took care of the whole family.

So I was really very busy just being at home, it meant a lot. [Sometimes] we had to cook at night, naturally [because the kitchen was shared with neighbors], and it was hard. They were hard times. Finally, then, we helped [the in-laws] to get their own place. Then they both had jobs. My mother-in-law got a job in the hospital and my father-in-law got a job, and finally they were on their own. But it takes time, everything takes time, so I never was able, while I was in Israel, to go back to my studies.

SL: Why was it that you decided to leave Israel?

MH: Well, here’s a good question. There are many complex [things], as I said. When you leave a country, it’s not simple that you leave for one definite reason. There are a number of things. I think what affected us very much [was] that my husband had an interesting position and, as far as work, he was satisfied, but there were other disturbing things in Israel. It disturbed me, and I think it disturbed him, too, the insecurity that you had to live with. I think we were exposed too long of a time to that. And I think that you wanted at one time of your life, while you are still around on this earth, to live with a little peace. I’m very sincere. But that was one of the reasons.

Secondly, I would say, as a physician, you couldn’t even afford a vacation. The only place where we would go is to go to my mother to Haifa. We couldn’t have a car. We had a car only two years before
we left [Israel]. I remember it was an old Citroën. In fact in the morning, you had to give it a push because you couldn’t start it going. You had socialized medicine, as you have it [in Israel] now, too, and somehow a truck driver really could earn more than a physician.

But that was one [reason] among many others. There were a number of reasons. We maybe had also the desire to give our children a place, a future, where they have more possibilities. Maybe they have more of a chance to live in peaceful conditions. Maybe we were worried a little bit about their safety. I had my [fears], especially concerning my second family. You know, I have a second [family], and if you lose one, you are really worried about that. [Because] many young people died, when they were seventeen, eighteen, years old [after being drafted into the military]. You go to the border lines, and those are the people who are staying there. You are constantly trembling for your family.

But they [my children] were small at that time [when we emigrated to the United States], my son was 8 and my daughter was 3½. But again, you have to look into the future. I do feel that while Israel is a great country now [1980], Israel now is different than Israel twenty years ago, twenty or more, almost twenty-three years ago. It’s a completely different [country]. At that time, it was different. It was also the insecurity, that you never knew when the war might break out, and you had a constant [worry]. I remember that we were so conditioned, for instance, [that] every evening in Israel while we were living there, we put our clothing on the chair next to us, in case there is something [an attack], we can dress up and go for shelter or something.

We came here in the United States and [on] the first night, I remember, we came in November, it was a thunderstorm, a really a big one. We were sleeping and we woke up with this thunder and lightening. First thing we did, we jumped out of bed, going for our clothing, the war broke out [we thought]. Suddenly, I never forget it, Gene said, “We are in the United States, what are we doing?” And we started laughing. You see, we were conditioned for this readiness, and you have to be [like that] there [in Israel].

When the Sinai War broke out, we were there and Gene was mobilized. I was all by myself with the children and I can never forget how scared I was. Then the sirens were blowing, and we did not have
any shelters. Now, [when] I was in Germany and there were bombardments in Bremen, if you
wouldn’t have had shelters there, you would have been annihilated. I thought [In Israel] if the bombs
are going to come and we don’t have anywhere to go, [what will happen?]. We were at that time in
an apartment on the second floor, because you could not afford private homes in Israel at that time.
We couldn’t even afford air-conditioning, [and] because it was very hot, we really were suffering from
that heat. [Even if you had] a beautiful apartment, but if you didn’t have air-conditioning in summer,
you suffered from that heat. I remember at night I would go out on the terrace, I thought I would
choke from the heat. Now if I would go back and I would have an air-conditioned place and a
beautiful [home], and all the comforts were done, it would be fun. It would be a different world.

When the sirens were blowing [during the Sinai War in 1956], my daughter was sleeping. She was a
baby practically, so I had to take her in my arms. Then my son, he was a small boy, he was so
scared, he said, “Mother, Mother, am I going to die? I don’t want to die.” And I said, “Henry, I am not
going to let you die.” He said, “Good Mother, then I won’t die.” You know, when they were so small,
and I was shaking, and going down [to take cover], and all by myself, it was [frightening]. I thought,
“Oh my God, if I lose [my family] the second time, I don’t know what I am going to do. I can’t survive
that.” It is very hard to lose twice.

I was worried about my husband, too. He was so busy. He came home occasionally, and then he
even he had no time to shave his beard, he was shaving at home. So, it disturbed me a great deal.

There were a number of things, when you put everything together.

It is impossible to tell everything. It was an emotional part, too, it’s much more complex. But although
we left Israel, I can tell you now, I lived in Israel for nine years and Israel’s strength are Israel’s
people. Because you have able people in Israel and they are dedicated, and there is a struggle for
survival at all times. I think when you have these terrorist acts in Israel and you have to hide, you
have to be very careful, you have to be very firm. Israelis are always blamed, that they do this and
they do that and I think that it has to be also a blame for the other side. What about that terrible thing
in the [Antibe] airport that happened? What right have the terrorists to do that to innocent people?
And it’s an unfortunate situation, but that is reality.

I think Israel has to be supported. I think that Israel -- I am very outspoken, you know -- cannot give in, and if they want from us this little thing [territory], that little thing, [then] Israel has to look at its safety. Because as long as when the borders are so close and you have a political situation, when anyone can come in and put up bombs in Tel Aviv, and in all places, [then] you have to watch out.

Certain positions you cannot give up. I lived in Israel long enough that I know what it means. I lived in Israel long enough to see all the people who came from the borderline, and then my husband performed neurosurgery on them. We have seen a lot. I think that it is very important for Israel to defend its borders. You cannot give up certain things.

It doesn't mean that you leave Israel and then you don't feel for Israel. You feel for Israel always, you see. I feel I am Israeli, I'm a Jew, and I don't deny that. I am proud of it. I feel that the state of Israel has to be, because we were discriminated enough. It has to be a state which stands up for us and gives the world [the message] that if we have a state of our own, it's not going to ever happen that the Jewish people can be persecuted and annihilated like they were [before]. So we have to support and maintain Israel as a Jewish state.

My mother is telling me every time she comes [from Israel. about] all the changes there. One day I would like to go back and see Israel as it is now. Both my children were born there and they are Sabras. They said that one day they have to go to Israel to see it, because that's where they were born. And you know what Sabra is?

SL: Oh, sure. I'd like to move on to your coming to the United States.

MH: Yes.

SL: How did you make the trip? By boat again?

---

54 A term used to symbolize people born in Israel, from the fruit of a cactus that grows there. Its heart is sweet and tender but its exterior is thorny and tough in order to survive in a hostile environment.
MH: Well, coming to the United States, we planned to come with a boat. And in the last minute, really, almost in the last minute, Gene said, “You know, we had so many [unpleasant] experiences with the boat.” And we wanted to get here as soon as possible. He said, “Why don’t we just decide to go with a plane?” Now this presented many things. The disadvantage was, coming with a plane, that we had to leave everything there. But my in-laws were still there and my mother was there -- see, my mother was in Haifa and my in-laws were not very far from us -- so we decided to leave [everything there]. It really was a last moment decision, and so we just picked up this plane. I thought this would be a great time, but it was a propeller plane. At that time, there weren’t any jets. I was so sick in the plane, all the time, because it wasn’t the smoothest of a drive. And so was my little girl, my daughter, who was at that time 3 ½ years old.

And so we came, really, as you might say, in style to the United States. But after we arrived, all our money was -- We had, I think it was [$100], that we had in the United States [laughs]. You see, we have relatives here [Alexander Salamon and Mrjam Kishony, cousins of my mother], which was helpful because you have to have a guarantee from here [in order to immigrate], and so our relatives [Mr. Salamon] guaranteed [for us].55 They have moved [now retired] to Florida.

Then my husband had a friend here, a Hungarian [Dr. Szekely, a psychiatrist], who was helping because you have to have a job, you have to have something when you come here, otherwise you starve. So when we came here, my husband did have a job in New York. It was not exactly in his specialty but it was just a provisorical [temporary] thing in order that we should be able to survive. We arrived in New York and it was really nice that our relatives were here; it is nice to have relatives.

They came to the airport and they were very helpful. We had to look for a place in New York which is cheap, actually that we could afford, coming from Tel Aviv to New York.

So our first place was a place that I wouldn’t go there for anything now, if I would know more about New York. It was a summer resort in the woods, it’s a summer cottage [near Haverstraw, N.Y.]. And

55 Magda is referring to the affidavit written by her relatives, a written guarantee that the new immigrant will not present a burden for the United States.
there was another family there at that time who probably were in the same predicament. I don’t remember if they were Spanish or what, anyway those were my neighbors. That’s where we were. I remember that I didn’t have any washing machine and we didn’t have a car, so eventually Gene got a car because he had to go to work. So I was home and it was getting into winter. It was cold, and you had the frost, and I was really cold at that time, because in Israel it never goes to the freezing point at any time. My neighbor really enjoyed it. I mean, she said to me, “I have fun seeing you coming out, hanging up clothes with gloves, with winter coat, with a hat.” I was freezing for a while all the time. And I remember I put out my laundry [on a line between two trees] and when I wanted to go and collect it, it was like an icicle. I took it back and I dried it in the kitchen. Then [not having a washing machine] I would make a full bathtub [and] I would soak the laundry. One day our friend, my husband’s friend who was a psychiatrist, came and he said, “What are you doing? For heaven’s sake, why don’t you bring it to the laundromat?” I said, “How? I don’t have a car and I don’t know where the laundromats are.” And so then after that, he instructed us, so we went when Gene came home at night and brought the laundry. There were hard, really hard, months. The nature was very beautiful. It was snowing and we were running outside [in the woods] with my daughter, and my son went to school.

SL: Now where was this?

MH: That was, let’s see what place? I don’t know how you call it but it was a summer resort, but it was out in the woods [near Haverstraw, N.Y.].

SL: Now this was outside of New York or was...?

MH: Yes, yes in New York, it was in New York, some summer resort. And we were there for three months and my relatives would come occasionally, they would come quite a bit, and I think they brought us the first dishes. When we came to the United States, we went shopping and [our relatives] wanted us to go to the supermarket. When we came we were impressed by these terrific roads. And the supermarket? We couldn’t believe our eyes. Then he [our relative, Alexander Salamon] said, “I shop for you.” I have seen him put this and this and this [into our shopping cart] and I said, “Gene, this is
going to be a fortune. How are we going to pay for that?” And I kept saying it. He [Mr. Salamon] said, “Don’t worry, don’t worry, don’t worry.” And then he wanted to pay for that and I was amazed. I thought that if that would have been in Israel, two months’ salary could go on that [much food]. And then he said, “Well, you keep your money, you keep it for pocket money, because you don’t have much.” And it was true.

So it was rough, you know, until we have seen the first installment of salary, which wasn’t big. And after three months, that was really a provisorical thing [temporary situation] because New York makes terrible disadvantages for foreign [medical] graduates. I mean, you have to go almost back to the last year of medical school there, in order to get a decent job there. And [therefore] we decided that it wasn’t the place for us.

And so, it happened really that my husband was fortunate that he got a position at the Yale University. He was teaching there a whole year and so we moved to New Haven, Connecticut. Then, we had a little car at that time, I didn’t have a car [for myself]. My first car was an old Pontiac, ten years old, and that’s the car with which I drove down [from New Haven, Conn.] to Augusta, Georgia, after a year.

What happened [was] that there was an opening in Augusta, Georgia, [for a neurosurgeon] and my husband really was looking for help, to work in his specialty. He was working in neurology, he was teaching in the Yale University, but this is different from actually practicing what you were trained for. So they were looking for somebody [a neurosurgeon] and it was down in Georgia. Dr. [George] Smith was a neurosurgeon, he was also a professor at the university. My husband was also teaching at the medical college in Georgia, in addition to working with Dr. Smith. He was an extremely pleasant, a very nice man, they became very good friends.

So we were there, I think it was about a year. Still my husband felt that he wants to [be independent]. When you were a chief neurosurgeon for [four] years by yourself, you want your independence, and I think that my husband couldn’t be happy just being an associate of somebody and not him having the real department.
So then it was an opening in Monroe, Wisconsin. They were looking for a neurosurgeon and we went for an interview. We were encouraged also by Dr. Smith, who had his parents in Indiana, and he said, “It’s such a pretty place, the Midwest, and the people are so nice.” He said, “If everything is fine and the interview goes well, I think it’s a good place.” And indeed it was. The people were very nice to us from the Monroe Clinic, and my husband was [also hired] to the [St. Clair] hospital.

SL: When did you get to Monroe?

MH: Ah, let’s see, we came here [to the United States] in ‘57. We were 16 years in Monroe and we were four years here [in Dubuque]. I think it was around ’60, 1960, more or less.

SL: I’m gonna have to turn the tape over.

MH: Yes.

END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 1
SL:  [...talking about] your arrival in Monroe.

MH:  Yes.

SL:  And where was the first place that you lived?

MH:  Well, in Monroe?

SL:  Yes.

MH:  We lived not far from the place where [my husband] worked. We lived in the vicinity, I would say, of the house which we built later on. What happened when we came to Monroe [is that] they really needed badly a neurosurgeon and my husband [has] always the pioneer spirit. So he really established a very beautiful neurosurgical department there and he developed it so that it was like his baby, and they got patients from all over. He worked very hard all those years. So at first, when we arrived there was a problem. We didn't have any furniture of our own, because living in New York, then in Connecticut, where we lived in three [different] places in New Haven. Then we had to move twice when we were in Augusta, Georgia, because we came to one place and then we wanted something better, and finally we found a better place. By the time we were there for a little while and I cleaned it, then we were moving [again]. So we felt that for us to buy furniture [seemed impractical]. First of all, it costs money. So all this time we had furnished places, and finally we came to Monroe, and there were no furnished places. So we had a problem.

We found out from one of the ladies that [she has a friend] who is going to rent us her place because she's going to get married. But it was not going to take place for another two or three months, or one month, I can't remember. [So in the end we rented the house of her friend who got married] She married and she left all the furniture there. So it was fully furnished. Again, we didn't have a problem with furnishing it.

But it happened so that she wanted to sell this house, and we felt that the house was not going to be adequate for us because my in-laws were planning to come [to Monroe]. See, we were really not
[there for] long, we were maybe only about three and a half years in this country when my in-laws wanted to come here too, because they were retired at that time. They felt very lonely without us. And it wasn’t easy. We had always the problem of taking also care of the parents when they come, so to think in those terms. And my husband is not only a wonderful husband and father, but he is a wonderful son to his parents. I think you really have [to] be nice and [give] the most support for your parents, because your parents do a lot for you and when your turn comes, it is your duty as a son or daughter to take care of them. I felt just as strongly as my husband about that. So they were coming and we knew [then], what we are going to do. It was a problem. We had no furniture and we had no money to buy a house because we were just a short period here.

So we decided [that] the best thing for us was to have a house, to build something where we could accommodate our parents. So we were looking for places to buy a lot and we were fortunate at that time because of Dr. Bronkow. He was our neighbor later, right across [from] us. He was a physician also at the [Monroe] Clinic and he was a surgeon practicing at St. Clair Hospital. He was doing surgery at St. Clair where my husband did. St. Clair Hospital was run by the nuns. So he said that he can sell [us a lot] for a good price. We would never have gotten that price from anyone else. At that time, we had a choice, we could select the lot we want, and we selected something which was really across [from] the hospital. At that time, the hospital was at the edge of the city and there were no houses practically around. He said, “Pick your choice.”

We picked the one which was a corner lot and it became a court, St. Clair Court. That’s where we lived, and it was very private and we were so close to the hospital [that] my husband just walked to [his work]. It was opposite, you could see the hospital chimney from there. So we chose the lot and we gave a good price and then we [hired] the engineer, Dr. Roth [to build our house]. Unfortunately, he’s not living any more. But Mr. Roth was a good engineer, we heard from others, and we said to him, “We want to [build] something not too expensive. We ask for space, not for luxury.” But we had to accommodate our parents. So we ended up with a duplex. This way, he said, we [will] have each
privacy and all that, and everything had to be calculated. I was shopping for carpet, for everything on
sale, so that we get the best buy, and then we took a loan. And that's the way we built our house.

SL: What was the address on St. Clair?

MH: 511 St. Clair Court.

SL: So you lived there the whole time that you were in Monroe?

MH: So we lived there for the whole time, actually for 15 years, taking off that year that we lived in that
other houses in the two places. It took some time to build the house, so it was about a year, I think, if
not a little more than that. And then we moved in the house, and there were no trees [there] at that
time, and, oh you should see our place now. We planted trees and they grew, it is like a park now,
you can’t find a big lot like that. Now, you would pay a fortune [for it]. At that time, it was a little
different, but it was way back, how many years? Twenty years, it will be. We lived 16 in Monroe and
four here [in Dubuque]. It was a cozy house. I liked our house, and we had downstairs a family room
and then later on we built an addition to it. We built another family room and we built a basement,
and we really made some changes. We had it cozy day and night. I liked our home. Even now
sometimes, I can't help it, I go to the old house. There is where our children grew up and they had
friends there. There were quite a few young children in the neighborhood, so they really were very
happy because they had friends of their age. And now everyone grew up. [If you would] go there at
Halloween [now], no children would come to our [old] place. All the children grew up there.

SL: What were your first impressions of Monroe, of the city?

MH: Oh, my first impression? I was so enchanted by it [when] we came to Monroe. I was there -- let's see,
[my husband's] interview took place in the summer, it was at the end of spring or summer. It was the
beginning of summer, and I said to Gene, “I didn't see anywhere [such] beautiful grass. It is Green
County!” [Monroe] was the smallest place that we had ever lived, because it only had eight thousand,
nine thousand, by now maybe 9,500 [people] and at that time even less. And it was such a change.
Augusta had about 100,000 or something. The city of Cluj where I was born had about 150,000, then
New York and Connecticut. [Monroe was like] coming down to a complete different world. It was like
a village, at your first impression. But we were very impressed by its beauty, its atmosphere, its quiet, and the friendliness of the people.

It was like a family [place]. There was something in that little city that we really loved, and it was a nice place for our children to grow up. I was never worried. They could walk out from school, you could walk at 11 o'clock [at night] in the parks. Where could you do that nowadays? Then you went out and you walked every day in the countryside. There was a time when we did lots of hiking around the countryside and also bicycling. Like after every dinner we would go out on the bicycles in the rolling hills. And we did the hiking around in the countryside, and we had good air, there was no pollution. People were very nice and my husband was treated very well and he liked his work. It's not the size maybe, but the quality of the place which counts, and I have nice memories from Monroe. I have to tell you, I loved that little city and I still like it. I go there to see my friends. After all, you live in a place like that for many years and it grows on you.

SL: Did you get any help at all? Was there a Jewish community in Monroe when you moved in?

MH: As far as Jewish community, you would be amazed, Sara. There was one Jewish family living at the time when I was there, and I heard that there were about 20 Jewish families or 15, during the years, and all moved out, and I just don't know why. Maybe because some of them might have been businessmen and they found out that they want to find a bigger place or -- I have no idea why they moved out from there. But at the time that we arrived, there was a Jewish store, Beckers, and it was on the square. The only Jewish people were Mrs. Becker, who was a lady, at that time that we were there, she was in her late 70's or close to 80. And her son, who was at that time almost 60 years old, or he was at least in his 50's, and he was a bachelor. So these were the only Jewish people, as far as this is concerned. [It's] very interesting that, in a non-Jewish community like this, they were the only Jewish people for a long time there. [About] the history of the Jewish people, and what it was like in Monroe, I got a first-hand report from Mrs. Becker. I liked that lady. She was a lady who did lots for charity. They were wealthy people and she gave lots of money to Israel. Always rabbis were coming to her place and she always showed all the presents she got from one rabbi or another.
SL: Do you recall her first name or her husband’s name?

MH: I know her name is Mrs. Becker and they have still the store there, Beckers, it’s in the square. But I found out through others that she was quite a lady. That Jewish family was respected in town.

SL: Did they offer you any help with your settlement in the city?

MH: Well, the Beckers were very friendly after we arrived. They didn’t know for a while [that another Jewish family had moved to Monroe]. Then they found out, and I remember that Mrs. Becker was at the store [when] I came in the first time and she was very pleased. They were very happy, let’s put it that way. They were very happy that a Jewish family moved into the city because they said that for a long time they were the only Jewish people there. And then I found out from Mrs. Becker and from the other people, one thing which is very important, that the Jewish families were very respected in town, and so when I came it was interesting.

First I was there for, oh, how long was I there? We were there for, oh, two years or so, and then one of the ladies called me up and she said they want to know [more about us]. They knew that we came from Israel. I tell you what was her name. [It was] Mrs. Turver, Irma Turver, she was the first person to call me. She was a school teacher, she used to be a school teacher. She is my friend now, too. And I didn’t see her for quite a while. She called me, she said, “We heard that you came from Israel,” and they had a meeting of the, what was it? The Women’s Club meeting, or a special meeting in her place. It is another word for club, or a reading club, I can’t remember what. They wanted me to come and talk about Israel, they wanted to know about Israel. I thought it was really strange that they want to know about Israel. My English at that time wasn’t so great, so I was very nervous about it. I [thought that I] had better do justice, and I prepared myself, brought an Israeli map and everything. I was surprised at the strong desire that they really wanted to know and they had such [an interest]. I was glad that I went. Some have false ideas about Israel, they think that Israel is a little hole there, somewhere where you don’t have much civilization, so I was happy to tell them that it isn’t so.

They wanted to know about Jewish customs. And then the second time I was invited to talk to Sunday School children about the Jewish religion and holidays. I talked about Hanukkah and some
of the prayers. It was interesting what I found [out]. Considering that [although] it was a non-Jewish community, they wanted to know so much about Judaism. And I was the one who was [called] every time that there was something about the Jewish religion or customs. I was always invited because I was the only Jew, the only one who knew about it. Because Mrs. Becker was an older lady, she wasn’t quite going out to do these things. Mr. Becker wasn’t [interested to talk about it, either]. They knew him for so long, they knew him. But we were like the people coming from the actual state of Israel. I think my husband being a neurosurgeon [was also interesting to them].

SL: Did you find you had the typical problems that a new immigrant would have, or did you feel that those new immigrant problems were left behind you in Connecticut and Georgia?

MH: You mean if I had the feeling of a new immigrant being treated like a human being there?

SL: Yes.

MH: Well, I tell you my first impression, being a new immigrant. When we came from living so long in a place and when you leave that place, you have a lifestyle, you have certain spirit with which the place is connected. When we left the country, I remember I was worried. I was sitting in the plane and I had to leave my mother [behind], and I was kind of sad, [thinking also] of relatives. I was wondering, “Am I going to be a complete stranger here? How is it going to be, or how are they going to accept us?” And I had a wonderful experience. I came to New York and to the cottage I was talking to you about, and the owners were just terrific. They came in asking if we had blankets, because they knew that we are immigrants. [Asking] if we have blankets, if we have a radio, every half an hour somebody came in to ask us if we need anything. That, I think, gave me a good first impression about the people of the United States. They were caring about us and we were [looked after]. My first impression was that they treated us like the immigrants who need help, and they wanted to help. [My] first impression [was] that the people cared and they wanted to help.

SL: Did you get the same type of feeling when you went to Monroe?

MH: Yes, the same type of feeling. I felt that in my personal experience, I didn’t feel any anti-Semitism towards us. I felt that we were treated like, special, especially even for [being] Jewish. That made it
even more special. I never felt [like a stranger]. We were treated special in Monroe, and I had some of my close friends who were Christian women. I was invited to Christian women’s lunches, I was invited to talk during that time. I was the only Jewish [woman]. Not [only] that I was the only Jewish person there, we were the only Jewish family, but [also I was] the only Jewish survivor of the camps. Many people didn’t know [that], only because I didn’t like especially to talk about it. Years ago, I did not. I don’t think I wanted to. It was too big of a trauma for me, for years. I just kept it to myself. But then, as you talk with friends, some of my closest friends knew only that I was in the camps. But they wanted to know about Judaism in Monroe. They wanted to know what Judaism is, there. It’s just amazing how much they wanted to know.

I am very happy, Sara, because I had an opportunity to do that. So maybe it’s a one-woman campaign, [it’s] the best campaign against anti-Semitism, if you talk about Judaism to the people and they know maybe what it means, Judaism. So I personally, in my family, had no bad experiences in that sense. we were in nice places. I can’t talk about other places [where] I wasn’t, but in the places where we were, up ‘til now, the people, the community, those people in the community, were very nice and they accepted us totally. And while I was in Monroe, I started my public speaking. It is just tremendous how many invitations I got from all over. People wanted to know. They felt sorry for what happened. By telling what happened, you see, you do something good for the future, because it points out for them how much there is a need for an Israeli state. That we should be represented. How much there is a need that the people should realize what happened so that they never let that happen [again]. And I think the more they know, it is the better. So [from 1973 until 1976] I was invited not only in Monroe, all over, but in all southern Wisconsin, and so I can tell you about it. I was invited to Madison, New Glarus, Monticello, Blanchardville, Janesville, Beloit, and all over southern [Wisconsin]. I traveled a lot during this time. I traveled a great deal. I talked to the people a great deal. All of them without exception wanted to know about Judaism. All of them without exception displayed to me a great respect for the Jewish people. Many said they are the chosen people. They said. “We admire the strength of your people, and that it should be acknowledged.” So I feel I was
fortunate. I feel that I am happy that I came out of the camps, I survived, so I can do maybe something. I couldn’t help what happened then, but maybe I have a little share of preventing something from happening again. So in that sense, I think I am doing the right thing.

SL: I’d like to talk to you now about your children. Your son was born in Israel?

MH: Yes.

SL: Could you tell me his full name and his date of birth?

MH: Henry Gideon Herzberger. Well, Henry Gideon, Henry really is Zvi, his Jewish name was Zvi, and why? Because my father was called Herman. I don’t have to tell you the Jewish custom that you name your son after a close parent. So his name was given in the memory of my father. And then [later] he wanted the middle name Gideon, so that was his choice. So he ended up Henry Gideon Herzberger.

SL: And when was he born, what day?

MH: He was born in 1949, just when we arrived in Israel [about three weeks after we arrived], on February 21st. He was my birthday present. I was born on February 20th, and on the 21st he was born.

SL: What is he doing now?

MH: Well, right now he’s at the University in Iowa and he is getting a master’s degree in business administration and education. He’s a mathematics major and he also was, in my husbands business, office manager for one-and-a-half years when we came to Dubuque. But he went back to get [some] further studies.

SL: Did he graduate from college?

MH: He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in Madison in mathematics. He just expressed his plans, that after he finishes this that he is interested in getting his [PhD] degree in science. So he was very good in math and physics. And see, the business administration he can use. It is very practical, but he wants to work in physiology research. So, we are going to see. First he is going to have his master’s degree in December in physics. He is going to get that. He is very close to that.

SL: What about your daughter, what’s her name?
MH: My daughter, Monica Alice Herzberger, is her full name, and she is [presently] living in Milwaukee. She graduated from [the University of Wisconsin in] Milwaukee and she is a psychology major. She was first in music, and then she majored in psychology. Then she had a job, secretarial, and at some point she was assistant manager. She has a love for music. So she really has a great musical talent and I wish she would have stayed in music. But then, you know, it’s what she wants to. She has an operatic voice and at the present time they [she and her husband] formed a band and they perform. They were here in Platteville this last weekend and they performed. She’s singing and she’s playing the guitar beautifully. Now she is going to go back to school again, and she takes a master’s in the business administration [while my son Henry has] business administration and education.

SL: When was she born?

MH: She was born in Israel in 1954. She was 3½ [years old] when we came to the USA.

SL: What was the date?

MH: [Exact day], 1954, she was born.

SL: She’s presently married?

MH: Well, she was married and then unfortunately they divorced, but they are together again, so it looks like they might get together again.

SL: What is his name?

MH: His name is Harvey. He is a teacher, he’s from Racine. His parents are also from Racine. He’s a school teacher in Racine.

SL: I am going to have to stop.

MH: And also he’s a musician. Guitar [banjo, and vocalist]. So, that’s on the side, that they were doing [music]. My daughter has a full job now in a lawyer’s corporation and then this is a sideline, the music of theirs. And now she wants to go back and get more education. I think nowadays young people need lots of education, to get better and better jobs. I think it’s not an easy time.

SL: I am going to have to stop or we are going to run out of tape.

MH: Yes. **END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 2**
SL: The questions that I want to ask you now are the ones that we asked all the people that we interview to try to get an idea of how different experiences may have shaped people’s feelings about things and many of the questions that I am going to ask will deal about your family situation or with when your children were growing up. And since, of course, we are interested in your Wisconsin life and the community that you had in Wisconsin. If, when you answer these questions you could try to answer them in a way as it was when you lived in Monroe, rather than now, although of course I don’t want to negate that but we are interested in...

MH: Yes, while my children grew up in Monroe, they were there [with us] most of the time, but [now] they are not here [in Dubuque], except at the time that my son was here for 2 ½ years.

MH: When your children were growing up, did you speak English with them or other languages?

MH: Well, at the beginning, when we came to the United States, we did not speak English with them, because my son had to learn English in school and that took some time. My both children speak Hungarian. The first language that I taught my children was Hungarian. So, it is very nice now, because they can communicate with the grandparents so well. Then naturally, as my son went to school in Israel, he learned Hebrew, and he really was reading Hebrew books. He was an excellent [student]. When we came, we talked anything else but English. He was already in school and [as] time passed by, he was mastering [English]. He went to high school in Monroe, and to junior high in Monroe, and my daughter actually started her first elementary school in Monroe.

Naturally, you know, when children go to school, they pick up the language so easily. I wish adults would do that. Pretty soon, [in] the first year my daughter was speaking English. She is the one who for a good while didn’t have any accent at all. Because of the fact that my son learned Hungarian and Hebrew, he had in the beginning an accent in English, but my daughter had absolutely none.

So, at the beginning, it was difficult, with my son. He would come [home] sometimes and he was crying. I remember, especially in Connecticut, he came home one day and said, “Mother, everyone thinks I am a jerk. I have an accent and I have to take time to answer [questions].” He was so self-
conscious of the language. Though by the end of the first year he was mastering [English]. He was the first in his class, and he got a beautiful gift from the teacher. He has a knack for languages, so he really picked it up well and he was always a very fine student. My son already was speaking English, my daughter was speaking English, my husband was naturally out and practicing medicine and he was speaking English all the time, and I was left home with poor English, so-called, because although I was trying to learn, I learned on my own. I was reading and taking out words from the dictionary, but I was poor in conversation.

I remember [when] I was in Georgia, in Augusta, Georgia, and I had to put up with the Southern accent. I had great difficulty. I was mastering well this accent [in Connecticut] and then [came] the Southern drawl! Sometimes I thought that I can’t understand half of the words, but I understood more or less what was [their meaning]. When it came to talking, I had the feeling that the other people had exactly the same problem. They understood half of what I said, and I was very self-conscious. Then my husband came up with a suggestion one day. He said, “You know, the only way you are going to improve in your language is if we speak English at home.” At the beginning, it was rough, because I would speak English and then I would just resort to the other languages, because I couldn’t express myself well. And he insisted, “no,” and then my children [said], “No, Mother, you have to do that.” So, finally we started speaking English [at home]. Sometimes we were speaking Hebrew before, too, and especially Hungarian, and then Romanian, because my husband is from Romania. So we were [also] speaking then German with my father-in-law. Anything but English. Especially my in-laws didn’t master the English, either. That was later on, naturally, when they came [to the U.S.]. But in Georgia I felt very embarrassed about this.

I think we decided in Monroe, when we came to Monroe, [to speak only English at home]. We were about two years already in Monroe. My daughter started school, and then after two years she was speaking so well English, and my son was speaking so well English, Gene picked it up, and I was the only one [left out]. So finally, I said, “Okay, I agree [to speak English] on one condition. If I can’t express myself well in English, I have the liberty to put in some Hungarian or whatever words I
choose." So at the beginning, that is what it was. I was speaking English and then another sentence in Hungarian or Romanian, where I could express myself. And I got on like that for awhile. Then I noticed that the more we were speaking English at home, I got really to know better the language. Then my husband said, "If we speak so many languages [at home], the children are going to have constantly an accent, they are going to be mixed up." They speak all the time in school [English], and when they come home, then they speak Hungarian. So, then as time went on gradually we were speaking English at home all the time. And that was very good because I could learn from my children, I could listen to their pronunciation. Being at home most of the time, all of the time, you learn very slowly because you don’t talk so much to people.

SL: So do you speak English with them now all the time?

MH: Oh yes. We speak English, except when grandmother is here. Then my daughter likes to speak Hungarian, so does my son, so they speak with her Hungarian. But I am glad because they can communicate with their grandparents, especially my mother-in-law. She was very poor in English, so they could talk to her. For years, they talked Hungarian to her.

SL: Do you think your children had any problems in school, other than the language problem because of your unique experiences?

MH: No, they had absolutely no problem in school because of my experiences. They felt happy in school. They were both good students. Henry finished his high school there, he graduated from the Monroe High School, and so did my daughter. They had no [problems in school], they were treated very well always and very respected.

SL: How much do they know [about your experiences]?

MH: Actually, I wanted to tell you that my daughter skipped a grade, she made the 3rd and 4th elementary grades in one year. Then my son skipped [a grade] in the end. Actually, I have an article from the Monroe paper. He was the only one who finished his high school in Monroe in one year instead of two, and with a high honor key. So they really had no problems in school. They were happy in school.
SL: How much do they know about your experiences?

MH: They know a lot about my experiences. Like one day my son was home and when I started presenting my slides, because I have a number of slides, he was reluctant to see the slides. Then one day, that was really in Monroe because that's where I started doing that [presenting slides], I had some trouble with my projector and I said, “Well, Henry, would you like to help me?” He was really good at it. [I said to him,] “I have to give a presentation, why don’t you help me with this?” So he agreed. The first time when he had seen the slides, he said, “Mother, why do you want to talk about it? Why don’t you just forget about it?” Interestingly enough, my children had difficulty at one time to understand it. It is something so painful -- it is very painful for them -- it’s a horrible thing. Why do I want to talk about it? Why don’t I forget it? I had difficulty in getting across that things like that you don’t forget. You should not forget, otherwise things might be repeated.

Now, interestingly enough, as they grew up, they were thinking differently about it than when they were younger. When they were younger and we were in Wisconsin, they were questioning why I am doing that, what I am doing. But then the interesting part was, when my book came out [The Waltz of the Shadows], they read the book and after they read the book, they felt that I was right [in] what I am doing. You see, maybe in my book, I conveyed to them the full picture and I didn’t really like to talk, they didn’t like to hear, many details from the camps. It affects them, because I am [their mother]. It makes them feel rebellious, why a thing like that had to happen, and it disturbs them.

My book [The Waltz of the Shadows, the first version] was published by the Monroe High School [two printings in 1975]. I am going to be eternally grateful to them because if they wouldn’t have asked me, I would have maybe never compiled that book. And maybe there was a reason why they asked. I had to compile this book. I think through my book, my whole family really supported me a lot in my goals. While until then, they were questioning [if I do the right thing]. Although when I first exposed it, I asked my husband what he thinks about [writing the book] and I thought, “Well, he might think that I am not doing the right thing. Why don’t I just not start it?” To my great amazement,
my husband asked me, “You think you can do it?” I said, “I am going to try.” He said, “If you think that you can do it, then do it. Why shouldn’t people know?” You see what happened?

But, if I asked my children at that time, they said, “Mother, don’t do it. Why do you have to do that? Forget it. Why do you want to hurt yourself?” You see, they didn’t want me to be hurt twice. I was hurt there [in the camps], and [why would I want to] hurt myself now by exposing myself? They were worrying that it might affect me, it might make me feel depressed, I might go too much into the past. And they [also] are affected by it in that sense.

SL: I would like to go on again and ask you some more questions. In comparison to other families, do you think that your family is closer than other American families?

MH: I can’t speak for every family. I think in American families, you have families that are very close, but I feel that our family is extremely close. I think that we are, in my opinion, the closest that a family can be. I mean, that’s my personal opinion. Because we are good friends. We went through lots of stormy periods. When my children were born, there were hard times. So they didn’t grow up just in good times. We were always together and we were always supporting each other. I think there is a great strength in family togetherness. I think that if people don’t have family togetherness and a good harmony, good family, and there is no love, [then] I think that you cannot be happy, no matter what you are doing. Whether you have a very interesting profession or whatever you have, you need love, friendship, togetherness, and intimacy.

And we are intimate friends. I am intimate friends with my children. And now they are grown up, if my daughter wants an advice -- [for example] she called me up one day, [and] she said, “Mother, you are my best friend, I [would like to] ask your advice. The first person I think I want to get an advice from is you, because you are my true friend.” And that’s what my daughter is doing and she’s always consulting [also] with my husband, and so is my son. Like [if] we have something to discuss, we come together [and] discuss that. [Even] when they were small, we used to have [discussions]. See, you have to spend time with your children. When they were small, we created togetherness, like involving our children wherever we went. [When] the children were small, we took them along. When
they were bigger, a little bit, we had programs together, something nice, like we would sit together, we would listen to music. [When] they were bigger, we would follow [the same way], like listening to an opera, we would follow the text. Or [when] they were smaller, they started to read.

Monica was in the second grade then, that was in Wisconsin. So my husband got some slides from one of the museums with famous paintings, and then whoever was doing the best reading, we projected the slides, and the reading was done by Henry for years because he was reading well. And then one day my husband said, “Now Monica is going to be reading.” She said, she cannot read well. So, she started, she was reading. That’s the way we discovered that she needs glasses. She was reading the text and she made mistakes and my husband said, “How come? You are a second grader, can’t you read?” Then my husband got an idea, [and he] said, “Henry, give me your glasses,” because he was wearing glasses, and put it on Monica and she could read every word. You see, you have to know your child. I, personally, can’t talk about other families, probably there are families who are close, but we are very, very close.

**SL:** Do you see yourself as a more concerned parent than other people you know?

**MH:** I consider myself as a very concerned parent. I was very concerned for my children when they were small. I remember now, my son grew up in Israel, as you know. When he started walking, I was walking beside him, maybe over-concerned and protective. I feel that I am protective [but] that I am not possessive. There is a difference between being possessive and protective. But I feel protective and I feel very concerned. Their [well-being] concerns me. I’m always [concerned]. I speak not only for myself [but also] for my husband, and for the grandparents. They are just as concerned. We are a very tightly knit family.

**SL:** When your children were young, what do you think your greatest concerns were about them?

**MH:** Their safety, and also the influence of the environment. So I tried to [guide them]. When your children are small, then you have to give them a guideline so when they are going to be on their own, they are going to handle themselves right, and that’s their safety. In that sense, I mean protection.
SL: Now as far as your contact with surviving family members, you mother lives in Israel but she is here now and has been here for the last year, so you see her with regularity.

MH: Yes.

SL: Your in-laws, where are they right now?

MH: Well, my in-laws are here in Dubuque.

SL: So they [also are here], you’ve also maintained a close contact with them.

MH: Yes, Yes.

SL: What about your cousins that met you when you first got here. Are you still in contact with them?

MH: Oh, yes. I am in contact, we see each other occasionally, but we feel very close to each other. And they were extremely helpful to us. [Alexander Salomon] is the cousin of my mother, but when we came to the United States, I hadn’t seen him for ages and I don’t even think I remembered his wife. When we came, then it was another cousin of my mother, whom I didn’t see for many years, and they lived for a while in Israel, when they were very young. When we came to the United States, I couldn’t believe it, you know, they were waiting for us at the airplane. They prepared for us a feast and then they went shopping with us. Then they bought dishes for us, and then they would come down everyday [to] see what is missing [what we needed]. That’s what I mean [by] their concern. Not that somebody comes and then you [only] invite [them] for dinner and that’s it. You see? They ask you, do you need any money? They give you [support], they want to help you. You see? This is what I meant [by] true concern.

SL: When you were living in Monroe, since you were the only Jewish family there, then your good friends were all non-Jewish. Is that correct?

MH: Yes, mostly. Yes, my good friends were non-Jewish really, but there were very, very few Jewish people. I mean there were none, except Mrs. Becker. I liked her a lot, but then she was an older lady. She was quite a bit older than I was.

SL: And what about in Dubuque? Do you have more Jewish friends now?
MH: Yes, yes. In Dubuque I have [more Jewish friends]. I have here also some Christian friends and I have Jewish friends here, because we have here the [Beth El] Jewish synagogue. Then, [as] I mentioned, I have some wonderful Jewish ladies, one of them became a good friend of my mother, Mrs. Solomon. She is a wonderful person and I like her a lot. And Mrs. [Phyllis] Storbach, she’s very nice. And Reva. Well, I have now more Jewish friends, and I have Christian friends, too.

SL: Are there any other survivors in Dubuque?

MH: In Dubuque? None. I think that I am the only survivor in Dubuque, and wherever I was, I was the only survivor. I don’t think there were survivors in Augusta, Georgia, and truly in Monroe, I did not meet anyone. I am sure that I am the only survivor here in Dubuque. And not only in Dubuque but [also] in this area. It is an interesting thing [that] happened to me. I was invited to speak to St. Donatus School and the principal of the school is a nun. She is [from] the same order as the Sisters of St. Francis. When I was invited, I was told that in this school no Jewish person ever stepped into. They don’t know what is a Jew, period. I felt honored, and I thought that I better do justice to Judaism. So, I talked to the children about Judaism and I read some poetry. And then I had made a tape of the Horah, and we danced the Horah, and those children were just terrific. They sent for me Easter [cards], I still have [them]. Did I show you those? They sent for me for Easter [all] these cards.

SL: Yes.

MH: So you see, in many places, like the Sisters of St. Francis, they wanted me to have a series of mini-lectures about Judaism. They never had anyone doing that. They wanted to know about my experiences, and there were so many organizations I talked to in Dubuque. I am still not done, I am still getting invitations all the time. And then I went out in that area, and I found out how few Jewish families maybe arrived in the surrounding towns, too. And there were definitely no survivors. In a big radius here [Dubuque], there are no Jewish survivors. So it is strange, in some ways, that we come to places where I am the only survivor. When I was in Madison, I was in Lake Geneva, there was a program called “Respect for Life.” It was a panel, and I was invited by one of the nuns at St. Clare

56 An Israeli folk dance.
Hospital [in the late 1970s]. The whole program was initiated by St. Clare Hospital, and [on the panel] there was one physician from there, a pediatrician, Dr. Stiles, myself, and one of the sisters from the Emergency Room, I think. I was surprised, there were about 400 people there and they wanted me to talk for ten minutes about “Respect for Life” due to my camp experiences. It just shows you that there was no one before me who had something like that [to share], and that was in Lake Geneva. And then I met there a lady from Madison, she was a survivor. I don’t know if you know her. I have somewhere her name. She was working in the Blue Cross and her husband is a professor. I don’t know if you have an opportunity to look her up. At the end of my speech she came out, and somebody told me a lady wants to speak to you. I came out and I found this lady. She was crying, and she was telling me that she went to buy my books because they were on display. As she [was holding] The Waltz of the Shadows she started crying, and she said she cannot read it. She said, “It is going to take a long time until I can read it.” And then I found out that she was in Auschwitz, and she was the victim of a terrible experiment. She couldn't talk about it. At that time she couldn't even talk about it. If you just were asking her where she was [during the Holocaust], immediately she was crying.

So that was the first and the only person who came up to me and said that she was a survivor of the camps in Auschwitz. When she read my book, she said, “I knew it was genuine and authentic because,” she said, “I have seen the camps and I have seen everything.” And she said, “I couldn’t take it. I can’t take it.” And then she told me, “I never told [it] to anyone but I feel that [as] we are fellow prisoners, I will tell you.” And really, they experimented on her. They sterilized her and she couldn’t have any children. She remembered what they did to her and she said she didn’t want to talk about it. She said even when she reads about it, [she feels the pain]. But she still bought my book, and she said she is going to just take a little from it and read it. That was the only person whom I met [the only other survivor] through the seven years during which I was really out in many places. Every place where I talked, they said, like [when] they invited me in schools, that I am the only one who talks and who was a witness or a survivor from the camps. So that’s what my experience is, so I
I don't know how many survivors [are there]. I don't think they have survivors here in a big radius, not in Dubuque. In Dubuque there are very few [Jewish families], I know all the Jewish families in Dubuque. And they were here [during the war], they were not in the camps, none of them.

SL: Do you belong to any organizations of survivors?

MH: Well, I didn't even know that there are organizations of survivors.

SL: Now, say in Milwaukee there's a club, B'nai Brith, and the survivors in Milwaukee, they have a club.

MH: No, no, I didn't even know about this, that they have a club. I had no idea about this.

SL: I am going to have to turn the tape.

MH: Yes.

END OF TAPE 9, SIDE 1
SL: As far as the contact with American Jews that you know, do they try to make an effort to understand the Holocaust, what you went through, do they ask you about it?

MH: Oh, yes. They asked me to talk once at the Hadassah about the Holocaust. I tell you something. Sometimes I feel, that’s my true opinion, that some of the Jewish people sometimes express less interest [in the Holocaust] than the other members of the community. And I know that at the beginning, it seemed to me [that way] here [in Dubuque], because I was invited to so many [other] places until finally I was invited to the Hadassah. I think that what happened [when] I was invited to the Hadassah, was [that I was] speaking at the Hamstead High School. And one day Phyllis Storbach called me and she said, “We didn’t realize up till now what you are doing here.” “But,” she said, “you are doing a wonderful thing for the Jewish community. I thought that I should call you up and tell you what happened [after you spoke at the high school].” Two children from the Hamstead High called her up. She was the one who organized with her husband the whole program [at the high school]. They called her up and they told her that they are so sorry to what happened to the Jewish people, that they apologize. Although it’s not their guilt, they feel that it is because somebody should have done something [to prevent the Holocaust]. I think that this really made them [the students] aware, maybe, of the value [of speaking up], that we have to do this [inform people about the Holocaust]. I was invited by many Christian organizations before I was invited to Jewish organizations. For instance, I tried to do something with my book. There is a place, Jewish publications, and I tried to contact those people. For instance, I sent my book [there] and they were so [unappreciative]. I would have liked them to support me, and my book one day maybe should be published [by them]. I sent a copy of my book to the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and after weeks and weeks, I got a simple thank you note. That's it. I feel that there is much more reaction sometimes from others than from actually my Jewish people. I noticed that, and I tried to understand why.

Maybe because they are so [knowledgeable], they know about the [Holocaust], and they feel that

57 Yad Vashem is the Holocaust Memorial museum in Jerusalem, Israel.
they are a part of this [being Jewish], that injustice was done. And the others feel guilty about it. I try to explain [it], and that just hit me; maybe the others feel guilty about it. But then I think that I would have liked to see more reaction, frankly, from the Jewish communities.

I wasn’t invited, for instance, in Madison to the Jewish [organizations], by the Jewish communities. I was invited by all the [Christian organizations], like by the University and the Christian Men’s Club, and Woman’s Club. And very occasionally I got invited [to Jewish organizations]. I tell you frankly, the first invitation from Jewish circles [was the Hadassah in Dubuque]. Naturally I wasn’t in Jewish circles [before], because I was in Monroe so long, and we did not have Jewish people [there]. [That’s the reason why,] maybe, that on [only] one of the occasions I was invited here in Hadassah. So you see, proportionately I feel that they [the Christian organizations] are more interested. Now this is through my own personal experiences. Now, maybe in my situation it is different than in other people’s, but I don’t know why.

SL: So, what do you think, then, the reactions are of the non-Jewish people that you’ve told? How do they react to the Holocaust?

MH: They react with a lot of compassion, a lot of interest. As, for instance, the Holocaust movie was [received]. When I go to the schools, they ask lots about the Holocaust. I find that the young people are so interested, the girls, and the high school girls, and junior high. After my program many came and hugged me, they thanked me that I came. I found that they did not know many of these things [about the Holocaust]. I found out that if somebody goes there who is a survivor, like one girl came to me, she said, “I’m glad I hear from somebody who is a survivor. I don’t read that only from the history books. I want to hear something authentic and that I can relate with.” And I got many comments from the teachers that after my speeches I did something good for the children, in the sense that they express more gratitude for what they have. There was lots of discussion. I have, for instance, discussions, like question and answer periods. I was with young children and you would be surprised how young children, junior high children, how much interest they have. Now, I wasn’t invited to Jewish organizations so much, so that I can’t tell [about their interest]. I know when I was invited at
Hadassah they showed lots of interest. I can say, they were [interested]. But I find that in all these years, I was invited more to the Christians than to the Jewish organizations. I know that naturally, in all these places, maybe, where I was there were very few Jewish organizations, so it might be that it is due to that. I couldn’t tell you for sure. But, for instance, what bothered me was that I didn’t get for so long an answer from the Yad Vashem. I wrote really my book in the memory of those [victims of the Holocaust]. I don’t think they get many books like this, and they had no comment on it. I just felt that when they get something like that, they should appreciate [it] more and they are less appreciative. Or maybe they take it for granted, that, oh, it’s just another person’s experience. But you cannot go by that way [cannot have this attitude]. I would like my book, *The Waltz of the Shadows*, should maybe one day be published by a Jewish organization.\(^{58}\) I wrote this in the memory of my family, but I wrote this in the memory of all the victims. It’s very [unfair] they would publish other things but [not] something like that. I don’t get the support for what I am doing from the Jewish community, a Jewish publisher or something, and I think that it is more of a non-care attitude, in that sense. I don’t want to [say these things, but] you asked me for a criticism, so I am very sincere. See, I like to say what I think, and I had some disappointment in that respect. I have to tell you the truth.

SL: Again, I’d like to move on to some other questioning.

MH: Yes. Yes.

SL: Do you belong to any political or social clubs? Did you in Monroe belong to any clubs?

MH: No political. I tell you, I don’t want to get involved in any politics because I just don’t. I belong to the Woman’s Club [here in Dubuque], for instance, and the Monroe Woman’s Club. I was a member for many years. And then presently, I am belonging to the Jewish organization Hadassah and the Sisters of Beth El.

SL: As far as your religious life in Monroe, did you get to go to synagogue at all?

---

\(^{58}\) It was published in 1983 by a Jewish publisher, Philosophical Library, in New York.
MH: Our religious life was very much affected by the fact that we lived in Monroe, because my husband had to work on Saturdays, and it happened so that the services were on Saturday morning, and so by the time we would have gotten to the services, it would have been the end. And it is very embarrassing if you go with your children, always, without your husband. So now I changed my mind, because [if] my husband is busy, now I go to the temple here [in Dubuque]. But you see here they know [me], and they know my husband is busy. But there in Madison, if I just show up, they don’t know anything about our family, you see. So very seldom would we go there, like to a Bar Mitzvah or something like that. We were twice at the Bar Mitzvah. Once one of our friends who is a physician in Rockford, Illinois, whose son had a Bar Mitzvah, and he wanted Gene to be there, and us. Occasionally we go, very seldom. So we practiced religion at home and that is it. My daughter, for instance, now she wants to come home to go here to the services, because she didn’t have an opportunity to go there [in Monroe]. In Milwaukee [where she lives now], occasionally she can go [to the synagogue]. Then, my son, when he was in the army reserve, they had services there. He went there for services more than he did in his entire childhood.

SL: Was he Bar Mitzvahed?

MH: Yes. So you see, that’s the thing. Even if you don’t go, just occasionally to services, you still can respect your traditions. But it is sure [that] certainly [you are] affected if you are in a community where you are the only Jewish family. I mean, in that respect, going to services, you are very strongly affected. It also depends what profession your husband has, and when he has to work.

SL: What about traditions in the home?

MH: Well, traditions, that is different, that you can practice. It is the only thing, like holidays [that you can keep].

SL: So you kept that?

MH: That you keep, but other things [you lose]. You have family being together for holidays, but other things, you can't keep. But you would be surprised [that] my son is -- I call him a *Talmud bocher*[^59].

[^59]: A Hebrew scholar involved in the study of the Talmud. The Talmud is a compilation of Jewish Oral law.
because he is reading and knows so much about religion, Judaism and Christianity. You know what he does? He came home and he said, "Mother, you know, I realize how much I forgot of the Hebrew [language]. So I have here a poem I am reading through the Hebrew dictionary." He ordered now, a Bible, he ordered the Old Testament, he ordered the Torah. He ordered it from this Jewish publications and he wanted to take them and study [them]. You have the translation in English and then in Hebrew, and another translation that is not as correct as these. So, he is really [a scholar]. I told my husband he should have become a rabbi. He is that much interested [in the study of Judaism and in religion], although he wasn’t as exposed maybe like others. When he comes home, he comes to the services, when I go. [When] he was living here [in Dubuque], he came to the Synagogue, to the New Year's [and other] services, and he enjoyed them. So he is [religious]. You see, even if you don’t go to the temple, you still can have a serious flavor of Judaism for your children. It depends, what example you give through religion. It has many aspects besides the temple.

SL: How do you personally think that your feelings about religion have changed since your experiences?

MH: My feelings about religion? I have a strong faith. I felt that it was a very strong force. I felt that in the camps my faith was one of my strong anchors to which I was clinging. [And that was true of] most of the survivors. So I don’t think that changed. Now what changed after the camps? My mother was Orthodox and we had kosher and all that. That changed, because in the camps you were starving, you couldn’t see that something is kosher or not. I found that this isn’t really all about Judaism, because this is [only] part of the ritual, but Judaism is much more than just eating kosher or treyfer. See? So, for instance, before the camps I wouldn’t eat anything which wasn’t kosher, for nothing in the world. And I was a teenager. After I came from the camps, I didn’t make much fuss about it, you see? The camps changed that, and I think I became more liberal after the camps. I [went through] some change, I can’t say that I didn’t. I did. Not in my faith, there is no change [in that]. As far as [the dietary rules, they are only] like accessories [in Judaism], I would say. They are just the outer

and commentary on it.

60 Yiddish for food that is not kosher.
accessories. You become less rigid, that’s the only thing that changed. And you cannot come back from disaster without any change, it’s not possible.

SL: Now on a more social type of level, these questions are more about your own personal things that you do.

MH: Yes.

SL: What do you say you would do in a typical day? What is a typical day for you?

MH: Oh, you mean, what is a typical day of my life?

SL: Yes. Right now.

MH: A typical day of my life right now [is like this]. I try to get up as early as I can in the morning, I got up at 5 o’clock today, and then I go for my 8-mile run. But today I missed my run, because yesterday we were running and I thought, well, today I should get my house organized before you come. But normally I would [run] because I do believe in taking good care of yourself.

SL: So you would do an 8-mile run in the morning?

MH: Yesterday, [I did] an 8-mile run in the morning. But the weekends are different. I usually do 13 or 12 miles. And then I come home, take my shower. What I do lately [is], I run with my husband and that gives me an opportunity to be with him longer in the morning, because then I see him only at 5 o’clock in the afternoon or 5:30. Then we come home and we eat together, Mother, and everyone. Right now I have it very good because my mother prepared the breakfast, otherwise I have to do that in the evening, to prepare things. We always make a point to eat breakfast together. And that [way], we feel that we are family. You see, people go and eat their breakfast, the man goes [to work], and the wife is feeling bad or [only] says hello [to her husband]. But, we can visit, [my husband and I] about one-and-a-half hours in the morning, so you don’t feel deprived when your husband goes away and does not keep you company. Then I come back and right away I start my cooking. And now, my mother is here, so we do it together. Maybe I am old-fashioned, but I feel that your family comes number one. So when you start your day, and you did your running, and you did your eating together with the family, then you have to think, “What are you going to serve for dinner?” I am [a
good cook], I can cook European style. I am a gourmet cook, so we always have a very good soup and we have good meals. I believe that if you eat well in the morning and we have a good meal in the evening, then at lunch time you don’t have to eat much. Then after [that], I do my house, and we have a fairly big house, with three levels, so it takes a little time until you straighten out the house. Then I do my shopping. So, I try to do everything during part of the day, everything which concerns my family; washing the clothes, doing all what a housewife does. But then I like to take some time in the afternoon for myself. I think everyone needs that. I like to read a little, half an hour if I can, or more. I like fiction and non-fiction. I always try to read something, I like psychology greatly, so I read lots of psychology books and I try to understand [the text] while I do that. I had an interest [in psychology] also in the camps; maybe that stayed with me. Part of my survival was my desire to understand what was happening, and ever since I have the desire to understand people, to understand life. I naturally have to reserve some time for my writing, that’s very important for me. And writing is time-consuming. It takes you half an hour just to get into it. So I work constantly on some new poems or new [writings]. Writing is something I do for myself, but I have the same strong obligations to that as I have for my family. Number one for my family and number two comes my writing. Then, naturally, by the time I do this little section in the afternoon, maybe one hour, maybe one-and-a-half hours, I reserve for that purpose. And then I know my husband is coming home at 5 o’clock so I start doing [the dinner preparations]. I take very seriously my duty as a wife and as a mother. My children are not home right now but when they were here, I left everything. I dedicated totally myself for my family this weekend. There was no writing, nothing for me. [When] my children came home, we had together a big table, my father-in-law was here, we were visiting with each one separately, and my daughter was playing for us some music. Then it’s a total abandonment to my family, when my family is home. And then I catch up with everything [later]. We have a very spartan type of life in the sense that my husband is very busy. He’s doing [in] the morning his rounds at the hospital, then he has patients, and at 12 o’clock he starts surgery. Many times he has two surgeries in an afternoon, which is time-consuming; brain surgery or a spinal cord. When he comes home, he
likes to see the news and I know he’s hungry and he doesn’t eat much [during the day]. He has ten minutes to eat there [in his office], so we always eat in the dining room at night. We have our dinner and then we talk, and we share our experiences. Then in the evening, sometimes, we take a walk. We love to read [and] we like to listen to music. If I have something to do, like I want to do some reading, or I have to do some writing, then I would dedicate some little time for it. In the meanwhile, my husband can do his reading or something. Then later we are together. So I am not the person who is going to stay up and leave my husband there [by himself] and do my writing until the morning. I feel that my family is just as important to me. I think in order to have a real good family life, a real good intimacy and harmony and friendship and everything, you have to pay attention to each other. Also, you have to nurture a marriage, to treat it with care. Just like anything what is dear to you. So, naturally, [sometimes] we meet some friends. I always have friends. I go out for lunch [sometimes]. Now, this is a typical day when I don’t have any invitations, like to go out with my friends for lunch. That’s a little different. My husband usually doesn’t come home for lunch, very seldom that he would, and not usually at lunch. This is a typical summer program. But then when fall comes, and winter and spring, then my program changes, because I do lots of public speaking, for which I have to prepare myself. I do it here in Dubuque and I also do it outside [of this area]. Now, sometimes when I have to go out to a school outside of the city and I have to be there at 9 o’clock, then my whole day takes a different shape. I have to cook a day in advance, but that is very important to me, too. Now there were times when I had lots of [presentations], at the beginning. I had lots of engagements at night and I was traveling and my husband was very understanding. Now I try to do it a little differently, I try to take engagements in the day time, like lectures or speeches at noon time. And I find that people are very understanding because my husband wouldn’t like me to travel too much at night. First of all, he worries about my safety. I would come home sometimes at 12 o’clock [midnight] all by myself in the car. What if something happens on the country roads? I traveled in weather when there was fog and ice and snow, because I feel very motivated of doing what I am doing. It gives me an opportunity, Sara, to come in contact with many people. I need that outside contact, I need the
conversation with people, to listen, to exchange ideas and thoughts. Number one is my family, then comes my self-expression, and then I need people around me. So this is the way I program my life and my days, with variations. And then, you know, I write music now, too, and I dedicate some time for creativity. I wouldn’t be able to live without creating something new.

SL: Okay. What newspapers and magazines do you get here at the house?

MH: Oh, we have Time magazine, first of all. I think that the Time magazine is a real fine one. Then we have the Runner’s Guide because we do this long distance running, [and we plan to run] another marathon. My husband is very interested [in that]. We are very interested in physical exercise. Now, in winter there is something I should mention to you what changes [in our program]. Whenever we can, we go skiing and we always [do that] in the weekends [when] I don’t do anything much in the house. Then I am with my husband and we go wherever [we want]. In summer, we go running or we make a [different] program. We go to a movie. My weekends are totally free.

SL: Newspapers and magazines?

MH: The newspapers? We have the Telegraph Herald, our local paper, then we have Newsweek, and let’s see, what else do we have? We have the Money Market. Occasionally I buy this Life Magazine, and I think that’s just about it. Because my husband, then, has the surgery journals, and he has to read quite a bit to keep up. But he’s a very fast reader, avid reader, so he reads all the journals and he reads quite a bit of fiction and non-fiction. But as far as journals, I find that if you have too many, you end up by not looking at them. So I think that having a limited number [is better]. We used to have magazines and magazines that would come, we were bombarded [with them] for years, and we found out that some of them just were laid aside, we didn’t even read them. So now we got a little smarter in this respect. We have [only] a few, but we read those.

SL: Okay, I am going to have to stop the tape.

MH: Yes.

END OF TAPE 9, SIDE 2
SL: Have you read any books on the Holocaust?

MH: Yes.

SL: What was your reaction to them?

MH: Well, I was impressed very much. One book, Martin Gray's *For Those I Loved*, impressed me very strongly. Then there is a book, I thought it was excellent, *Let Us Not Forget* [by Irene Teger, subtitled *A Mother’s Letter to a Son*]. There is another book, I can’t recall the author, that impressed me because these were first-hand experiences of people. I also have seen [a book called] *The Yellow Star*. I read that one and I think it is a true documentary book. Then, I like Elie Wiesel. I really like his books. I read *The Night*, I know you are familiar with [it]. I read several of his books, and I find something of a kinship with Elie Wiesel in the sense that he is [also a survivor]. Sometimes people ask me [about him]. Well, as I was reading the book [*Night*] my husband said, "Look here at Elie Wiesel. All the subjects [are] are about this problem [the Holocaust]." I think that because he is very dedicated to [the Holocaust], I feel that somehow he’s the one person whom we should point out, who wants to try to tell you, who tries to convey, the strife and the struggle of the Jewish people. I like his books. Then I have a book, *The Auschwitz Inferno* [by Filip Muller and S. Flatauer]. I read a book what impressed me greatly, *The Five Chimneys*, and that was written by Olga Lengyel. I know how authentic this is because the woman was from the same city that I was, and her husband was a physician and he had a private hospital, and that impressed me. I like to read books about the Holocaust. I think now of another [book]. *Children of the Holocaust* [by Helen Epstein]. It was one of my friend’s [books]. She gave it [to me] because she knew how much I like them [Holocaust books]. Then [there is] another book called *The Holocaust* that I got from the library, which is also like a documentary. So I do read about the Holocaust. Although I was there, I am [still] interested. I want to know what other people’s experiences were.

The book *Let Us Not Forget* is a very interesting one. I have it upstairs, maybe later I might show it to you. It has also some music that the people were writing and I remembered in this book there was an
experience of one of the survivors who was shot. I think she was Polish and was pushed in [one of] those ditches that the others were digging, and she crawled out miraculously from there. She was shot and her daughter was shot. In that book *Let Us Not Forget*, I was surprised to see her experiences describing that. I have seen her on television on one of the programs titled *Holocaust*. So I am interested in anything what’s coming up on that subject. There is something else that I have seen that I think [is] coming out now, recently. I put it aside in the bookstore.

SL: Did you watch the *Holocaust* television program?

MH: Yes.

SL: What was your reaction to that?

MH: I think that the *Holocaust* should be presented every year because I was very impressed. After the third one, I got to the point where I got depressed. I was thinking that the one comment that I have about the *Holocaust* [program is that] it wasn’t really Auschwitz [represented], it was Ravensbruck, I understand. I can’t compare it to Auschwitz, because Auschwitz was much more horrible, much, much more of a nightmare than Ravensbruck. But I think that generally the movie was good.

SL: Did people become more interested in your experiences afterward?

MH: Oh yes. After that, I had something that came up that you wouldn’t believe it. I had for a whole month invitations in schools. I was invited to Monroe to have a radio talk for one and a half hours, and there were people calling in, after that. I would say that people reacted, there was a very strong reaction. This is why I say [this program] should be presented. Every time the *Holocaust* is presented I could see how people are interested to hear more about it.

SL: Now you told me that you traveled quite a great deal in southern Wisconsin. Have you done any traveling in the rest of the state?

MH: Well, as far as my public speeches or...?

SL: No, just in general with your family.

MH: Oh yes, oh yes. I traveled, we were traveling in Texas.

SL: Actually, I mean in Wisconsin itself.
MH: Oh, excuse me, oh you mean in Wisconsin itself?
SL: Yes, other than the southern part of Wisconsin that you traveled in.
MH: Well, we were in Door County, and let's see, where were we? We were in northern Wisconsin, we were skiing there, and I loved that area. We did cross-country skiing, lots of it. I have very nice winter [memories]. We went up to Ironwood.
SL: Then you would say you have done quite a bit of traveling?
MH: Oh yes, we did, we went to Wisconsin Dells because that wasn't far from Madison, and we had some nice times there. Oh yes, we were traveling around this country, definitely.
SL: Was there any part that you especially liked?
MH: Oh, there is a part I love. If you ever go up to northern Wisconsin, there is a Lake Lucerne. I think it is the nicest lake. It is about one hour from Madison, it's on Highway O. I don't know where you catch O, but you go towards Wisconsin Dells for a while. Anyway, it is called Lake Lucerne. Let's see what locality would be close? I would say, Silver Crest. The Silver Crest Lake [and the Silver Crest restaurant] is very close from there. Anyway, it is a lake which is beautiful. It has absolutely no motor boats on it, and it is owned, I think, by one of the churches around. They don't allow any houses to be built around it, no cottages. We used to have a little mobile home near the lake in an oak forest, [later on] we sold it. That lake gave us so much joy. It has practically no weeds. It is spring-fed and we swam across and around that lake. I loved the northern Wisconsin area. We had beautiful experiences swimming there and skiing there. I think Wisconsin is a beautiful state. And we went [there] year after year, for years. And from here [Dubuque], it is harder to get there. But when we were living in Monroe, we would go up in summer every nice weekend and then we would go up for Labor Day, like a long weekend. And there are other lakes around, but Lake Lucerne is one of the nicest lakes that I ever encountered [among the] swimming lakes, because we love swimming. We would go into the lake for two hours, we would do long-distance swimming. So, the northern woods are just gorgeous. We have a picture [a painting] by my mother-in-law depicting the northern woods
in fall. This is from northern Wisconsin. We took them [my in-laws] there once for about four days and they were very impressed. So I really like Wisconsin. We lived there for so long.

SL: How much did Wisconsin remind you of Cluj?

MH: Very much. This is why I felt so close to Wisconsin. For instance, northern Wisconsin, reminds me very much of Cluj. It reminds me more than anything of Cluj, more than any other place where we were. Like, for instance, here in Dubuque, the climate isn't like in Cluj. Northern Wisconsin has these cool summers, and the summer isn't so long, and there is lots of snow [in winter]. We had lots of snow in Cluj. The snow started early and melted late. Then also why Wisconsin reminds me of Cluj is that [Cluj] was a very rich agricultural place, and so is Wisconsin -- lots of corn. Actually, Madison reminds me very much of the city of Cluj because it has the same [population]. Now Madison is larger, but [Cluj] used to have [a population of] 150,000. It was a university [city, with] lots of students. It was a cultural place. Even the vegetation [of Madison] reminded me very much [of Cluj]. This is why we felt so happy when we came to Monroe. We were very happy that it was close to Madison. We used to go to Madison almost every weekend. Because in the city of Monroe there wasn’t too much going on. As far as movies are concerned, we had one movie house. If you have seen the movie once, that’s what it was. But there [Madison], you have the Union that you can go [to], and there we have seen outstanding concerts. We used to have the tickets for all year, now how do you call it?

SL: Season tickets.

MH: Season tickets, and we have seen [concerts]. There was sometimes, occasionally, an opera. Then we have seen movies. We are great movie-goers, we love movies. We liked the Delaney’s [restaurant]. We spent lots time [in Madison] with my daughter. After my son was for four years in Madison, then my daughter was for two years in Madison. She finished [her studies] in Milwaukee. But we liked Madison, it’s a beautiful city.
SL: Again, speaking from the vantage point of being in Monroe, how much happier do you think you would have been if you were living in a city that had a larger Jewish population? Would that have mattered at all?

MH: Well, I think it always matters. I would have liked to see more Jewish families there. I [would have felt] more complete, let’s put it that way. I like the fact that I belong to the Beth El Temple, that if I want to go to the temple, I can go to services. I feel good that I can contribute something. Frankly, when I came here [to Dubuque] and we went to the services on Friday night the first time, I felt pretty emotional when they opened the Torah. I felt [emotional], I can’t say no. I was [invited to talk] in Beth El [Synagogue]. I [also] was invited by other Jewish organizations. I should mention that it was in Beloit. I was invited there [to talk] in the temple. So I have to say that I [also] felt at that time very emotional, when they opened the Torah, because it reminded me of something [in a] way. You see, Judaism is not something that you discard if you have difficulty of this kind or that. I grew up with it, I can’t discard it. I can’t be nonchalant when a holiday is coming, like the Day of Atonement or the New Year. I feel good to go to the temple. It goes way back into my childhood. I think that I always [do] like to light the candles on Friday night. I grew up in an environment, in a house, like that, with my relatives there, my grandparents. You can’t shed this off by anything. You can, like we were talking, have little changes, like kosher or no, but you don’t shed off your tradition what you grew up with.

SL: How did you feel about living in Wisconsin with its high percentage of ethnic Germans in the population?

MH: Well, there were lots of [them]. Actually in Monroe, there are lots of Swiss people, you know. Later they thought that I am German, because I had an accent. Due to the fact that I had an accent, I was totally accepted. People were very nice, and I have to tell you, there are very nice decent people living [in that city]. They are very friendly in Monroe. The people [are friendly], I didn’t have any bad feelings about them at all, they were nice people. They are decent and hard-working.

SL: What effort did you make to acquaint yourself with Wisconsin history?
MH: Ah, we are [sorry about this]. I tell you I should make a self-criticism. I could have done more in that line. I feel that maybe I should have explored it more, and you just pointed it out. I wasn’t thinking all these years [to do that] and I was for so many years [in Wisconsin]. I think it is a mistake, because you should get acquainted more [with Wisconsin history]. I think I should have acquainted myself more.

SL: How do you feel that you’ve contributed to the Wisconsin community? How did you feel you contributed when you were there?

MH: I feel I contributed. Some people say, many of my friends say, I contributed a lot. I can’t brag [about it] myself. I didn’t start to contribute with that aspect. I tried to give a lot of myself for the community. Not only the fact that I was speaking, but I organized concerts, I was active in the [Monroe] Woman's Club, I did things for the community regardless, not only my speeches about Judaism. I really was trying to do things for the community. I do the same thing also here in Dubuque. I organized here concerts. I tried to, for instance, do some drives for the symphony. I am always involved in some community project wherever I am. That’s natural with me.

SL: Did you feel an obligation to Wisconsin or to Monroe for giving you an opportunity to make a new life for yourself there in the community?

MH: Yes, yes. I feel very grateful. I feel very grateful for the people who gave us that opportunity. That was the first opportunity my husband could do what he really wanted to do, [by] giving him the opportunity to have a department in neurosurgery. I have nice memories of Wisconsin. I really loved that state. I have to tell you, I lived long enough there but I [still] feel [the need to] go back. I just love to go back, occasionally. Very seldom, we go back to Madison. From here we go very seldom, because my husband is on duty six days, seven days a week, really. Like on the weekends they call him, and although another neurosurgeon is here, my husband's practice is even bigger and not smaller at all, so he is very busy. Occasionally, very seldom, we would go up to Madison and we would go to Delaney's [restaurant] and to the mall, and to a movie, and to the bookstore. I like the University Book Store. I like that [one] because it has really nice selections, and [also] the Brown's
Book Store, I went there so many times. I have nice memories. I will always love Wisconsin. I spent part of my youth in Wisconsin, my children grew up in Wisconsin. We had there nice years, we were offered opportunity, so I am really grateful. I lived [there] most of the time while we were here in the United States. Most of the years we lived in Wisconsin. We are here [in Dubuque] for four years, but we were in Wisconsin for 16. We were in New York for three months, and in Connecticut for one year, in the south for one year. So that is the longest time of our life that we spent in one place.

SL: What was your reaction when the American Nazi Party had planned to march in Milwaukee?

MH: I was furious, if you ask me my reaction. I was also disappointed that they took such [strength], that they grew in their power so they could do that. I didn't like that because I felt that they tried to contaminate our youth. And you know, there were many questions in the schools. They asked me how do I feel about it. I felt outraged. I think that, after what happened, that somebody should make propaganda for what they stand for, it is a terrific insult. I know [that in] the United States, we should retain our democracy because we should always remain a democratic country. But I don't think that we have to encourage elements of this sort to grow, because it's just like we let a cobra come closer and closer and then eventually it's going to bite you. I think we have to watch out that [the American Nazi Party] shouldn't grow. I don't think that they should march and make propaganda. That's what I think. If you would ask me, I would say I would protest [against] them to march. But they weren't successful anyway, because I see many people who felt the same way [that I did].

SL: How satisfactory do you find the American system of government to be?

MH: How satisfactory? Well, I still think it is the best government, because I was in many countries and nowhere can things be perfect. So what I would like to see, if you ask me my sincere opinion, [I would] like [to see that] some things, sometimes, are not exaggerated maybe for the sake of personal gain. Even the energy crisis and the government crisis, and for instance the fact that we have 55 miles [speed] limits, and then we find out things maybe are for a purpose. But then, you see, in any government you have things that you can comment on. On the other hand, still, whatever the problem is, by the fact that we stay a democracy, this is good. Because you have other governments
which are very corrupt. Like, speaking of Romania, if you compare them, there is no comparison [with the United States]. Because if you wanted something to be arranged [in Romania], [and] if you didn’t bribe people, you would wait for months. That was because of the very, very low salaries that they would pay. Like the standard of living [was so low that if you] worked there, when you grew older [you] could go on the street begging. You could see the people begging on the streets. Here, no matter what, people have more of a standard of living, more decent things. It is a good country. Now, every government can be criticized because of their mistakes. They are not perfect, but I find that [ours] is still the best.

SL: How do you feel about the prominence of Jews in American society?

MH: The prominence? You mean, if I do think that there are more Jewish people prominent?

SL: Or do you think it is a good thing for Jews to have a lot of exposure nationally?

MH: Yes, I do think so. Like, for instance, here in Dubuque, let’s put it that way, where I am right now. How do the Christian people here relate to the Jewish community? They said that they respect the Jewish community because all these are successful and able, outstanding people. Well, I think that is [also] how they relate to Israel. That [determines] how they are going to relate to Israel, you see? So it is very important that we should be outstanding and we should make contributions, because the more we do, the more respected we are, not only where we are but I think Israel will [also] get more support. That is my personal opinion. Naturally, there are all kinds of political issues there, but I think that it just speaks well of the Jewish people. So the more we are prominent, the better we are thought of, and we are still a minority, remember that, Sara. So then, our striving [is necessary, because] we are always a minority, so we have to strive more, and I think that’s true. For now and forever, in the past, too.

SL: What do you see are the most important issues facing America today?

MH: The most important issues facing America today? Well, first of all, I think that peace is a very important issue what is facing [us now]. I hope that we are going to strive, no matter what the situation is, to maintain an equilibrium, so that we are not going to have any wars, too often. I think
and I feel that we have to also pay attention to our [people], [and to] what is happening here in this country, so that we maintain a certain standard [of living and] we don't have too much unemployment. Because if we are not going to think [about that], we are going to have trouble at home. Then you will have more of a crime rate. One thing is related to the other.

I think [the United States] is a very rich country and we have to take care of our people. We can [get] involved in foreign politics, but we should not forget the issues that face us now. I think that sometimes we forget about [domestic issues] and we pay lots of [attention to the] things from outside. We don’t concentrate on [what is going on] here and now [in our country]. That's what I think we have to pay attention to. That's what I think is the primary concern. Because you are not alone, you cannot make peace with everyone, you cannot create a peaceful situation [somewhere else], you cannot solve the problems of every country, it’s impossible. I think that a very important concern for the United States is the situation in the Middle East. I think that it would be very important to support Israel in these peace negotiations. It must also be a realization that it’s very important that Israel should stay the most advanced country in the Middle East. Not only should we support [Israel] materially, but [also] support Israel politically and spiritually. Because this is a very important key to our safety, too. Because I would say [that Israel] is a sister country, Israel shapes itself after the United States of America. So we have to pay attention to this important subject, which we can’t [ignore].

Then we have to pay attention that we should not allow too much corruption in our government, and we should not let [corruption] grow. That’s very important. Because it is important that even if you get the position of power, that you shouldn’t be drawn into all kinds of things whereby you lose your identity, and then you talk about drinking water and you drink wine. This would be very important. I'd like to comment more on it but it’s going to be too time-consuming.

**SL:** Okay, I am going to turn over the tape.

**END OF TAPE 10, SIDE 1**
SL: To what extent do you believe that there is anti-Semitism in this country?
MH: Well, I wasn’t exposed [to it] in the big cities. I think probably in the big cities it might be more because of the struggle for survival and the struggle for positions. But on the other hand, I could see that Jewish people can be in high governmental positions. It speaks well, as far as if you speak about discrimination.

SL: How secure do you feel as a Jew in America?
MH: I feel secure, I really do. I didn’t have any bad experiences. This is why I feel secure. And I think that there are so many Jewish people in important positions, and I feel that there is a great respect for the Jewish people here. Now I shouldn’t say that probably there’s absolutely no anti-Semitism, because I am not knowledgeable in that. I speak of my immediate environment and the places where I live, and my experiences were good. And the experiences of other Jewish people here [in Dubuque], like the Jewish community, they don’t feel that they are threatened in any way or that they are not treated fairly. I would say probably in the big cities, there might be more, because life is harder. Maybe those people, Jewish people who have education and hold positions, maybe they might be envied or resented. Due to the fact that we always have struggled, we are very aware of that. In order to succeed you have to make an effort, so I think that it is ingrained in us very much. So maybe you strive always for more education if you can afford it. And the more education you get, the better things you have, the better future you have. So I couldn’t [say for sure to what degree there was anti-Semitism in the big cities], because I really don’t have any insight into that. I wouldn’t like to make a statement in which I might not be fair one way or another.

SL: What are your feelings about Germany and present-day Germans?
MH: Well, I heard some things that bother me, frankly. [But] there are [also] things what I do like. I have some friends who went to Germany. They say that West Germany and East Germany are like two different worlds and [East Germany is] worse. And I see that [West] Germany is flourishing now. What bothers me now is the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany. I have seen a television program
where some of the Nazi Party is taking some roots. I wouldn’t be secure as a Jew in Germany. If you asked me that, I wouldn’t like to live there. Now I have nothing against the German people because they are good people. But I think that the chance of rising anti-Semitism is still a great danger in Germany. I don’t want [to live there]. It’s not prejudice, but I think this is a reality. We have seen a program on the television which really impressed me. They are showing some of the drawings that advertise this [anti-Semitism]. And I don’t, I just wouldn’t, I would never feel comfortable living as a Jew in Germany. Now maybe it has to do with [the fact] that I suffered so much. But I trust less Germany, as far as anti-Semitism is concerned, than any other country. I have to express myself sincerely, that’s what I feel. I wouldn’t like my children to live in Germany. Now, there are lots of good things in Germany, but I wouldn’t like to be a Jew in Germany and to spend my life there. Maybe I [would] wake up 15 years from now, or 20, and there [would be] another trend for anti-Semitism coming up. I just wouldn’t be comfortable there. It can be a great country in that [respect]. [It has] nothing to do with the German people. But there is something there -- like the earth is more nourishing [for anti-Semitism]. That’s my personal opinion.

SL: Do you receive any restitution at all?

MH: [I do not receive any restitution. I applied for restitution and it was promised, but I never received any]. I could have asked for more, I think, but I felt even embarrassed at that time [to ask for anything at all]. At that time, many years ago, I was there [in Israel] and I was encouraged [to apply because we were very poor at the time]. My mother even told me [to do so]. [But] I [never] got any restitution from there. But I can’t remember [the details].

Now, I told my husband that I was looking for my certificate [from Bergen-Belsen]. I had this for years in the [safe]. When I was liberated from Bergen-Belsen they gave us a certificate with fingerprints on it. I’m still hunting for it. And I was wondering, when I asked for restitution, [I am sure that] I did give it to them. And did I ever receive it back? I was looking [for it] in the safe and I am still going to hunt for it. And if I don’t find it, I would like to write a letter and get that [certificate] for myself, because they must have a record [of it] there [in Bergen-Belsen]. Everyone who was liberated in Bergen-Belsen
got a fingerprinted [certificate]. While there might have been a record in Israel, where I [applied for] the restitution, I am still looking [for it], I was hunting [for it] yesterday. I went into the safe and I was looking among all the papers. All I know [is that] I did get a fingerprinted [certificate, at the time of my liberation in Bergen-Belsen], and I had to present that at the time when I [applied for] restitution. But later on, I was even sorry that I even applied for it because I feel that no restitution money would buy back the life of my father or my relatives, and I thought I shouldn’t have accepted anything. At that time, I was many years younger and we didn’t have much money, either. But now, thinking back, I thought maybe it was a mistake that I even [applied for] any money in restitution. But at that time there were a number of people who did get money, restitution, for that.61

SL: You’ve been lecturing for a long time but here is a question that we ask of people, most of whom do not do as much speaking as you. And that is, do you think it is easier for you now to talk about your experiences than it might have been five years ago?

MH: It is never easy. As far as it would have been five years ago, it is never easy, because whenever I talk I become very emotional. It is something that I wouldn’t say is of less intensity. It grasps me at one point or another with a very strong intensity. So that every time when I talk, up to five years ago now, I feel totally drained by the evening. The next day I can’t sleep well. Then I occasionally have some nightmares and I am in Germany. I would say it is not easier really, it is never easy. It can never be easy. As you remember, when we had our talks I got very emotional. This is something that I am not going to ever overcome, as far as emotionally.

You might have to accept [what you went through], but you see there is a difference between just accepting. Accepting or forgiving doesn’t mean that you forget, or it doesn’t mean that you approve, or it doesn’t mean that now you don’t feel any pain, because that’s okay, done, and done with. Your subconscious and your soul has a reservoir and it is there as long as you live. I know that, because

61 Officials at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial Museum later reported that the certificates of survivors had all been destroyed. These documents were required by German authorities when survivors applied for restitution, but they were never returned. In 1995, however, the International Tracing Service found documentation that Magda had been in Bergen-Belsen before November 27, 1945, under her maiden name of Magda Mozes.
now I am doing that for seven years and I still get very emotional. I still break down in tears almost every time, somewhere along, because it brings me back memories. It brings me back [horrible memories], but maybe, Sara, it's strange. I had to come back alive and survive and I am not allowed to forget. I believe in God's will, that I have a purpose. I had to come back and I am not allowed to forget. I am not allowed to take it just nonchalantly and talk about it. No, I have to evoke that time and time again. How can I get it across to you? Many times I see people crying when I talk, and I cry myself. Now I think if you have something [like a] genuine experience and you follow that, the pain is there when you talk about it, it is just revived. It isn't easy. Like my husband said, [I have to decide] up to a point, how many [presentations] I should take within a month? Because it does affect me. I can't say it doesn't. And when I have [many presentations], like after the Holocaust [television] program, [when] I had a series -- the schools, the radio, I was the whole month of May going madly all over. At the end of May I was totally exhausted and I said to Gene, "That's it. For three months, I am not going to take anything because mentally and emotionally I feel tired. I feel drained."

So you see, there are so many years since then. But my desire to do something for those unfortunate people who didn't come back is so strong that even if I have to suffer a lifetime, time and time again, year after year, I still want to do it. Now it is hard to explain. This is why my children, I am speaking of the children of the Holocaust, sometimes [my children have] difficulty in understanding why am I doing that to myself? But [anyone] who wasn't there, Sara, cannot fully understand it. You would ask why Elie Wiesel writes? Why does [Simon] Wiesenthal go after those people and dedicate his life to it? Why? Because they can't forget it either. And I think this can be explained only by the person who is doing it, because that experience does motivate you. When you have seen the others perish and you came back, you feel that you cannot just stay idle and do [nothing]. I would like to do genuinely something for them, and I hope that one day, as I said to you before, there's going to be a memorial here in the United States for them. Can you imagine all those innocent people, innocent

---

62 Simon Wiesenthal spent his life after liberation from the concentration camps trying to hunt down Nazi war criminals such as Dr. Josef Mengele. He worked for the Israeli government.
children, killed just because they were Jewish? I think this has to be pointed out to history, so that this thing should not be done. Why do the Jewish people have to be always the target of persecution?

So we have to remind [the public] time and time again, so that it sinks into the new generation, so they see what injustice it was and they are not going to let it happen [again]. They are going to voice it [speak out against it]. It is going to be voiced more. And if you don’t do anything to inform them, it is not going to be voiced [any]more. What if anti-Semitism one day is going to grow in Germany again and people are not informed and you didn’t voice it, what then? They can be fooled with the wrong [information], they can be contaminated. So you have to squash it like an epidemic and you have to prevent it. I believe in prevention and this is one of the ways to prevent things like this from happening.

SL: How do you feel about the increasing awareness in this country toward the Holocaust?

MH: This is very interesting and I try to understand it myself. There is definitely an increasing interest. I think that part of it is also a guilt that no one was doing anything for them [the Jewish people], and especially the United States which is such a democratic and liberal [country] that stands for the justice, and justice for all. I think it feels embarrassing in many ways [to the Americans] that they didn’t do something. Everyone left things like that [did nothing to help]. So now you want to do something for the victims, to make up for it. That’s one thing. You see? Things are complex. I think there is true compassion [in Americans]. I think there is a true compassion for what happened, and that’s why they want to know, and they feel badly about it, and they want to make up for the Jewish people. I think that [also] what’s happening is that many of the people actually didn’t know about the full scale of what was happening. So, there is a desire, and it’s a complex thing, but definitely there is a great interest in reviving this and I noticed that.

And what I noticed is that now there is even more [interest] than there used to be, because before they didn’t bring that often movies like the Holocaust and not one year after another. Then I think also that maybe there is a desire to show it to the young generation, too. They are afraid, just like I
I am afraid, that maybe [the Holocaust] tends to be forgotten, so it has to be revived. And also maybe it’s pointing out what you can do to humanity when you have systems of government, like in Germany, you have dictators.

I think there is a political and emotional issue, I think it’s many things. But I think that the social, emotional, issue is also [important]. Maybe [Americans feel guilty], and then another thing [is that] they truly feel sorry for what happened. The injustice was so [horrendous] that even those who didn’t suffer are not allowed to forget. That’s a strange thing. So, I personally think that somebody should have intervened. Somebody should have done something about it, but all the massacre was allowed. I think what they feel [many people], looking retrograde now into something that was [done back then], that something should have been done and it wasn’t. So let’s now inform [everyone], so that in the future we can do something and we can prevent it. Maybe that has something to do with it.

Maybe [the Holocaust] also shows that, if we are going to be so cruel to each other and there would be discrimination [of this kind], [then] we are going to become so criminal. And then what is going to happen [to us]? What [would be] the outgrowth [of such behavior]? There are many things, as I described to you, political and emotional.

SL: How do you feel about the fact that part of the funding for this project that we are doing has come from the federal government?

MH: If there wouldn’t be interest in reviving this [topic], you wouldn’t get a cent. You know what is the reason? They want that it should be documented and it should stay like a testimony, so that if somebody in another century looks at it, it is there. And the Historical Society is the best place because that’s where it belongs. That’s who keeps the archives, so there is a desire that it should be some place very safe and protected, and it’s there for the future generations. I think that reflects interest, lots of interest for it, and goodwill. So I think it speaks well of the people who secured that and who initiated that [the federal funding]. That’s my opinion.

SL: I have one last question for you. Why do you feel that it is important to participate in an oral history documentation?
MH: Why or what?

SL: Why. Why do you feel that it is an important thing for you to do, to participate in this?

MH: Oh, I think it’s very important, because I feel that this is something that is going to be preserved for the others to listen to. I think that the Historical Society is one of the best places where you should have a testimony because, in other words, it is protected. Otherwise, it may get somewhere [else where] it is not quite as safe. Also, it’s used appropriately, in the sense that they are not going to abuse this. Whatever you say, it is going to be kept like under a seal. It is safe, yet it is open to the public at the same time. I think this is very important. I was thinking of it before you came. I have to tell you, Sara, although we had at the beginning [a brief discussion about] the contract thing — contract with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin — everything was straightened out. I have to tell you that I am very happy that I had the opportunity to share my feelings, my experiences and that I had the privilege to be asked, and I feel that my testimony is in the right hands, in the right place. I just wonder sometimes how a desire can come true. Maybe for many years I wanted to tell [my story] to someone, or to put it somewhere, where it is going to stay for other generations. I feel that this is the best place where it’s going to be staying. It’s going to be preserved. It’s going to be used by your researchers and your historians. So it is going to be used for a good purpose, doing something good for society. It is going to be doing something good. And this is why I opened myself totally, because I did not inhibit myself in as far as experiences and also as far as my sincere feelings and opinions about the issues that you asked me. Because I have confidence in you and I have confidence in the State Historical Society. I think that’s the best way to end.

SL: I have a little bit of time left on the tape, probably enough time for you to play a piece of music, if you want to do that.

MH: Yes.

---

63 Magda refers to discussions about preserving the copyright of her testimony.
MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS

[Magda Herzberger is also a composer. During this section of the tape she performs two of her musical compositions: Seduction and Prayer (music and verse for voice and piano). Through the years, Magda further developed these compositions by making more elaborate changes to them. Below you will find the lyrics for both compositions. The following pages of this transcript (pages 193-207) include enlarged, revised versions of both scores.]

“Seduction” 64
Don’t leave me alone on sorrow’s throne, wrapped in the shroud of pain and grief.
Don’t let me dry and shrivel up like a dead leaf.
Come and embrace me, warm up my cold heart, don’t let my spirit fall apart.
Listen to me, and come quickly, before dark gloom strikes my sick soul,
Before the hand of cruel fate bores in my mind a wide, deep hole.
Please come and take me to Cupid’s corner, beyond the border of doom.
Please hold me tight, caress my face with tenderness,
Let me find peace, laughter, joy and happiness.
Let me abandon the land of sorrow,
Let’s roam the hills of bright tomorrow.

“Prayer” 65
Almighty God, upon you I call. Don’t let evil spirits possess my soul.
Don’t let hatred strangle my love, or despair crush my hope.
Tie me with the rope of patience to the pillar of strength.
When anger erupts in my mind, don’t let emotion blind my reason.
Teach me the psalm of faith, and restore my calm.
Dispel my doubts and fears, while the bells of life toll my years,
Let the warm rays of affection and compassion conquer my spirit.
O Lord, our God, please disperse the seeds of peace and brotherhood upon the earth,
As time rolls on the wheels of the universe, as time rolls on the wheels of the universe, of the universe.

END OF TAPE 10, SIDE 2

64 The musical score and lyrics of Seduction, composed for voice and piano, can also be found in Magda’s book of love poems If You Truly Love Me (First World Library, Austin, TX, 2007), pages 113-119. The book is dedicated to her husband Eugene in celebration of their 60th wedding anniversary.
65 The new enlarged version of the musical score and lyrics of Prayer, composed for voice, piano, and chorus, is also included in Magda’s book The Waltz of the Shadows (First World Library, Austin, TX, 2005), second edition, pages 111-121. The book features Holocaust poetry and music.
MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS

Seduction

Arranged by
Frank Metis

Words and Music by
MAGDA HERZBERGER

Slowly, quasi ad lib

Don't leave me a lone on sorrow's

thorne, Wrapped in the shroud of pain and grief. Don't let me

~ 113 ~
Seduction

dry and shrivel up like a dead leaf.  Come and em-

brace me,  Warm up my cold heart,  Don't let my

~ 114 ~
Seduction

spirit fall a-part. Listen to me, and come quick-

ly before dark gloom strikes my sick soul, Before the

~ 115 ~
hand of cruel fate bores in my mind a wide, deep

hole. Please come and take me to Cupid’s corner,
Seduction

Beyond the border of doom. Please hold me

pecor ric.

tight, caress my face with tenderness.

Let me find

mf with motion

~ 117 ~
Seduction

peace, laughter and joy and happiness. Let me a-

bandon the land of sorrow.
Seduction

Let's roam the hills of bright tomorrow.

poco a poco risolt.

~ 119 ~
doubts and fears, While the bells of life toll my

doubts and fears, Do

doubts and fears.

years. Let the warm rays of affection and compassion.

Let the warm rays of affection and compassion.

Let the warm rays of affection and compassion.

Let the warm rays of affection and compassion.
END OF MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS

END OF TRANSCRIPT