


June 2010

Renée Hammond oral history interview by Ellen Klein, June 21, 2010

Renée Hammond (Interviewee)

Ellen Wilson Klein (Interviewer)

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Ellen Klein: Today is June 21, 2010. I'm Ellen Klein, here today with Renée Hammond in Pinellas Park, Florida, in the United States of America. Our language today will be English, and our videographers will be Jane Duncan and Richard Schmidt.

I'm Ellen Klein. Today is June 21, 2010. We're here today with Mrs. Renée Hammond. This is tape one.

Renée Hammond: Now I have to go on?

EK: Mrs. Hammond, yes.

RH: Okay.

EK: Would you—

RH: My name is Renée Hammond, lately Königsberg. What else?

EK: Would you spell it for us, Königsberg?

RH: Königsberg is K-o-n-i-g-s-b-e-r-g. And on the O there is the umlaut.

EK: And did you have a Hebrew name?

RH: Yes. Chaya Rivka was my Hebrew name.

EK: And when were you born?

RH: I was born in December 25, 1925 in, at that time, Uzhorod, Czechoslovakia. Uzhorod is U-z-h-o-r-o-d, and Czechoslovakia you know how to spell.

EK: And who were your parents?

RH: My parents were—my mother was Theodora Königsberg, and my father was Ferdinand Königsberg.

EK: You have a brother and a sister. What are their names?

RH: My brother, Adolf Königsberg, who lives in Florida on the east coast; and a sister, Agnes Grant, and she also lives on the east coast of Florida.

EK: And do you know the dates of birth for your parents?

RH: My parents—my father was born in December of 1898 [*sic*], and my mother was born in November 1898 [*sic*].

EK: So, 1898?

RH: Eighteen ninety-eight. (laughs)

EK: Eighteen ninety-eight, okay. And how about your siblings?

RH: My brother was born in November of 1922, and my sister was born in August of 1997 [*sic*].

EK: And where were your parents born?

RH: My father was born in Slovakia, a town named Markušovce, and my mother was born in Poroško, in Czechoslovakia also.

EK: And can you spell those towns for us?

RH: Oh, Markušovce was M-a-r-k-u-s-o-v-c-e, and my mother was born in Poroško. That was P-o-r-o-s-k-o. And at that time, I think it was probably Austria-Hungary, because it didn't become Czechoslovakia until after the First World War.

EK: Okay.

RH: And after the Second World War—well, in 1938, it became Hungary again, and now it is the Ukraine.

EK: Yes.

RH: Markušovce is still Slovakia, the Slovak Republic.

EK: And your brother and sister were born in which town?

RH: We were all born in Uzhorod.

EK: Okay.

RH: I already spelled that, I think.

EK: Yes, you did.

RH: Yes.

EK: Would you tell us a little bit about your childhood before the war began?

RH: Our childhood was, as far as I remember, pretty good, normal. My father had a furniture business, and we were, I would say, upper middle class. We attended Czech schools until the Hungarians came into my hometown, and then there were no more Czech schools; it was Hungarian schools.

EK: What do you remember about that?

RH: About what?

EK: When the Hungarians came into the town.

RH: We weren't too happy, because we considered ourselves Czechoslovakians. We did speak Hungarian at home, but in school it was Czech. So when we had to, you know, start—the reading and the writing was different, but we adjusted very easy. Everything seemed okay, until—life was normal, you know, like we had girlfriends and we had parties, dances, typical teenage life. When we were expelled from the Hungarian school, we went to—fortunately, there was a Hebrew *gymnázium*. I don't know if you're familiar with the *gymnázium*.

EK: Yes.

RH: The good thing about it was instead of learning more German, we learned English, English and Hebrew. So, we had three years of English and three years of Hebrew.

EK: And how old were you at the time, when you were made to go to Hebrew school and expelled from Hungarian school?

RH: About fifteen or sixteen. We got adjusted to that very well, too. Like I say, it was actually a good change. I think the reason we didn't go to the Hebrew *gymnázium* before is because that was more like a Zionist.

EK: Okay.

RH: And Zionists were not that religious, and my mother and father were more religious. They were Orthodox, so we observed all the holidays and all that. Like I say, we observed all the holidays, the Friday night dinners, my father going to the synagogue: typical, you know, dinners that Jewish people had.

EK: Tell me about a night you maybe remember.

RH: Pardon?

EK: Tell me about a night you maybe remember.

RH: Uh—well, like every Friday night, my father would go to the synagogue, come home. We had a typical Friday night dinner with—usually it was chicken, chicken soup, and all the—my mother baked a lot, coffee cakes and all kinds of desserts. And we usually had some, you know, household employee who helped around the house. After the Hungarians came in, they put in a law that no Jewish family could have non-Jewish employees in their house.

EK: Okay.

RH: Also, what they changed is my father had to take in a Christian partner, because Jews couldn't own businesses. And we were like—everything was fine until 1944, when the Germans came in, and then everything started. We had to wear the yellow star. There were curfews that we couldn't be out after dark. They wanted the Jewish community to give money to the Germans. That happened a few times, where they were collecting money that we had to give.

And then finally came the order, and there were signs all over that we are going to be taken to farms to work. At one point, we couldn't even leave the house. And we should be getting ready to be transported to these different farms. So, we were getting ready, getting our clothes and everything what we could, because we could only take with us what we could carry. So, people would put layers of clothes on, and taking food that would not perish. Then the day came when they came and took us out of the house. It was like the police department.

EK: This is Hungarian police?

RH: Hungarians, yes.

EK: Okay. What time of year was it?

RH: Hmm?

EK: What time of year?

RH: Nineteen forty-four.

EK: What time of year?

RH: It was in the spring.

EK: It was in the spring.

RH: It was the last big thing that we had at home was the Passover seder. That was the last holiday that we spent together at home. So, they came, and they took us out of our house into the streets, and they marched us through the streets into a lumberyard that was set up to hold us, like a ghetto. People were on both sides of the streets watching, you know, watching us marching into the ghetto. We were there for several weeks. They took my mother once out, because they didn't think we gave enough gold jewelry, so they actually tortured her to see if she would tell them where our jewelry was. She came home with bruises.

They did set up tents with—I don't know if there was some straw on the ground where we slept. And we stayed there until the order came that we would be transported to what they called farms. They took us to the railroad and put us in these boxcars, jammed full. There was no room to lie down, just sit next to each other. There were no windows. There was one little peephole. No water, no bathrooms to use. We would hold a blanket in front of people that had to go into a bucket. The men were looking out of this peephole to see which way we were going, and they realized that we were leaving Hungary, that we were not going to any farms. That was just a lie, to get us to go easier, no resistance. Of course,

we couldn't resist, because the police had the guns; we had no guns, so there was really nothing that we could do.

EK: Where did you think they were sending you? It's not farms?

RH: Originally—well, when they thought that we're leaving the United States [*sic*], my father did hear of the concentration camps, and he knew about what was going on in Germany and all the other European countries.

EK: Okay.

RH: We were very naïve, and really we didn't know—the children.

EK: But your father knew because of what?

RH: Because word came through where people would sometimes get out and come back. He listened to the BBC with all the windows and doors closed, because we were not allowed to listen to news from any other country except Germany and Hungary. But he did. He knew what was going on, and he heard through different ways. Well, there were some people that managed to escape and came back, not very many, but they were talking about what was going on. Well, I understand there were people that went to [Franklin D.] Roosevelt telling him what was going on, and he didn't want to hear it.

So, we were three days on the road in these boxcars, taking us to Auschwitz. When we got there, they opened up the doors and were yelling, "*Raus! Raus!*" which meant "Get out!" There were big floodlights, very scary, very intimidating, and there were the SS men with their sticks. If anybody did anything out of the ordinary, they'd hit them; or, in many cases, they were shot, if they did anything. Some of the inmates that were helping were saying, "Eat everything you have, because they'll take it from you."

We got out of the boxcars, and then the order came to—they separated the men from the women. For my father, that was the last time I saw him. He went with the other side; my mother was with us. Then, after they did that separation, they separated younger people from the older people and the children—

EK: Was your brother still with you at the time?

RH: No, he was with my father.

EK: He was with your father. Okay.

RH: So, they separated the younger women from the older ones. We tried to go with my mother, but they didn't let us.

EK: And how old was she?

RH: She was forty-six, and she was considered older. And all the little children went with the—well, if a younger woman was holding a child, she went with the older people.

EK: Okay.

RH: So, there were many young people, too, that went into the gas chambers because they were carrying a young child or had a young child by the hand.

EK: Right.

RH: They were telling us that we'll see our parents, our mother and father, after we get our shower. And the reason we didn't go together to the shower because they were going to go on a truck so they don't have to walk so far.

EK: Did you believe that?

RH: Yes. They made it sound very reasonable. And, like I say, we really didn't know that we were in—we never heard of Auschwitz, so we didn't know what was waiting for us. They took them away, and they took us and shaved our hair off. They told us to get undressed and leave our clothes there, because we'll get them back after our shower. Well, later we found out that when the older people got in the room where the showers were, they didn't get water: they got gas, and they died.

EK: Who told you that?

RH: The people that were there a longer time. There were people that were there a year, maybe a couple of years, working around the camp.

When we went in, we got water and we showered. Then they gave us a gray sack, for like a dress, with a number on it. From there—and they gave us some wooden shoes there. It was cloth on top and wood on the bottom. From there, they took us into these barracks, where they had three tiered bunks. They put six in each bunk. You could only sit; you couldn't lie down. When they gave us a piece of bread, it looked like a piece of brick. They woke us early in the morning—it was still dark outside, it was still cold; this was in May when we arrived in Auschwitz. And we stood outside in rows where they were counting us, and after they counted us, they just let us stand outside in the cold.

We were in Auschwitz for a few weeks—I don't remember exactly the month—when they started picking people to take into Germany to work.

EK: Was your sister with you at this point?

RH: Yeah, the whole time. Yes, she was with me, and the two other girls that were from my hometown. In Auschwitz, we actually—we didn't work there, I don't think. No, we didn't. They were just holding us until they transported us out. And it was also kind of like a quarantine, to make sure that we don't have any diseases or something. The food was—I understand the soups that they made was made out of potato peels and beets. There wasn't much of anything. They took us into these latrines, where you better not stay any length of time, you know, just hurry up and do what you had to do. And if they didn't think you were doing it right, they'd hit you with a stick. They were cruel people, sadistic.

Then they started picking for work in Germany. They had us undress, and in the nude we had to walk in circles. They were the men that were picking who looked healthy enough to go to work and, fortunately, we were picked, all four of us. So from there, they took us into Germany. First we went to a town named Gelsenkirchen, and that place was bombed, so they never took us to work there. They took us from there to Essen, where the Krupp factory was. The Krupp factory, during the war, was an ammunition factory. They provided ammunition for the war. But at that time, there was more cleaning up than anything else, because they were heavily bombarded by the British and Americans. When they were bombing, all our guards, the SS guards, went into their shelter. We were outside, and we were just watching the bombs all over. The guards used to tell us, "Don't worry. When the war ends, we'll still have enough time to kill you." Some of the SS were actually from Hungary. Hungary had some pockets where there were Germans; they were

called the Schwabs [Swabians]. And one of them, he used to say, “Don’t worry. We’ll always have enough time to kill you before you are liberated.”

In the beginning, there were some streetcars that they used to take us from our camp to the factory. Then, I guess, they didn’t have them anymore—maybe they were bombed, or whatever—so we walked. It took us a couple of hours to get from the camp to the factory. Our clothes was the dress that I was telling you; of course, we had nothing, no underwear, no nothing, just this dress. And we had blankets; everybody had a blanket. The blanket served at night for a cover, and during the day we had it over us as a coat. Of course, if it rained, it got wet. By that time, first they had these blocks, you know, where we stayed, but during one bombing they were burned. So, we had to stay in—there was a basement, a cellar, and that’s where we stayed.

EK: In the camp?

RH: Yeah, this was all in the camp. We slept on the floor with our blankets, if they were wet or dry. How we survived, I don’t know, because the cold winter—we were there during the cold winter, and the winters in Germany are pretty bad. But, we made it: without food, without proper lodging. We lived. It’s amazing what people can survive. The time was coming where—there were some very decent Germans in the factory, and they would bring a carrot, an onion, you know, different things like that from their garden. And there was one German man who told one woman that if we—when the end comes, when we know that the war is really coming to an end, he said, “If you can escape, I’m going to help you out, to make it.” So, we knew that the end was coming.

EK: How did you know? What let you know?

RH: Maybe we already heard shots, I don’t know. But somehow, we figured that the end is—you know, that the end of the war is coming. One day, during a heavy bombing, all the guards were in their shelters. So, the four of us, and the girl who the German man told that he would help us, and then another girl—so it was six girls—we were ready to leave. And we just walked out of the camp, because it was not guarded by the guards; they were in their shelter, and it was during a heavy bombing. And we walked out and started going to where we figured we could hide.

Somehow, we wound up in—it was a Jewish cemetery, and there was a building that was bombed, but the basement was still there. So we got down into the basement and planned what to do. We had saved some of our bread for this, and the one girl said she—the one that the German man told her that he’ll help, she said she knew where he lived. I guess he explained to her when we were walking, and he was telling her where it was. I don’t

know. But two of them went out and looked him up. He was shocked. He never thought that we would actually do it. But then he kept his word, and he brought us—every night he came, and he brought us a boiled potato and water. He only missed, I think, once, that he didn't come.

Well, then one day, a German guard came down there, and he said, "Who are you?" We spoke German pretty well, and we told him that our parents were looking for an apartment, because we were bombed out from the next town. He looked, and he was looking—he was guarding some Russian prisoners of war—and he left. When the man that helped us came and we told him, he said, "Well, he might come back. He might not believe you and come back, so you're not safe here."

So he had a little cottage on a little farm outside of town. He took us there, and we were there for a little while, but we could already hear a lot of shooting. It was that close. So he finally contacted some friends, and there was a German man who owned a grocery business. His family was—he sent them to safety from the big town, where there were no bombs. And he had a housekeeper, so he took us in, four of us; the two girls went with somebody else. And we stayed in his house for a few weeks, until we were liberated, and then he gave us regular clothes. Somehow we already had some clothes that they distributed, clothes that they took away from Jewish people, so when we escaped from the camp we wore regular clothes.

EK: They had given them to you in the camp, to work in the factory?

RH: Yeah, yeah.

EK: Okay.

RH: So he took us in and fed us. We finally slept in a bed and ate normal food. He was a very good man. Then, when we went outside, my sister said, "Hey, those are not German soldiers! Those are, you know, somebody else; it's either Americans or British." And they were; it was Americans. Well, when the Americans were marching into the town, we went out and we waved and welcomed them. The German people looked at us like we were traitors; they didn't know who we were.

EK: Right.

RH: They thought that was awful, to welcome the enemy. But we were liberated.

EK: Do you remember the name of the people that helped you? Do you remember?

RH: Yes.

EK: Who were they?

RH: The one was Markwald, and one was Neiermann.

EK: Neiermann, okay.

RH: Yeah. When we were liberated, we didn't go back to a camp, because there were some camps where the people were liberated, but we didn't want to be in a camp. My one friend and I, we applied to the British military government and got jobs as interpreters and translators. The other two, my sister and the other girl, they worked for people that worked the camps, but they worked in their house.

So later, when my brother was—he was liberated in one of the camps, and he got typhus. They never thought he would survive, but he did. They wanted to send him to Sweden for recuperation, and he said, "I can't go to Sweden. I have to stay here and find my sisters." So he started going from camp to camp looking for us, and he came to one camp where there were people that were together with us. So, he asked them what they knew about us, and they told him that we escaped. And, according to the SS people, we were found and shot. He said, "Well, did anybody see them being shot?" Nobody did. You know, if they would have found us, they would have taken us back to the camp and shot us in front of everybody. So he didn't believe it, and he kept looking.

And then he came to this camp and he told them the name, and they told him, "Oh, yeah, I have a girl that's working for us by that name." So she took him to meet, you know, where my sister was, and they came to us, and that's how we were reunited with him. He was telling us—he didn't tell us till much, much later, years, years later, what he did in the camp when he was in Auschwitz. He had to pull out the dead people from the gas chambers, you know—well, not the crematoriums, because they were already dead, but he pulled the dead people out. He could never talk about it till years and years later.

We were going to go back to Czechoslovakia. There was a transport going, and the officer that was organizing it one day said, "I have to tell you one thing. No problem

going back, but I can't guarantee that when you want to get out of there that you can get out."

EK: Okay.

RH: Well, we thought it over, and we said, "In that case, we don't want to go back. We don't want to risk that we will be stuck," because by then the Russians were there.

EK: That's what I was gonna ask.

RH: Russian occupation. So we stayed in Germany, registered to come to the United—well, we were in the British zone at the time, and it was hard to be in contact, you know, to get out of Germany, because we wanted to come to the States. We had offers from some British people to go to England, but we didn't want to go there.

EK: Did you have family in the United States?

RH: We had a cousin. I think that's all we had. We had an aunt in Chile, but she wrote to us that Chile had a lot of anti-Semitism and it was not a good place to go.

EK: Okay.

RH: So then, I went with my brother to the American zone, went over to an American organization, and told the man in charge that we're trying to move to the American zone so we could immigrate to the United States, but we need a job, and he gave us jobs. I think it was ADC, American Distribution Company. It was funny, because the receptionist wouldn't let me in. She said, "We don't have any openings, and you can't see the director." And I was thinking to myself, "I didn't come all this way to be turned away." So I was in the hallway, and when the door opened to his office I just went directly in. And I said, he was a man that couldn't resist young women. (laughs) Well, he heard our story and everything. He was just a good man. He gave all of us jobs, all four of us.

So we stayed in the British zone [*sic*] and we were going to come under a student visa to the States. Then I met my husband. I went to a wedding; he was in the Army.

EK: You met him where?

RH: In Frankfurt.

EK: In Frankfurt, okay.

RH: We went to a wedding and we met there.

EK: He was an American?

RH: Yes. Yeah. We wound up married. We dated for a year and then got married, and I came back with him. Then my sister came a few months later, and then my brother came a few months later.

EK: What was your husband's name?

RH: Ralph. Ralph Hammond. From then on, it was just a normal life, like most young people in the United States: some good times, some bad times.

EK: Do you remember what year you came to the United States?

RH: Yes, I came over here in 1948.

EK: Okay.

RH: Yes.

EK: And you lived where?

RH: Well, my husband was from Pennsylvania, so we went to Pennsylvania. He was still in the service, so he was stationed in Washington, D.C., in Walter Reed Hospital. So we lived in D.C., and then we bought a house—when he got out of the service, we bought a

house in Maryland, and we lived there for a couple of years. From there we moved to Long Island, and then to different states in the United States. Now, here I am with—

I have five children, four girls and a boy. The oldest one is Yvonne, then Patty, Karen, Robin, and Gary. I have ten grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. I have a big family. Unfortunately, they live all over. I have one in New Jersey, one in North Carolina, Arizona, one in—my one daughter, right now, she's in Oregon. And Gary lives right now in Costa Rica. So, I don't get to see them as often as I would like to. I wish it would be like years ago when family stayed in the same town, but that's not the way it is now. Is there anything else that you would like to know?

EK: What do you want your children and your grandchildren to know? What do you want them to know about who you are and your experiences?

RH: Well, they pretty much know, because even though I didn't speak to them about it when they were very young, but now they know everything. They would like me to write a book about it, but I'm not that good in writing. I don't have that talent. But they do have the Shoah, and they'll have this, too. There was one little book that came from Germany that wrote about us, our escape and everything. I was interviewed by the *St. Petersburg Times*, that I have, and they all have copies of it. But they know my life as much as possible.

EK: What would you want people who aren't your family members who will read this transcript or see this video, what would you want them to know?

RH: Well, I feel that the reason for us talking about it is that things like this shouldn't happen again. We should have compassion for other people. One thing I feel that is very important, that we do have the State of Israel now, that we have a homeland and somebody who will talk, you know—

EK: Be your voice.

RH: —try to prevent what happened, because nobody really tried before. The main thing: that there should be peace in the world. Fighting and wars and all that is very bad, except when you have to make sure that your freedom is not taken away from you.

EK: Right.

RH: But there are a lot of people, even right now, that claim that there was no Holocaust, that that was just made up and it's not true. Well, that's why it's important that people that went through it talk about it, because how can they deny it when here we are? We went through it; we're the witnesses. My sister was a witness at the Nuremberg Trials, against Krupp.

EK: Okay. What do you know about that?

RH: Hmm?

EK: What do you know about that, her experience at Nuremberg?

RH: Well, she gave testimony of what was happening and how we were treated while we were in the camps, because naturally they tried to say everything was fine, you know, we weren't mistreated or anything. So there were people who were witnesses that it wasn't true.

EK: And what happened with the owners of the Krupp factory, do you know?

RH: Pardon?

EK: What happened with the owners of the Krupp factory, do you know?

RH: Oh, they are in business now. Don't you see their coffeepots? It's a big industry, and a lot of it is imported to the United States that Krupp makes. Yeah, everything was forgiven.

EK: How do you feel about that?

RH: Well, they should have punished for what they did. They tried to make restitution—you know, to the people that worked for them—after the war. But they are very successful people now. The people that lose the war are not always the losers, right?

EK: Right.

RH: I mean, I think the United States is a country that helps everybody, and they are still doing it. And I'm not—I don't hate Germans or people like that, because you can't blame a whole nation for what a few people did. There were some good people in Germany and everywhere, and there were some very bad. But you don't judge them all the same way. You can't live with hate in your heart. You make yourself as unhappy as the people that you hate by carrying it. So, we try to live a normal life. And I'm very fortunate having a nice big family, and they are all good people.

EK: All right. Anything else you wanted to share?

RH: Can't think of it. Probably when you leave I'll think of something. (both laugh)

EK: Fair enough.

RH: Okay.

EK: Thank you. Thank you.

RH: I guess I don't go into too many details about the cruel—

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

EK: Today is June 21, 2010. I'm Ellen Klein, here today with Mrs. Renée Hammond, and we're at tape two.

So, Mrs. Hammond, you had some things that you wanted to add, that you wanted to share about your experiences.

RH: Well, just little details, like when we were marching to our barracks. When we arrived, we could—

EK: At Auschwitz?

RH: There was a smell. And later, we found out that that was the smell of burned flesh. And we did see this big building with flames in it. We didn't know what it was; we had no idea, because like I said, at home my father knew a lot what was going on, but we were in school and we were not discussing politics or anything like that. We were really very naïve. So, we had no idea.

Basically, we were in shock. I mean, it didn't hit, what really happened. When we got into the barracks and we would say about, "When are we going to see our mother and father?" and instead of being kind about it, they just said, "You will never see your mother and father again. They are dead." And we cried a lot.

There was a woman in the thing with us, where we, you know—what would you call it? The bunk. And she was actually my sister's teacher of English, because she didn't go to the Hebrew school. And ash fell on her arm, and she cried and she said, "This must be my little girl's ash." It was sad.

And I remember when, before we were taken away from home, we had a dog. My father would go out and feed the dog every night. The last couple of nights, he would say, "What will happen to you?" He was so sad about the dog. And for a couple of nights, you could hear the dog howling at night, which he never did before, and just howl like he must have felt something. The day that we were taken away from home, he disappeared. He, like, left. So, he must have felt what's coming. And my father, who was such a kindhearted man—whatever beggars, you know, in town, he could never say no.

One day he came home with some prayer books, and my mother said, "What do you need these prayer books for?" He says, "So and so came to me, to sell the books to me, and I didn't want him to feel bad if he needs the money, so I took the books from him and gave him the money." He really didn't need the books because he had lots of them himself, but that's the kind of a man he was. And anybody that he could help—people that worked in the store before we were taken away, they would come and we would give them stuff to take with them. But they came to see us and see if they can help in any way, even though they were risking that people will say, you know, because they were Christians. And when we were in the camp and there was fencing around, one of the girls that I went to school with, she brought me some food, handing it over through the fence. It was just things that you remember: the kindness of some people.

I used to draw; I used to do portraits. My father took me to an artist in Budapest, and he said yeah, I should continue it. So when I was in the camp, when we worked for Krupp, some of the guys found out that I was drawing and they would bring pictures to me to draw, of their families.

EK: Oh, they wanted you to draw for them?

RH: Yeah. And then I hurt my finger. I was doing some stamping irons, which I don't know what they used it for, and it must have been that a piece of iron got under my nail and got badly infected. So they took me someplace, a hospital—this was Krupp—and they cut it. They cut it the wrong way: it should have been cut here, because this way they cut the nerve. But I couldn't use that finger anymore, and I never went back to doing any of the portraits. But these guys would give me a piece of bread for doing it, or an extra bowl of soup that I shared with my friends.

I'm trying to remember.

EK: What was it like working in the Krupp factory?

RH: Well, it was all opened, because of the bombings, so a lot of our work was cleaning up the debris after the bombings. It was cold, very cold. One German gave a pair of gloves to one of the girls, because they were handling iron and stuff like that, and when the SS man saw it he took the gloves from the girl, threw it in the fire, and hit her for doing it. We had no way of cleaning ourselves, so while sometimes in the factory they would manage to wash their hair and it would freeze, because it was so cold. The walking from the factory back to the camp was just terrible, because we weren't fed right, we were weak. But I still say we survived it, but life was very, very hard. But we were together, like with my sister.

While we were in one of the camps, and I think it was Gelsenkirchen, I came down with a rash, and they thought it was scarlet fever. They put us under a tent with straw on the ground, and they didn't give us anything. They were going to send us back to Auschwitz. And one day, my sister was coming in with a big smile on her face. I said, "Why are you smiling?" She said, "Well, we can be together again."

EK: She had the rash?

RH: I guess she had it, and she was happy that we'll be together. But miraculously, before they sent us back to Auschwitz, we got better, so we went back with the working crew. But it was just lucky; there were a couple of women that were pregnant, and they were sent back to Auschwitz because, you know, they couldn't have a baby. And anybody that, like, got sick, that's what happened. Before we escaped, there was talk that we'll be sent back to the camps like Auschwitz and all the other exterminating camps, and later we

found out that, yes, they marched them back to all different camps, and a lot of people died on the way to the camps.

EK: And these are people that you worked with in the Krupp factory?

RH: People that we worked with.

EK: That had not gotten out like you had?

RH: Right, right. But we were just lucky that we managed to do it, and that we had to help us some good people. We couldn't have done it without it.

EK: Have you ever talked to them again? Do you know what happened to them?

RH: Who, the men?

EK: Mm-hm.

RH: Yeah, they were liberated, and they were living a normal life after the war.

EK: And you spoke to them after the war?

RH: Yeah. They were nice people. I don't think people have—some people have not learned by what happened before, because you know in Yugoslavia, that ethnic cleansing and killing people; and in Africa. People just don't learn, don't seem to. But I have some Hungarian friends, and they are nice people, too. Yet the Hungarians—well, really the Hungarian government couldn't do much. I mean, they didn't have to cooperate that much, but with somebody like Hitler, you either went along with him or you suffered. So, they accepted his policies.

EK: Should we suffer to save someone else?

RH: Pardon?

EK: Should we suffer to save someone else?

RH: If you can, yes. You can't just always look out for yourself. There was a—I don't remember who was saying that when they first came for the communists and they were going to take them away, and people said, "Well, I'm not a communist, so why would I help them? I don't believe in it." Then when they came for the Jewish people, "Well, I'm not a Jew; why should I worry about it?" Then they came for different other people, and there was nobody to help. But there were countries, from what I understand—in Denmark, the Danish king put on the star, and the Danish people, and there were a lot of people that were saved through the people in—I think it was mainly the people in the Scandinavian countries. They tried everything, even though they risked their own lives. So, yes, if you can help, you help. The only thing is—you know, like people say, "Well, why didn't you do something, fight them when they came for you?" What can you do when somebody's standing with a gun? You don't do what they tell you, they shoot you.

EK: Right. And you didn't know what was coming.

RH: No, because that was their way of doing it. They never said where they are taking you. Well, in Germany, a lot of people said, "We didn't know what was happening." But a lot of them did know what was happening. Your neighbors are taken away and never came back. One of my—somebody I knew from my hometown went back after the war, and he went to the house that they lived in. He went to the woman that lived there, and he told her who he was. She chased him away. You know, this was hers now. "You have no right to it." So, that's how some people were. But I do hope not everybody was like that.

I told you why we didn't go back, because we wanted to make sure we can get out. But one of my friends went back, and she wrote to me and she said, "You should be very happy that you didn't come back, because you remember the way our town was before, so you have good memories of it. I don't have those memories. You walk the streets and you don't see anybody you know. It's very sad." Her father—her grandfather owned a brickyard, and she told me she went with her family very much later, and they went to the brickyard. She talked to the man in there, and he said, "Why are you interested in the brickyard?" Well, she didn't say, "My grandfather owned it." She said, "My grandfather worked here," because I guess that was already—there were a lot of communists at that time already. I don't know how they would have treated her after, if you owned it. But she felt the fact that we didn't go back, we were better off. And she's probably right, because I remember the way it was.

There's a girl that works for Gulf Coast, Leah; do you know her?

EK: I do.

RH: She's from my hometown.

EK: Really?

RH: Yeah. She was born there, but she was only a baby when they came over here.

EK: So, they left Hungary early, then.

RH: Her parents, yeah. They went back because her grandparents couldn't have come to the States.

EK: I see.

RH: So, they stayed with them, and then the grandparents died and they immigrated to the States. Yeah.

Well, I can't think of too much more; it's just little things that come up. I hope it will help you, hope people will realize what it's like when people don't care about other people.

EK: Yeah.

End of interview