

**THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM  
ABSENCE OF HUMANITY PROJECT (AOH)**

**MEMOIRIST:** ROSALYN GROSS HABER  
**INTERVIEWER:** JANE LEAVEY  
**LOCATION:** ATLANTA, GEORGIA  
**DATE:** 1995

**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

<Begin Disk 1>

**Jane:** Anytime you are ready, Rosalyn. If you'd like to start by telling us your name, where you are from, and give us a picture of what your life and your family's life was like before 1933.

**Rosalyn:** My name is Rosalyn Gross Haber. I was born in Palanok<sup>1</sup> near Munkacs, Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup> I came from a fairly large family. I have six brothers older than I am. I'm the youngest and the only girl in the family.<sup>3</sup> We were very, very happy at home.

My father was the *gabbai* [Hebrew: leader of the synagogue] and also the cantor [sings or chants prayers] of the *shul* [Yiddish: synagogue]. He had a magnificent voice and he coached the boys to be the singers in the choir, too. Our home was exceptionally happy. We had people working for us also—approximately five to six people all the time—in the tailor shop. You can imagine what our tables [dinners] were like. Being an only girl [daughter], I'm told I was spoiled. I do not recall that. Times were not easy, so I just took it for granted that's the way life was. On *Shabbat* [Sabbath], whenever anybody came through the village and they didn't have a

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<sup>1</sup> Palanok [also known as Palánka or Polanka] is a small village located along the Latorytsya River, near the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. The village sits below a volcanic hill where Palanok castle was built in the fourteenth century. Historically, the area was part of the Kingdom of Hungary from the eleventh century until 1918. At the end of World War I, it became part of Czechoslovakia. Less than 200 Jews lived in the village at the start of World War II. From 1945 to 1991, it was part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Today, the village is part of the city limits of Munkacs (or Mukachevo) in southwestern Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> Munkacs [also Minkatch, Munkács, or Munkachs] is a town in present-day southwestern Ukraine. Munkacs changed hands many times over the years and has many alternate spellings. It was part of the Kingdom of Hungary from the eleventh century until 1918, when Munkacs and the surrounding area became part of Czechoslovakia. In 1938, this part of Czechoslovakia was ceded back to Hungary. At the start of the war, Munkacs had a very large Jewish population. Life for the Jews of Munkacs was difficult for the Jews under the Hungarians—their occupations were undermined, many were put to forced labor where many died and some were expelled to other cities under German occupation. After the war, it became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Today, it is called Mukachevo.

<sup>3</sup> Rosalyn's father was Chayim Akiva Gross and her mother was Ettele Lebowitz Gross. Her brothers were: Alex (Yankele), Filip (Fishi), Benjamin (Ben), Bernie (Bendi), Bill (Beresh), and Sam (Smilku). Alex published a memoir that recounts his experience: Gross, Alex. *Yankele: A Holocaust Survivor's Bittersweet Memoir*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001.

place to stay or they were beggars, they always ended up in our home.<sup>4</sup> My mother always had enough food for everybody. Saturday afternoon, my father, mother, and I would go for walks. It was their only leisure time in the entire week.

When I was six years old, the Hungarians took over [our part of] Czechoslovakia.<sup>5</sup> Life started to change from then on. They were going to take my father away and kill him. Because of my screaming and holding onto him, they said they'll come back the next day and take him. Luckily, they never did.<sup>6</sup> My father remained with us until 1944 when the Germans [had] already taken over our country.<sup>7</sup> From then on, food was rationed. Jews were not allowed to get anything extra. Things were getting pretty bad.

When I was 11 years old, I was allowed to go to the Hebrew Gymnasium, which is a preparatory school for university.<sup>8</sup> I had to walk three kilometers [2 miles] back and forth to school. In the snow, when it was very cold, my youngest brother, Alex, would always come and meet me halfway. We would walk home [together] so I wouldn't be by myself late at night. These were scary times because they [non-Jewish neighbors] started to throw rocks at us and spit at us [Jews]. Things were getting to be very, very difficult. Early that year, we were made to

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<sup>4</sup> *Shabbat* (Hebrew) or *Shabbos* (Yiddish) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. *Shabbat* observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. *Shabbat* begins at sundown on Friday night and is ushered in by lighting candles and reciting a blessing. It is closed the following evening with the recitation of the *havdalah* blessing.

<sup>5</sup> Hungary took advantage of the break up of Czechoslovakia in 1938, annexing the area around Palanok in 1939. The Jews in the region were immediately subjected to Hungarian antisemitic legislation. Hungary had passed one of the first antisemitic laws in Europe in 1920. The persecution of Jews continued in the 1930's with a series of "Jewish Laws" that restricted the number of Jews in universities, liberal professions, administration, and commerce. Hungarian racial laws passed between 1938 and 1941 were modeled on Germany's Nuremberg Laws. Among other provisions, the laws defined "Jews" in so-called racial terms, forbade intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and excluded Jews from full participation in various professions. The laws also barred employment of Jews in the civil service and restricted their opportunities in economic life. Although the Hungarian Jews were subjected to wide-ranging discrimination and persecution and tens of thousands were killed, the majority lived in relative safety for much of the war. Despite its alliance with Nazi Germany, initially the Hungarian government refused to deport the Jews of Hungary.

<sup>6</sup> According to Alex's memoir, this incident provided only a brief reprieve. Alex recalls their father was later taken to a forced labor camp on the Russian front, but was sent home after six months because of his failing health and because his three oldest sons—Filip, Ben, and Bernie—had been sent to the camps by then.

<sup>7</sup> The Hungarian government began to build an alliance with Nazi Germany soon after Hitler came to power in 1933. In October 1940, Hungary had officially aligned itself with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. After Germany's defeat at Stalingrad and other battles in which Hungary lost tens of thousands of its soldiers, the alliance with Germany began to weaken. In March 1944, Germany occupied Hungary. Jewish businesses and property were immediately seized and Jews were forced to wear the Jewish badge. During April, the Jewish communities of Hungary were isolated in ghettos and, in May, deportations began. In just eight weeks, more than 420,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Most were murdered on arrival. By the time the Soviet army liberated Hungary in April 1945, up to 568,000 Hungarian Jews had perished.

<sup>8</sup> Rosalyn is likely referring to the Hebrew Gymnasium, or high school, which was founded in Munkacs in 1925 and soon became one of the most prestigious high schools east of Warsaw.

wear yellow bands, Jewish stars in front and in the back. Life became very difficult. All three [of my] older brothers [Filip, Ben, and Bernie] were taken away to a place called *munkatabor*, which is a working camp.<sup>9</sup> We did not see or hear from them.

Then in April 1944, the day after Passover, my mother in her normal [routine did] what she always did.<sup>10</sup> She made the kids and the maid take everything upstairs in the attic and put away the Passover dishes. She said to my father and she said to us, "We will never see this home again, but I've got to do everything the way I always did it." That morning, the trucks came and took us to a ghetto, the Munkacs ghetto.<sup>11</sup> In the Munkacs ghetto, people were from all around the area of Munkacs—not only our little village, but from everywhere. We were told that our living and sleeping quarters will be the brick ovens. The only thing that we had there was straw. We didn't bring any sleeping pillows or things with us because we weren't allowed to do that. That's how our lives started [to change] in April 1944. We were in the ghetto for approximately six weeks—my three younger brothers, my father, mother, and I. Then we were told that they were going to take us to work. We were extremely happy about that because, the way things were in Munkacs, we thought it couldn't get any worse. Little did we know how terrible life would become. They herded us to the train station and made us get into the cattle cars that were going to take us to Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>12</sup> Of course, none of us knew what was ahead of us.

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<sup>9</sup> *Munkatabor* [*munkatábor*, Hungarian: work or concentration camp] were camps for the Hungarian forced labor battalions. In 1939, Hungary created a new type of labor service draft. In May 1940, an order was given to mobilize all able-bodied Jewish men ages 18-50 in forced labor battalions. These units at first performed manual labor duties in Hungary and later, after the German invasion into Russia, they were transported into Poland, the Ukraine, and Russia to help the German war effort. They built railroads, made tunnels, built airfields, trenches, and performed other hard labor. Most died from starvation or illness. Under the Hungarian labor service system, tens of thousands of Jewish men were also conscripted for the army and forced to perform unarmed service. Before Germany's occupation of Hungary in March 1944, at least 25,000 Jewish labor servicemen had been killed on the Eastern Front, many by the Hungarian military. At the end of 1944 and early 1945, thousands of surviving Jewish labor servicemen were deported to Germany, where many met their deaths.

<sup>10</sup> Passover [Hebrew: *Pesach*] is an eight-day holiday that celebrates Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. Jews traditionally have separate dishes for Passover. In 1944, Passover began on Saturday, April 8.

<sup>11</sup> After the Germans took over Hungary in March 1944, Jews were concentrated in short-lived ghettos. Immediately following Passover in April 1944, flyers announced that the Jews of Munkacs and the surrounding villages must move into an improvised ghetto. They were allowed to take only a few items into the ghetto. Over the course of two days, over 11,000 Jews were concentrated into a section of the city centered on an old brick-making factory and its yard, where they stayed for a few weeks. Railroad tracks passed close by it so it was a useful and easy place to guard. In the ghetto, Jews lived in terrible conditions of poverty, and suffered from cruelty, daily abuse and forced labor in the town. They were interned in the ghetto about a month until mid-May 1944, when they were forced into cattle cars and transported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. By the end of May 1944, Munkacs was declared *Judenrein* [German: free of Jews].

<sup>12</sup> Auschwitz-Birkenau was a network of camps built and operated by Germany just outside the Polish town of Oswiecim (renamed 'Auschwitz' by the Germans) in Polish areas annexed by Germany during World War II. It is estimated that the SS and police deported a minimum of 1.3 million people (approximately 1.1 million of which

It took us approximately six days to get to Auschwitz-Birkenau. How does one describe hell? It's impossible to describe it. When the cattle cars opened up, we were so exhausted from the lack of space—children screaming and people defecating in the same space that they lived in for a week. They opened the gates or they opened up the doors and we were practically falling out. There were people all around us with striped uniforms. German soldiers with their guards, screaming, hollering, yelling, “This one go this way, this one go that way. The men to the left, the women to the right.” You didn't know what was going on.

Then the people in striped uniforms like we'd never seen in our entire lives, like they were mumbling to each other, saying, "Don't . . . Whatever you do, say you are 16." To my mother, they said . . . my mother was 42. They told her to say she was 36. We arrived to the area where they were separating all of us. My father went to the right. My mother and I went to the left. My brothers: I don't know. We were all separated, except for my mother and I. We were taken to our bunkers. No, we were taken first to be shaved and deloused, they said. All our clothes were taken away. My mother had saved one loaf of bread for an entire week not knowing what was awaiting us. They took that away.

They took us into a huge room. They said they were going to give us water, or they were going to let us take a shower. We did not know that that could either be gas or water. When we came out of that room, the Germans were everywhere with their German Shepherd dogs. We were absolutely crazed—women naked and covering up their bodies, and they're screaming at us. My mother didn't recognize me. I didn't recognize her until I heard her voice. We were taken to our barracks, number 24 in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

My mother was with me only two weeks. The two weeks we were there, we saw my brothers Alex, Sam, and Bill walking by. They saw my mother. They threw over [the fence], a little scarf or something to cover her head.<sup>13</sup> She did that. When we got back to the barracks the *Lagerälteste* [German: camp elder]—the head of that particular barrack—asked my mother where she got the scarf. She said, “My children threw it to me.” She beat my mother so badly, [saying], “How dare you take anything we don't have? How dare you!” My mother gave it up. She [my mother] didn't eat anything the entire time she was with me because she saved every

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were Jews) to the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex between 1940 and 1945. Camp authorities murdered 1.1 million of these prisoners.

<sup>13</sup> In his memoir, Alex recalls that his mother called out to him, "How are you, my Yankele? Go in good health." When he tried to talk to her, he was beaten. He does not recall throwing her a scrap of cloth.

piece of bread to give to me and my girlfriend, because we were together at the time.

Two weeks later, we had a *Zählappell* [German: roll call]. You knew that something was going on because we could feel the electricity in the air—that something terrible was going to happen. My mother kept telling me constantly, "You've got to promise me one thing: you're going to survive." I said, "Oh, *Mamika*, don't talk foolish. We're all going to survive. Don't talk silly." She said, "No, you've got to promise me." After realizing she wasn't going to give up, I said, "Of course, I promise. You're going to survive and I'm going to survive." She said, "No, you've got to promise me." I did. That day that they took her, we were lined up from about six in the morning until . . . it must have been around noon. [Dr. Josef] Mengele and his people that were with him, came and pulled my mother out [of the line].<sup>14</sup> I said, "No, no. I want to go with her. I want to go with my mother." He said, "Your time will come," and he pushed me back. That day was a terrible, terrible time, a terrible day, a terrible time in my life. They put her in a circle with hundreds and hundreds of other people and wouldn't let me go to her. I tried several times to run to that group and somehow or another I was always pushed or pulled back by somebody. I never saw my mother again. I was lost . . . totally, totally lost.

I was in Auschwitz-Birkenau until the fall of that year [1944]. They were making selections for people to be taken to working camps. I was only 13 years old at the time. I think I just about the youngest person there. I didn't get a [tattooed] number because they didn't expect me to live. Although I tried to say I was 16, they knew. I never got a number. When the selection came for people to go to camp to work, they pulled me out and put me in an area where they put people to be sent to the [gas chambers and] crematorium.

Evening came and the girls selected for labor were put on the trains. The trains didn't move. The girls started to scream at me, "You can crawl out from under there." I think it might have been 10 or 12 inches altogether. Somehow I managed to dig myself out from that area and ran into the train. The next morning there was a *Zählappell* again, or counting time. They found there was an extra person. They said that person who shouldn't be here had better come out or they would kill everyone. The girls said to me, "Don't say a word. You're coming with us. We'll all go with you. We're not going to let you go." They said they were going to shoot all of us.

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<sup>14</sup> Josef Mengele was a doctor who joined the SS. He was notorious for being one of the physicians who sorted newly arrived prisoners on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, picking out those he wanted for his medical experiments—especially twins—thus earning him the nickname the 'Angel of Death.' He fled the camp before the Russians arrived.

Nobody went out. They said, "Alright, everybody *raus* [German: out] from the train." As they got us out of the train, we heard this siren. They said, "Okay, everybody back onto the train." We all jumped back into the trains and off we went.

We ended up in a place called **Unterluss**.<sup>15</sup> When we arrived there, it was fall already and it started to get cold. The first job that I had was building a brick barracks for the Germans. After that was finished, we were sent to dig ditches and bunkers for the Germans for the ammunition factory. By then it was wintertime already. I think we marched maybe an hour-and-a-half to get there in the snow. It was bitter, bitter cold. [We had] no coats, no underwear, and wooden shoes. It was so cold. There was nothing for our hands, absolutely nothing. We were outside, digging the barracks. After they [the barracks] were finished, we were sent to work in the ammunition factory [on] the night shift. By then, most of us were half the weight that we had come with. I wasn't very heavy to begin with. I was very tall but I was very thin. People tried to hide me between the lines so that they wouldn't see how skinny I was, so they would take me away to be sent to Bergen-Belsen.<sup>16</sup>

There was a lady with us who that [had] lived back of our house [in Palanok] and she sort of looked after me a little bit. She got very sick. She was sent away, so I was left totally alone. The winter seemed like it would never end. It was so unbelievably horrible—working under those conditions and no food, marching an hour-and-a-half to work, and hour-and-a-half back home. We worked the night shift so we walked in the evening and came home early in the morning. The temperature must have been below zero most of the time. How most of us didn't die on the marches alone—it's just totally unbelievable to this day.

Towards the end of February [1945], they said, "Everybody is leaving the camp." We were going to be shipped away somewhere else. We had no news whatsoever of anything going

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<sup>15</sup> **Unterluss** [German: *Unterlüß*] is a village in northern central Germany, located approximately 30 kilometers (19 miles) northeast of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. From August 1944 to April 1945, it housed a satellite camp of Bergen-Belsen. Around 600 female prisoners were forced to clear the forest, do construction work, or work at the Rheinmetall-Borsig AG munitions works. Rheinmetall-Borsig AG was a munitions company founded in 1889. In 1935, the state-owned industrial conglomerate Reichswerke AG Hermann Göring absorbed Rheinmetall-Borsig AG. As a result, it became Germany's second biggest arms supplier during World War II, with multiple plants in Germany that utilized slave labor.

<sup>16</sup> Bergen-Belsen was a concentration camp in Germany. It was established in 1935 as a prison camp for political prisoners, criminals, Communists, "asocials," etc. In 1943, it began to serve as a transit camp for Jewish prisoners. Toward the end of the war, Bergen-Belsen became a dumping place for Jews marched out of camps in the east. There was no housing for them, no medical care, no food, and no water. Ultimately, there were about 41,000 prisoners in the camps and the mortality rate was extreme. The British liberated Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1945 and confronted unspeakable conditions. It took weeks to deal with the horrifying situation. Piles of corpses lay unburied and survivors were so weak, emaciated, or sick that thousands died in the days and weeks after liberation.

on. The only news that we ever heard was from the Germans talking among themselves, which wasn't much because they wouldn't talk in front of us. We knew that the war was coming closer to an end. At the end of February, we were all loaded into an open wagons or a truck to be taken somewhere else. When we got to the forest, they lined us up. They were going to shoot us. We didn't realize what their purpose was. As we were lined up, the bombs started to fall all around us. The Germans ran away and we were saved again.

They came back and they got us into the trucks. They took us to a hellhole called Bergen-Belsen. How does one describe Bergen-Belsen? You think Auschwitz-Birkenau was the worst place in the world because of the stench and the fire all the time around us, but Bergen-Belsen was totally indescribable. People were walking around like skeletons. The ones that weren't walking were dead. Inside the barracks, outside the barracks . . . it was so bad that we were sleeping on dead people. There was no food. There was no water. There was nothing except death all around us. A couple days prior to us being liberated, they told all of us to go to an open pit. As we were marching towards the open pit, we heard bombs again and the Germans scattered. We were spared again. Our lives were spared again. Later, [we were] to find out that that's where they took all of the bodies, and they threw them into open pits there, and lie people together [in a mass grave]. By then, most of us were more dead than alive.

On April 15, [1945], we were liberated by the British. I can see them opening up those gates and [saying over] the loudspeakers, "You are free. People, you are free." I saw soldiers crying, not believing their eyes what they're seeing. It was . . . just to watch them, we knew what they were seeing. We were in such misery we didn't even know what is happening to the world and anything that is going on near us or if anybody was alive or dead.

After liberation, they [the British] did something that unfortunately killed a lot of people.<sup>17</sup> They meant well. They gave people chocolates and tuna fish. Whatever they had, they gave to us. People just died, left and right. Just like flies, people were dying. The next day, they came with a truck again. I can't remember the German [commandant] that they had at Bergen-Belsen . . . he [Josef Kramer] was hanging from . . . They took him around the barracks to show

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<sup>17</sup> After liberation, camp survivors faced a long and difficult road to recovery. Well-meaning soldiers without proper medical training often gave survivors foods that made their conditions worse. Eating foods, like chocolate or tuna fish, that were too rich or complex for survivors' bodies to handle could exasperate years of malnutrition and starvation, resulting in sickness or death.

that they found him and they hung him.<sup>18</sup> You would think that there would be so much joy. Unfortunately, there wasn't. There was nothing left in us to be joyful about. We had no life left in us to know that from now on we were free people.

That same day, I walked to an area [of the camp] where people were milling around other people and talking. A young man was asking, "Is there anybody who know a family of Gross'?" The cadet came from Palanok. I'm listening to him talk. I had no idea who he was. I approached him and said, "I am **Rosie** Gross. I come from Palanok. I have six brothers." He said, "I am Yitzhak, your stepbrother." I had no idea that I had a stepbrother. My father was married to a lady in a pre-arranged wedding for one week. Out of that, a child [Yitzhak] was born. I had no idea I had a stepbrother. He said, "Tomorrow, we're meeting here. I'm going to find a potato somewhere, and we'll bake it, and we'll eat it." The next day came. I'm there, and I wait, and I wait, and it starting to get dark. He doesn't show up. I said [to myself], "Something must be wrong. Maybe it was my imagination." Most of us were hallucinating anyhow. [I thought,] "Maybe I've just totally lost it completely," but I decided not to let go of that idea that somebody was alive. I went looking in the men's barracks to see if there is somebody by that name. When I went into the barracks, I would say 90 percent, maybe more than 90 percent of the men were lying dead. The ones that walked around were begging me to leave because typhus was rampant.<sup>19</sup> I said, "No, I've got to find Yitzhak Gross." They said, "He died last night." That was my . . . another hope gone.

Soon after that I got sick. I don't recall too much more after that particular time except that I woke up in [the town of] Bergen. They took us to where the [German] soldiers had their headquarters.<sup>20</sup> Five girls hid me because they knew my brothers. They felt that if I . . .

<break in tape>

**Jane:** You want to pick up where you . . .

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<sup>18</sup> Josef Kramer was the Commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1940 until 1944, when he was transferred to Bergen-Belsen. Kramer was so cruel that he was known as the "Beast of Belsen." When the British liberated Bergen-Belsen, Kramer and the remaining SS men were rounded up (most had already fled). Kramer took the British on a tour of the camp and the SS men were put to work moving the bodies to the mass graves. Kramer was not immediately hung, however. Kramer and 47 others were incarcerated and indicted. The Bergen-Belsen trial by a British military court began on September 17, 1945 in Luneberg, Germany. Josef Kramer was sentenced to death on November 17, 1945 and was hanged in the Hameln prison on December 13, 1945.

<sup>19</sup> Typhus is contracted from the bite of a louse, and results in chills, delirium, high fever, headaches and muscle pain and, if untreated, often results in death. It was common in the camps due to hygienic conditions and the constant infestation by lice.

<sup>20</sup> The "headquarters" Rosalyn refers to is probably the ex-Panzer Training School where survivors were evacuated to, which was about one kilometer (just over half a mile) from the camp, near the town of Bergen, Germany.

**Rosalyn:** Liberation?

**Jane:** You were about to tell a story about Bergen [Germany].

**Rosalyn:** I came down with typhoid fever.<sup>21</sup> These five girls hid me. I recall waking up one morning, and having to go to the bathroom, and crawling to the bathroom. It seemed like it took me a year to get there. Somebody came out from one of their rooms and they said, “Get back quickly into your room and hide under the bed because they’re coming to move people out of here who are sick and you look like you are not well yet.” That would have meant I would be sent to a hospital. How I managed to get back their [to my room] . . .

The first thing I recall when the girls came back, they brought a mirror—which really wasn't a mirror. It was a piece of aluminum. They said, "Look at yourself. You're so beautiful. You are up now and you are doing so well." I recall looking at myself in that aluminum piece of metal. I threw it against the wall and started to scream, "That's not me!"

I got well and stayed in Germany, or in that area, for about six months. Then they told us, “Alright, people. Now you’re ready to leave. Where did you want to go? You can go anywhere in the world you want to go to. Or, if you know that you’ve got family . . . where you want to go.” I said, “Where can I go? The only place I go is home and, hopefully, someone might still be alive. I got onto a train to go to Prague [Czechoslovakia] and then to Palanok.<sup>22</sup> When I was on the train, I met somebody who was from my hometown. The two of us were like two children holding onto each other, afraid to let go, and just talking about things that happened to each one of us.

We got to Prague and the train stopped for several hours. We heard somebody calling, "Is there a Mrs. Gross here? Is there a Mrs. Gross?" I didn't pay any attention to it because I wasn't Mrs. Gross. I was only 14 years old. I didn't go out. They kept coming around [asking], “Is there a Mrs. Gross?” My friend said to me, "Why don't we go outside and see who they want? Maybe it's somebody that you might know." We went outside. People were milling around this man wearing with a black uniform and I thought, "No, no. He's a Russian. I don't want to go near him." He [my friend] said, “Come on, come on. Let's go hear what he wants.” As we got closer

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<sup>21</sup> Typhoid fever and typhus are different diseases that are caused by different bacteria, although the symptoms are similar and both were common in the camps. Typhoid fever is a common bacterial disease caused by the ingestion of food or water contaminated by the feces of an infected person or from lice that fed on the feces. It results in a high temperature, delirium, and intestinal hemorrhage and, if untreated, is often fatal.

<sup>22</sup> Prague is the capital and largest city of the Czech Republic. It is also the historical capital of Bohemia. It is situated in the northwest of the country on the Vlatava River, approximately 740 kilometers (460 miles) west of Palanok. The Soviet Army entered Prague on May 9, 1945.

to all those people, he kept saying, "Is there a Mrs. Gross here from Palanok?" The only Mrs. Gross from Palanok would have been my mother. I had no idea who he was. As I approached him, I heard his voice. I knew it was my brother Ben. He did not expect me to have lived. Nobody did. He expected my mother to survive. He picked me up, put me on his motorcycle, put on a Russian flag, and off he took [me]. I didn't even realize that I left my friend behind.

When we got to an apartment, or while we were on the bike, he said to me, "All your brothers are alive." I said . . . "That's ridiculous." When I arrived—this is very funny when I think of it now—they made me undress outside so I wouldn't bring lice into the house. I undressed, went into the bathtub, [and] got cleaned up. I was so exhausted. I went to sleep. Then I felt someone touching me. I got so nervous, not knowing where I was, [or] who it was. Could it be a German? My brother, Bill, was kissing me and holding me. I knew he [Ben] is right—they are my brothers and some of them are alive. I still didn't believe all of them were living until I saw them. Then my youngest brother, Alex, and Sam showed up, and my brother, Bernie. Filip was the only one that was in my hometown. After several months, we had a chance to go to Palanok. My brother Ben and I were going to go together because he had an order to go to Budapest [Hungary] and I was going to go with him.<sup>23</sup> When I arrived to Palanok, my oldest brother [Filip] was there in my house, in our home. It was very difficult to believe that we were able to the house back. He [Filip] came [back to Palanok] before the war ended. From what he told me, he had to hide out several months, being very, very sick. Then my brother, Bernie, and he managed to be together before the war ended. Here we were—my oldest brother, my brother Bernie, and I—in our home, in our house.

There was no joy. There was so much sadness. We didn't have our parents. We knew that our parents were killed right away, but my brothers survived. We were the only people in the entire community that all the children survived. It was so unusual. [We] considered ourselves exceptionally lucky.

When I was there maybe a month or so, we realized that the Russians were closing the borders of that area.<sup>24</sup> We decided to get out of there as quickly as we could. Under extreme

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<sup>23</sup> Budapest is the capital and the largest city of Hungary. It is situated in central Hungary and is bisected by the River Danube. The city was liberated by the Soviet Army on February 13, 1945 and remained under Soviet control until 1991.

<sup>24</sup> At the conclusion of World War II, Czechoslovakia—like most of eastern and central Europe—was occupied by the Soviets. As relations between the Soviets and the US-led Western allies became increasingly polarized and tense, crossing the borders between occupation zones became increasingly difficult. The Communist Party emerged

difficulties and standing two days and three nights, queuing up to get a piece of paper from the Russians or whoever they were to sign so we could leave. Again [we] went to the train station. There are so many stories about that train station that happened to me in particular but I won't go into it now. A Russian soldier managed to push me into the train to get out of there. He was Jewish and he knew that I was Jewish. I was just very, very lucky.

I ended up back in Prague with my brothers. We had one room. The kitchen was maybe [the size of] a postage stamp—just enough to turn around in—and a bathroom. Every single night, there were people from everywhere coming to our home. Many times there were seven of us in a bed because whoever showed up, my brothers just said, “Come up to the house.” They had nowhere to go.

I wasn't there too terribly long when we realized the Russians were taking over Czechoslovakia. The Jewish agencies told us that the children under 16 should go and register. They were going to try and get us out of Czechoslovakia, out of Prague. We registered. I was the first one to leave because I was 16 at the time. It was in February [1946]. I was taken to England [and then] Edinburgh, Scotland to a kibbutz-like environment.<sup>25</sup> Soon after, my brother Alex followed. He was with me. Later on, my brother, Sam, managed to get out, but he was taken to London.

In Edinburgh, we didn't do too much except work—like a kibbutz works: working in the kitchen, doing different chores, and so on. We weren't sent to school. I was very, very upset about that because we were promised we would be sent to school. When I visited London, I complained about it. They said, “Okay. You will need to go to Lancashire, which is another part of England, and you can go to school there.”<sup>26</sup> My brother, Alex, and I went to Lancashire. I went to college there. I wasn't there too terribly long either—only six months. We [Alex and I] felt very guilty that my brother, Sam, is alone. Alex and I decided that we need to be with my

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as the largest party in Czechoslovakia's Parliamentary elections in May 1946. Following the elections, the Communist Party formed a coalition government and gradually took control of the entire government. Most non-Communist members resigned and, in February 1948, the Communist Party seized full power in a coup d'état.

<sup>25</sup> Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland, located on the North Sea. A *kibbutz* [Hebrew: gathering, clustering] is a collective community in Israel traditionally based on agriculture, which combined socialism and Zionism. It is unclear where Rosalyn and Alex stayed, but Alex describes it in his memoir as a farm-like hostel on a hilltop overlooking the ocean, in a place called “Lasvaile,” in the outskirts of Edinburgh.

<sup>26</sup> Lancashire is a county in northwest England. According to Alex's memoir, Rosalyn and Alex stayed in a farmhouse on the outskirts of a town called Nelson, which is approximately 330 kilometers (205 miles) north of London.

brother, Sam. We left Lancashire and we moved back to London [England].<sup>27</sup> Then we moved into an apartment together.

Soon after that, there was a lady that just absolutely adored my brother, Sam. [She] asked him to go and live with them. He [Sam] said no, he's going to go to Israel. In London, my job is to work in the Jewish Agency, or right now is the Israeli Embassy. I worked on the *Palcor*, which is a news agency for Israel, or Palestine at the time.<sup>28</sup> I would bring all the news home. My brothers both wanted to go. They decided that somebody has to stay with me. It was decided that Alex would stay with me and Sam would leave for Israel. The lady that was so fond of Sam begged us to go live with her. The story is much too long about how we ended up there, but we did end up with the Ralph family outside of London.<sup>29</sup> I lived with her for a year. Alex lived there much longer.

I was the first one to leave to come to the United States. I came to the United States two days before Thanksgiving. My three uncles picked me up in New York: my mother's brothers. I had never seen them before. They never saw me before. But we recognized each other. It was a great, great joy to see that I had family in the United States and what great people they were.

You can imagine somebody coming from concentration camps—seeing all the horrible, horrible tragedies—and coming two days before Thanksgiving, when there was so much food, and cake, and everything. I was just totally overwhelmed by this feast. I said, "This is crazy. How can people live like this, with so much of everything and the whole world is so hungry?" Things were still rationed in England. But I got used to this kind of life very quickly. It's very easy to get used to wonderful things. I did go to school for a short while.

Soon after that, in 1949, I got married. I have four children. I have four grandchildren. Unfortunately, we're sort of scattered. One lives in Erie [Pennsylvania], one lives in South Africa, one in Tampa [Florida], and one here. That is my life story.

**Jane:** Can we go back a little bit to the situation in Czechoslovakia when the Russians were taking over? Do you want to talk a little bit about why, as Jews, you felt you had to get out

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<sup>27</sup> London is the capital and most populous city of England and the United Kingdom capital. It is located on the River Thames in the southeast of Great Britain.

<sup>28</sup> The *Palestine Correspondence (Palcor)* was the Zionist news agency of the Jewish Agency. *Palcor* was established in 1935 by Henry Montor to bring news from the Jewish community in Palestine.

<sup>29</sup> The Ralph family refers to a family the siblings met while living in London. Mr. and Mrs. Ralph were among other Jewish Londoners who visited with members of the Primrose Club (a club for child and teen survivors established by the British Jewish welfare agency). They had three children of similar ages—Gerald, Derek, and Maureen—and lived in a town called Croydon, just outside of London.

of there?

**Rosalyn:** It wasn't so much as Jews we had to get out of there after the war. We knew if the Russians were taking over the country, that our lives would be, again, meaningless. The Russians treated everybody very badly. We knew that if you remained there, it would be another hell. Nobody really wanted to live under those conditions. When I was in London and I worked on the *Palcor* in the Jewish Agency, they saw to it that I would get a passport to go see my brothers I because I thought I would never see them again. I went back to Prague under false papers saying that I'm a British citizen and I was sent by the Jewish Agency to do a story there, so that they [the Russians] wouldn't keep me [there]. I wasn't going as a Czech citizen. I was going as a British citizen. I saw that their lives weren't really terrible at the time yet. There was still quite a bit of freedom, but I knew that if they remained under that situation, that their lives would change drastically. It was very sad for me to say goodbye to my brothers thinking that I might never see them again. We knew that the only reason that they tried to take us out of Prague—the Jewish agencies, UNRRA, and so on—they took all the children out because they knew what was going to happen.<sup>30</sup> I was so scared. I was saying goodbye to them. It was tearing us all apart because we never thought we'd see each other again.

Soon after I got back to England, I got my passport to the United States. What was so amazing [was that] I got to the United States in November [1948]. My brothers from Prague got their papers in February the next year [1949]. My brother Alex didn't get his for another year-and-a-half to come to the United States. Sam was a soldier in the Palestinian army, now Israel. We didn't hear much from him either. He got very badly injured in the war there.<sup>31</sup> We were really so fortunate through all these difficult times that we managed to survive and all of us are here in this country and doing very well.

When Alex came to this country, they immediately took him into the Army, which was also very scary because [we worried], "Good heavens. What is going to happen to him now?" We all have done exceptionally well. I feel I'm the luckiest person in the world to be in such a wonderful country. Not only did I get opportunities here that I would have never gotten

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<sup>30</sup> The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was founded in 1943 to provide economic assistance to European nations after World War II and to repatriate and assist the refugees who would come under Allied control. UNRRA managed hundreds of displaced persons camps in Germany, Italy, and Austria and played a major role in repatriating survivors to their home countries in 1946-1947.

<sup>31</sup> Rosalyn is referring to Israel's War of Independence, which broke out when five Arab nations invaded territory in the former Palestinian mandate immediately following the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 and continued until February 1949.

anywhere in the world. I was able to go to school. I was able to become a very good interior designer by sheer determination and will. And here I am talking with you.

**Jane:** That's great.

<End Disk 1>

**Interview Ends**

Cuba Family Archives