

Louisa: Today is November 12th, 1990. This is Louisa Weinrib talking with Susan Eisenberg in her home. Susan, you are a survivor of a concentration camp, and that's why we are talking with you today. Would you start off telling us a little bit about yourself and your background, starting with your date of birth?

Susan: I was born October 16th, 1924.

Louisa: Tell me about your family origins.

Susan: My family origins go way back. At least a hundred years that we have researched, and they were all born and raised in Hungary.

Louisa: In Hungary.

Susan: That's right.

Louisa: In a city or in the country-side?

Susan: They started in the country. Later on they moved to a small town, called Miskolc. It's spelled M-i-s-k-o-l-c, and my father was connected to a huge farming cooperation. He did all the buying and exporting of livestock and grains, things like that. It was like a brokerage. My grandparents owned...they were landowners, which was kind of rare in those days in Hungary, because Jews were not allowed for the longest time to own land. When they got older, they sold the farm and moved into the city. My father was taken away. He was liberal, very outspoken, and very very patriotic man. He was Hungarian through and through. He fought in the First World War. He was wounded twice. He was member of the Hungarian Veterans Legion; he was the spokesman for that. So he was one of the first targets when the right wing government took over, so my father was taken at the very early part, I think in 1941, to a war camp, and he was released later, but he became so ill and so bitter and so depressed. He died in 1942. He was only 44 years old.

Mother and I moved to Budapest because we had relatives there, and that's where we lived and I was taken away from.

Louisa: How old were you at this time?

Susan: I was 19 when I was taken.

Louisa: And so you grew up in the smaller town.

Susan: I grew up in a smaller town. I went to school. As a matter of fact, I

went to a Catholic School, because it was a better school. It was like a liberal art, and of course I wanted to go to college, but by the time I got to college age, Jews was not allowed to colleges.

Louisa: When did it start being difficult for Jews to get a good education?

Susan: It started 1940 already. Little by little it changed. They set up quota systems, and it got to the point that the fraternities would not allow Jews to enter and it became the unwritten, really the unwritten laws at that time, of course later on that was the rules, that Jews just were not accepted in any universities. That's why a lot of Hungarian Jewish doctors came as early as 1939 to the United States. They went to France to the Sorbonne for a medical, or whatever, degree, engineering. The smart ones never did return to Hungary, but they went directly, or came directly, to the United States. Because, really trouble started in Hungary in 1938, when it started. The Nazi Party, which was very small and kind of ridiculous group of people, was gaining strength. As Hitler was gaining strength in Germany, his sympathizers were also gaining strength in other countries, and in Hungary they had a very strong Nazi Party.

Louisa: Did you go to the Catholic school because it was the best school available in your town?

Susan: It was more traditional. Most of the family members sent their kids to that. It was a French order, you know, from France...the nuns. Sacré Coeur was the order, if I remember correctly. It was very rigorous, but they were excellent teachers and disciplinarians. It really helped me later on. "Self Discipline" they have told that to us. Believe me, it was a life-saver later on!

Louisa: Good! What was the nature and size of the Jewish community in your town, where you grew up?

Susan: Well, in Miskolc, it had a good middle-sized...very comparable to Montgomery. This town reminds me so much in a way, the way you have your groups. Now I come from a family that really did not practice the faith very much. We belonged to more of like Dr. Baylinson's church.

Louisa: Reform. A Reform-type church.

Susan: Reform-type. My father was that way. My grandfather, who came to live with us, from my mother's side, was Orthodox, and he is the one who uphold the rituals and the rites, so I got familiar with it. But, then when he died, it just reverted back. Now the Orthodox Jews, they had two synagogues, so there were more of them in Miskolc. They were the same thing. They were the merchants, the doctors, the lawyers. They had mine interests, big business interests. It was a wealthy Jewish community.

Louisa: How many members of the family lived in your home?

Susan: There was just my mother, my father and myself, and my grandfather when he was still alive. Mother was the youngest daughter, and when he became ill and couldn't live alone, he came to live with us.

Louisa: You had no brothers or sisters?

Susan: No. I had no brothers. I was an only child.

Louisa: Did you have family members in the town?

Susan: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I had aunts and uncles and cousins, and just a big big large family. From my father's side, mainly, because my mother's family lived in Budapest. But in Miskolc I had two aunts from my mother's side there, and all my uncles and aunts from my father's side. And cousins, and my parents' cousins, and so it was an extended family. It was a very large, large family.

Louisa: How did the large family interact with each other? Was there a matriarch or a patriarch? Did you have family meals for holidays?

Susan: When we had, like, the Seder (traditional ritual meal the first two nights of Passover), my mother set it up in reverence to my father, to her father, and my father liked the High Holidays. But in between them (laughs) he never attended anything else! Yes, they used to bring home people from the temple to the meals. My father was the oldest, so his three brothers, who was the youngest three, was with us on holidays. We visited on daily basis. Daily basis. It was an interaction in the family. The family was so big, that you could be busy just visiting and seeing, and like on Saturdays and Sundays you always had high tea. You always had some of the family

members and their children coming in for cakes and tea and coffee. Yes, we were very close.

Louisa: So, did the family constitute most of your social life?

Susan: No. No. No. I was very active. I was a good student. I had a lot of friends from the Christian community. It was no difference. When I was growing up, Hungarian Jews were so integrated into the society itself. You were considered to be "Hungarian", except you were of Jewish faith. That was the only difference. In school, for instance, they had religious instructions every morning, and what they did, they had Jewish children, they had Catholic children, they had Methodists, and different religious groups. Each and every one of us had our instructions. Every morning we went to a classroom and we were instructed, so we - I could never understand all this hullabaloo about having all this problem with religion in school - they did not discriminate against anybody. If you wanted to be a Buddhist, that was fine, they got somebody who will teach you about the Buddhist religion. That's how open-minded society was, at that time.

Louisa: In a Catholic school.

Susan: In a Catholic school.

Louisa: What language did you speak in your home?

Susan: We spoke Hungarian. We spoke Hungarian. And I probably spoke German. We had a German fraülein with us, so she could teach me a second language, because with the Hungarian language you do not get any further than the border, so you had to learn a second language, and I learned German.

Louisa: So the language you spoke in your home was the same as in the town.

Susan: Right.

Louisa: What did the family like to do for recreation?

Susan: Well, we used to...we swam a lot and hiked. The countryside was absolutely beautiful, right outside of the town it's up in the mountainous region, so hiking and camping out was a big thing. Saturday and Sunday you didn't see a soul in the city. Everybody was out and they had some beautiful resorts right...oh, just a short bus ride away from town, and you spent your

weekends there. There was skiing. We got a lot of snow. The mountain is right in the middle of the city. I don't know if I have any pictures from Miskolc, but I have some pictures of Budapest, but, of course, it is of no interest now because it is wide open. Everybody knows...but anyway that's what we did mainly. And skating. Ice skating was the big thing for the winter. Everybody skated, and I had an uncle who was a great hockey player. He was on the team, the Hungarian hockey team, and he taught me how to skate. That was the youngest brother of my father. So skating, ice skating was the big thing in the winter time. Then we had gymnastics. The schools very much stressed physical education. In Europe that is very important even today, but in Hungary it was especially, and everyday we had p.e., and you had to dress-out and you worked, anything, from uneven bar to you-name-it...climbing ropes and doing calisthenics. It was a very important part of the curriculum, p.e.. And there was no excuses. I mean there was p.e. and you went!

So, I think we had a very well-rounded education there. We didn't have electives. You had to take every class. Like we had to take languages; of course, it was German, and then, when you got into the higher grades, you have to take a dead language, which is either Latin or Greek. Then, if you were really ambitious, you could pick up French or Spanish, if you wanted in the afternoon. We went to school all day. We didn't get out of school til four o'clock in the afternoon, and then we had homework.

I think that I survived in this country without any formal education or going to school, and was able to work. It's all falling back on that education, because I only graduated from high school. I never went anywhere. I never learned anything, except what I learned at that school, but I was able to work in this country, and able to learn English, which I didn't speak a word when I came here. Actually I worked for 30 years. A self-learner, a self-starter (laughs), whatever you call it, but I have had enough background in my education, that I could fall back on it, and it was pretty easy for me when my daughters were in college. They came to me to help them with their homework. (Smiles) It just always struck me kind of funny.

Louisa: You sound like a person who is self-motivated, and you never stop learning.

Susan: No, I am still learning, really. Life is a learning experience.

Louisa: When you look back at your life in pre-War Hungary, what were your happiest moments? What do you think of as your happiest moments?

Susan: I was a ... I cannot explain how it was. Every day it was happy. I came from a loving, close-knit family. I loved my friends. I loved my life-style. I loved where I lived. I enjoyed everything. I never, ever wanted to leave. That is where my life was. That is where my roots were. I cannot think of any one moment when I was the happiest. I guess I was the happiest when I finally managed to graduate (laughs)! That was a big relief! Over all, I really can't think of anything that I had turned on. I was pretty even tempered and just a happy child! Not anything special. Just my over-all life-style. I was a happy kid! I guess not too many kids can say that (laughs), I just can't think of ever having any problems. I used to go to the farm to my grandparents, when I was little, and spend the summers there, and I learned to ride horses. Went canoeing. We just had fun! I loved my parents very much. I was very close, I'm still very close to my mother. I never wanted to be anywhere else where I was. In Hungary, pre-War, the Hungarian Jews had a very decent, happy life. Really. There was no problems there. I mean, there was always anti-Semitism, but it always came from the low low echelon, the people who were uneducated, who never really wanted to work or achieve anything, and it was easier to blame somebody else. Since being so close to Germany, and even before that, there always had anti-Semitism, but you kind of learned to live with it, and if it ever showed when I was young, and I was little, I don't think I have ever been subjected to it, because, you know, I was in both society. The Jews were so intermingled, that it was never a problem. It was never a problem til 1939.

Louisa: When did you first start to worry about Hitler?

Susan: When the first refugees from Germany. I remember having this family coming in, and it was in one of my friends' house. They were relatives of hers. They came from Berlin. I think they came shortly after they had that Kristallnacht (Nov. 9, 1938), and they were on their way either to France or Spain. A lot of them went to Spain, which was a big mistake later on, but at that time we didn't know. That was the first time, the very first time, that I really got kind of concerned.

Then they had people in the neighborhood, like the neighborhood grocer. Next thing you know he is wearing a brown shirt and he had a swastika. But, we still traded. His name was Mr. Markowitz...I will never forget. I used to play with his little girl. Then they started sending their children to Germany in the summer. They started sounding of slogans. But we figured, "This is just the corner grocer. Who cares?" Big mistake. Big mistake. When you see the first signs of it, you should be aware. Now I know, but at that time, we just ignored it.

Louisa: Do you think that other people were gradually getting sympathetic to the Nazi cause, but not wearing brown shirts yet?

Susan: A lot of people were sympathetic to the Nazi cause. Later I found out, but, no, they didn't wear the brown shirt, but they were getting a little bit more open about their expressions. The press begin to sound more and more to the right wingers, and then the newspapers later on started to turn toward the stronger political party, which was getting more leaning to the right.

But, don't forget, we had a regent, who was not sympathetic to the Nazi cause, but, Hungary being a small country, and after the First World War they cut it, they completely chopped it up, and there was a lot of resentment among those people whose life completely changed because of the borders and everything else, and Hitler was going to return to Hungary part of Romania, part of Czechoslovakia, and part of Yugoslavia which at one time was the Austro-Hungarian Empire. So those people were very much in favor of Hitler. At that time, you know, I'm sure they didn't know about the death camps and all, but it was...it was...they had Goebbels, and he was a genius when it comes to propaganda. I mean, that man was a person that I... there was an evil person, that he knew how to make the people think or write articles or ... Then, of course, money was coming in from Germany. Lots and lots and lots of money.

Louisa: Going where? Where was the money going?

Susan: To building the Party. The Nazi Party in Hungary, and so, you know, money talks, and so a little corner green grocer becomes another man, and buying a big car and things like that. The money came from Germany. A lot of money to people who never had anything. And it was easy to blame the Jews. You know, there was the problem...all their problem will be solved if they get rid of the Jews. And the people began to buy it.

Louisa: You told me earlier that your father was arrested. What was the circumstance in which he was arrested?

Susan: Oh. When the Nazi...now in 1940...I'm trying to think, '42. Anybody who they thought had liberal connections. They called it "socialist" connections. One of my uncle who was run at the newspaper, but it was a financial paper, it was not a political paper or a daily newspaper, it was a financial paper, was a socialist. I imagine my father had inclinations, like organized labor-type ties, but really I don't think so, because he just was a very popular man, he had friends everywhere. So there is no rhyme and reason, you know, when they knock on the door and they take you, you are gone. They set up this work camps, and people they said was undesirable and not good for the country, they started bring them in to those so-called "work camps". They were taken then, I think my father was the border of Poland. The Poland and Russian border. You know the Germans were already started marching into... already been in Poland, and they were starting with the Russians. And a lot of this so-called camps they set up was...they used those people for labor that many...they were exterminated like...I lost one of my uncle and the whole squadron went and we never did find out, but they said they drove the whole unit on a minefield. That's how they were testing it was mined. See, they were between the (clears throat) army, between the two armies, and they were the guinea pigs. But I lost an uncle that way.

Later on, another uncle died. They took all the doctors and they took him, and they were all shot at the very...almost the end of the War. But, this all came a lot later.

Louisa: So when your father was taken, the War had already been going.

Susan: Not to Hungary. Not in Hungary. The War was going. Hungary was used by the Germans as a supply route. We were neutral. We didn't go into any kind of war. We saw the American planes, and we saw the British planes; they were flying over Hungary, bombing Germany. Or the Germans were using the trains. They moved their troops and their supplies and everything through Hungary. But Hungary was a neutral territory up til almost 1944. That was after the coup and all they declared it.

Louisa: Well, what events did you witness in Hungary of this growing



sympathy to Hitler, and anti-Semitism?

Susan: What events? You mean toward the end when we had to wear those... Well, that came a lot later, but before

Louisa: You first said that Crystal Night had not yet happened, and so start from then. How did events build up? And overt acts or covert acts against Jews to isolate them.

Susan: Well, like I said, the only thing I know, when my father and the lot of other members of whatever they belonged to this party... I was much too young, and I really didn't pay that much attention. Of course, when they took my father, that ... he was released. He was released. He came home and he was a very sick man, and he died shortly after that.

It was just kind of a subtle thing. They had demonstrations. They had marches. But it was not until they started...when the Germans came into Hungary. When the German troops came into Hungary (flips through pages of personal papers on her lap) I'm looking at Fairy's(friend with whom she was incarcerated) notes here, just trying to look at some of the dates, because I met her in the camp. I think they came into Hungary in March of 1944. I know it was Easter Sunday.

What happened was that Hitler was in bad shape at the Russian front. It begin and Germany was bombed, and things beginning to turn around. Our regent, who was...his name was Horthy, declared

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

Tape 1, Side B

Louisa: You were talking about events when Germany's fortunes started to change, around Easter.

Susan: We had noticed, you know, we were getting more and more involved. When Hitler occupied Poland, we started hearing of the things that were going in Poland, the atrocities, what was happening to the Polish Jews, and

we got that from Polish refugees who came into Hungary. Nobody believed them! One of my friends, one of my friends...you know, sometimes I wonder where my brains were going...he was a college student. He was an officer in the Hungarian army, and his unit went to what they called a part of Poland, which was Galicia. I don't know how you say that in English, but that is what it was called. And he came home, and I'll never forget one night, he came over and he said, "Susan, there are some horrendous things going on." I said, "What things?" He said, "The Jews are being murdered." He says, "I've seen them being shot." This is a Hungarian officer, who I knew from high school, and he was a college student.

Louisa: He was Jewish himself?

Susan: No. No. He was a non-Jew. But a very close friend, and he said, "They talking about gassing Jews." He's telling me that! He said, "There is a place called Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they're taking them, and I know that..." (pauses) I forgot to mention that how I...it's beginning to come back...they started to have all the Jews come up with a birth certificate. That you had to be born in Hungary. If you were born in any other place, like in Poland, they took you back to Poland, but they didn't take you to Poland. They put you in camps, and they were systematically shooting them. But we, we didn't know that. But that is what's happening to them. We heard the stories, though we weren't sure. And we had to start "digging in" to our ancestry. That's how I know that my family lived in Hungary for many, many, many years, because even before they started keeping regular birth certificates and records of Jews - at one time they didn't do that, it was only in the synagogues where they reported, recorded the births. That's how far back my grandparents and great-grandparents, and so on, it went.

So we know there was a lot of people who was taken away because their parents weren't born in Hungary. So it started, but nothing really added up. People were almost like paralyzed, or just said, "Well, it is just not happening to us. This unfortunate people, but they were Polish-born, so they send them to Poland." But they didn't take them to Poland. They took them to the border, and they ended up being exterminated.

And this young friend of mine, was telling us, a whole group of us. And it was mixed company; it wasn't just all Jews or all Christians. We were just a group of friends, and he was telling us. You know, nobody believed him!

I mean, it was so far removed. So far removed. It didn't touch me. It didn't have anything to do with me. (Her mood is one of incredulity.)

Louisa: And so outrageous.

Susan: And so outrageous, and so far fetched, and so unbelievable. You know, it just didn't work. But we have heard more and more and more stories, and then they started taking... in 1944, mind you by that time the Polish Jews were almost exterminated, the Czechoslovakians definitely went, the Austrian, German Jews there were all just a very few of them left. But in Hungary, the Hungarian Jews were not touched. Not until the time we had declared that we are going to sign a peace treaty with the Allies. That night the German troops came into Hungary. They took the Regent, they shot his son, and the Hungarian Nazi Party officially took over the government.

Louisa: After the government signed a treaty with the Allies?

Susan: They never did sign it. They just announced it on the radio. That's as far as it went.

Louisa: Wow!

Susan: And the next thing you know, the German panzer outfits were marching through the bridges. Budapest is two sides of the city: the old part which would open up the road to Germany, and the more industrial and modern part, which is Pest. And then you have your bridges in between. While I lived at the old part of the city, I was at what they called the Duna Kőrző (Danube Walk) which is <sup>lined with</sup> the older hotels. It was like the hotel strip built on the water, and we were on an open cafe <sup>terrace</sup> with a friend having coffee and watching the people go by, because it was Easter Sunday, and then you looked up and through the bridges were coming the German tanks. That's the way they came into Hungary.

Then I felt sheer terror! When I saw the tanks coming through that bridge, I felt a forbidding of something. Something horrendous was going to happen; I just had that feeling. By the afternoon they started, they took positions, they had put tanks on the street. They took over the <sup>railway</sup> station, the radio stations, all the utilities, the Parliament, the whole thing. It was a Nazi government. And then they started.

First...well I know <sup>you heard</sup> about first they took the people from the country.

The Jews first went from the countryside. That is when my family. I was in Budapest then, but they were in the country.

Louisa: You were there with your mother, right?

Susan: Yes, I was in Budapest with my mother, sitting around getting nervous about this whole thing. But anyway, (clears throat) they took my whole family, everybody.

Louisa: How soon after Easter did they go out in the country and round up people?

Susan: They started very shortly.

Louisa: Immediately, huh?

Susan: They started very shortly. I cannot tell you any timetable, but shortly. That early part that summer we got a postcard from one of my aunts. I think it was the end of May, and we think, "Oh my God, this is wonderful." We got a postcard from Thersienstadt. They were in the camp, they had two little kids, and they working hard, and they gonna survive in the camps working hard, and when it is over they all gonna be returned home. You know, just little postcards. Lots of people got postcards from Thersienstadt. By the time we got the postcards they were all gone. They were all dead.

See what they did, before those transports were sent out, everybody got a card and they had to sign something, and they mailed it to Budapest to their relatives, and devious. So we thought they were alive, but then we heard more and more of the atrocities. By that time, we were restricted. We had to wear the yellow star. They had designated houses set up for the Jews, so-called "yellow star houses" (clears throat) but it was scattered, and it had ... (smiles) This is my husband (husband has been doing yard work and walks past patio window), he doesn't want to bother us (laughs). And we were restricted when we could go out of the house. There were designated stores at a certain time of the day when we could go and try to buy some food. We were not allowed to go to any public park. We were not allowed to walk on the sidewalk, but had to give room to the other people. We were not allowed to hold any kind of a job that wasn't manual job, like if you had a doctor's office that was shut down, and you could only practice if you had Jewish

patients.

I was very defiant! Very defiant! We moved in with my aunt and uncle from my mother's side.

Louisa: In Budapest?

Susan: Yes. At that time that house was not designated, so we knew we would have to go, and from there we went to...we had to go to another house where they moved in an apartment several, several families. We were moved together. (clears throat) And I absolutely refused to wear the yellow star. I had to sew it on, but I took it off. I went to the train stations. I went on the train. I went out to the country. I got food. I brought it back. I was fortunate. My looks did not give me away. The typical, typical Jewish look, you know, the dark hair, the big nose, the way Hitler had it all over him.

Louisa: You have blue eyes, and your hair is gray.

Susan: And I had very blonde hair. It is gray now!

Louisa: Okay. You had blonde hair.

Susan: Light blonde. Did not look Jewish, so the only way I could be recognized is if I run into somebody who could recognize me and know who I was. But I did. I took chances and I have gotten food for them. And I had some very hairy experiences (laughs)!

Louisa: Like what?

Susan: Oh, one day after ... oh, by that time we were bombed, like three times a day.

Louisa: In the city?

Susan: In the city. We had the British in the morning. We had the Russians the afternoon, and all night we had the Americans bombers. We lived in the basement. It's a big apartment building, and it just finally got to the point I didn't even go down. I said, "To heck with it." But we were bombed very heavily and the city was burning. I went out after one of the raids, and went to a very distant part of the city, where I was supposed to get, some of my friends was going to get me some potatoes and bread. I know if I didn't go then, I won't be able to get out. So I did, and they had

sirens going, because that part of the city was badly hit. It was more of the industrial part. There were German cars all over, and pick-up trucks. They were taking people they found on the street, but I made it! I got my potatoes and my bread, and I was trying to get back. And now I'm talking about 5 miles just walking, because there was no transportation.

This German - they had panzer cars, looked like jeeps, but it was the size of a van - and there were two German soldiers, and they pulled up and asked if I needed a ride. I said "Sure." My German came handy, and I said, "Sure." They drove me in the city and one of them said, "Can I take you to dinner?" And I said, "Yes. Sure. Why not?" And he said, "Where do you live?" And I said, "I live right here." Of course, I knew the city like the back of my hand, and this one particular place<sup>that I</sup> showed them was one of those complexes that had two entrances. And I said, "I live in this apartment building." Underneath the apartments were stores, you know, it was like an alley, and you can go right through it. I said, "I live in this complex, and you can come and pick me up at 8 o'clock." And he said, "Sure." So, I just got out, and ran out the back entrance, and I went home. (Smiles) But I was young and foolish and very defiant, and I just had to do something. I just couldn't be led like the rest of them. (Thoughtfully) I guess I got that from my father. He was like that, feisty, (laughs). I guess I was, too.

But, I had run into them continuously. At one time I had a blouse and when I took the star off, all the marks of the star was left in the material, and after I had an encounter, they were picking people up left and right, and I looked down and I thought, "My God, only thing they had to is take a look at my blouse and they knew that I took the star off." So this is the way we survived.

By that time I just had this aunt and uncle, whose son, incidentally was in the United States. He came here for a vacation to Cleveland to another uncle from his father's side, and when things started to get bad in Europe, his uncle said, "Don't go back. Stay." So Stephen stayed, which saved him. But his mother and father was in Budapest.

Then came the time when they put out the signs. The Hungarian Jews, the Jews from Budapest was no more bargain chip to the Germans. They couldn't

get what they wanted, or whatever happened, we got orders we had to report. And, see, by that time everybody openly was a Nazi. You had no friends in Hungary, and I mean it! Maybe a handful who has taken chances, but if I say a handful, I am not exaggerating.

Louisa: Do you have any personal experience with friendly Hungarian Christians helping Jews?

Susan: No. No. I only had experience when they took things off of us and kicked us and said, "I hope you will burn in the chambers." Those experiences I had.

Louisa: These were personal acquaintances?

Susan: Well, I'll talk about personal acquaintance. I'll tell you a story which is really pretty hard to believe. My mother's cousin married a Hungarian officer, who was a career officer in the Hussars, which was a very elite part of the Hungarian army. It was highly unusual, because they frowned upon those people to marry somebody with a Jewish background. They fell in love. She was very beautiful, and they got married. After they got married, he could not stay in his unit. They would not allow him, because he married a Jew.

My aunt had a very successful...well I call her my aunt, but it was my mother's cousin...had a very successful shop, boutique. She was a designer. She designed from hats down the line. Very exclusive. She was making very good money, so her husband really didn't work at all. I mean he played the "gentleman", which he was and played hockey, and went to Germany to ski, and had his cars and motorcycles and whatever. But he never worked!

Louisa: Was he wealthy in his own right, or was she?

Susan: She was wealthy.

Louisa: She was.

Susan: She was the wealthy one. But he was part of the family and he was accepted and taken in and all.

She went to Miskolc to see about her father. That is when they rounded up the Jews in Miskolc, and "Ilus" , Eleanor was her name, was there, because she went to see about her ailing father. So she was taken in the ghetto, and when the word got out, some member of the family in Budapest got in touch

with her husband. Because, had you...if you were married to a Christian, they did not take you at that time. Later on they did, but at that time they didn't. (Contacted him) to get his wife, out.

He didn't. Ilus died in Auschwitz with her father.

Louisa: He made no effort to?

Susan: No. Later on we found out that he was a big Nazi sympathizer. Got a big job in the government. When mother told me, I wasn't in Hungary after the War was over and all, he was down and out and he was running for his life, because he was on the list among older Neo-Nazis, and he came to my mother, and tried to say how much he tried to save his wife, and he was not anything, and he needed help, and he needed food, and he needed this, and, of course, they just run him out.

This happened in my family. So you can imagine, things got really bad. People who would try to help you, maybe one person, were afraid of the rest of their family, because they would turn in. Even if you were not a Nazi, but your son was, or your daughter was, you'd better don't move or wouldn't say anything because they turn you in.

Now, I have had friends. I had one friend, my schoolmate, my most beloved friend, who stayed behind and she was hidden for a very short period of time, because it was too dangerous, and so she was like a hunted animal. In a way I think I was better off in the camps, because I know how I was going to die. This is where I am going to go with the rest of them. But hiding and trying to hide every single day in an environment like that, it is pretty difficult. She didn't survive. She survived the War, and a couple of her brothers survived and came to get her, but...I went to visit...I heard that she had a mental problems, very bad ones. The day before I arrived to Budapest, and I could hardly wait to see her, she committed suicide.

A lot of us who survived, really did not survive. We are all touched in a way, and there are a lot of us committed suicide after it was over. So, you know, we are all marked.

Louisa: The toll goes on. Or, went on.

Susan: Yes. Yes. Yes. It never stopped.

So after that, we got the orders to go. We're gonna be taken into



labor camps.

Louisa: What was the pretext for deportation?

Susan: No pretext.

Louisa: No pretext.

Susan: Uh-huh.

Louisa: Just time to go.

Susan: Uh-huh. There is no pretexts. Before they used all kinds of things, but not in Hungary. They did that in Poland a lot, but at the first transports...like I said, those phoney letters from Thersienstadt. There was no pretexts. We got orders to report and we reported for physical labor. That didn't come from the Germans. That came from the Hungarian Nazi government.

Louisa: Did they tell you to be at a train station?

Susan: At the football field, ages of such-and-such and letters starts with an "E". Okay? (making sure Louisa understands) So we had to report, because if I didn't report, the house man, who was the official representative of the government, the Nazi would report me anyway. So, it was no point not going.

Louisa: Did your whole family go together?

Susan: No. I was the only one, because it was in my age group that I went. Okay? Mother, in the meantime, was in another yellow-star house, because they put you wherever they had the room. My aunt and uncle were still in that same house where we were. I went to the football field, and to make it very short...they took us in a group. It was horrendous experience. By that time the Russians were already in Hungary, not too far from Budapest, as a matter of fact. So they took the people to dig fox holes, can you imagine, to stop the onslaught, when and if the Russians would attack.

Louisa: Your age group?

Susan: We were all the same age group. We had horrendous conditions, I won't have to tell you that. They gave us a shovel, and then they started. Oh, our guards...the Hungarian Nazi guards we had, I mean, some of them was like fifteen years old, fourteen years old...kids!

Louisa: With weapons.

Susan: With weapons, and they were using the weapons. I mean, you step out of the line. The kid next to me was crying for her mother, that's perfectly normal, and she sat down and she was crying. They shot her! And she was standing right next to me! Her name was Judith , I remember.

Well, anyway, that night, one night we had no place to stay, we were on open fields. It was cold and raining; we had no food; we had to dig those ditches. That night they decided that the Russians were advancing and we had to move back, and that's when all the horror started. They run us back. I mean we ran practically for two days and two nights til we got back in Budapest, and we was put into a brick factory. I think if you talk about hell, that was it.

Louisa: The brick factory?

Susan: The brick factory.

Louisa: Well, did you have proper clothes on?

Susan: No.

Louisa: No shoes on?

Susan: I had shoes on. I lost the heels on my shoes. I had no proper clothes. None of us did.

Louisa: When you reported to the football field...

Susan: I had on a pair of pants and a jacket and a pair of shoes, and then I lost the heels of the shoes, that's all I had.

Louisa: And you had nothing else with you.

Susan: We had nothing. Ferry was in another place, but we ended up in the same cement factory, uh, brick factory. It was horrible. By that time they started picking up the Jews in Budapest, the older ones, so you could find your mother. You could find your father. That was a gathering point, that brick factory.

I got in with a group...like I said, I was full of adventures. I am going to tell you this. This doesn't sound very good. (laughs)

Louisa: It is not supposed to sound good!

Susan: I got in a group who was very very ill, and they were going to take

'em back into the city. And they probably were just going to shoot him, you know, because they were old and sick, and could hardly move. I pretended that I had a broken leg and arm, and I was dragging myself, you know, just trying to imitate them. I went through the bridge and I got back in, into the city. I thought I was safe. This part I don't know if you are going to put on records, but it's the truth.

Louisa: I want you to tell the truth.

Susan: I'm going to tell you just how it was. I went in...they had a Jewish community there. They called it The Omzsa . I managed. I knew where it was. I managed to get there, and I thought, "I'm safe."

Louisa: The Jewish Community - what?

Susan: They had a Jewish community office.

Louisa: Oh.

Susan: A place. A house. Where they were. And I figured, "If I get that far, I'll be safe." Mind you, there was German patrols. There were Hungarian patrols. There was a curfew. I was ragged, filthy. They knew where I escaped from. They could see it, and I managed, I managed, and you have to know the city to know what I did. But I did get to that house, and I went in

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

Tape 2, Side A

Louisa: This is Tape 2 of the conversation with Susan Eisenberg. You were talking about the fact that you escaped from the brick factory and you rushed to a Jewish community center, when we changed the tape.

Susan: I asked for asylum. I asked for food. I asked for a place to stay, to sleep. My God, I haven't slept for a week! and they told me they cannot keep me and I should not be there, because I am endangering them. That was the Jewish community people who was appointed by the Nazi government to handle the Jewish affairs, and uh...

Louisa: Collaborators, in other words.

Susan: Whatever you want to call them. They had them in the Polish ghettos, they had them everywhere. They had them in the camp. To make a long story short...they put me out that night, and I had no place to go, except back to that house, where my aunt and uncle were still. I know they were there.

In Hungary at night they lock the gate. They lock the doors. You know, the apartment houses have big, big doors, and it is locked, and you have to ring and then the houseman will come and open and let you in. So I know I am going to ring the doorbell. He's going to come and know I am back, but I didn't care by that time, I was almost crazy with exhaustion and hunger and I went back there and, oh, before I even got there, I got picked up by a police patrol. And this one man...you asked me if I have ever seen any kindness... that Hungarian policeman asked me where I was going. He knew where I was coming from, and I told him I am going to that ~~street~~ (laughs) if I say it in Hungarian, you'll never be able to pronounce it. And he said to me, "This is a bad place. That is all going to be rounded up by tomorrow morning." And I said, "I got to go. I just have no other place to go." And he walked me all the way to that house, which was, like, maybe about a good three miles away from that Omzsa center.

I rang the bell. The houseman let me in. I went up to my apartment, this little one room where my aunt and uncle stayed, and they just cried and I cried with them, and I managed to wash, and they had some tea, and I fell in bed. And five o'clock in the morning there was a knock on my door, and there was the houseman with two Hungarian gendarmes, and said, "You've got to assemble down the street." And this was the last time for me.

Louisa: And your aunt and uncle also?

Susan: Left them behind. No.

Louisa: Oh, they left them behind?

Susan: You know, when I was in that transport going...because we walked all the way from Budapest to the German border, which was a town named Hegyeshalom; we walked in the dead of rain, ice, cold. You know, in the end of October. Well, no, that was the beginning of October, because my birthday was in October, and I was already in Dachau. We walked. It took us ten days to get to the border in that walking transport. Meantime, they had somehow, they had obtained

Wallenberg passport for me. But, see, people were running up and down the side of the transports yelling out peoples' names, who had managed to get a passport.

Louisa: What was the transport? Were these vehicles that went along...

Susan: No. No vehicles. Just long lines, long columns of ragged people that Nazi troops, Hungarian Nazi troops...I've got to stress that, it's very important...I did not see a German until I got to the German border. There was all Hungarian gendarmes with their dogs.

Some of them who managed to get...who heard their name and get their passport, but the Nazi guard just ripped it up. You know! So it did not mean anything. It all depended...but somehow, some of my friends...I don't know who it was...but they have gotten a Wallenberg passport for me. In my name. But it never gotten to me. It got back to my aunt and they were saved. They used that passport in my name, and they were saved.

Louisa: Where did they go?

Susan: They stayed in a ghetto house with that Wallenberg passport til the end, and then they came to the United States, because their son was here.

Louisa: I see.

Susan: In Cleveland. But they died<sup>very</sup> shortly after. My aunt had a heart attack on the way, and she lived, I'll say, about a year after they got here she was dead. And then her husband died shortly after that.

This was ironical, but we marched on that march. I think if I think back of that march from Budapest to Hegyeshalom, I think it was equal with the camp, if not worse, because it was...you know, by the time you got in the camp, you are resigned to the fact that this is the end of the line, and it is just a matter of time. But that march, it was just sheer terror, because you never know what those guards are going to do. And you went through the countryside, and the people, the people were so glad to see you go.

Louisa: People along the way? Standing along the side of the road?

Susan: And the people who had some food left or some clothing on their backs, or whatever, the country people would take everything off of them, and maybe they gave them a piece of bread. Maybe. Most likely they didn't.

Louisa: You mean countryside people would snatch clothes away from the people

walking?

Susan: Oh, yes. Everything. Everything.

Louisa: What food did you have?

Susan: (Turns pages of her friend's diary.) There are little things in here. Ferry wrote down the towns, the name of the towns, what happened in each town. We were all in that same...I had never known her...we were all in that line of thousands and thousands of people. But at the beginning she said that she knew her mother was there somewhere, but she never did find her and she said it is good that she didn't, because husbands who came running after the transports, or parents, or...it was absolutely horribly cruel, because when we assembled in that town house when we started out with that transport that morning, they had young mothers in that group. They had to leave their babies in the rooms. The babies was left! I mean little babies! If there was someone else in there, and they could look, like an older person...but, like this one, one woman who lived below us, she was like a crazy person. You can't imagine forcing you away from your child, an infant. This is what Fairy wrote, that it is the best thing that she didn't find anything, because I am the only important thing to myself. That's just the way one...

She mentions different things, you know. We had a gendarme, a young gendarme was kicking us and asked if we had any valuables. And somebody poisoned themselves at night and was screaming. We weren't even touched by it.

We stayed it, uh...she tried to escape. So did I. But she tried it before I did in another town, and whatever she had left...I think she had a gold necklace or a bracelet. <sup>She said,</sup> "I saw this girl and she looked like she had some sympathy in her eye", and she asked her, "Would you help me escape", and she says, "Well, if you give me that, I will", and she did and she said, "It was so simple that I know it wasn't going to work", and she says, "I sat for four hours in a ditch with the pouring rain" and I mean it is an ice rain, its terribly cold, and the girl never came.

Something very similar happened to me. I had escaped from a barge where we spent the night.

Louisa: On a barge?

Susan: Yes.

Louisa: In a river?

Susan: Uh huh.

Louisa: Which river?

Susan: The Danube.

Louisa: Danube?

Susan: Uh huh. There were so many people dying around me that night, that I couldn't handle it. See, it was a still body and they didn't tell us it was dead, so people were either falling in the water or falling through that hatch, because they missed their footing, and just smashed themselves. You know, it's like two story deep at the bottom. And I just said, "I've got to get out of here." I did climb up on this other thing and I got out of the barge, and I started walking and finally it was daybreak and, of course, you cannot mistake where you are coming from starving and dirty and wet and all. I ran into this man, and he said, "You got anything valuable?" I didn't, and I said, "Will you help me? Just help me to get dry, or you'll get something dry that I can put on, and I will look after myself." And he said, "Sure. I do, but I got to go back to the village to get it." This is outside of György, which is not far from the border by that time. He came back with two gendarmes. (Laughs) So...you could not escape! This is why you could not escape from the transport and you could not escape from the camps, because they know who you are, and they would turn you in.

Louisa: What did you have to eat during this time to sustain your strength?

Susan: Some of the people who had...you know, since we had the raids, everybody had a bag where they had packed some food, because that was the standard you carried into the shelters, the air raid shelters. So a lot of the people in the transports<sup>still</sup> had some canned goods, and, you know, they shared it. But, they normally, that one place, she says here (referring to the diary) they cooked some bean soup, but you have to fight to get some of it! I don't know...we didn't. And then, whoever had, like I said, a blouse or clothing of any sort that was worth something to the peasants, they traded it for bread. We shared, if you were lucky. There was days when you had none. Like they said, they cooked some big carrot in some hot water and some beans and things like that...you had to fight hundreds of people, and if you couldn't do it, you didn't eat. That one night I remember when we slept

in the, in the...what they call that...after they harvest those big, uh, pile of straws on the field?

Louisa: Hay?

Susan: Hay. It was...

Louisa: Haystack?

Susan: Yeah, but it was the hard one, the strawy kind. It was pouring, pouring rain, and we tried to dig in to those things, and some of us just never made it and some of them was falling off and broke an arm, broke a leg. Some of the people poisoned themselves on the way and died. A lot of them just died from sheer exhaustion and, you know, the older people. And, that thing was just covered for some reason, with fleas. We were just covered. In the morning, when we tried to come through the rain, it was really good. That's one thing people cannot do (Laughs) is go camping! I will never sleep on the ground, and I'll never be anywhere where it is wet or uncomfortable, as long as I can help it! I have done my share of camping, believe me! (Smiles)

So the transport, we lost...you know, people didn't even care. If somebody fell down and died, you didn't even look. Didn't even give it a second look at it. Finally we got to the border, and when we got to the border we marched for about another ten miles, and then they had the trains waiting for us. That is the first time I really saw the Germans. Until that time I was, my only contact was Hungarians. And they all kept telling us, "You're all going to die when you get to Germany." That's what they said. "The one who dies on the road is lucky, because you're all going to die in Germany. That's why they are taking you to Germany."

Louisa: They told you that.

Susan: Oh, yeah. All the way. Every single one of them.

Louisa: You must have been in outstanding physical condition to have made that.

Susan: I was. I was. As I told you, I was a great skater, I skied, I swam. I was on the gymnastic team. I was in good shape. In excellent shape. And when I wasn't in any shape, I had such a defiance in me and such a hatred, that I wasn't going to let them let my spirits get...I guess if I was in Warsaw, I would have been with the fighters at the ghetto. I am sure of that.



At least one thing I've got to say, I didn't let them lead me down to slaughter peacefully. I fought it all the way, the best way I know how. I'm proud of that. (Her voice tone reflects emotional pain.)

Louisa: Were you ever abused, slapped around?

Susan: Yes.

Louisa: Raped?

Susan: No. No. No. Never. The Germans would not...they would be...if they would even attempt to...and there were incidents...not rape. I don't know any of the rapes, but they have taken girls out of the camps for their own private use. I know that, and I was very fortunate I was not in that group. No, they were punished for that, unless it was...they had camps set up just for the German soldiers, but it was not in our area, where I was, but I have heard of it in other camps.

Louisa: When you got to the border and there were trains, then what happened?

Susan: We were loaded on the trains. We just all collapsed. It is a very hazy recollection. I do not remember. I know we were jammed in. It was closed cattle cars and we were on top of each other. There was an awful lot of moaning and dirt. You know, it's no facilities and so people were having diarrhea, throwing up and everything else. You know, you just kind of laid in it!

Louisa: The smells must have been unbelievable!

Susan: The smell of the camp will stay in your nostrils for the rest of your life, and you will smell it as long as you live! That was an indescribable smell. You could smell that camp miles away!

Louisa: You mean that literally? No exaggeration!

Susan: That's no exaggeration. We didn't smell it because we lived in it.

Louisa: Yuk! So how long was your train trip?

Susan: (Turns pages in the diary.) I don't know. I can honestly tell you, I don't know.

Louisa: A few hours or a few days?

Susan: Oh no, it was days. I guess. We couldn't see out. Somebody scratched a window. They had it blackened, you know those little black slats on top, and somebody climbed out and scratched it and looked out, and they said, "It's mountains and snow and it was dark and twilight, so, I don't think any one of us really know how long.

Louisa: But you were not fed at all.

Susan: We were not fed. So the first thing (clears throat) coming out of the train, it was in an open...she describes it so wonderful (referring to her friend's diary). It was in an open field, where the train stopped. Now, in between, it had stopped a lot. We don't know where. It just stopped, and then we started up again. It stopped; it started again.

Louisa: Do you think it picked up more people?

Susan: I don't know. I don't know. It just, um...I think it probably, the railroad was bombed and had the raids, and you know...but they did not care. Their cities was burning. Their people were dying, but they were still taking the transports. They were going to destroy us one way or another.

The Germans were yelling, and we had to get out of the train. Then (she) said that, and I remember that, that was horrible...the first time we saw the inmates from the camps. We saw this...skeletons...that's the only way I can describe it. We called them "musulmans" , but they were just skeletons. They were not even like human beings, just attacking us and pulling...if you had a blanket or a towel something in your hand, they were pulling, they were searching for food. They kept saying "shtikeleh brot", that was, you know, I don't speak Yiddish, but, you know, the "brot" I know it was the bread, and that is one of the expressions I will never forget for those people, and the Germans was hitting them and beating on them with whips and sticks and they were holding their heads and the blood was running out, and we just stood there. I mean that was all new, new experience. That was the "musulmans", that were down at their last stages, reduced to...this was no humanity left in them. There was just sheer hunger, and to satisfy that or do something about that, they just got beaten to death or died.

Then, we were in that big open field assembled and waited to be taken in.

Louisa: This was October '44?

Susan: October 1944.

People was recognizing each other and families. Saw each other, and we were waiting to go, and we didn't know where the camp was. We couldn't see it. I mean it was just a big, like a big football field, an open area. But the camp was in there, but they had built, where we were staying, down in the ground. (Looks through papers.) Something is interesting...I have to tell you. This friend of mine...this is changing the subject...went into, in Plainview, New York, to one of the centers where they were dedicating to the Holocaust survivors, and there was this young girl there, and somebody asked Catherine where she was, and she said, "I, we were assigned to Dachau, but we stayed in Kaufering Eins." And this girl came over, and she was beside herself, because that was the first survivor they had ever seen from that camp. Kaufering. And Catherine sent me this thing (shuffles through papers); this was where we were in. I'll give you this to read if you want to take it home to read it. This is where we stayed.

They only have one or two of those bunkers left, because the Germans, you know, they did not want the knowledge for all the years, then kids started to digging in as a project, and so when you read the whole thing, you will understand it. This had grass on top, so the outside didn't know. And it was not high, only about three feet high, and you went down about four steps, and they had this wooden plank, forms, had straw on top of it, which was rotten. That was our camp. That's where we lived.

Louisa: Was this girls, or everyone together?

Susan: Just girls. They were separated from the men. You never stayed in any camp. I'll give you this whole package so you can read it.

Louisa: Oh, good!

Susan: Then when you get through with it, you can give it back to me.

I stayed in that camp and several of the ... Mrs. Prevost, that's Catherine's married name...I'll let you read that because this is an American reporter, who got in touch. As a matter of fact, she called me, because she said it was only Catherine and I when she talked with me talked about this Landsberg Kaufering Eins, and and I stayed in Kaufering Two, and Kaufering Eleven, and finally I was in the main camp in Dachau when the big march was over.

Louisa: So where you went off the train was not where you ended up.

Susan: When we went off the train, we were taken to this camp. This was outside the city of Landsberg, which at that time we did not know. And they called it Kaufering, that was the name. Then it's really where they had the village. They had thirteen or fourteen camps in clusters built, and they were all were under the main camp, which was Dachau. These were out-lying camps. See, Dachau could not accommodate us anymore, because they had run out of room, even with the bodies being cremated. So I didn't get into the main camp in Dachau until April, 1945.

By that time Landsberg was already under siege from the Americans. That was in '45. At the end of it I went on a death march from Dachau, and I was liberated in a town called Wolfratshausen, which was in the mountains in Bavaria. But that was the end of it.

Louisa: You were on a march when the American troops marched in and discovered you! That must have been a wild scene!

Susan: I suppose so, I don't remember because I was too sick. (Laughs) That is another story and another chapter.

Louisa: Well, tell me as much as you can remember about your camp routine, your living quarters...

Susan: The living quarters were what I showed you. A pallet with straw on it, which was never changed. You just occupied whoever was on it before, whatever illness. This was supposed to be a work camp, a work camp, but it ended up what they called a "Vernichtungs Lager". In other words, they had a percentage that should have not survived under any circumstances in this camp. My very first job...well, we were stripped. Our clothes were taken away. We were given the striped pajamas, and striped, well, whatever. We were driven into this so-called barracks. The food came once a day. We had a block <sup>(leader)</sup> "altast" that was in charge, and we had that one barracks, I would say there were five hundred of us.

Louisa: In that one barrack.

Susan: Uh huh. They brought that big wooden, like, barrel and they had hot water and big hunks of...what they call it, looks like carrots, not turnips...

Louisa: Parsnips?

Susan: The one they make sugar out of. Looks like a carrot.

Louisa: A beet? A sugar beet?

Susan: A sugar beet. That's what it was. And then we got a piece of bread at night, which was made out of saw dust. I mean (laughs) the saw dust was coming out of it as they cut it, a very thin piece of that and a very thin piece of artificial marmelade. That was the food that you had. At the very beginning we could not even swallow it. The other inmates said, "Eat it, eat it, eat it, no matter what", you know. So at the very beginning, a lot of....

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

Tape 2, Side B

Susan: ...they either went to another outlying camp, like Lager Eleven or Lager Two, which we didn't know. They had a designation for each one of those camps, because they had a certain work object. Each camp had a certain designated work place.

Louisa: What sort of work were you given to do?

Susan: The very beginning my first job, I was assigned to the kitchen. Due to my perfect German and my very blonde hair, the arbeit fuhrer , the Germans just picked me from what they called the "appell" . Now the "appell" we had to do everyday. You stand in this big open place, lined up by your block altast and then they have to account, and the count goes to the German commandant, and how many people are in the camp. If they thought we were hiding something or if somebody was hidden in our camp, or for any other reason they decide to raid our living place and throw everything in the sun out from under there, then we stayed all day. And if you fell out, you were either beat or shot, whichever, or died, whatever, but "appell" you stayed, no matter what. And if you had a friend who was dying, you made sure that she stood up no matter what, and not left behind in the barracks. So out of the very first "appell"

that we had to stay, I was picked. He went around in all the groups and he was calling people, and I was picked as one of the people who worked in the kitchen.

Now, you would think working in the kitchen would have been a big privilege. It was horrendous, because...well, all we did was peeling that sugar beet and boiled it in this big cauldron of water and then we had to put it into those barrels that they were carrying to the barracks. That's where the Germans brought in all the people they were going to beat up or punish, and so we had to stay and wash the blood from the kitchen floor constantly, because they hung them up on the rafter and beat them, and so the blood was just running under what they called the "schlager", the hose, washing the blood. I worked, for one reason I was very happy to be there, because I stole sugar beets or whatever I could lay my hands on. Hid it inside of my blouse, carried it out and gave it to the people, the so-called "musulmans" . Because among them I have recognized one of my neighbors son who was a concert pianist, that you would not believe reduced to death, and a distant relative and his son. And I took a plain, great chance, but I did, and then I was able to steal and smuggle some of it back into my barracks and share it with my friends, but I didn't last in the kitchen very long. When they brought the Lithuanian and Polish girls in from Auschwitz that was the first job they got, because, see, the kitchen capo and the capo of the police was Polish Jews, so they kicked us out, and they put the Polish girls from Auschwitz into that. That was the first time I really got the stories from Auschwitz.

Louisa: About extermination?

Susan: Yes, because in our camps they were beaten to death, but I did not see a crematorium at all. I just heard, from the other girls how their families went up in smoke. (Clears throat) But we knew about it, because we knew they had them in Dachau. The people was taken to Lager Two, which was the sick camp, usually ended up in the crematorium in Dachau, which was just up the road. You know, it wasn't that far.

From that commando I was taken to a Holzman commando. They were building...they had a building project, and the Holzman commando was to cut the wood and take it to a lumberyard and carry it to the work site whatever they were building. What they were really building was enlarging the camp.

That was a fairly new camp. Instead of horses, we were the horses. We were the ones who pulled the wagons. We the one who loaded. We the one who was used as the labor and the carriers. But it was the Holtsman was run by the organization that took command, which I think was the engineering end of the German Whermacht, they were not S.S. troops, and they were more humane. They were more humane. They didn't have much themselves, but they have tried to give us a piece of bread or a piece of wurst, you know, just food. But then, the condition was horrendous, because we had just the thin pajamas, we only had the wooden clogs, no socks, no mittens, no nothing, and pulling the wood up in the mountains in wagons, in the Bavarian winter. It's not easy task. I worked that Holtsman commando outside of Landsberg and Augsburg. The Germans said they never saw us. I was taken out of the camp details to wash clothes for German hausfraus, so they used us as laborers, besides working at that Holtsman commando.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, I was going downhill fast, because my weight...you know, in spite of the good physical condition, I was between starvation and heavy physical labor, my strength was going, and I was getting reoccurring extremely high fever. I could feel being burning, but there was no way to tell what it was. Typhoid broke out in the camp from the dysentery, and they shut the camp down. They wouldn't let us go out to the commandos, because we were all carrying something. We lost an awful lot of people, who would have died anyway, but we had no medication. There was nothing. Only thing they did, shut the camps down, put guards all around us and throw some of the sugar beets and pieces of bread over the fence. That was it! We had several doctors among those "musulmans" and other survivors, and they tried, but there wasn't much they could do for us, because we had no medicine.

Louisa: Did you have soap?

Susan: Well, we had...they gave us...it looked like little square pieces of dark something, which that was soap. That was really, as horrible as it sounds, that all came from Poland. That was, the fat contents of that soap, was the one that came out from the crematorium. They turned...you know, Germans don't waste anything. So we were very reluctant to use it. We didn't even know.

Louisa: They turned human fat into soap.

Susan: Uh huh. They turned <sup>human</sup> hair. They used human hair...every...we had to...

I worked in a Sonder commando, which...our sole purpose was the corpses had to have their teeth taken out. They had gold fillings.

Louisa: You did that work too.

Susan: I worked in a lot of different commandos. They didn't waste. Clothes had to be sorted. Clothes had to be washed. Eye glasses had to be collected. Shoes. Everything was shipped to the mainland. They didn't waste. The Germans didn't waste.

After the typhoid epidemic, I got the first beating, a bad one. That picture I showed you there, that grass on top, and it was early part of March, '45. I was sitting on top of it, that grass knoll, and a German guard...I thought he was a guard...they all look alike to me, but he wasn't...he was one of their commanders...said something to me. And I turned around and I said, "I am going to be where you are, and you are going to be where I am."

Louisa: One of these days?

Susan: And I know everybody said, "We are all going to die and there is no point." And they were giving up, and I says, "Well, I don't care, you are all going to die, but I'm not, and I won't." That has kept me going. So after I said that to him, the Aufseherin, the German guard who was more vicious than the men, really, the women were...they came in and I got beaten with a stick for the longest time. I had a big, kind of a discoloration, I would put it, you know, black and blue and then it turned and it never ever got on the side of my face, and I really got cut on one side. I must say, the more they hit me, the worse it got, because they could have beat me to death, I wasn't going to cry. And they said, they kept telling me...

Louisa: Did they break your jaw? or your ear drums?

Susan: They didn't break it. I don't know. Whatever they did, it took a long time to heal. I had a lot of contusions. A lot of contusions, because even after we were liberated, and I was free, I was given vitamins, those discolorations was a long time fading. But it's all gone now.

Anyway, that was during...and then after that I knew I was going to be in trouble...they are going to ship me out, and they did. And then I went to the Mohl commando. Now the Mohl commando was a bad, bad situation. You could see it in the back. We was building a hanger. We thought it was an ammunition factory, but it really was a hanger, and under ground. Underground



hanger.

Louisa: For airplanes?

Susan: Uh huh. We didn't know what it was. According to this (papers in her lap) it says that is what we were building, and she (the article writer, Toby Axelrod) has a sketch of it, one of the things that we were building in the back. This is it. You see that bridge that curves over there? That was like ten stories, and we had nothing but a cat-walk, and it was just a drop on both sides. And they made us carry hundred-pound cement bags on that arch. And that "musulmans" , that skin-and-bones...had that people...how could they carry a hundred pounds, they weighed at about thirty. I mean you put it on them and they just went down, just like that. They were just falling. You know, they were just falling off of that arch. There was as much blood and flesh in that hanger, as there is cement.

Louisa: So you had to go on that work detail.

Susan: I was on that work detail. They called it the Mohl commando. Incidentally, the people who were building it Mohl , I.G. Farber , all the big names. They still build in Germany. Messerschmidt. All of those people used labors. Just like the V-2's they built for the War in Flossenburg , that was all built by inmates of the concentration camps.

In this camp, where I was, people in charge of you were German civilians who were also inmates in the camp. And their crime was, like, mass murderer, a lot of the homosexuals they put in jail. But I would say 90% of them was murderers, so you can imagine, when they tell them, "You take a hundred and you bring back ten, and no problem with them falling into whatever" and how they died...and they had too much, then they beat them all the way from the command<sup>back</sup> to the camps, and so by the time you got back in, there was nothing.

Louisa: Was that everyday you'd go back and forth, and fewer people...

Susan: Every night...

Louisa: Fewer people...

Susan: Every night we end up with the same amount of people. But every night we came back with half or less. That's the way it was.

Louisa: And you survived that reduction of people. Wow!

Susan: Oh, yes. I survived that, too.

Louisa: How long did that go on?

Susan: The Mohl      commando...there were not enough manpower<sup>left</sup> to do the commando, so they brought the Russians in. See, the Russian prisoners from Dachau, they were the workers, because they were in better shape. They were prisoners-of-war. Women mostly. They were      ?      . And so we were taken off of the Mohl      , and then we went into a dynamite factory. And that dynamite factory...by that time the raids were almost continuous...and the Germans locked us in that "arbeit stuber" where we were working with dynamite, spinning caps, dynamite caps. They locked us in and they took off and went into a shelter, so any time you have anything falling, it goes up! The dynamite factory was my last work assignment.

The raids were so numerous and so frequent by that time, that they could not take the people out to work, unless they were going to endanger themselves, and they weren't going to do it. We had airraids almost continuously.

Louisa: Were you still running a fever at this time?

Susan: Yes. On again, off again. And I was very rapidly losing whatever weight I still had on. One night, shortly after that, after...what kind of a holiday we have in the spring...a Jewish holiday (she struggles to remember). Usually our worse "appells"<sup>always</sup> were during any kind of Jewish holiday came up, the Germans made sure that we'd get punished, but good for whatever. And running the normal camp right, and the hangings and "kappell". We had an orchestra. Every night we were coming in the camps, the orchestra was standing outside, and we could march down and they are playing and watching the people between the barbed wire with their potatoes stuck in their mouth, and their arms behind their backs strung up on the pole between electrical wire for whatever they did, or hangings or beatings or whatever.

Louisa: Who was the orchestra? The townpeople?

Susan: No.

Louisa: Inmate orchestra?

Susan: Inmate orchestra. We had an inmate orchestra. They had to play for us going out. For us coming back in. For the hangings. For any event that

happened at the camp, they played.

One time they let the Red Cross come into the camp. They took one barracks and they all spruced it up and put tables and chairs and table cloths and beds, and they took a few people who were still in good shape and put them in, and showed it to the Red Cross, how well prisoners were treated in a war camp.

Louisa: Where did this Red Cross come from?

Susan: Switzerland. And they had brought rations. They brought us condensed milk and canned foods and chocolate and all that. And they had it all piled up at the Oper Platz and the rumors went, you know, we were going to get some of all that. And after they left, the Germans came and hauled (laughs) the whole thing away, so we never did get any of it.

We had one barracks, where there were some expectant mothers. They allowed them (to) have their babies. One of the commandants treated them to let them have milk and bread, and keep their babies, and they were not in any work force, and then one night just took them off.

Louisa: Took all the babies?

Susan: Yes! Not the mothers, and put them in a work group. Just for no... You know, the physical cruelty, it just becomes part you that your body kind of gets numb to it. Hunger is the main driving force, and that kind of overtakes all other emotions, really. If people had a little time, the only discussions we ever had was about food. We "cooked" continuously, everybody was "cooking" (laughs) in their mind! That was the topic of conversation. Food. Of any sort. Or how we're going to fix it, or how do you cook that, or how we're going to do it, or if we have the ingredients, you know, and stuff like that.

Louisa: Where did you go to the toilet?

Susan: Oh! They had an open trench dug with wooden planks, and that was the toilet. But to get to that, oh, the mud! I've got to tell you about the mud. We had that mud (fairly spits out the word) that was, like, knee deep. And this is terrible to say, but it's the truth. People died during the night. The bodies had to be thrown out, and many times they laid in the mud, and we had to go at night...getting to there, we didn't want to fall in the mud, we stepped on them. We literally stepped on them. You know, that's a pretty

hard thing....

Louisa: Well, you harden yourself to what you had to do.

Susan: You had no feelings left. If you allow yourself to feel, you die.

Louisa: That's how you survived?

Susan: That's how you survive. You don't think of yesterday. You don't think of tomorrow. You think of right now, at that very moment.

Louisa: What about your mother? Did you know where she was at this time?

Susan: No. No. I didn't have any...I didn't get together with my mother til I came to the States, because...I know she was back. By the time she got back, I was gone, and, she was taken off of the street and she was taken to Bergen. But that was in December, of 1944.

Louisa: You had been gone two months already.

Susan: I was gone, and so she was not there. She was there in December, and I think it was the Russians that liberated them in March or April. She was not in it a long time, she would have not survived.

Louisa: She had to march all the way?

Susan: No. They were taken by train. Mother was taken by train and they never worked. Just kept them in a barracks. Would they have had to go out and worked like we did, they would have not survived, you know, older people would have not survived.

So one night we were taken on a march, and they said we are going out of the camps, after that one twenty-four hour air raid. So we were lined up and we walked from Kaufering to the main camp, to Dachau. I have never returned to Dachau. I could never make myself go, or wanted to see, or have anything to with it, by my girl friend did. She went into the museum, and the first thing she saw was this huge picture, and, guess what! It was her and I! (Laughs) Somewhere, someplace, I have this picture, because she took one. She had such an emotional collapse over that...

Louisa: Seeing herself.

Susan: ...that she went, she was going on a cruise after that trip that she took as a side trip, and they went to the Greek Islands, and Catherine says she doesn't remember <sup>the trip</sup> at all or anything. She knows she was out in limbo and

and sick and she came back with a horrible cold, flu-like symptoms, but the doctor said she didn't have the flu. So, I told her I don't want to see it, I don't want to be any part of it, I don't want to be remembered, I just, I just want to put it behind me. So I never did go, and I never talked about it, except to her occasionally. (Clears throat.)

Louisa: Yes. This death march that you were on at Liberation, can you describe that?

Susan: We marched out...we spent one night in the showers in Dachau, which we thought was going to be the end of the line, because the showers was usually before you went to the crematoriums, and they were still going strong when we got into Dachau. At night I remember it was pouring rain and they took us to the showers, and we thought, "That's the end." For some reason, and how, some of them was left behind. We were marched out of the camp and we started down...this was southern Bavaria...we went through Munich, incidentally...

Louisa: You said "we". Who was "we"? Many people? Young people?

Susan: All of them was young. I think...I would say, at least five thousand.

Louisa: (Incredulous) Five thousand!

Susan: See, the trains were coming into Dachau from the other camps, and they were opening, we saw them, the trains were coming into camps, they had railroad in the camps, and they were opening them and the bodies were falling, and there were inmates who were stacking them up, you know, like mountains and they were all in front of the crematoriums to be burned. They did not burn most of it, because they run out of time. You know, the Americans came, and they were very close, you could hear the guns. They were from camps from all over Germany, from France, from Belgium, Holland, you know...that was the end of the line.

We started marching. They marched us at night, and hid us in the woods during the day. Any body who fell behind was shot. We had the S.A. ...oops, my dog...we had the S.A. behind us, that was the Black Shirts, which was mainly Latvians and Ukrainians, and anybody who fell out of the line, was shot. We came through the most picturesque part of Bavaria you'd ever want to see! (Laughs) We were allowed to go to the fields and dig whatever food we can, you know, roots and potatoes. We ate that raw, we ate them all. They didn't feed us. We had less and less guards; they were disappearing in the night. We

got as far as Wolfratshausen, which is a little village in the mountains, not too far, about forty miles from Garmish on this side, and everybody who marches into the mountains, and the order was to destroy us in the mountains, you know, where they could not trace the bodies. By that time, I was so sick, that I barely remember it all. The fever just completely has overtaken me. It would not be what Catherine, Ferry and another friend of mine...I would not be sitting here and talking to you, because I would have fallen out, which I did, and I would have been shot.

END OF TAPE 2

Tape 3, Side A

Louisa: This is the third tape in talking with Susan Eisenberg. You were talking about your liberation march in the woods.

Susan: We, ah, during the day they were, as I said, in meadows in the mountains. We could see...they could see the planes flying above us. We saw the American planes with their insignia so close that we could practically touch them. That's how close they flew. And do you know, they practically swooped down over us, and they must have seen all that sea of striped uniforms. They flew away. Never dropped the bombs. So the SS guards was very happy to use us as shields.

After about five days we got into this little town called Wolfratshausen which is in the mountains in Bavaria. And that was a work camp there where they used Russian prisoners. We were there that night and most of the German guards has fled and left us. There was a handful of them - Winston, Winston (she is chiding her dog) stop that! Winnie! He's not listening. He's a terrible dog. He's not mine. He's Mom's. (Laughs) He's really a pain. - Anyway...they were going to take us, and we couldn't move. Nobody could move. We were without food, water, in a complete run-down conditions. Couldn't march any further, so <sup>if</sup> they were going to kill us, they had to do it right in that camp, and that was right next to the village, so I guess they couldn't

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do it, or wouldn't do it for some reason. But they took the Germans...or the Germans took the Russians. They took 150. Winston! Winnie! God! (her dog). 150 of the Russians. Prisoners, they shot 'em. They managed that. But, as I understand, I was almost out of my head. I was laying on that roadside and I heard that roar, and that was the first American jeep was coming down the road. Totally unexpected anything would find they found. But it was the Third Army who has liberated us. And I know that the inmates who were there, who was still able and could do it, got the "lager fuhrer" and tore him from limb to limb. That I know, because he had a wooden leg, and that wooden leg laid in that camp ground (laughs) that I used to have that "appel" for the longest time. (roll call)

I was very very ill, but we had no medical care. These troops were combat troops. They had no facilities for caring for several thousand of very ill people. Then we had another typhoid epidemic which wiped us - a lot of the survivors - out, including that lady I told you, who stayed with us all through until Liberation, then she got typhoid and died. Who had the little girl, the baby who she left behind.

I spent that summer in the woods with some friends who tried to survive. But that's how we got liberated. The Germans disappeared. The Americans were there, and we were left on the side of the road to shift for ourselves.

Louisa: So, the American military didn't call in any help for your group. And there you were in the German countryside, with previously hostile people...

Susan: Oh, but they weren't hostile after that.

Louisa: They weren't hostile after that.

Susan: Oh no. They 'didn't know anything about the camps'. They 'never know there was a prisoner'. That was not them who done it all. You know, they would not acknowledge it. They...the Germans did not take the blame for what happened in Germany.

Louisa: Were you at that point, when you were liberated, the War was over, you were sick...who helped you?

Susan: My friends.

Louisa: Your friends.

Susan: Yes, my friends.



Louisa: Who were equally as debilitated.

Susan: Well, we did, Louisa, well, they did, because I was too sick...they stood at the roadside where the American trucks and troops were going, and they had a tin can, and they stood there and waited for the Americans to throw some food into those tin cans. And that's what it was, and then they set up a kitchen. They went into the village of Wolfratshausen. The inmates, ex-inmates who were capable, and they robbed the town blind, and took all their supplies and brought it out to the camp, and they started cooking soups for the people. But we didn't have medical help. We had nothing, and so we had to survive by our wits. But the Americans took German prisoners. A lot of the SS, who was hiding in the woods. They drove 'em back. They fed 'em. They clothed them. They played baseball with them. Basketball with them. And we were still on the outside! That has made a lot of the young liberated Dutch, French, Belgian young Jews terribly angry. And a lot of them took the law in their hands: they formed groups; they went out in the woods; they hunted the Germans like you hunt deer here. You could hear gun shots all night long. And I don't blame them. I don't blame them.

Louisa: How did they get the strength to do this?

Susan: You'd be surprised what strength it gets you. And they were the survivors. And they all went to Israel. They all fought in the war.

Louisa: Were any of these SS officers arrested and put on trial?

Susan: Not that I know. Not any that I know. (Laughs) It's very funny because I remember one named Engel, I never heard Ferry mentioning, but there is one that has a Polish name, that Udo, who was absolutely a sadist. He did most of the beating and the killing, and she remembers the name (Susan thumbs through Ferry's diary) but, you see, she started writing...this is a very interesting journal because she names names and dates. She even remembers her, you know we all had what they called that "Kacet" number. I didn't get tattoo'd because I worked in the kitchen and the time they did tattooing. We were kind of a little bit more of the 'upper class' because we worked in the kitchen. They didn't tattoo us. In that article that I gave you mentioning about the Lager Schreiber named Weiss, I knew him, and that's another reason I did not get tattoo'd. See, up until I read that, I never know if he was alive or he existed, but obviously he is, and he lives in Fresh Meadows on Long Island.

I never got in touch with him, I mean, I don't care. I've never been a friend of his, but that's why I did not get tattoo'd. But we all had a number assigned to us. And if I ever really want to look up my name and number, I guess the book he kept went into the Jewish Museum, and I can look up myself if I want to, according to that story. It's interesting. But Ferry's number is in here.

Louisa: Do you know what number you were assigned?

Susan: No. But I don't remember. I used to have a kind of a certificate that I got in Germany, that I was a, not a 'displaced person' but a 'persecuted person' and they used the number. They used the number that it was given to us in the camp. But I don't know what happened to the paper. I guess I threw it away. Ferry's number was 132052, so mine was very similar, very close to it. I think it was like 56, because I remember when we were signed in, we were very close to each other. One of these days I really should translate that.

Louisa: I'd like to copy that, if I ...

Susan: Surely.

Louisa: Just for someday somebody might be able to read it.

Susan: But it is all in Hungarian.

Louisa: Who helped you medically?

Susan: Nobody.

Louisa: Nobody ever helped you medically at that time. How long did it take you to recuperate, or at least get rid of the fever that you had?

Susan: The fever lasted. I still had some of it when I came to America. I still had episodes of fevers.

Louisa: Did you ever get a diagnosis?

Susan: They said I probably had malaria, but who knows? Who knows what it was. I was in bad shape, because right after I came here, but already in Germany, I started having back problems. Very serious back problems. And when I got here, United States, the very first thing I had a horrendous kidney attack,

and I had kidney stones. And the doctors said they never saw anything like it, because it was all mud and dirt and formed and it was huge. He said, "It looks like you were eating dirt." I says, "I was." (Laughs) So I was very young. I almost didn't survive that. The kidney stones were number one.

After that it was touch-and-go because I got peritonitis from that, you know, infection, and it was very slow recovery. Then after the kidney stones, I had uh...the back problem just got worse and worse and worse, and I have had two back surgeries already. Disc.

Louisa: I want to go back to the immediate period after Liberation. And you said it was August and you were still living there.

Susan: Oh, I lived there...

Louisa: In Germany?

Susan: In Germany. We lived in the woods. The whole summer. The whole summer. Other countries came and took their prisoners, you know, they made an attempt to relocate. Like the French and Belgian, and the Dutch. A lot of them went into other camp and tried to smuggle into Israel. You know, they took the boat to Cyprus, and then we had Sabra agents in some of those camps who helped a lot of people go. But nobody came for us, and we didn't know what to do. So the three of us: Katherine and I and Ferry, we managed to go to a town called Regensburg what had a big Jewish community established, and they had a Joint Unrra agencies there. And Ferry went to work for the Joint and Katherine and I tried to work for the Joint which was a Jewish organization at that time...they called Joint that had the survivors, and it also tried to locate families. And, of course, everybody wanted to come to America, except me. I wanted to go home.

Well, we had managed to get back to Hungary in the winter of 1945. That was an experience. It would take <sup>about</sup> another five tapes, because there was no transportation. We walked and we got in finally to Czechoslovakia. we got into Prague. We got on a train. We had no money. We had no tickets. We couldn't speak Czech. We wouldn't dare to speak German! We got on a train, and the train happened to be a Russian troop train! (Laughs) I mean, I should write a book! I really swear to God! Not my camp experiences, but afterwards. Anyway, We did go to Budapest, which was devastated. It was in rubble and I

couldn't even find our house I used to live in. I managed to find my aunt and uncle and they were on their way to the United States with their son to Cleveland. I tried to work. They had inflation going at the time, that the only way you could buy anything if you took a barrel of paper money, but by the time you get to the place with the barrel, the price had already changed.

I met a friend of my uncle who became a minister of agriculture in the new government, and he gave me a job at the ministry. They paid us in potatoes and bread, because money was worthless, and if they could give us food, that was the payment. We stayed in a room in the dead of winter that has no windows and no doors, because it was all bombed out. We had to cross the bridge, but because the Communist government wasn't elected at the time, they took the pontoon bridges up, and the other bridges were so badly damaged that you could not go back and forth, so I had to leave where I was. And then my girlfriend, Ferry, approached me and said, "Do you want to go back to Germany and try to get to America?" and I said, "Yes." And she said, "There is two Sabra agents are bringing about fifty Polish Jewish children who survived in hiding and with Christian families in Poland. They trying to take them to Israel. Will you be willing to help with the children and take the journey?" And I said, "Yes." And that was on a Monday, and Tuesday early morning I went to the railroad station, and way out in the track was the wagon with the children. The children ranged from maybe a year old to about ten, eleven. We got to the Hungarian border. They paid the railroad. They paid the...in Europe everything gets paid under the table. And we got to the border and uh...they said we are going to have to walk. And that was in dead winter snow all the way up to your ears, and we had those children with us. And it started out at night...there was Ferry, Katherine, myself, the two Sabra agents and three other men. I think I got Polish men. The children did not speak anything but Polish. Some spoke some Yiddish, but they had forgotten it by then. We walked through this fields and woods. We got stopped three times by Russians that the Sabra agents paid up two of the patrols, but they radioed the third one, and they got us just before we got into the German border, and we made a run for it. We had bullets going, and, I mean, it was nightmare. The older children carried the younger ones; we carried the babies. We lost everything. We had some food and some valuables that was all left behind. It was given to the Russian patrol and we managed

to get to the outskirts of Graz in Germany. And then they got on a train, and they got <sup>with</sup> the children all the way to the German border from Austria, and then they were going on another route to south, to try to get to Switzerland to Cyprus and then into Israel. They asked us to go with them and end up in Israel, but I didn't want to go to Israel. I had had it! I wanted out! I wanted to be a human being. I wanted to be normal (tearful), so I didn't go!

Louisa: So you parted with your friends?

Susan: No. See Katherine had relatives in the States. Ferry had an aunt and so they know that sooner or later they will be sent for, and they will be able to get out from Germany. I had the brother of my uncle in Cleveland but I didn't have any high hopes, or I did get it touch with him, but he was unwilling to sponsor me. I also had a really live blood uncle, my mother's brother who came here after the First World War and lived in Asbury Park, and they were so afraid that I would be a burden to them, or that they would have to support me, or I don't know know whatever their problem was, but they would never do anything. So, anyway, but that's another story, because there was another story going from Austria to Germany, but we did part with the children and the Sabra agents. Winnie! (the dog) Please cut this out! (Louisa laughs). Come on, come on (claps hands) go outside! He does not listen!

Louisa: He's OK. I've got a dog. I know they do that (lick themselves in front of company)!

Susan: Anyway, that's what happened. That's how I got back out of Hungary in 1945, in December 1945. And then I lived in Germany for three years, and I came here in '48. December of 1948.

Louisa: How did you get to come here?

Susan: I was married.

Louisa: You married a G.I.?

Susan: That didn't work out, but (laughs) that was the only way I got here.

Louisa: So that marriage didn't last, is that right?

Susan: No.

Louisa: And when he rotated back you came?

Susan: That's right, in 1948.

Louisa: So, where did you go when you first came into...

Susan: New York.

Louisa: Into New York. Was he from New York?

Susan: No. He was from Indiana.

Louisa: And did you go to Indiana?

Susan: For a visit. Yes.

Louisa: Well, did you live here as a married couple?

Susan: We lived in the States as a married couple.

Louisa: Where did you live?

Susan: On Long Island.

Louisa: And, how long did you stay married to him?

Susan: I was married in 1946, and I got divorced in 1958, so I stayed married for quite a while.

Louisa: And you had children by him? Yes.

Susan: Yes. Both of the girls was by him.

Louisa: Did you try to maintain your identity as a Hungarian Jew at that point, or a German?

Susan: No. No.

Louisa: You decided to change your...

Susan: No. No. Everything. I didn't want any part. I didn't want to remember, and he certainly wouldn't want me to remember it. But we had bad problems: background, cultural, etc., etc.

Louisa: He was Christian?

Susan: Yes.

Louisa: Did that religious and cultural difference create the problems for your marriage?

Susan: Mainly, yes.

Louisa: Did you um....did you get any uh...Describe your becoming an American. I mean, how did you assimilate. Did you...

Susan: It was not easy. It was very difficult time for me. Very difficult time for me. I had...my whole concept what America was all about was all wrong. First of all, most - look - my English was very bad.

Louisa: Did you go to school to improve it?

Susan: No. No. I never did. I really actually learned to speak English through LIFE magazine (laughs), by looking at the pictures and putting things together, and then the radio and listening and maybe I picked the eighth or tenth word. I was very much treated as a second rate citizen. At that time I spoke Hungarian, fluent German, fluent French. I had a scare. I was looking for a job, and every time I tried they told me I could not be anything but a domestic or work in a factory, or something like that. And then I got the input (sic) 'Just because you people came here, and you think you are etc., etc....' And I got to the point I hated it here. If I had the money, I think I would have gone! Go back to Europe. I mean I am being very honest. But I loved the country, I really truly did, and I thought to myself: the ideals and everything this country was built on - the people that I am running into, that is nonessential. That is not what this country is all about, and I kept telling that to myself, you know. I really truly greatly believe in your Constitution and Freedom and I am not using that word loosely. But I did resent an awful lot of things. To me, for instance, in the camps we forever heard of Roosevelt and what a devil he was and how he's gonna die, and they have a secret weapon and they're gonna destroy the whole United States, and I guess that that was the Atomic Bomb they were talking about. But, we didn't know that, and to us he was our life, he was our savior. To us Roosevelt was everything! To the prisoners; to us. Then I come here, they talked about him like he was kind of a, you know, incompetent something or other, that everything he'd done was wrong. That just absolutely made me ill. You know, I couldn't believe it. Then, like I said, I run into people, I run into situation when I really felt put down to such...they were either condescending

or they were downright rude, whichever you want to choose. So, I wasn't very happy then.

Louisa: Well, that's understandable...and you lived on Long Island.

Susan: I lived on Long Island. I have made friends there, though. I really truly did. I met an English family that were absolutely wonderful to me. Helped me, and made me understand, and I learned. I was more of a second-rate citizen a lot in my husband's family in their book. They just wasn't my kind of people, I mean...

Louisa: Did they know about your background?

Susan: Well, they know that we got married in Germany. I really don't think that they know that I was Jewish. If they know that it would have been even worse.

Louisa: Did you get to travel outside of Long Island during this period? Did you get to see other parts of the country or meet other people who maybe had a different attitude?

Susan: Not too much. No. I travelled in New York State and then I had friends in New York City who came, that I knew from the camps and from after I lived in Germany, so I have had friends up there. This was more on the work level, and I have had some horrendous jobs. Absolutely horrendous.

Louisa: What sort of job did you have?

Susan: I had a job on Long Island. We needed money. My husband was in school, and we just had nothing, and so, you know, we both needed to work, and I had that illness that we had to pay for, and we had no money to pay for it. And they told me they could not help me, because I was not a citizen, so they weren't going to be able to help. So we had to pay back the hospital.

Louisa: Who couldn't help you because you were not a citizen?

Susan: The social worker told us that I was not an American citizen, so that illness...I don't know, the welfare or something or other could not take, and we had to repay a lot of transfusions, and just all kind of things. So we had to pay for that, and like I said, we didn't have anything, and it was very difficult.



So the first job I took, it was in a factory where they were doing pharmaceuticals supplies, and my job was to sterilize little bottles where they put penicillin in, and the sterilization was with ether. Ether gas. It was so strong, that if I went into a store to buy groceries or anything after work, people just (laughs and grimaces to show a bad smell)...I just wreaked of this ether. They paid, like, fifty cents an hour. There was a Mr. Klinger I remember, he was in charge. Was German, I should have known. That job ended with me having this kidney surgery. All this time I was suffering, and so I ended up in the emergency room in Meadowbrook Hospital

Then, the other job I had was on an assembly line from a factory working, ah, putting little wheels on cars

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE A

Tape 3, Side B

Louisa: ...in a factory putting wheels on cars. These were toys.

Susan: Toys. That was Ideal Toy Company in Mineola, Long Island. I'll never forget it. And they paid you by piece, and they had a quota system, so you can imagine (laughs) how much money I made in that. And then we got laid off from that, and then I had one more factory job.

That was sorting buttons out of big drums of chalk. They dumped giant fifty-pound drums of buttons on an assembly line and you had to sort out different size of buttons to fit different boxes. Mind you, this was such a low type work, that none of the people who worked there even spoke English, because they were, like, coming from Puerto Rico, there was a lot of blacks, different islands like Trinidad and Jamaica. They spoke very little English. They paid us minimum wage. Horrendous working conditions, absolutely horrendous. I thought to myself, 'I can't survive in that, I just won't do it.' They advertized for a publishing company in Westbury, Long Island. I went for the interview. By that time my English...I have a heavy accent and and I always will have that, but it's because I never had any formal training, so I retained my accents <sup>so much,</sup> and I went for the interview and they asked me if I

typed so many words, and I can do this, that...then I said 'Sure'. I didn't! But I learned! I watch other people doing it, and learned!

Louisa: You trained yourself on the job.

Susan: I trained myself on the job. They asked me if I know how to use a key punch machine. I didn't even know what they were talking about. I said 'Sure'. That publishing company was mailing magazines all over the country. From Reader's Digest, you name it. We had to type addresses, labels on a key punch machine. Needless to say, that was an interesting experience, but I picked up on it really fast, and I did it!

Then from there, lucky me!...we used to get laid off those jobs in the Spring when it slowed down, and they rehired us, which worked out just fine for me. During this lull period, when we were not working for this publishing firm, Mitchell Air Force Base needed clerical workers because they had some kind of a squadron there who asked that the Commander didn't want them, send them off, and they called the unemployment office. So everybody who was unemployed and 'clerical' designated went to Mitchell Air Force Base.

Louisa: Was that on Long Island?

Susan: On Long Island. It's now the Adelphi College Campus, but at that time they was back-to-back, you know, bordered, but it was Mitchell Air Force Base. That started my Civil Service career! I worked for Civil Service for 30 years. I retired from Civil Service.

Louisa: Did you come to Montgomery through Civil Service?

Susan: No. I came to Montgomery through my husband who was active duty military, and we were sent to Montgomery while he was still on active duty, and he retired here. And then I took a job at Maxwell.

Louisa: That was your first husband?

Susan: Second.

Louisa: Second.

Susan: I got remarried.

Louisa: You divorced. And did you remarry up north?

Susan: Yes.

Louisa: And came here.

Susan: Yes.

Louisa: Your husband is from...

Susan: My husband is from Canada.

Louisa: Canada. And he lived in New York? and you met him up there?

Susan: (nods affirmative). Anyway, he...the children are adopted. He adopted the children. One was just a baby and the other one was only four years old.

Louisa: During that period when you lived in New York, did you seek out a network of other survivors as your friends?

Susan: No. I didn't seek out anybody. I have stayed friends with my two friends that we went through together all of it, and we maintain that friendship to this very day with Katherine. Kerry died. She got aplastic anemia. And Katherine has a...it's not a lupus, but it is similar. Very rare type things which is under control and it's in remission, but she got it anyway. And I have had so many episode of almost catastrophic illnesses just coming out and disappearing, and then I go a long long period of time without even sneezing or having a headache (laughs), and like the last time I came down with this horrendous attack of gall bladder I didn't even know I had! It was just really a complicated case.

Louisa: Do you think that any of your medical problems are a result of your...

Susan: Every one of them.

Louisa: All of it is a result of your incarceration.

Susan: Right. Right. Right. As a matter of fact, as much as I try to distance myself from the whole thing, I have never asked for restitution from the Germans.

Louisa: You never have?

Susan: I have never asked. I never tried. I never wanted anything from them, which is foolish, because they should have. But I just did not want any part of it, and my husband encouraged me to. Not to. You know, this is so - wrenching thing for me to even talk about it. I am surprised that I can...I am almost putting this as a third person.

Louisa: Uh huh.

Susan: You know? I don't let myself get into it. I'm kind of like an I'm private, an observer, instead of...otherwise I couldn't do it.

Louisa: It's to protect yourself.

Susan: I guess.

Louisa: Did this experience change your religious outlook at all? Your view of God? Or your sense of who you were?

Susan: (nods)

Louisa: Yes? Can you describe how you...

Susan: I believe there is a force. I don't believe God is a...the way you're supposed to perceive...you know, he is everything, knows anything, involved in your everyday affair, looking out for you. I'm sorry. I just can't do that. Because I know better. But I do believe in a Divine Power, like that. Destiny, The Faith. Whatever you describe it. I am not Agnostic. I do believe, but I do not believe in organized religion. And more so, I don't believe here, where they use religion as a social activity. A country club of some sort, where they give you in your churches - this sounds terrible, but this the way I feel about it - where they give you in your churches...it's a sense of belonging, a sense of activity. To me a religion is very private. It's between God and myself. He's there...the force is there; the power is there. There is a way and a reason why I survived. Maybe it's to have my children; what to give birth to another generation, who probably can achieve something or do something. There is a reason behind it, because why should I survive? Why should I be capable of having children? Almost everybody I know who came out of the camp never did. And I never had but those two, and it's just strange.

Louisa: Your two best friends didn't have...did they have children?

Susan: Katherine did. Very difficult times. She so badly and desperately wanted, that she has a son, but Ferry never did. And like I said, she died of aplastic anemia. I, ah, I don't know how to explain that. As I said, I do believe, but my faith has been shaken up. There were people in that camp, Louisa, whose faith never changed. There were people there who accepted

that as a punishment. But I can't. I cannot see innocent children, babies. There's no God, ever, want this to happen. I don't believe in that. There was just nothing but human cruelty and insanity who brought that on us. Just like we got an insane person who's going to bring some bad bad trouble in the world. So, I don't um...it's very difficult for me to join a church or go to a synagogue. My mother has faith. She believes still. She's not shaken, but my mother I don't think quite had the understanding of it all, the way I have it. The rituals are important to her. She says, 'If I die, who is going to say a ~~'meszer'~~ <sup>(special prayer for the dead)</sup> for me?' I said, 'I don't know. I tried it once here when she was so ill, and I called a rabbi and he refused to come.' So. (shrugs.)

Louisa: Why?

Susan: He said we are not members and he doesn't know her. And so, since then, the first time I had anything to do, or even mentioning the whole thing, was when Bea (Cohen) was talking to me at the exercise class. And I had never had any contact or say or anything. I told Mom, 'If you pass away,' and she is going to be cremated, because that is her wish. It is not what the Jews normally do, but, since so many of us died the same way, I guess one more is not going to make any difference. And I said, 'I'll take your ashes to Hungary,' and that's what I have to do. And I'll get <sup>the</sup> eight people over there to say the Kaddish for you.' But hopefully I won't have to do that.

As far as the children, they know their background. They both know who I am. I never talk to them about the camp. I never discussed anything, not until such time <sup>when</sup> Diane asked me questions. She knew that I was a survivor, that I came out from the camps and she asked me because she was going to do a project in school. But I didn't know that. She just asked me a question and I told her, and the next thing I got a letter the professor, who since then passed away. He said that I must be a very remarkable mother, because I have a very remarkable daughter. And I didn't know what she did. And that took guts, because that was at Huntingdon.

Louisa: So she was essentially an adult when you told her about this?

Susan: Yes. I sure did. And she very much identified with it, you know. She's not following in any faith with any religion. But she knows who she is. Now Leslie, on the other hand, she knows it, but it doesn't faze her one way or

another. She's very proud of it. She will tell anybody, but she's not a practicing Jew. None of us are.

Louisa: Have you returned to Germany or Hungary for vacation?

Susan: I went to Hungary...that was kind of a sentimental journey...I wanted my mother, while she was still able to, to go back, and we stayed for three weeks. But I have not been back since, and I'm not going back.

Louisa: Was it a positive visit, or was it very difficult?

Susan: It was difficult, because I wanted to think of the good part of my life, but I couldn't.

Louisa: When did you go?

Susan: In 1978.

Louisa: So it was very much under Soviet domination.

Susan: Yes. It was.

Louisa: And did you have trouble getting in and moving around?

Susan: No. None whatsoever.

Louisa: You haven't told me how you became reunited with your mother.

Susan: Ah! I had a friend, who was kind of running back and forth between Germany and Hungary, and there was no mail connection then. You know, the mail was not running. And he came back one day and I told him, I said, 'Go to this address and look up and see who you can find for me. The people who live there if they know anybody.' And he came back and he said, 'I found your Mom.' I said, 'You didn't!' He said, 'Yes. Your mother was in Bergen Belsen. She returned, and she's in Budapest.' And I managed through pulling strings... at that time the border wasn't tightened down that it became later on... that she could come for a visit to Germany. And I have met my mother in Germany once before I came to the States. But then we had difficult times, because that Cold War just tightening up. I could not get any mail to her, because they were watching. She could not go to the consul because they were taking pictures of people who were going to the American Consulate. So I had a cousin in England, from my mother's side, and I used to send to her money from here, and she was able to send some packages to her.

Louisa: You sent money from here to England, and...

Susan: ...and my cousin sent packages, because they would allow from England. And this went on for several years. I tried to ask my uncle...shortly after I came here, I tried to ask my uncle to sponsor her, his sister. My mother was the baby sister, and they wouldn't. So, she could have come out then, but because they didn't, she couldn't come out until 1956. And in 1956 when the Hungarian Revolution was on, but prior to that, the way she came out, it is almost unbelievable. We had tried visas. By that time I was an American citizen. I tried to sponsor her, and I made I don't know how many trips to the consulate, and we did the visa bit and all, and then it expired. They won't let her come. One day she was walking the street and ran into a friend of mine, who became, unknown to my Mom, a KGB agent. We did not know that. He lost his family. He was Jewish and he lost his family. He came to visit Mom, and <sup>he</sup> was married and didn't have a place to stay, and we still had the apartment. At that time they did not move a whole bunch of people in, and mother said, 'You can bring your wife and stay with me. I'd rather have people living with me that I know.' And then mother was very good to his wife, who was very young and lost her parents and her whole family, and she told this friend of mine how much she would like to come to the States, and they wouldn't let them give her a visa. Two weeks after that they came home and they said, 'Pack your bags. I got you a passport. You had better be ready to leave tomorrow.' And that's the way my mother came out!

Louisa: So he probably got her apartment.

Susan: He got her out! He got her out of there. But shortly after ~~that they had to~~... that was in 1956, but before the uprising, and Mother got as far as Vienna... she couldn't bring anything, she couldn't do anything, just pack up and go. She got to Vienna, and then, in Vienna, she applied for...I had my cousin in England, her husband's sister <sup>who</sup> lived in Vienna. So when she applied for a passport, you know, a visa to come, they called me. They knew me by that time at the consulate, and they said, 'You have to come and to prove that she is your mother.' They took a blood test from me, and they did one from Mom in Vienna, and they matched it to know that she was my mother. There was no other way, you know, we had no papers, no nothing. She came out on a (whispers uncertainly) what federation sponsored her...I don't remember now - in New York. The attorney from the consulate got me in touch with this group of people. And they're the ones

who go to the National Council of Jewish Women. And that's the way my mother came.

Louisa: A group from New York paid for her passage.

Susan: Passage, yes. And she came in May 1956.

Louisa: And you were on Long Island.

Susan: I was on Long Island, and she has been with me ever since.

Louisa: When did you become an American citizen?

Susan: Ah, 1950. See, I was a war bride. I didn't have to wait 5 years. '50 or '51. I came in '48.

Louisa: And when did you first vote in an American election?

Susan: I don't remember, but I think I voted ever since I became a citizen.

Louisa: Because this had special meaning for you?

Susan: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

(suffles papers) I had a little book in here...right here. I'm trying to...Ferry wrote it down the best way...Yes, it means a great deal to me. Yes, this is freedom. I never lived in...I'm going to get this. I'm going to give this to you, because I think she wrote that in English. That's the best way. And this is in her handwriting. She was very very bright, very smart, very well educated. She went to school in Switzerland; that's when she learned English. So. It's a shame <sup>that</sup> she had to die, because she loved this country more than... (tearful)

Louisa: Where did she live?

Susan: She lived on Long Island.

Louisa: And you saw her there?

Susan: Oh, yes! A lot. We were there. She used to come almost every weekend, and we were just...she was Godmother to my older daughter. This is a little thing that she wrote, and she typed, the way she felt when she came to this country.

Louisa: And it's in English. May I copy this and give it back to you?

Susan: Yes, surely.



Louisa: Oh thank you!

Susan: ...kind of expressive. She was starry-eyed about the United States. She always wanted to come here. I didn't. See, that's the difference. I love this country. To me, this is my home. I found peace here. I found freedom here. I have my family here, and I would do anything that I could in my power to help, whenever they would need my help, to do so. But I could see the faults, the weaknesses, I could see the shortcomings. Ferry never did. She never did. I remember, the only thing she brought back from Hungary when we did that march and we finally arrived in Germany, was a Leica camera, because she used to work as a reporter, so she figured she'd be able to earn her living as a reporter. And we were in Ravensburg, that little town, where I used to be before we went there. One day the doorbell rang, and there was two American soldiers at the door. They were looking for a lady who would do laundry. That lady lived in another apartment, so Ferry showed them where the apartment was. And then they wanted to know if they can get some water, and so she said, 'Sure, come on in.' German apartments have a long narrow hallway, and they have, like , a little table there, and she had her camera on the table, and the kitchen was there, and she went to get them the water. When she came back with the water, they were gone and took her camera. (Laughs) To me, it was an unbelievable act, and it was horrible! And to her, it was all right. That was the only thing we had any value for. We were going to make our fortune with her camera, and it was gone, and, of course, we never recovered it. They told us to go, but we didn't even know that. They had all kinds of better things all around us, and, oh, we didn't know who, which was who, where. So they took her camera. Katherine and I, we were devastated. Ferry was just... 'They wanted it, and they needed it, and they probably never had a camera...so be it...' That was her way.

Louisa: Yeah.

Susan: That's the kind of person. An American could never do any wrong in her eyes. And she had some rough times here. She didn't have it all that easy either, although she landed a very good job and she was a foreign correspondent. She worked for the United Nations and she worked for a big...oh, Schenley whiskey company, and she handled their foreign accounts. And, so she died.

Louisa: Did she marry?

Susan: Yes. She married a Czech, a man from Czechoslovakia.

Louisa: Have you had, over the years, flashbacks or nightmares about your experience.

Susan: I constantly have nightmares. (Laughs)

Louisa: Presently?

Susan: Not so much anymore, but sometimes. Usually when I am sick, or if I am in great pain and they gave me some pain killers. I don't like to take it, because for some how they put me in a third stage...

Louisa: You hallucinate.

Susan: ... gives me some very bad flashbacks. It's like being there or taste it or smell it or seeing, and that's bad. So, I normally don't take too much. I'd rather take the pain than take too much of this.

Louisa: Have you ever needed therapy to help you deal with your, with any feelings you had, especially in the early years?

Susan: If I needed therapy, I wouldn't know, was too ignorant to know it. And I think through the years I came to terms with myself. No, I didn't. How can anybody help me, when they didn't go through what I did? You know? I know myself well enough...

Louisa: Unless it was a group situation that dealt with survivors anyhow.

Susan: Yeah, but the people who are dealing with survivors are not survivors themselves, so the only people who can deal with your problem is the one who went through the same thing as you did.

Louisa: As you think back over the War years and your family's experience, who are your heroes?

Susan: My father. My father, whose pride carried him all through it all. He gave me the values that I had to survive, because I was not a sheep and I am proud of that. It was my father.

Louisa: Do you have anything else that you'd like to say that I have not asked you?

Susan: No. I don't think so. Do you have any more questions; I'd be willing to talk to you about different subjects, or how I feel about

different things. I do have that, for my later years now, I have a little problem with my identity, but I'm dealing with it. Part of me, 'The Great Escape', as I call it, you know. You come into a new country, and your person would change what you are. But you don't. You are always the same person. You know, you could put the cosmetics on, but deep down, you are who you are. That has given me questions. Have I done the right thing to come to America? Should I go with my people, to whatever awaits or the fate will bring to them? Because...

Louisa: You mean back in Hungary?

Susan: Back in Israel. Never to Hungary.

Louisa: Oh, back in Israel.

Susan: I have lost, I have lost whatever I had for Hungary. That trip back, the flashbacks that I had...they were all bad. When I saw a policeman, I thought of the gendarmes. When I went to the countryside, I could see the march. I could see what those people were doing, and basically, as I hate to say, things did not change in Hungary. The deep-seated anti-Semitism is there and worse than ever. Now they are blaming the Jews again for the Communists, and a lot of the people who returned, and that is not a few, but a handful who has returned, has taken jobs with the government. A lot of them took revenge, and I can't blame them. I cannot blame them. And because things did not turn out the way the people wanted, it's all their fault and it is due to the Jewish-Communist conspiracy. And it's the same old thing that was fifty years ago, so things did not change.

END OF TAPE 3

Louisa: ....the fourth tape and the interview (laughs) with Susan Eisenberg. You were talking when the third tape ran out about you have questions about your Jewish identity, and you have been searching for a while, how you feel, and you said that sometimes you wonder should you have gone to Israel.

Susan: Yes.

Louisa: So, would you continue.

Susan: My loyalties, based on my past experience, I feel that if I would have gone to Israel when I was young and strong and full of ideals, because I was even after the camps, I could have been a very contributing factor in the establishment when they first started. Remember? In 1948 when Israel was first established, a lot of the people who were there on the ground was people I knew. People, a lot of them camp inmates, that they suffered, they went through, and at that time (clears throat) I just wanted to run and escape and put it all behind me. But that was really irrational, because, now that I am 66 years old, I think, that whatever happens to the people in Israel...I am part of it. I should have been there when they <sup>were</sup> first became a statehood, and if they have to go down the wire, I want to be there if they have to go down, and whatever happens to them.

See, I feel I run out of my commitment. (Clears throat) I'm not Hungarian anymore. I have no contacts. I have no interest. I have no desire. They have killed all that in me a long time ago. But, in Israel we have something in common: the suffering, the sacrifice, the making a last stand to be proud. You know, even if you have to die, if you die on your feet fighting, it's a heck of a lot different than to be shoved into a gas chamber and die like like mice or cockroach, or whatever. And I think you call it pride, dignity. I feel now, that I sold out, really.

Louisa: You feel this is a lack in your personality, now, to have a group to identify with on that very basic level?

Susan: On that level. Now there is several generations. There is at least two generations now since all this came about. You know, the one who are, 'Israel is a very mixed, confused (laughs), conglomerate of Jews from all over', and a lot of them carried their own nationality, their identity with them. I know there is the German Jews who are just as insufferable as the Germans. Because I knew several of them. They carried the same, same things with them. Then there is the

Hungarian, and there is the Polish, and there is the Russians who were in the pogroms and persecuted and always lived in a ghetto. I am different than the Polish Jews. They always lived in their own little conclave, their little environment. They were always put down. They were always afraid for their lives, except in the big cities, but mainly, basically, they lived in a ghetto. But not the Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian Jews were part of the main stream, just like the American Jews are right now. They are so similar to the Hungarian Jews. So, all of this came in play when Israel was founded, and the people still fight among themselves. They have their differences. They're very vocal. There is all kind of things going on, just like with any countries where there is different nationalities. But, basically, they are always in the track of extinction. (brief laugh/gasp from Louisa) If that happens, I feel I should have been there. I can't help that, you know? This is a pay-back. And I think that God, He ... (choked up) but then on the other hand, I wouldn't have had the kids, and my grandchildren. And I have a wonderful husband, who is...he is taking care of my Mom. Now, how many years? She has always been with us. If I want to go out, if I want to go on a trip, he's home with her. Now, how many men would do that? He loves her dearly. He looks after her better than I do.

Louisa: Well, you're blessed.

Susan: I am blessed. I am blessed. And he is not a Jew. So, that doesn't go, but I think this is my biggest regret.

Louisa: He must, though, have a certain capacity for understanding that you have been together under these happy circumstances all these years.

Susan: Yes. Yes. I think has a lot to do with it. He is very understanding, and I tell you the truth, I never talk to him about my past. Never. I never bring it out. I never tell him any details because it's just something in my past that he knows of, but I think it hurts him if I talk about it. I don't and...

Louisa: So you don't talk about it to protect him?

Susan: No. No. Which is...it's just something...if I'm really need, have a great need to talk about it, he would listen. But he will understand my feelings.

Louisa: And it's OK with him that I am here with you today talking about this?

Susan: Oh, yes. Yes. I have asked him that, you know, I said, 'Look, if they

asked me a year ago, I wouldn't have done it. But', I said, 'now I feel this is the smallest thing I can do, for whatever it is worth, it is at least a testimony. They know this is the truth. You can't make up stories like that, even though some of our Jewish (laughs) friends think that it is just, just a make-believe. That was the main reason why I agreed to this.

Louisa: Some Jewish people think it's make-believe?

Susan: Yes. There is this Jewish lawyer, a friend of my friend, who, they were at a gathering, and he thought it was just made up!

Louisa: Do you ever have...are you in any conversations with Christian friends, or maybe your in-laws, that get you feeling uncomfortable about this subject?

Susan: I had one...

Louisa: Either about Jews or about Hitler or about anything...are there any squirmy situations you get into where...

Susan: I have been into several very squirmy situations, and I walked away from them a lot of times. I just ignored it and walked away from it, until there was one incident...

Louisa: Literally? You walked away?

Susan: Uh huh. Literally. I walked away. I would not speak up. I would not discuss. I just walked away. But there was one instance, and it was several years ago, and it happened in Canada. We were there for Christmas, and my sister-in-law's family are Lithuanians. Comes a big family and there's a lot of people there for<sup>a</sup> Christmas Eve party, and we went, and we were there, and I was in the room and there was a Lithuanian minister and his wife, a so-called 'displaced person' who was placed in a displaced person camp in Germany and came. But I know why the Lithuanians were in a displaced person camp, because they were afraid <sup>the</sup> Russian come and catch 'em and hang 'em. (laughs) So, they all, when the German armies move back, all the sympathizers move back to Germany, and they set up this big displaced person center.

Louisa: So you think she was a ...

Susan: She was a daughter or part of the Nazi establishment. I didn't guess, I knew it! And, they were talking, and of course, like I said, nobody knows who I am really. My sister-in-law does, but, you know, these people didn't know who

I was. A little kid came in the room and was misbehaving, and this woman grabbed the kid and said, 'If you don't behave yourself, I'm going to let the Jews take you.' That was in my sister-in-law's house.

And then, I thought to myself, Susan, 'Enough is enough is enough.' I lit into that woman; you would not believe. You would not believe it! I a spade a spade. I says, 'Listen. I don't care what story you are saying to the rest of the people here, but you are not sharing with anything.' I says, 'I know who you are. I know where you came from.' I says, 'You or your father must have been one of the guards in the camps that I was a prisoner and,' I says, 'I happen to be a Jew.' And I says, 'And we are not buying kids', I says, 'It was your people who killed all our kids.' She stood there shaking, and I says, 'You're scared' I says, 'because if I really go after you', I says, 'they found out that you are one of the daughter or wife or the son, or whatever. But your family could have been very easily one of the war criminals, because Canada is crawling with them.' (silence) They were speechless!

Louisa: I bet they were!

Susan: I lost it. I really did. And I says, 'Don't you ever, ever threaten young innocent children with stories like that.' I says, 'A Jew would never harm a young child.' I says, 'On the contrary, it was your people who shoved our children into the gas chambers and in the ovens.' She knew exactly what I was talking about.

Louisa: That killed Christmas that year, didn't it?!

Susan: That killed Christmas! (Both laugh) I went up to my room, and my husband went to come for me and couldn't find me. I was crying. I was very upset. And he came and I told him, I says, 'I'm sorry.' They were going to say the blessing or whatever to the dinner, and they left.

Louisa: This family left?

Susan: That couple, yes. My sister-in-law came in and I told her what happened. She said, 'Good for you.' She said, 'I wish I knew it. I would have never had them in my house.' There's a lot of things that can be said about her, but in that respect she's all right. She apologized. I apologized, because it was at her house. I was her guest, you know...this was something I would not do under normal circumstances.

Louisa: Yes, but that was a gut reaction.

Susan: Ah! That was a gut reaction. So that was one time, that I really stood up for being a Jew. (Laughs)

There was other occasions that I kind of set the record straight, but without really revealing who I was or what I was. They just don't...well, she's European, she lived over during the War, so she knows what she's talking about.

Louisa: You could have said you were in the camp because your family was Gypsies!

Susan: Well, they died, too. I didn't look like a Gypsy. Now, this friend of mine who's coming, she could pass for one. And I think she does have Gypsy blood from her father's side...Katherine, but she was in the camp because she's... her mother is Jewish. See, according to the laws of the land, your mother is Jewish, you are Jewish. Period. So.

But, before, like I said, I walked away. But, now, I'm not walking away from it anymore. (Clears throat) And so, when I mentioned it to my husband, and we have the meeting, he said, "You do what you want to do. It's up to you." And I told him, I said, 'I had a need to do that.' And he said, 'Just go right ahead.'

Louisa: If you could create a memorial to the Holocaust, you know, we talked before turning on the tape about the planned building in Washington, and you expressed your misgivings about that...if you could create a fitting memorial, what would you create?

Susan: A Holocaust memorial does not belong in the United States. The Jews in the United States did not suffer. You cannot, you cannot (clears throat) feel what we feel. You have not been through any hardship. You have never experienced, you don't even experience an isolation, because you're not. You are part of everything else that's going on here, very much like we did. And the people here, a minority number of people, maybe, cares. The majority of the people could not give a hang about a Holocaust or the Holocaust victims. And that's the truth. It's only going to live in the mind of a few intellectuals, scholars, historians. They need the data to refer to. But on the whole, to make a memorial that only means something to the Jews, is not going to mean flick to the rest of the population of the United States. So, I really don't feel this is the place for it.



To me, if I...they need the data. I firmly believe in that. They need to report. It need to have a record of it somehow. If it's in libraries or testimonials...things like that. But, to have a museum with the things left over from the camps...just another tourist attraction, maybe. I hate to say that. Most of the people do not even know, with the few exception of this handful that I described is going to go to the Holocaust Museum to see. Unless you drag them over there. It's not a comfortable thing for people, and not come see other minorities. You know, Oh, they could have a memorial for the Kurds, that Sadaam obliterated. I don't know many Armenians, they can have it. They've been slaughtered by the Turks. There was a, the same thing, look at in Africa. So there could be a memorial...I mean, let's fact it, what happened to the Jews was absolutely horrendous, but genocide is happening. Continuously. It's not the Jews alone. This...

Louisa: I can't imagine a Genocide Museum where there's a gallery here for this group and a...it's not...

Susan: Yes. But, in the same, when you think about it, it could be. I mean, they could have an endless line of museums going down with the artifacts and the stories, as a museum. I don't know. I never thought about it.

I think the people should be aware. There should be something taught in school about it in the textbooks, and it's never happened, but it should be. It should be because it's part of history. It's part of world history, not American history, but it's definitely world history, because it changed everything. The memorial should be built for the victims in Israel. That's where they belong. That is where it have some meaning. Not in the United States. Not for people who are very wealthy, millionaires ten times over and they want something everlasting. You know? (chuckles) Some of them been camp members. Some of them kind of touched it.

Now, Elie Wies<sup>(sic)</sup>ner was in the camps. He's a writer, and he's a poet. He organized a lot of that, and he's credit for it. But, I don't...he also won the Nobel Prize for it, and he's making a darn good living out of it. I mean, this is a horrible thing to say. He became and Establishment. He's something people will look up to and and ask questions and an 'expert'. He's no more expert on the Holocaust as I am, and I'm not.

Louisa: Did you go to hear him, when he came here to speak?

Susan: No. No. I've heard him in Philadelphia. I mean, he's a very good speaker. He's a great man, and I'm not knocking him. Don't get me wrong. Not for one single minute, but I don't think what he experienced is any more than the other thousands who are silent. There are other people beside me, who have the same experience, and never will speak about it. Or the ones who blow their brains out, and never spoke about it. So it is good that he did stand up and has speak. But it's getting out of hand, I think. As a survivor, it's getting out of hand, because they are commercializing it. It's not...the meaning is beginning to get lost.

Louisa: Diluted out.

Susan: Yes. It is become a commercial commodity. Something to display, to show...there is a uniform, there is the picture, they did this. But, there is a lot of people who are, who don't feel the same way, and this is why you are having the Museum, and all this Holocaust gatherings and all that. And I watched <sup>them</sup> in Philadelphia, Katherine and I, which is sad that kind of was. They had big tables set up from Dachau, and big tables for this, and big tables for somebody else. And, ah, we never said anything, we never participated; we were just kind of watched. And I saw people who came over, and, oh, some of them looked pitiful...they still looked like they were...that camp life put something on a person, and...

Louisa: This was a reunion for Holocaust survivors....?

Susan: In Philadelphia.

Louisa: When was this?

Susan: Uh, 19..(thumbs through some papers) how many years...I had all the papers out...I throw them away...

Louisa: Were you invited to this, or did you see an advertisement, or what?

Susan: Katherine called me from New York, and said we ought to go. She said you can come up to New York and then we'll drive to Philadelphia. And that's what I did. No, I wasn't...I get their paper. I get this Holocaust paper, that they put out. It comes quarterly or every three months, or something. And then I get a lot of mail for donations.

Louisa: You do?

Susan: Oh, yes. A great deal for donation, donation, donation, and buy this, and buy a book, and buy the cloak, and buy the hat, and buy...you know, just like you have at any convention. But, I watch people and any...if you weren't somebody who knew somebody, or you weren't part of the ones who were setting up the convention, or part of the really upper organizers...anything you have to say, they weren't listening.

Louisa: Mmmmm!

Susan: Or they put you down.

I remember a lady stood up there, and she was French. She came. I don't even know where she came from. She wanted to tell her experiences, and she stood up, and they escorted her out, because that was an obscure camp somewhere where she was and it was not headline makers.

Louisa: So, there was a hierarchy of importance about this reunion.

Susan: Yes. Yes. Yes. Very much so. Very much so. So, I never went to the others. Never wanted any part of it. It just kind of dropped....Katherine bought a couple of books.

On the other hand, a professor from Boston University, who was writing a thesis and a book about the European Jews, then about the American Jews who in the Holocaust, which was very nice. (chuckles). You know, brought out the fact that a delegation of rabbis to Roosevelt and told him not to do anything, because they don't want anti-Semitism to start in the United States. And this was brought out in his research, and several other things. I went to one of his workshops and it was very interesting, and I enjoyed that part. The rest of it was all glitter and gala and whoop-de-do, and, like I said, little people didn't matter. It was all a show for the sake of television and newspaper coverage and whatever. And it was all the people there who were 'somebody', you know, either financial or very prominent in the television business or communication or any sort. They stood up and anybody give a testimonial; then Mr. So-and-so just donated a million dollars in the memory of Mrs. So-and-so; and then five hundred thousand...and I told Katherine, 'Come on, let's go. We don't belong here.' And we left. We went back to New York.

So, I should not putting them, because it was a gathering, it really was, and they made beautiful speeches and they gave a chance for the different American veteran groups to come out and speak about the Liberation, and the mayor of Philadelphia could make a speech, and the Commander of the Third Army

could make a speech. You know, this is the kind of setting. But, as a survivor, it didn't touch me. It turned me off.

Louisa: Have you had any further contact with this uncle in Cleveland or any other relatives...

Susan: The one in Cleveland died, and I had one contact with my uncle who was my mother's brother in New Jersey, when I first came in 1949...I beg your pardon, it was in '48. He found out where I was, and they called, and said I have to come to visit and to meet the family. And I did, and I went. They were very wealthy people. They lived in Asbury Park. They owned the whole shoreline, one big house after another. All the children had a home. They were driving big cars, and they had big televisions in 1948 and '49. They asked me if I have a television set...I didn't even know what they were talking about.

I went with a friend, a friend of mine who was not a Jewish person, the daughter of this English family, who was so kind to me. She came with me. They introduced me to my aunt, my uncle's wife who was Jewish, American-born. At first, what it was to me, 'Well you don't look bad. And, it couldn't have been so bad in the camp, because you didn't die.' I says, 'If I would have been dead, I wouldn't be here talking to you.' And all the cousins came, and all their families were there to meet me. There was only one cousin who's a lawyer in Brooklyn, who just came to meet me. He has no real contact with him family. I don't think he liked his father and mother (laughs) or the rest of them too well. So, he told me not to take it to heart, but at that time I did not understand English that well, so get the meaning, actions spoke louder.

So, anyway, the night came and they didn't invite me in their houses. Everybody visited with me outside for some reason, I don't know why, but my aunt and my uncle and one of their sons, they took me and my friend to a diner. Some place like 'Ma's Kitchen Diner', something. They ordered for me, and they ordered spaghetti, and my aunt said, 'Eat that. This is all paid for.' And I picked up the plate and dumped it on her! and I said, 'You paid for it; you eat it.' And I walked out! (laughs) I did it! I was pretty unconventional at the time, and by that time I had just about 'had it'. They told me how hard they had in the War, and how they had to suffer with the rationing, and they didn't have nothing. And I knew better, because my uncle became a millionaire

during the War. He owned several garages, and it turned into a manufacturing plant, etc., etc.

My friend and I went to the railroad station and waited all night (laughs) for a train to get into New York, and we left, and I have never seen them since. I got a phone call one time from my uncle and he apologized, and he asked me if I could meet him in New York. By that time they had turned down my request for sponsoring my mother. I said, 'No, we have nothing further to discuss.' And then I got a call from the son who said, 'Don't worry about the family.' He said, 'Susan, Father died this morning. He went to the Mayo Clinic. They gave him a clean bill of health. He came home and had a heart attack, and dropped dead at the breakfast table, and my mother requests your attendance because you are the only relatives on his side.' I said, 'Look, he lived a lifetime without me. He can be buried without me just as well.' I said, 'I'm not a hypocrit,' I says. 'I have no good feelings for him. He let his sister down.' They were so afraid that she was...that they would be responsible for her welfare or for mine, for that matter, that he turned her down, and I thought...

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE A

Tape 4, Side B

Louisa: ....family estrangement, huh?

Susan: And I don't know why, because I did not know them. I have never met them. Or, I know one thing, that <sup>when</sup> my uncle came to this country...the reason he came is because he ran into some trouble at home. He embezzled something, as the family story goes (laughs). So rather than to be punished for it, my father bought him his tickets to come to the United States.

Louisa: Has your mother made a circle of friends since she came to this country. I mean, at least before she turned deaf?

Susan: My mother, when she was younger and could hear, she kind of draw people

to her. She is very kind and very sweet. People just liked to be around her. Even today, I have friends come just to visit Mom.

Louisa: She is very sweet to me when I came in.

Susan: She is. She is. She had friends that...when we lived in New York, she had a lot of friends, because there were a lot of Hungarian-speaking people there. Then, as we travelled, because we lived in Georgia, we lived in Colorado, and we lived in Washington. You know, we lived in a lot of places. It was hard to keep friendships. A couple of times, my mother always made an attempt to be part somehow for the Jewish community, because she is the type of a person, you know. She's not rebellious like I am. Each time she had a bad experience with it, so she finally just gave it up, and she just wouldn't do it no more. Like they told her in Colorado...they had this couple live down the street, and when the High Holidays came, said, 'Well get ready and we'll take you to the temple.' Mother got all dressed and they never came!

That was one time. There was another one in Washington who happened to live next door to us and said, 'Do come over and we will go Friday night to the temple,' and my mother went over there; she was back in five minutes. I says, 'Well, aren't you going?' She says, 'No, I told them I came to go to the temple, and she says 'We are eating dinner and we are not going.' So she shoved the door in her face, and she came home. So mother gave up on that. So we both did.

For some reason...I mean these are all negative experiences with the American Jewish community for some strange reason. I don't know why. But it just kind of got to the point we just quit. Altogether. Like I said, mother made a couple of trips to the temple when she was younger and felt stronger.

Louisa: Is there anything else that you would like to say that I haven't asked you, or that we haven't covered so far?

Susan: I don't think so. You are the one who has the questions if you have anything else. (referring to Louisa's prepared outline of questions)

Louisa: These questions that I've prepared I'm sure are not complete. There is much I don't know, and we've covered everything that I had wanted to cover, and more. Do you have any thoughts for future generations who might listen to this tape? People a hundred years from now?

Susan: The only thing I've got to say is, 'Stand up what you believe in. Very important. You pay the price, then you pay the price for the consequences. And then, you can't run away from what you are. You cannot change yourself. Not really. It's just the same way as you cannot change the world. Be true to yourself. Be who you are, and not be afraid. And that's very important. I think that is the most important thing. Be kind; be kind to people, because it does kind of return, kind of, you know?' The old saying...you treat people the way you want to be treated...it always works out. I tried to do that, even with at the very beginning, it was just blind hatred toward the Germans. You know, it was no rhyme and reason behind it. They all came under one hat. They were Germans, and because they were Germans, that was 'it' for me. I would not distinguish between individuals. They all came under one umbrella - Germans, and that was in my young days, naturally. As I grew older and more tolerant, I do understand a lot where they come from. I understand that there was a lot of them who disagreed, but were afraid to speak. And I can understand the reason behind that, too. When you are threatened the way you are being threatened, you will not speak up. Not everybody's a hero, but in the other hand, Hitler never died for the Germans. Never. And never will die for the Germans. He will be their savior and god as long as there is a German left on the face of this Earth. And I know this is a strong statement, but I lived among them, and I know what I'm talking about. They will not change. They are what they are. They have a lot of great people in there, and there is a lot of people who are very sorry from all the things they allowed to happen in their country, but in the same token, there is more who said Hitler didn't do it  
?  
A few of us escaped...I'm very glad that.

Louisa: Do you have misgivings about reunification?

Susan: A lot. A lot. I think it was...history will bear me out, and Germany will be a super-power. Very, very much in the same lines as it was before. Once all that internal strife will subside, you know, the East Germans versus the wealthy West Germans...once that generation passes and the new one comes in, which will be united...there will be a stronger and more threatening force than it ever was, because they have a basic common thing going through. It's Germany united. It's the fatherland, and for that they want to be number one, and they tried once, they tried twice, they will try the third time. I remember

after the War was over, and I mingled with them, I lived with them, I spoke their language. They didn't know who I was, and they just tell me, and they said, 'The Americans has destroyed Germany'- talking about the bombing - they were rebuilding and were going to be bigger and stronger than ever. And that was right after it was over.

So, yes, I do think that we will have the repercussion from that. Not in my lifetime. I won't see it, because I'm too old for that. But it will come. It will come, and they will have a lot of support. They will have a lot of support.

And another thing - people don't realize it - they think "Freedom!" Now that the communists are gone and everybody can do what they want

the hatred, the ancient dislikes for each other, the mistrust. It's all there. The same way it was in my time. Having the communists moved out now, it will be another force and I'm afraid it will be the Germans, because they know how to play the minorities against each other. They're good at that.

No, I don't want to go to Europe, I...

Louisa: You have no desire to go back, except you went with your mother to Hungary.

Susan: At that time, and I have friends are going. Life is good in Budapest now. It's great. It's like it used to be in the old days. It was always very cosmopolitan. Very beautiful. Very lighthearted. Just a great city. Budapest is a great city. One of the best that I've ever been. I'm not saying that because I lived there, but I lived all over the world, but I really mean it. There is something about that city that is just unique. I was all prepared to go, then I started to getting some information trickling from Hungary back to me about their anti-Semitism and how very outspoken and horrible it is. It's in the newspapers and everything else. And I thought to myself, 'I don't need them. I don't need to see that again. I don't need to relive it again. I don't need to subject myself to it, even though I personally won't be subjected to it, but I will experience it. And a friend of mine, who's non-Jew, but she's Hungarian, and she went back to visit her sister, and she came back, and looked (amused) at me, and she said, 'Susan, if I was a Jew, I would pack my bags in Hungary right now!'



Louisa: Well, that tells you something.

Susan: That tells you something.

Are you cold? My husband wants to put on the air a little bit.

Louisa: I think that if you don't have anything else to say, I'll just...

Susan: No. No. Unless you have anymore questions.

Louisa: I don't. I don't. And I want to thank you, on tape, so much for talking with me today.

Susan: Oh! Thank you to let me talk, really. It was a great help to me.

Louisa: Good!

Susan: Because I have never really sit down and said that to anybody, and I think it's good.

Louisa: Well, that makes me very proud...

Susan: Yes, it is.

Louisa: ...and if you in future months think of anything else you want to say, call me up.

Susan: Okay.

Louisa: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW