

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

TIBOR MATYAS SCHMIDT

Transcript of Audiotaped Translation of Interview

Interviewer: Inge Karo

Date: March 3, 1989

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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TMS - Tibor Matyas Schmidt [interviewee]¹

BG - Belinda Glijansky [daughter]

AM - Adela Matyas [wife]

AG - Alex Glijansky [son-in-law]

IK - Inge Karo [interviewer]

Date: March 3, 1989

Tape one, side one:

IK: Okay, this is Inge Karo interviewing--how do you pronounce your name?

TMS: Tibor Matyas.

IK: This is Inge Karo interviewing Tibor Matyas. Now, please tell me where you were born and when, and a little bit about your family.

TMS: I was born in 1925, 25th of May, in Transylvania. Now about my family. What do you mean talk about my family?

IK: Well, your economic class, your social class, what you did...

TMS: I come from a family, we were six brothers, four brothers and two sisters. My father was the president of the Jewish community for 20-some years. I had a brother who emigrated to America in 1924 before I was born and my oldest brother, he was a physician. He lived in Bucharest. He did escape, he was not deported and afterwards he went to Israel. He was also the president of the dentist association. He lived in Ramat-Gan.

IK: Now, you had mentioned your father was president of the Jewish community. What, what type of Jewish community was it? What kind of...

TMS: It, it was an Orthodox. I don't know, here Orthodox is too religious. Over there Orthodox is more or less like religion on a higher scale of, of Conservatives, I would say. The system in Europe, it was very similar to yours here in the United States. Everything goes around a congregation. In Europe belongs different congregations, they have their synagogue, but my father was the president of the Jewish community in Klausenburg, in Cluj, and I think, if I'm not mistaken, there were about 15,000 Jews in that city, or probably more than 15,000 Jews.

IK: Did they live throughout the city or did they live in certain neighborhoods?

TMS: No, no, we lived in the city.

IK: Not in any particular neighborhood?

TMS: No, no, no, we lived in the city.

IK: Before we go on, maybe if you don't mind, would you spell the name of the city for me?

¹Matyas is Mr. Matyas Schmidt's father's last name; Schmidt is his mother's last name. When he moved to Venezuela, he used both last names in this order, following local tradition and kept that format.

TMS: The city had three names, Cluj, it would be C-L-U-J, that's in Romanian. Now in German they called it Klausenburg. Klausenburg, that I can see that you know how to write.

IK: B-U-R-G.

TMS: B-U-R-G. And in Hungarian they called it Kolozsvar. So I [unclear].

IK: Okay. Now, what was your life like before the German invasion of Russia in 1941? Did your parents and your family feel comfortable and secure in their life and did you feel yourself to be a Hungarian patriot?

TMS: Well, let's put it this way; first of all I was born in Romania and not, not in Hungary, which in those days we spoke Romanian. At home we used to speak German and Hungarian with my folks. Before the First World War I had known that my father was, I don't know how they call it, civilian justice. So...

IK: Like a mayor?

TMS: Like a mayor. He used to collect pensions from the Hungarians and from the Romanians, so I wouldn't say that I felt patriot as a Hungarian. I felt always more patriot as a Romanian. I finished my high school in Romania, it was an industrial high school. In 1940, when Hitler split Transylvania to the Hungarians, I mean Transylvania in two, which half belonged to the Hungarians and the rest to Romania, we had opportunity to go to Romania, but my father was still thinking the way that he lived in the time from Franz Joseph's time, and he didn't want to move. I remember, I was a kid in 1941, a commission, actually not a commission, I told you about my brother the physician who went to Israel, he had a very close friend in Romania. He lived in Bucharest in those days and secretary of the peasant ministers, the ministry.

BG: [Unclear] of agriculture.

TMS: No, no from the...

TMS: You know what a peasant is? Who works the land?

BG: *Campesino*.

TMS: *Campesino* [farmer] is not a peasant.

BG: [Unclear] a farmer, or a [unclear].

TMS: He was, he was not a minister like you call here, he was...

BG: In charge.

TMS: In charge, no, a *ministro*, how do you call a *ministro*?

BG: A secretary of agriculture, something like that, a government official.

TMS: Government official. He sent three gentlemen to Transylvania to speak to my father and asked him, begged him, "We know what's going on. Why don't you come over to Romania?" We have the opportunity because the border between Cluj and other small city, Turda, was about 10 or 12 kilometers and everything was settled just to, to go to Romania, because they knew that from Romania they won't send us to concentration camp. But my father still insisted he didn't want to go. He didn't believe that it could happen, whatever, so that's why we didn't go.

IK: So you did, did feel comfortable and secure there until...

TMS: We felt, we felt secure, more or less, so-called secure, more with the Romanian than with the Hungarian. Definitely.

IK: How would you describe your relationship with the non-Jews at that time?

TMS: Well, I can't complain, because we were really very well related with, with the non-Jews, especially with a group of, of the Romanians. Remember, you must, you must know something, that Transylvania is a very peculiar piece of, of land. We were all minorities. It was--this belonged to Romania, but the Romanians were minorities, the Hungarians were minorities, the Jews were minorities, so we got almost--we got well together. We didn't suffer those riots that they had in Romania, I mean the Romania [unclear], what I mean, and we used, we used to get along quite well, the three minorities.

IK: Did you have social friends, social relations, with non-Jews?

TMS: Yes, we had social friends, mainly Romanians, because with the Hungarians they were always, "*Wer bin ich?*" [German: Who am I?], so we did have relations and good relations. For instance, I remember that my father had a very, very close friend, he was a priest, and we used to go to their home. His children, he had three sons, we used to play soccer together, older, much, much older than I. I was the baby among them and he would never, never, would never offer me to eat anything in his house.

IK: Very considerate.

TMS: Because he knew that we were kosher home, but when he left, his wife, because the Orthodox priest, they do get married, she always used to tell me, "Hey, baby, a little milk you can have or a little piece of bread." They would never offer me something which was not kosher, respecting my father.

IK: Very, very sensitive of them. Now, you had mentioned school before; were those Jewish, you know, like they had in Germany, they were public schools, but they were Jewish schools. Is that the type of school you went to?

TMS: No, we had, no, no, I went for the primary school. By us, the studies were four years primary and eight years high school. I went to primary school in a Jewish school.

IK: Primary is elementary?

TMS: Elementary. That means elementary school.

IK: That was not Jewish. That was...

TMS: No, Jewish, Jewish, Jewish, and then we had also a Jewish, very, very good Jewish school there. The first four years I went there and after that I went to an industrial high school which I finished.

IK: That was for all...

TMS: That was for the public, *ja*.

IK: Did you, early did you experience any discrimination at all against Jews

either at school or in, in business?

TMS: Yeah. Yes, especially after, after the Hungarians came in.

IK: And what--can you remember what form that took?

TMS: Well, sometimes, you know, the typical word was always "You dirty Jew!" But not, not particularly or personally I never felt it because I didn't behave-- you know, you have to be very careful when somebody say that you are different, you are good, you don't look, you don't, you don't seem to be, you don't look as a Jew. Those are the worst anti-Semites. So probably my physic or because I was a sportsman, what I did, felt, was in 1943, we went to a championship representing the school in skiing. I won the first prize and they denied to give me the, how do you call, the trophy, and it was only because I was a Jew.

IK: When you say they, who was it, the school [unclear]?

TMS: The Hungarians. No, no it was a national tournament, was a national tournament from Hungary and they denied it to give it to me.

IK: It was not local?

TMS: No, no, it was not local. The local people, they insisted, simply they said, "Jews can take part in this tournament." That was it.

IK: Now, culturally I think you had mentioned this before, what nationality did your family feel closest to, was it the Romanians or the Germans?

TMS: Definitely not the Germans.

IK: Not the Germans.

TMS: At home we used to speak Hungarian.

IK: Did you mention what was your father's occupation?

TMS: Well, before the war, the First World War, we had vineyards. I don't know actually what he was. I only know that he was the president of the Civilian Justice. I don't know what you call it here, a mayor or *alcalde* [mayor], something like that.

BG: A public official?

TMS: Which...

BG: [Unclear]

TMS: *Viñero*, [One who cultivates vineyards].

BG: Oh, vineyard.

TMS: Vineyard. Yes, and I don't know actually because I am the youngest of the family. Imagine my oldest brother was 19 years older than I, so I was told by my brother who lived here in the United States, a certain time after he left and my father sold everything to emigrate to the United States, I mean to America. He went with another family because he just finished his high school. When he got here, he couldn't get in because it was a quotation or something like that.

IK: Quota?

TMS: Quota to come in, especially the people from this part of, of Europe, so to get back everything again he couldn't, because he sold everything for nothing and

nobody would give it back to him. So those days I don't remember him, because I was not born. It was very hard, but he made a living because he was collecting pensions from the Hungarians and also from the Romanian.

IK: Had you mentioned--I don't know whether you want to say, had you mentioned what year you were born yet when I started out, did you say?

TMS: When I was born? I said 25th of May 1925.

IK: Oh, okay, I'm sorry.

BG: Well, I think that the second time that we started taping there was no introduction, or did you leave that part...?

IK: [unclear].

BG: I'm sorry.

IK: That's alright. [Short pause]. Was your family affected by the anti-Jewish laws that were passed in 1938 and 1939?

TMS: We didn't have anti-Jewish laws by us.

IK: The German laws, that is.

TMS: Yeah, but not by us.

IK: The Nuremberg laws did not affect you?

TMS: *Numerus clausus*² did affect us but it was later. It was in 1940 after the Hungarians came into to Transylvania.

IK: Oh, and how did it affect you then?

TMS: No, it didn't me at all.

IK: Now, again, I don't know whether this applies to you or not, did you ever hear any discussion about the territory that Hungary lost after World War I? Do you remember the feeling in your town when the territory was returned to Hungary in 1938 - 1941?

TMS: No, in 19-- I don't know what happened because I wasn't born, but in 1940 when Hitler split Transylvania in two, I remember the way they came, the way the military people, the Hungarians, came in and that was a big, big feast especially for those Hungarians that lived there. Remember what I told you before. It was, it was three minority groups: Hungarians, Romanians and Jews.

IK: Were the other...?

TMS: The Hungarians were very happy about it, the others, part of the Jews, probably they were, nobody expected from the Hungarians what they did, because the old generation, not my generation, the older generation, they always thought that they still live the way they lived under Franz Josef's time, I mean, Hungarians that used to belong to the Hungarian, the, the Austrian-Hungarian monarch. Transylvania used to belong to them, so they always thought that they would have the same life.

²*Numerus clausus* - [Latin] closed or fixed number in the admission of persons to specific professions, institutions of higher learning, professional associations, positions of public office. *Numerus clausus* on the admission of Jews to institutions of higher learning was applied in the 19th century and extended into the 20th century. www.Jewishvirtuallibrary.org.

IK: But there was no--with the Romanian and Jewish minorities there was no strong nationalism that they did not want to belong to Hungary?

TMS: No, as far as I remember, no.

IK: When did you or your family first realize that there was anti-Jewish persecution in Western and Central Europe?

TMS: I would say in 1940, after the Hungarians came in.

IK: And how did you learn about this? What happened?

TMS: Well, first they started they started to come, the trains.

IK: And then you knew what was in those trains?

TMS: Well...

IK: Because, you know, the reason I am asking is so many people now are saying we never knew what was in them.

TMS: I will tell you something. We didn't--we knew because the people which we used to speak--first of all, we used to give them food, clothing, and all those things and they used to tell us try to get out. Try to leave somewhere because you don't know what's going on and what's expecting you.

IK: The people on the trains?

TMS: On the train, but they didn't know either where they are going; they only knew something is--they going to some concentration camp.

IK: And nobody tried to keep you from the trains?

TMS: Nobody, nobody, no, they let us go there to give them especially help, help them out. Those days were not the Hungarians, they were not the Germans yet, because those trains that came from, from Poland or Czechoslovakia, I don't know exactly where from, I don't even remember, but we still didn't believe. And, you know, nobody believes until they don't feel it in their own body what's going on.

IK: Unfortunately.

TMS: Unfortunately, but I would say that we could have been saved a lot, if they would--if the Jewish communities those days would have told us the truth what's going on. I'm almost sure that they knew what's going on, especially when the deportation started, because at the beginning we had no ghettos. The ghettos started in 1943.

IK: In Transylvania?

TMS: In our places and those days I'm sure they knew already what's going on. In 1943 they knew about Auschwitz. They knew about those concentration camps.

IK: When you say they, who do you mean? The Jewish communities outside of Europe?

TMS: The Jewish community leaders.

IK: In Europe?

TMS: In Europe and in Transylvania.

IK: That's interesting.

TMS: That's my very humble opinion, and if they would have told us the truth,

I'm sure that my generation, which we were already 15 years old, 16 years old, we could have fought and we could have gone up to the mountains. I was, I was in the mountains for a few months when they started with the ghetto, in Cluj, in Klausenburg. I didn't want to go in.

IK: I want to hear about the ghettos because that's important, but if we could just go back for a minute. Do you have any opinion on, if these community leaders knew, why do you think they didn't tell the rest of the Jews? Why do you feel they didn't warn them? You think, for their own selfish...

TMS: They probably were afraid thinking what would happen to them or to the rest of the Jews if a group of Jewish boys would go up to the mountains. That, that's my feeling. I probably am wrong.

IK: Well, you're entitled to your opinion.

TMS: But I will tell you something, boys like we were 15, 16 or 17 and 18 years old, we had a complete different point of view and different way of thinking than the generation today. And I'm sure that we could have, probably a lot of us would have died, I don't doubt about it, but many, many would have escaped. It wouldn't be so easy, not for the Hungarians and not for the Germans, knowing that they had partisans all over, especially in our places like Transylvania it was very easy, because, remember, it was surrounded by mountains, the Carpathian, and we really knew the territory.

IK: Would you have been able to get weapons?

TMS: Well, how did the rest of the people get weapons? At night you attack the Germans, you take away the weapons, and then you go to the mountains.

IK: When you talk about a group of boys your age, I assume you're talking about your friends. Were you just friends or were you organized in some sort of club or...

TMS: We were organized in the *Noar Hatzioni* [Zionist Organization] with the *Habonim*, we had the *Mizrachi*, we had all the Zionist organizations.

IK: About how, how large a number of young men or teenage boys, whatever, were they approximately? We talking about several hundred or...

TMS: No, in my town we were about, I would say a few thousand, I would say.

IK: Did you have any contact with the people your own age that belonged to the same organizations in other communities?

TMS: We were all together.

IK: You were all together.

TMS: We were all together.

IK: When, when you had...

TMS: In the Jewish school there we had about 1200 pupils, students, in the Jewish school.

IK: Not, but it was not just from Klausenburg, but from the other communities also?

TMS: No, no, I'm talking about the city of Klausenburg. We had another city next to us, 75 kilometers, the name was Oradea, Grosswardein in German they call it. They had over there over 25,000 Jews.

IK: Well, you had mentioned about when they first started the ghettos, I think that would be important to talk about how they started it, whether you were forced to go into it and what kind of--how physically, how the surroundings were in those ghettos?

TMS: Well, I will try to.

IK: You know, as much as you can remember.

TMS: Whatever I remember. When they started with the ghettos, they started with the streets. They say the Jews from this and this street will be taken to the ghetto. First they started with the main, main street and I remember we moved out from our home.

IK: Were you allowed to take all your belongings? What did you have to leave behind?

TMS: Well, what do you mean all your belongings?

IK: Furniture, clothing, money...?

TMS: No, no, no, forget about furniture, forget about everything. When they started, they took the people from their houses to the ghetto. You could take along with you whatever you could carry.

IK: Did you have much notice or did they just come one day and say...

TMS: No, no, no, that was notice, this and this street will be picked up and go there. We moved out. We moved out to another street further out of center city because we lived practically on the main street.

IK: To avoid being forced to go to the ghetto?

TMS: To avoid to go in today, but we knew that it will come to us within 10 days, within 15 days, it will come to us.

IK: Now if this happened in Germany, they would have had a list of who used to live in this house, and if you tried to move away, they would have said what happened to...

TMS: They knew.

IK: ...and look for you, but they didn't do that?

TMS: No, but they didn't do that, because they knew that everybody would fall in. Because it was not such, such a big deal to besides, of that, the Hungarian they were there. They were not so so good friends that they wouldn't give you in or turn you in.

IK: They would?

TMS: They would, sure, so I remember that we moved out. My father get cut because he was the president of the Jewish community so we were a little bit later in the group to, to get into the ghetto, but we did. I ran away. I didn't want to go there. That's why I told you I went up to the mountains, but I used to come down at night. I used to go into the ghetto. I used to be with my parents and I decided that I would go to the

partisans, not to, not to stay there. But one day it came out an order that all the young people, everybody would be deported to camps and the younger people would help out with work and with this help he could save their parents, they're elderly people, they can't work, so the children will work and they will, they will support their parents.

IK: And what did they tell you what these camps were? They told you they were work camps?

TMS: No, they didn't. They told us it's work camps in the country. They never spoke about out of the country. I mean, they were speaking always in the country of Hungary.

IK: They didn't call them concentration, I know they didn't talk about extermination but they call them extermination camps or work camps?

TMS: No, they said work camps. That's what they said, work camps. I remember that was--I finished my school, it was the 10th of May, and they were in ghetto already.

IK: I think this is important, did we mention the year, I'm not sure, had you mentioned the year that they started to go into the ghetto?

TMS: 19, end of '43.

IK: I'm sorry I wasn't sure whether...

TMS: End of '43. And in '44, '44 was the last groups that they took them already, trains. We were on the first group, so knowing that I'm going to help my parents out, I was the only boy because my brother, he was in a, in a military in a working camp and I was the only one home. So I decided to go to the ghetto and to go with my parents. So they definitely, it must have been about the month of May when they took us to the trains. That was the first or the second group.

IK: How did they take you in the trains, they put you in trucks, did you have to walk?

TMS: No, they--it was not far, it was not so far. It was about two miles from the ghetto...

IK: Did they come with guns and said line up...?

TMS: No, no, no. Nothing, nothing like that, because we were convinced that they take us to a camp, to a working camp.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

IK: This is side two of tape number one. Now, could I backtrack a little bit? You had mentioned something about your brother being in a work camp. Would you talk a little bit about that, what kind of work camp your brother was in and how did he happen to be in that? If I ask you about your brother and you don't want to talk about it...?

TMS: No, no, no problem. I can tell you whatever you ask me, I will answer you, if I know or if I remember. My brother was at age to be a soldier, he was five years older than I am and those days they used to go to, to take them to labor camps. Instead to be a soldier in uniform they used to be in a, in a labor camp, but as soldiers with a stripe, yellow stripe that they were Jews, but not as soldiers. In labor camps, it had to be...

IK: Were there only Jews in labor camps?

TMS: Only Jews.

IK: Only Jews. And was he paid for this?

TMS: No, what do you mean paid?

IK: No, okay, you had also mentioned that you, when you went up in the mountains to avoid going into the ghetto, you were thinking of joining the partisans. Could you tell me a little bit who these partisans were and how come that you had contact, were able to contact them?

TMS: They were two kids from our town. They were in touch with them and that was next to the mountains, called Bistritsa, this is Carpath mountains.

IK: Carpathian Mountains?

TMS: Carpathian Mountains, *ja*, in Transylvania and through them I could go and to reach them.

IK: And they were partisans mainly against the Germans?

TMS: Sure, mainly against, against the Germans and to save whoever wanted to go to fight against them.

IK: And they were not prejudiced against Jews, like other countries when the Jews wanted to...

TMS: Not at all, those two friends that I had, they were Jewish boys.

IK: Yes, but the partisans themselves were not, because in other countries when the Jews wanted to join the partisans...

TMS: That I don't know. That I don't know.

IK: Okay. And when the people were told they had to go into the ghetto, did they--were they told where they had to live or did they have to find...

TMS: No, they just came in, said, "Well, gentlemen, take your belongings," which used to be a *Rucksack* [German: backpack] or something like that and they took us to the trains.

IK: No, I mean, when you had to--before you went to the ghetto?

TMS: To get into the ghetto. That was the street. They started first with the

street.

IK: Were there empty houses there? Or you had to go...

TMS: No, the people were living there and then they came pick up the people, they said, "Come on, now we go into the ghettos." You had to leave your house, leave everything there. You could take with you along whatever you could carry.

IK: I understand that, but when you went into the ghetto, where did you live in the ghetto, were there empty places? Or did you have [unclear] with somebody...

TMS: No, no. This was empty, empty place. No, no. The ghetto was a factory of bricks. It was a big, big factory of bricks and we all went there.

IK: Just the one big building, that was the ghetto?

TMS: Well, it was a tremendous, a very huge space.

IK: Were there rooms? Were there...

TMS: Were there rooms? There were separated, you know, what *galfon* [phonetic] is?

IK: *Galfon*, where you make ...

AM: Like a warehouse.

TMS: Like a warehouse, a big, big warehouse and there they separate you...

IK: But you didn't, you didn't have a lot of streets, you just had this big warehouse.

TMS: It was very huge and we had a camp there, I mean camp...

AM: Inside the building.

TMS: No, no, it was a big warehouse, split and everybody could-- we separated them with cartons, what, whatever it was, you could separate them. But the people-- we didn't stay too long in those ghettos.

IK: How long did you stay?

TMS: I don't remember.

IK: About a month?

TMS: No, no, it was weeks, even less than weeks.

IK: And did people still go to work once they were in the ghetto, or did they have to stop going to work?

TMS: I don't remember.

IK: Do you remember what the reaction of the non-Jewish neighbors was when people were told they had to move out and go to the ghetto? I mean, did they object to it, or did they come in and take what you had to leave behind?

TMS: I think they were all happy seeing that the Jews were, were taken out from their homes

AM: Sure.

TMS: That's, that's my opinion, and waiting to see what they could rob out. We had a very big building. I took my wife there in 1974 when I went to Israel and I didn't want to go in. I was afraid to walk in to see the concierge that we had those days, to find

something from--so I went to the door, I got a shock, how do you say it, nerves. I wouldn't say a nervous breakdown, but something, I started to cry, I went out and didn't want to go in and in the same day we left. Once I went back to, to my hometown and I found a cousin of mine. They begged me to stay overnight, I couldn't and the same day I just showed--I was driving around to show my wife the, the city and the same afternoon we went back. So I couldn't stay, I didn't want to stay there.

IK: Too many bad memories. Okay, I'm sorry I interrupted you, but I felt this was important to find out just what this ghetto was. Now, what happened once you got on the train?

TMS: Well, what I remember, the group left, more or less it was the month of May. They, they nominated me to be the chief of the group of that train. I was one of the youngest. In that train they switched in about 70 or 80 people, among them my family.

IK: Was it passenger cars or boxcars?

TMS: [laughs] Passenger cars! It was where they, they carried...

IK: Cattle.

TMS: Cattle. So I remember that I had my father and another uncle to put the *Rucksack*, and I said, "What do you need that *Rucksack*?"

IK: You had to stand?

TMS: What?

IK: You had to stand?

TMS: Not to st -- no, no, no. Everybody who could take a place, was sitting, was standing. We were so crowded down there.

IK: Did they give you...

TMS: And I wanted to throw out everything, but, you know, they didn't want, because it was very important, *tefillin* and *tallis* [phylacteries and prayer shawl] was in the *Rucksack*, so that was very important to take along.

IK: Did they give you anything to eat or drink?

TMS: For the moment nothing. Just throw us in. All of a sudden we heard some voices, "*Schnell, los!*" [German: quick, get going!] They closed the wagons. They put a chain and a lock on it and that was it.

IK: Did they cover up so you couldn't see out?

TMS: No, they didn't cover anything, because, first of all, to see out you had to climb a little bit high to see outside. We had, everybody had some, some food and that's what we were eating. I remember that in the train they made all their necessities in the train. They didn't give us a chance to go out for nothing. Once we made a stop. If I'm not mistaken, next day after we left, they made a stop and to water the train and in the meantime they gave a chance the people ran down to drink some water.

IK: Did anybody try to escape?

TMS: I don't think so, because nobody knew where we are. And all of a sudden, all of a sudden they started to yell. That was already the German soldiers. I must tell you

something which I forgot to tell you. When they took us to the train, they were not the German, they were the Hungarians soldiers. They were the Hungarian *Kakastoll*, [Hungarian: feather] they called them. They used to have...

AM: Feathers.

IK: Feathers?

TMS: Feathers from a rooster. They were terrible. They are the worst of all of them.

IK: Was that the regular army or was it sort of like the National Guard?

TMS: They had, they had, the Hungarians they had that army, *Kakastoll*, they were very, very bad, bad people, anti-Semites and bad.

IK: And later on it was the Germans?

TMS: Then they turned over--when we made the first stop and the people went down to have some water, to drink some water, in the few minutes they started to yell again. That was already the Germans, because the train was supposed to leave and everybody had to run back to the wagons. Some of them they couldn't run, they started shooting. We didn't see too many falling down, because we were rushing back to the, to the wagons, but some of them, they were dead. The moment we went into to the, the train, they closed the door again and the train started to go. In my wagon we had one lady who died and one lady who gave birth.

IK: They didn't take the people...

TMS: We couldn't do anything. We couldn't do anything. We couldn't throw out the body. We couldn't do anything with the baby, because we were closed in and in situations like that you can see the whiteness of the feet of the people. You know what--that's an expression. You know what I mean by that? I mean, when you are in a very bad situation like this, then you can see who is a *Mensch* and who is not a *Mensch*, because the human being is sometimes worse than an animal. We got in, the next stop was Auschwitz.

IK: When did you realize that that's where you were going?

TMS: When we arrived there, we didn't know yet that it's Auschwitz. But afterwards we saw the signs that it's Auschwitz.

IK: And did they tell you the usual thing that they told people, that it's, that you're supposed to work and go to a shower, and all that business?

TMS: Nothing, nothing. We arrived there, they opened the wagons, "Everybody down, *los, schnell, und los!*" Mainly they were the prisoners that were there in Auschwitz already and unfortunately they were Jewish Polish prisoners, mainly because they were already in concentration camps since 1940, '41, '42. At the beginning, it was very surprising that a Jew can go against another Jew, like they, they were beating us up to, to go faster.

IK: When you say they, who was beating you?

TMS: The people they received us in Auschwitz, and they were mainly prisoners

from the concentration, from Auschwitz and Jews among them.

IK: Was it any particular nationality of Jews or...?

TMS: I would say mainly that was Polish, because they were from more-- they were in concentration camp already for more time. I mean for, for...

IK: And why did you think they did that? Did you think they did this to save themselves or to...

TMS: I don't know, they did it because they were all so, already, already fed up with everything, and probably they were watched by the Germans. I wouldn't be able to tell you why. And probably they, they became not so human after so many years being in a concentration camp.

IK: How did you know they were Jews?

TMS: Because they spoke Yiddish, that's why. So when we stepped down, the moment I saw, I will never forget and I already thought about that ever Mengele will be caught somewhere, I'm going to, to, to ...

BG: Testify.

TMS: Testify. We were received by Mr., that Josef Mengele. They start--first of all, when I saw an orchestra receiving us was playing music, it was very nice and I said well, at least I can switch into that orchestra with something to play. They started to separate us from the elderly people. We had to go five each one.

IK: Was it also separated by sex or just by age?

TMS: Just by age, just by age. And he was the one, Mengele was the one who used to put his finger to the right and to the left. We didn't know what was left.

IK: How did, how did you know it was Mengele?

TMS: After we arrived, when I went to the camp we knew already that it's Mengele.

IK: Yeah, but how did you [unclear]?

TMS: When we went in, they told us...

IK: Oh, they told you.

TMS: ...who the guy is. So, by that, arriving I didn't know, nobody knew who is, but it was an orchestra receiving the train and they started to separate us. What meant right or left we didn't know and that was the moment that I was separated from my parents, my uncle, my aunt. Because we went, as I told you before, we moved into another house from-- we were living in a main street. We moved out, together with the rest of the family.

IK: Before you went into the ghetto?

TMS: Before we went into the ghetto. So that, that was the last time I saw all, all of them. They took us there. Everyone said, leave everything here, nothing, nobody would touch anything, to leave here, now you go and to take a shower and so on. Then we got undressed, we took a shower. They shaved us and right away they gave us uniforms, the striped, striped uniforms.

IK: When you say “They shaved us,” was this Germans or was it fellow prisoners?

TMS: I don’t know, I don’t know. So they shaved us and right away they put us in *Appell* [German: roll call, inspection] and they asked your name. The moment they ask your name, forget about your name. And they told us, if anybody has anything hiding, you know that they took away the clothes, shoes and everything.

IK: When you say forget about your name, you mean because you had to [unclear] a number?

TMS: They give us a number. A number. So they start to ask, profession. And I told them that I was in industrial high school, that I finished industrial high school and that I’m a mechanic and I know about mechanic. I was three days there, and then they took me out with another group. One group went to the work, that was the *Zigeunerlager* [German: Gypsy camp], that was actually the distribution *Lager* [German: camp].

IK: When you say, you mean the Gypsy, when you say Gypsy camp, you mean *Lager*?

TMS: They called it. They called it Gypsy camp, *Zigeunerlager* that they call it. From there they started to distribute the people. Some of them they were staying there.

IK: This was in Auschwitz.

TMS: In Auschwitz. Some of them they were staying there working, and some of them they were sent out to other camps. About three days or four days afterwards there was another *Appell*.

IK: Excuse me, *Appell* is roll call?

TMS: *Appell* is, yeah, call. Everybody--what used to be in the morning and in the evening, it used to be.

IK: The reason why I’m asking is the people who may listen to this you know, may not know.

TMS: *Ja, ja*, that’s okay. And I don’t know exactly, after two or three days when we were on the list, they took me out and another two guys more or less in my age, and they took us out from that specific, that specific group of camp and they took me to another camp, which I felt in this camp I felt all right.

IK: Do you know the name of that camp?

TMS: Yes, I’ll tell you now that name, because at that moment I didn’t know the name, but I felt all right. I was working on close to a broiler. As I told you before, they asked me what I did, I said that I was finished industrial high school and I know about mechanics.

IK: You mean like a furnace?

TMS: It was a broiler machine.

AM: Broiler.

BG: *Horno* [Spanish: furnace]

TMS: No. *Horno*. Broiler, *para sacar*, [Spanish: to take out] *caldera*, [Spanish:

steam boiler] to take out steam...

BG: To make steam.

TMS: To make steam, you know what it is. Heating. It's a big--they call it, I think they call it...

BG: *Horno*.

TMS: No, in those days...

BG: It's a furnace.

TMS: It's a furnace.

IK: Alright, it doesn't matter.

TMS: And I was happy there, I was just watching that it should come to a certain degree. I had three meals a day, soup in the morning, with a piece of bread, so-called soup noontime, so-called soup in the evening, I got *Wurst* [German: sausage] from them.

IK: That's sausage.

TMS: Sausage every day, once a day, and I was really well treated. Even I got also even *Majorca* [phonetic] is certain type of *Tabak* [German: tobacco].

IK: Tobacco.

TMS: Tobacco. I don't know, the only thing that bothered me too much was the smoke.

IK: How many hours a day did you have to work?

TMS: I would say 9 hours, 10 hours.

IK: Every day.

TMS: Every day, but I'm telling you, I was very comfortable. The only thing that bothered me was the smoke, the, the smell.

IK: The steam.

TMS: The smell.

IK: When you say the smell, you mean from, from where you were working or from the, the...

TMS: I don't know. I don't know the smell, that bothered me. So after two days, three days, we had an *Appell* [roll call], and I was [short pause]-- so after a few days, two or three days I think, they made again an *Appell*. Then I found out where I am. That was Buchenwald, that was already in the crematoriums. A boy, a boy probably a year younger than I, he was from Sosnowiec or Katowice from Poland, he told me, he asked me if I speak Yiddish. I told him yes, not so well, but I do speak Yiddish, "So you know where you are?" I said, "I'm comfortable upstairs watching the degree of that machine." And then he told me that we are in Buchenwald in crematorium and that we are burning the people and so on and so forth, but we have an opportunity to escape. I said, "What do you mean escape?" "You see, this soldier over there, that's a Polish soldier who became an SS, but he grew up in my house, and he told me that when a new group will come in, because that was a double door, one group went to the train to the main station and other one that goes in to the crematorium. Sometimes they took you

with buses, not buses, *camiones*, [Spanish: trucks] trucks, and sometimes walking in. So we used to go there five, every, every five people, hand by hand, arm by arm, and they used to count. It was easier to count five people. So when he's going to count the people that come in, we should run behind him and he won't see anything." And I said to myself, well, in this case, now that I know what I did and where I am, the only thing that could happen they shoot me a bullet in my head and that's finished. I decided and I told him, I said, "Let's go. Let's do it!" And the first opportunity, I think it was a day or two days later, it was two groups, one that went to the trains and one that came in. We behind that soldier, we walked in to the group that went to the, to the station, to the train that was sent out, and then they started to beat us because nobody wanted to let us in.

IK: The, the Germans?

TMS: The Germans, Germans. They didn't let us in to that, but they didn't know what happened, so we were close to the train, they started to put us into the wagons, and then they, they took us to Hirschberg.

IK: H-I-R...

TMS: H-I...

IK: ...S-C-H-B-E-R-G.

TMS: Hirschberg *Osten* [German: East], that was a working camp. When they came and they asked, two, two person more than the list that they were supposed to have.

IK: That was you and that young boy?

TMS: That was my friend, that boy and myself. I remember his name, Yashek, but I don't remember his family name. So they started to ask how come that we, we are with them. I said that I'm Romanian, I don't speak any other language only Romanian, because I was afraid, I knew that the Hungarians were deported already, so somebody would come out. So I didn't speak German I didn't speak-- only Romanian. So finally, the gentleman came, one of the prisoners, he was Czechoslovakian and he asked me how come that we are here without number, without nothing. I told him the truth what happened, and I also told him that I speak German, I speak Hungarian, and whatever he's going to tell the, the *Lagerältester*, the camp's chief, I'm in his hands, he should do whatever he wants, but in the meantime he can put me to work, because I, I know about mechanics and all those machineries, that they probably would need me. This elderly man translated exactly the opposite. He told them that they just took us out, that we are technicians, both of us, and it happened that they put us into the wagons and they forgot to give us the numbers. So the *Lagerältester*, the chief of them, took us out, they gave us the numbers. I had the number *neunundvierzig-zwei-achtundachtzig*.

IK: 4988, right?

TMS: No, 4 *neunundvierzig*, 288. *Neunundvierzig-zwei-achtundachtzig*. 49288 was my number, and 49289 was his number. And the next day they took us to a factory to see if we really know, that we really know about mechanic and we were kept at that camp in Hirschberg. I don't know for how long, but it must have been...

IK: Do you know what year it was?

TMS: That was Hirschberg, was 1944.

IK: And what year, what year was Auschwitz? Also 1944?

TMS: Beginning '44. And that was 1944, must have been about not, not far from Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Had to be because I remember that we were working *Nachtschich*. We were working at night.

IK: Nightshift.

TMS: Nightshift, and when we left it was too early and when we came back was too early, so we were fasting. Those days I still believed in Yom Kippur. We were fasting two days and one night, because it was not coincidence the food that we were allowed to eat because of Yom Kippur and the food that they gave us before went to work. I don't know if you follow me. We left at four o'clock today, let's say.

IK: You mean the times the food is served?

TMS: The times, that didn't, that didn't fit in, so we were practically two days, imagine, all the time we used to have three meals a day, water in the morning, soup at noontime and water in the evening. Hundred gram bread, so-called bread and once a week we had hundred gram margarine, margarine and *Wurst*.

IK: Sausage.

TMS: Sausages, once a week. [Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

IK: Tape number two.

TMS: We were, as I told you, close to, to Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur.

IK: Now, how did you know? Did--were you able to keep track of, of the days?

TMS: I didn't, but the elderly people that were there, they took more or less, that's what we were told by them. And here's where we heard, with my friend, with that Yashek, as I told you, wanted again to run away because we could hear the cannons not too far from, from...

AM: Cannons.

TMS: The cannons--not too far from the camp and he being Polish, we knew that he would get along because probably the Russian they are close. He spoke Polish and Russian, I didn't. So we were ready to run away. And from Hirschberg, all of a sudden broke out typhus.

IK: Typhoid.

TMS: So call typhoid. And from 322 that we were there 387, we were in that camp in Hirschberg, I think we survived about 25, 23, 22, something like that. At the beginning, the chief...

IK: You talking about people?

TMS: *Ja*, the prisoners.

IK: You know about how many?

TMS: About 387 we were in that camp, because from this camp they took us to work. I used to work at the factory Dorie Fullner [phonetic], we used to make...

IK: Could you, could you spell that factory?

TMS: Dorie Turner, that I don't--Dorie...

AG: D-O-R-I-E.

TMS: Dor--

AG: R-I-E.

TMS: Fullner. F-U-L-L.

AG: N-E-R.

IK: Do you know who owned that factory?

TMS: No, I don't know. I was working on to make *hélices*, [Spanish: propellers] how do you call it, *hélices*?

AM: The propeller.

TMS: The propeller, I was working on a machine that made the propellers.

BG: For planes.

TMS: For planes. For planes. [unclear] So the chief of the Germans, whenever he used to come in to the camp to make the *Appell*, so-called *Appell*, he also got typhus and died, so the Germans were afraid to come in again. So they closed the, the camp

completely and they used to throw us in food from outside and the only thing that was possible to eliminate that typhus, or the sickness that was already there, they used to take out, they used to oblige us to burn the bodies, to avoid, to avoid the epidemic. I don't remember nothing because I had typhus.

IK: So you don't know whether there were any kind of doctors or nurses there?

TMS: No, no doctors, no nurses, they were afraid. They were afraid to come in. I don't remember too many things about it because I myself had typhus, but I remember that I, I got gangrene in that finger. Gangrene, that finger.

IK: That was the thumb.

TMS: *Ja*. I had, I had 103. You call it fever here, no? By us they called it 42, 45, I don't know anything. The only thing I remember that one of the guys who survived with me told me, "You were completely *meshige* [Yiddish: crazy]. You run out naked to the snow. It was hard to, to keep you and to take you back." And that finger was cut, that was cut, you can see it has one, two, three, four, five, six cut. That was a Polish student, a boy who was studying medicine, with a blade, with a razor blade he cut me that finger and started to--because my hand, my hand was almost black. At the beginning they want to cut me down my hand, then my arm to the elbow and I said, "I don't want to be cut, I want to die." And he--so the Germans they didn't care about it and he made a cut and started to massage me and took out all the...

IK: Infection.

TMS: Infection. And here I have the finger which I have the [unclear].

IK: During that time nobody had to work? When everybody was sick, they didn't have to work anymore?

TMS: No, no they wouldn't let--first of all, imagine, my weight was 29 kilos after typhus.

IK: And at this time...

TMS: I went through a window and I saw a shadow, I stopped there and I saw a face, because I didn't recognize myself.

IK: And was this when there were still about 300 people there and after the epidemic it was down to 25?

TMS: Twenty-some, twenty-some, I think 22 or 23.

IK: Were these, were these all young men?

TMS: Different ages. Different ages.

IK: But it was only men, not women?

TMS: No, no, no, we were never together. We were always separated, we were never together with...

IK: Did you have any...

TMS: So afterwards they decided to, to eliminate that camp, after the epidemic went over, and the few that we were left in the camp, they took us to put us in a, in

another train that came from Auschwitz. And when they saw us, one of the guys that were with us, he told them that we had typhus, they got scared and they threw us down and they sent us to another camp, which was a determination camp.

IK: Extermination.

TMS: Extermination.

IK: Do you know the name of it?

TMS: Yes, surely. And they put us in a truck, and they sent us to that extermination camp.

IK: That was again Germans, when you say they?

TMS: Always the Germans, always the Germans. First I stopped in Hirschberg, that was after it was Bad Warmbrunn.³

IK: Could you spell that?

AM: B-A

TMS: Bad War—Warenham [sic]. I'm not so good in German.

IK: Oh, Bad, B-A-D

TMS: B-A-D. Waren. V...

IK: W-A...

AM: R-E-N

IK: ...R-E-N. Brun. B-R-U-N, something like that.

TMS: Bad Warenbrut [sic], brut.

IK: Brut.

TMS: *Ja*.

IK: This way if we have the spelling, someone will know.

TMS: We, we jumped, we jumped with that friend of mine, that Yashek, always we were together, he also escaped, from that we ran away, and the Germans in the camp they, they caught us and they took us to Görlitz. From Görlitz they took us back.

IK: G-O-R...

AM: L-I-T-Z.

IK: L-I-T-Z.

TMS: G-O-R-L-I-T-Z. They took us to Görlitz. We were punished because we escaped.

IK: Can you say how you were punished, or is it too upsetting?

TMS: No. We had to take a, a bench, to hold with our hands the bottom of the bench, and they gave us with a, with a ...

AM: Lashing.

TMS: ... rubber--I don't know with a rubber or what it was.

IK: They beat you.

TMS: They beat us up. Just as an example that whoever runs away or tries to run away-- normally, they hang them. But, because it was the first guy who wanted to

³Bad Warmbrunn was a subcamp of Gross-Rosen, near Hirschberg.

escape--let's say that way-- so they beat us up.

IK: And was this--what year was this?

TMS: They took us -- Forty...

IK: Still 1944?

TMS: I think that was the end of '44. *Ja*, that was the end of '44.

IK: 1944, okay.

TMS: That was the end of '44 or the beginning of '45.

IK: I guess it was hard to keep track of time.

TMS: I'm missing another camp, Greiffenberg, and from Greiffenberg they took us to Dornhau, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Hirschberg [unclear] Greiffenberg, Görlitz and Bad Warmbrunn. The last camp was Dornhau.

IK: You know what country that was?

TMS: That was at the Sudeten, close, that was at the Sudeten. That was the last extermination camp. That was in 1945, it must have been about February or March, February or March. It broke out also the typhus among the Germans, about the German soldiers and then they came in, the doctor came in and asked whoever had typhus and I remember we stepped out, a few of them. In the meantime, after we were beaten up, my friend Yashek here in Görlitz, he died. When I stepped out, they took me away and they taught me how to put injections. And they took me to the hospital for the German soldier, because they were afraid to go in. I was taught how to put injections, and then I started to, to...

IK: How come they trusted you?

TMS: They had no other choice; I think so. They needed me probably.

AM: No, but, how--they didn't think that maybe you wouldn't give them the injections? It didn't occur to them. [Unclear] no choice.

TMS: You don't ask me because I wouldn't be able to answer you. They were looking for people that had typhus, because they said whoever had typhus once...

IK: Cannot get it again.

TMS: ...is immune to get it again and he could take care of them. We had certain soldiers watching us all the time. So imagine, I had a lot of soldiers there, I mean Germans, they gave us food. After you have typhus you eat with your eyes, more than you can eat. I recovered my strength and I was eating and the rest of the food that I had at night I used to, to take it in to the camp and I used to give it to the others, which of that I'm very proud of. I took out from the death chamber a family, a father and son. It happened that they were from my same town. They were not dead yet, they were just thrown into the barrack. I heard that somebody was...

AM: Moaning.

TMS: ...moaning, so I went in and I took them out and put them into the hospital, because we knew that nobody would come in. I was not afraid for the German didn't come. We took them in, we put them in...

IK: When you say, when you say death chamber, that was just a place from which people were buried that were there?

TMS: No, that was the [unclear] -- where the ...

AM: [unclear]

TMS: No, no, it's a room, let's say it's a room outside that usually the dead people, they used to turn them in until they take them out to burn, or to, to put them in a common, in a common grave, or something.

IK: But this was for, not just for Jewish dead, for all of them?

TMS: No, no, that was, always I am talking about the Jewish camp, that was a Jewish -- it has nothing to do, because it was here only Jews. So the food, whatever I got for the Germans, for the soldiers, I mean, once I finished and I, I fill up my stomach, the rest of the food I took it down to, and I used to give it for--this camp was a, a very interesting thing. The chief...

IK: That was still in Dornhau?

TMS: That was the last camp. The funniest thing was we had a chief, who was a German, he was also, I think, a prisoner, not a soldier, and he had a radio and he knew about the things, because we were close, and one day he didn't come out with his uniform, he came out also with a, with a *Häftling*, with the prisoners, with the striped uniforms. So he begged some of the others that were more or less chiefs there, "You know that I didn't behave bad." The moment he saw already finishing was going on to the finish tried to save me or something like that.

IK: He wanted to, he wanted to pass as a prisoner?

TMS: To pass as a prisoner.

IK: But didn't you all have the numbers burned in?

TMS: No.

IK: Oh, you didn't.

TMS: For instance, I don't have a number because they wouldn't spend ink-- in, in all those people that were sent to, to Buchenwald, they were not, they wouldn't spend ink on them. Because we were the people they worked there after a certain two weeks, three weeks, two months, three months, I don't know, because I left. We were also burned on that, that we should be able to talk about it. And the way they did it, when they went into the gas chambers, it's not like the people say that they poured out the water, they should say that it's water, came out gas. Sometimes they were not even dead yet. They were just fainted. When they opened with the [unclear] they took out, they took out the bodies on a...

IK: This is from the, from the gas, when they took the bodies out from the gas chambers?

TMS: Yes, from the gas chambers they put them on a, on a ...

IK: Whether they were dead or not?

TMS: Not all of them were dead.

IK: Okay.

TMS: Not all of them were dead, some of them were only just only fainted or something.

IK: They didn't care.

TMS: They didn't care, but this is not in Dornhau, I'm talking about Buchenwald. So one morning, the fifth of May, I think it was, 1945, a jeep came in with two--an American jeep came in with two Russian soldiers and they started a nice speech--we are free, no more camps, we can go wherever we want.

IK: What language did they speak?

TMS: In Russia. So next to me I had a friend, a friend...

IK: Do you remember the date, by the way?

TMS: Fifth of May, 1945. And he was from Czechoslovakia, he spoke Russian and Czech. He told me whatever the Russians said, and he said, "Okay we're free. Come on let's go, let's go home."

IK: Did you know where to go?

TMS: That same day another fellow ran into that camp, which that I will never forget. This guy was from my hometown and he came in with a prisoner uniform and everything. He wanted to hide, because he said once in another camp that "*entweder mein Band soll runterfallen, hundert Juden werden sterben*"--that means, that instead to lose my band here, being the chief there, hundreds of Jews will die. You don't understand what I said? He was the chief one of the camps.

IK: The one who ran in was the chief.

TMS: He was in another camp.

IK: And he said before he will lose...

TMS: I won't lose my band here, instead to lose as a chief, hundreds will die, because he was helping out...

AM: With the Nazis.

TMS: He was helping out with the Nazis, but he was working for them. Another guy recognized him in the camp, and right away they hanged him, they took him right away because the guy...

IK: Who hanged him? The Germans?

TMS: The Jews, the Jews, who recognized him, because he didn't behave, or like he behaved, so that's one thing which I was surprised. I was looking. I didn't say anything, because if he behaved like he behaved, he deserved it.

IK: You probably couldn't have done much anyway.

TMS: No, no, but he deserved it. As I told you before, bad things that when they give you the food-- I had to sleep with a dead person one night and I was happy because next day the food that it was supposed to give to him, I had it. But why, because it was so cold we slept, you couldn't sleep together under one blanket. So that father waiting for the son should die to have a piece of bread. Unbelievable what a human being

becomes in those situations.

IK: Don't you feel this was part of the whole way they designed these places, they wanted to dehumanize you?

TMS: Well, they wanted to destroy, I think, to eliminate the Jews and not just to inhumanize ourselves. They just wanted to get rid of us, that's what I think, because-- or just because he was crazy. And, you know that there are many, many things that people are talking. First, he wanted to get rid of the Jews, why, to get the fortunes of the Jews. Then you will speak with somebody else would tell he's, because he thought that he's descendant of Jews, who knows. Anyhow the only thing is that I am afraid that the future generation, as I told you before, would speak about us just like we speak today about the Inquisition. History will...

AM: Spanish Inquisition.

TMS: I mean the Spanish Inquisition. So many other details, but it's not easy and besides, if there are questions I can answer and many times I would want to start from the very beginning since I was born, but I come to a certain point, I destroy everything.

AM: [unclear]

TMS: What I have to tell you is about my parents. My parents perished the moment they arrived to Auschwitz. They were sent to, they were sent...

IK: Why don't you mention both their names, your mother's and father's names?

TMS: My father's name was Ignatz Matyas, and my mother's name was Berta Schmidt Matyas.

IK: And it's Matyas is...

TMS: M-A-T-Y-A-S.

IK: Do you want to mention any other family members that you know of who perished?

TMS: My, my sister who perished.

AM: Judy.

TMS: Her name was Judy.

IK: Also Matyas?

TMS: Oh, *ja*. Matyas. She perished, I think, a few months before the liberation. That's what I was told. She didn't want to, to live anymore. She perished in Dachau. That what I was told but I didn't see them the moment we were separated in Auschwitz.

IK: You never, you never saw them again once you were separated?

TMS: No, I never saw them again. And about the rest of my family, there's a book written by my brother. It's written in Hungarian and Hebrew. I have a copy of it, in Caracas, Venezuela, about the Jewry in part of Transylvania, part of where we come from, originally my parents and my grandparents. That book was written, I think, in Israel. So, if you have any questions?

IK: You talk a little bit about the living conditions at some of these camps where you were. You know, were you in barracks? How were you served your food, things like that. Were you warm enough?

TMS: We, we lived in barracks.

IK: Could you wash? Things like that.

TMS: We lived in barracks, whenever that was the time. First of all we were working, in the morning we used to go out. They took, take, take the *Appell*, took us to work and in the afternoon they took us back for, for meal or...

IK: Always on foot?

TMS: Always on foot. We used to walk, sure. But...

IK: Did you have shoes?

TMS: Once you had shoes and once we had that wooden, wooden sole shoes. We had only those *Häftlings* uniforms, that striped uniform that we had.

IK: Prisoner's uniforms.

TMS: Prisoners' uniform and the number that we had on our uniforms. Now, I don't actually, I don't know what you mean by the way of living. In the barracks we were 50 or 60 people.

IK: You had mattresses or you just slept on wooden...?

TMS: No, we had very thin mattresses on the wood. And sometimes...

IK: And when it was cold, did they give you any kind of blankets or warm clothing?

TMS: We had one blanket, we had one blanket, nothing else.

IK: Were you able to keep clean?

TMS: Well, if you got up early in the morning, you could go and clean yourself. The bathrooms, we didn't had showers. You can, you could only wash yourself. I imagine the way of living some other people must have already told you. The only thing, that at the beginning, at the beginning when I just got there in Hirschberg, for instance, I was even playing soccer, because the chief of the camp loved soccer. I was quite a good soccer player, so whenever we played, he gave us a very thick big soup, vegetable soup, and a piece of bread, because he was satisfied to, to, to play, to play with us.

IK: You play against the Germans or you played...?

TMS: No, he always had the two, two teams to play...

IK: But the two teams were always the inmates?

TMS: The inmates and sometimes they were even German soldiers that they liked to play, I mean the [unclear]. But that was at the very beginning when you had strength to, to play. After nobody had strength to do any sport.

IK: Did you, did you find, you had mentioned a little bit that some of the guards were also Jewish prisoners. Did you find, did the Jewish prisoners, Jewish prisoners try to help each other, or did the Polish Jews try to help the Polish Jews, and the German Jews help the German Jews? I mean was there, was there divisiveness by

different groups?

TMS: No, I wouldn't say that. I think where we could help, I don't know, what do you mean by help? Nobody could help nobody, because nobody had nothing with what to help, but I don't think there was any discrimination, as you ask me, between the German Jews and the -- no I wouldn't say that.

IK: Some people do say that.

TMS: I know, I know but you know why, I know that some people say that, especially against-- but you have to understand also that, at least I-- my point of view is that those that probably didn't behave so nicely, don't forget that they were in the camps already for many years before we got into those camps. So you have to understand, after two or three or four years being in a concentration camp, living like they lived, they become inhuman. So I wouldn't, I wouldn't dare to say that there were any discrimination, probably some camps, I don't doubt about it. Probably they complained more.

IK: Why?

TMS: Because a lot of Jews they went to the concentration, they don't speak Yiddish, and that part probably bothered them, that how come that a Jew doesn't speak Yiddish, and that could be.

IK: Was there any attempt--you had mentioned that you didn't eat for Yom Kippur, was there any attempt to have any kind of religious observance in a formal way...

TMS: No, no, no.

IK: ... that the older people tried to teach the younger people?

TMS: No, no, forget about it. No, No. To teach what? First of all, let me tell you something, at the beginning you believed in something, but after you went through those camps, in a few months you asked yourself, is there a God at all? How can he look down and see how babies, just-born babies got killed, and to live on the way that we were living. If there's a God, how could he punish us the way he punished? So forget about teaching or some elderly people try to teach you. I think they wouldn't even dare to teach anybody or to try to convince anybody to...

IK: Did you, when you were in the camp, for instance, in the beginning when you were working with the steam, did you have any contact with people in the other sections of the camp?

TMS: No. Only when we had *Appell*.

IK: Okay.

TMS: Only when I had *Appell*.

IK: Did you make any attempt, to try and, or did anybody try to make an attempt to contact their family, you know, once you were segregated according to sex?

TMS: I don't know. I haven't got the slightest idea, because the moment we were separated I was already sent to a barracks, so I...

IK: But were there children in your barrack?

TMS: No.

IK: No, the children were someplace else. But you knew once...

TMS: They were separated.

IK: But once after you were there, you knew the type of place you were in, you knew that people were being exterminated?

TMS: No, after a few days after, I didn't know at the beginning, nobody knew it.

IK: But I mean, once your friend had told you?

TMS: Once my friend told me where we are and why the, the smell of it, then I knew it was an extermination camp and again, Auschwitz was a distribution camp. Only the elderly and the sick people were exterminated. The people who could work, they were sent to other camps.

IK: Did you ever hear the orchestra again after that first day?

TMS: I don't remember.

IK: Now, before the, before you were actually liberated, was there any news of the outside, did news come in how the war was doing or that maybe the Germans are losing or you could...

TMS: No, we only heard the cannons and the bombings, that the only thing, but news, news, no. As I told you, before, before the 5th of May 1945, a few days before, I told you that there was a German guy who wanted to hide between the prisoners. He gave us some news through his radio that they are close, the war will end, but...

[Tape two, side one ended.]

Tape two, side two:

IK: Anything else you would like to say about your experiences with Mengele?

TMS: Too much I don't know about him, I mean I don't know, I do know about him whatever I, I read in the newspapers after the Liberation, I mean during the last 44-5 years. But I only know, I only know he was the one who made those experiment, that's what we were told, that's why he was the one who made the discrimination, the separation.

IK: Selection.

TMS: Or the selection.

IK: Who told you, the other prisoners or the Germans?

TMS: No, the other, the other prisoners, because he probably was not only the day that I came, that they took us to the camp. Probably he was there for a period of time which all the transportation that they got into to Auschwitz, he was the one who made that separation, but he was well-known as Dr. Josef Mengele. He, he liked very much the Hungarian music, that's what we were told, that's why they always--whenever you asked me before if I ever saw or ever heard that orchestra again, whenever a new transport came in to Auschwitz, they were always receiving them with music. I was told if they came from Czechoslovakia, they played some Czechoslovakian music. If they came from Hungary, it was Hungarian music. So that's what I was told, I don't know, because when we came in they really played some Hungarian music. So...

IK: And how was it, if this isn't too painful for you to talk about, you know, it must have been a dreadful adjustment for you to get off the train, and the first thing that happens is you're separated from your family, and you don't know what happens to them, and then you get thrown into this you know, this terrible existence, where you just, you, you eat enough to stay alive and you work and that's it. How did, how did you deal with this, you know, this dreadful change in your life?

TMS: Sometime, sometimes you don't know you want to live, you don't want to live. Sometimes you ask yourself what for? It's worth to go on to struggle like you are struggling, what for? It will ever come, but that's the nature to survive, you want. I remember...

IK: Because you were young?

TMS: I don't know, I don't know, probably probably because I was young. I only-- I do remember certain times I was thinking, just to be free again and I wouldn't expect to have nothing. I don't mind eating just bread once a day, but to be free, to be able to go out, to walk out. And sometimes after you work you are so tired that you fall asleep not even-- we had not even a mind to think about nothing, just, just to, to survive, *la intuición de sobrevivir* [Spanish: intuition to survive] just to survive. Whenever it comes, it comes, and that's it.

IK: And what do you think helped you to survive, to keep going, anything special?

TMS: Probably because I was young, probably because I was strong enough, a good sportsman when I was younger. I don't see anything else, because I wouldn't, I wouldn't think that I, I survived because I had faith, because I didn't. I had faith until I was there, but afterwards I lost all my faith. After the liberation, I really lost all my faith.

IK: Well, can we, now, you said you were liberated in 1944 in...

TMS: 1945.

IK: 1945.

TMS: 5th of May.

IK: In Dornhau?

TMS: In Dornhau.

IK: And it was there, did anything else happen after the soldiers came? Was, was there any kind of force, or...

TMS: Yeah. It's a very...

IK: If and how they helped you?

TMS: No, no, helped nothing.

IK: You mean they just leave you there on your own?

TMS: I told you before, I told you before that I had a guy who was a Czechoslovakian. And he said, "Come on, let's go home." So we went out from the camp. It's very important to tell you something which probably some people didn't mention that yet. Many, many of those survivors after the liberation, they died. For certain sickness, living for so many months or years in the camp without eating, the moment they were liberated they started to eat all kinds of food or junk, I mean junk for us, because it was good food, too good for our stomach.

IK: Too rich...

TMS: Too rich for our stomach, many of them they got *Scheisserei* they called it.

IK: Diarrhea.

TMS: Diarrhea, and they died. My friend ...

IK: Well, did you eat the food?

TMS: Yeah. When we, when we went out from the camp with that friend of mine, we went in, we ran into a German house. They were afraid to see us.

IK: Do you know what city that was?

TMS: Dornhau.

IK: Oh. That was also Dornhau.

TMS: And the moment they saw us, they let us in. They gave us food, and we wanted-- they offered us...

AM: Clothing.

TMS: Clothing. We changed our clothes, our *Häftling* clothes, and, but not all. We kept our caps and the jacket to identify ourselves whenever, because we didn't know

the Russians...

IK: Did you have the kind of time to say you were Jewish?

TMS: No, no. So that same night they gave us to, to stay over there, and we couldn't sleep on that bed because it was a mattress and all those things too good, so we slept on the floor. But we took away from them a, a horse and a wagon.

IK: The Germans?

TMS: We took away from them, and we went, and on the way trying to go home, don't ask me which way, because I don't know, we didn't know. All of a sudden a Russian soldier, they stopped us and I'll never forget the first thing they asked, "Where do we go?" So my friend told them that we are Jews, and we are political prisoners, that's the way they called us, *Häftlings*, and the first thing, the reactions of this two Russians were not so nice. First of all, when we said Jew, he said "*zhid parshov*" [phonetic], that means "dirty Jew," something like that. They took away from us the horse and the wagon. And they said, "You go wherever you want, everything is free." And, so we had to give them the, the horse, because they were with machine guns and all those things, and we saw a bicycle, a motorcycle, and we steal that motorcycle. And we started to go this little gas, gasoline that we had. We went into a camp to identify ourselves, that we are prisoners, finished the war. We want to go home.

IK: Did you have any kind of maps, or anything so you could tell...

TMS: No, nothing. So it was a very funny thing in that camp. When we walked in...

IK: Excuse me, do you know the name of that camp?

TMS: No, it was not a camp, it was just an office, let's say the *Kommandant*...

IK: German?

TMS: No, not German, forget about the Germans. This was after the liberation, and we identified ourselves that we were in camp, and we are Jews, we want to go home, so one of the soldiers there, captain or what he was...

AM: Russian.

TMS: Yeah, Russian, he said, "What do you need documents? Everything is Russia now. You go wherever you want, you are free, you go home." So we couldn't get even a piece of paper to identify ourselves wherever we go.

IK: So, in other words, this was the section of Germany that the Russians occupied?

TMS: The Russians occupied, right, so we started to go again. We finished the gasoline; we left the motorcycle, and we started to go with the wagon. All of a sudden we saw a group of people, and we asked what, what's going on there. Said, "Jew, you go away!" because the Russians they needed let's say 100 people. They took 100 and somebody left, run away, and they missed two or three, so they kept somebody. You, you identify yourself with a document, to the document, the paper, they, they ripped it and said, "Come on get in!" He needed two guys, he doesn't, didn't care who is it, so we

ran away. But it was that one of the parts which was-- a guy ran into the same office and one of the soldiers had a clock on his neck, on a chain, it was a *Wecker* [German: alarm clock] it was a *Wecker*.

IK: An alarm clock?

TMS: An alarm clock. When it started to alarm, he started to run; he thought that it's a bomb. A Jewish boy came in with *tefillin*, and he had to break it and to see what is inside, because they thought it there is something inside. Things like that you wouldn't imagine, you have to see it. We went, we run into the woods, you know what I mean?

AM: *Bosque* [Spanish: forest].

TMS: *Bosque*.

AM: Forest, like.

TMS: To the forest because we saw a group that went by. And two German soldiers still with the uniform, not from the SS, from the *Wehrmacht*, so they, they had a gun, but they were so afraid, they offered us the gun just to leave them.

IK: That must have made you feel good.

TMS: My, my friend spoke to me in Hungarian. He asked me, "Let's get rid of them!" He wanted to kill them. I said, "Ah, kill them! Do whatever you want! I don't want to see anything. Leave it, leave it!" He took away their guns, and we said, "Come on. Run, go wherever you want," because they were from the *Wehrmacht*. First of all, we saw that they are really not-- they were elderly, at least 60 years or older, you could see they didn't belong to the, the...

IK: They probably were drafted towards the end.

TMS: They, they were drafted, so we took away just their guns and we left them. Then we took trains and trains until...

IK: Did you go on the trains without paying?

TMS: What do you mean paying? Don't you understand that everything was Russia, everything was free, no documents, no passports, no nothing, and whatever you could get, the train, it was not a train to sit, it was wagons for, for the cattles.

AM: Animals, cattles.

TMS: That was for freight, so it was not *lagoli* [Spanish: European luxury train].

IK: Not a passenger, a freight train.

TMS: Not passenger. So we took train to train until we got home. I remember for my birthday, 25th of May, I was in hometown. I didn't find nobody from the family, and I decided not to stay anymore in Europe, and that's why I left Europe.

IK: Did you come in contact with any of the organizations that supposedly were helping many people who were liberated?

TMS: No, when I got home, no, I mean when I got back home, no, I didn't because I didn't need it.

IK: How did you manage to emigrate then, all by yourself?

TMS: That was afterwards. I decided to, to leave Europe, and with another four friends of mine we left the town. We went to Hungary, from Hungary to Yugoslavia; from Yugoslavia to Italy and in Italy we wanted to go to Palestine. In the meantime, we enrolled as volunteers at the 52 B Small Rest Camp for the American army to see if we be able to become American citizen.

IK: Could you repeat that, the 52nd what?

TMS: 52 B Small Rest Camp. It was a camp in, in Italy, Rest Camp for the soldiers. The war was not finished yet. It was still on against Japan, and we hoped that we get into the army and we would become American citizens to be able to emigrate to America. We were ready to go to, to Japan, but in August from Livorno we were supposed to go to Japan. The war was finished through the bomb of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the meantime, I was told that a sister that I was talking about, Judy, she came back from concentration camp...

AM: Alive.

TMS: Alive. So I went back home from Italy.

IK: How did anybody know where to find you to tell you?

TMS: A friend, a friend, not a friend, a gentleman from my hometown, he was also in Italy. He told me that he saw my sister. He knew me, he knew me. But unfortunately I went back and it was not my sister. He made a mistake. It was my other sister who survived. So then for the second time I do-- went through Yugoslavia to Greece to emigrate, and from Greece I was working for the *Brihah Galut*⁴, and the first ships that went to Palestine for the *Aliya Bet*.⁵ I sent them out. It was in 1945, the end of 1945, the beginning of '46 was the first ships that went to -- two of those ships went to, to Palestine, the third one was got to Cyprus, and afterward you know the history of Exodus, all those things you know.

IK: Could you just go back again, you mentioned the name of an organization that I'm not sure whether I understood it. Before you--the group you were working for to get the ships ready, what was the name of that?

TMS: *Brihah*.

IK: B-R-I-C-H-A.

TMS: *Ja. Brihah Galut*.

IK: G-A-L...

AM: From over the sea.

TMS: From over the sea. *Brihah Galut*.

IK: Okay, thank you. So when, so where did you go when you left [unclear], did you go to Palestine first?

TMS: No, I didn't, I didn't. I decided not to go, and then I got a visa to

⁴*Brihah* also spelled *Bricha* [Hebrew: escape or flight] *Galut* [Hebrew: diaspora]. *Brihah* was the organized underground effort that helped survivors escape from post-World War II Europe to go to Palestine. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/brihah>

⁵Clandestine immigration of Jews to Palestine from 1920 – 1948. www.ushmm.org.

Venezuela and to Brazil. I decided to go to Venezuela.

IK: Direct from Italy?

TMS: From, well, that was from Greece, not from Italy. Because those ships that were sent out through the *Brihah Galut* was from Greece, not from Italy.

IK: And was it easy to get a visa to go to Venezuela?

TMS: Well, I became a friend of the Venezuelan Consul in Greece, and he gave me the visa to Venezuela. I didn't know too much about Venezuela those days. I knew more about Brazil, so I got a visa to Brazil and I got a visa to Venezuela. For me it was the same because I didn't speak Portuguese, I didn't speak Spanish. I had no relatives in Brazil, I had no relatives in Venezuela, but being closer to United States and being closer to my brother who lived those days in California, I decided to go. Actually, I threw out a coin, whatever comes out, Venezuela or, it came out Venezuela.

IK: How old were you at that time?

TMS: Twenty.

IK: Well, is there anything else you feel you want to mention?

TMS: Is there anything else you would like to ask me?

IK: Well, I'll, I'll ask you these, and I don't know whether some of them may not apply. So, you know, if they apply. Did you hear of, did you hear of any anti-Jewish killing actions in Hungary before 1944?

TMS: No.

IK: Was your father's business or work affected after June 1941?

TMS: I don't know.

IK: Did you hear about anything that was happening to other members of your family, like cousins or aunts and uncles or immediate family?

TMS: *Ja, ja.*

IK: Well, what happened to them?

TMS: They were all, all cremated. They all perished. They all went to, to Auschwitz in the same, in the same train.

IK: So the only ones that survived were you and this one brother?

AM: No, a sister.

TMS: Survived? I am the only survivor because the rest of them they were not deported.

IK: Oh, they left before?

TMS: I am the only one, because they lived, my brother, as I mentioned to you that was a physician. He lived in Bucharest. He was not deported, and my sister whose name is Gisi, she lives in Israel. She was not deported because she lived also in Bucharest.

IK: Oh, I see.

TMS: And the other sister who perished in Dachau, as I told you.

AM: And Andor.

TMS: And Andor, my brother, Andor, was in, in a working camp as a soldier.

AM: In Russia.

TMS: He was a prisoner in Russia also for two years, I think, or three years. After the war finished, after the liberation, he needed, they needed some more people, and they caught him in the street, they put him in.

AM: The Russians.

TMS: The Russians, and he was for two or three years in, in prisoner in Russia, as a prisoner.

IK: And did he survive that too?

TMS: He survived that, with many, many sicknesses.

IK: He's the one in California?

TMS: No, no, no, no one is alive.

AM: Nobody is alive. Only one sister in Israel. No, I mean...

IK: Did you have any idea early in 1944 that Germany was exerting pressure on the Hungarian government? Do you recall any pro-Nazi activity at that time, or by that time you were already in a camp?

TMS: I was in a camp already. I remember in 1943, when, 1943, in the beginning of '44, when Szálasi⁶ obliged, obliged Horthy, I was a kid then, but I do remember that Horthy had to resign, to renounce that I remember.

AM: Resign.

TMS: Resign. And that Nazi group took over, which was managed by Szálasi.

IK: Now, I think you did mention you had no information on Auschwitz until after you got there, that's correct, isn't it?

TMS: Yeah.

IK: Okay, you told me you were sent to ghetto, and that the first deportation started from your town when your group was sent?

TMS: Yeah.

IK: Because-- what year was that?

TMS: In 1944.

IK: 1944, okay. Did you hear of or have any contact with Rezö Kasztner?

TMS: With Kasztner? Let me see the name of it, he's not a writer? I don't know. No. Kasztner must have been the same Kasztner which from our town who was a newspaper writer, I think. My brother I think wrote that book that I was telling you, he was, he knew very well this Kasztner.

IK: How about Joel Brand?

TMS: No.

IK: Ottó Komoly?

TMS: No.

⁶Ferenc Szlasi - Racist Antisemitic leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross party who seized power in October 1944. www.YadVashem.org.

IK: How about Raoul Wallenberg?

TMS: Well, that's only whatever we know now about him, not, not at the time.

IK: Now, did any...

TMS: Who knows about Wallenberg are the Hungarians, real Hungarians they were in Budapest, but not the Transylvania to Hungary.

IK: Okay. Did any Jews you knew try to escape, except for this one young man that you mentioned, I think, or any of your family try to escape?

TMS: No, I don't know.

IK: I think that's-- okay, I thank you very much. Is there anything else that you feel you want to add?

TMS: No, you're welcome, and if you feel that think you need any other question, you just let me know whenever I'll be back. [tape stopped]

IK: This concludes this interview with Tibor Matyas, March 3, 1989. [Tape two, side two ended. Interview ended.]

ROMANIA

Comuna *Reșca*
Județul *Cluj*

Extras din registrul Stării Civile pentru Născuți pe anul 19 *45*

№. crt.	DATA înreg. (anul luna ziua)	Anul Luna Ziua și ora nașterii	PRENUMEL, sexul și confesiunea noului născut	PRENUMELE, numele profesiei și domiciliul PĂRINȚII	Vârsta	LOCUL NAȘTERII, când e deosebit de locuința părinților	ARĂTAREA ACTULUI de verificare a scrierii sau p. numelui, p. numelui, p. i. numelui și domiciliului mamei	Existența înregistrării sau oiserv. val. înstate de seminare SEMNATURI
	<i>1925</i>	<i>1925</i>	<i>Tiberiu</i>	<i>Matyas Tibor, medic</i>	<i>17</i>			<i>Seunaturile</i>
	<i>Junie</i>	<i>Mai</i>	<i>barbade</i>	<i>Schmidt Tibor</i>	<i>37</i>			
	<i>1</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Mogac</i>	<i>Reșca</i>				

MENTIUNI ULTERIOARE

Se certifică exactitate prezentului extras.
Dat astăzi *25. Junie 1946*
Ofițer al stării civile,
(L. S.)
Notar,
Meda

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LEI 200

№ 2-172/1946.

Photo of what his daughter suspects is an original birth certificate for Matyas Tibor (Tiberius), courtesy of Belinda Glijansky, his daughter.