

"There is a basement. There is for all the sick ones who can't move," he said. "They lay right there by the basement." So I went. You had to walk about a block or two blocks until I seen people laying down there so I lay down with them. My uncle says to me, "I'll be back a little later." He says, "I'm going to look around, maybe I can see somebody from our family or friend. Maybe I'll find somebody from our *mishpocha* [family], and I'll see you later." It was in the morning around 9:00 or 9:30. In the meantime somebody came up, some American, and he started telling us that we'll have to stay here until they can make room in the hospitals. The hospitals are filled up with German prisoners. They've got to evacuate it to make room for us. . . .

Around 4:00-4:30 in the evening ambulances started driving up and they started taking us to the hospital and it was in Wiedergeltingen by Landsberg am Lech, and then as they put me on that stretcher and they took me to the first time even for a shower and that wasn't for a shower like they call it in the gas chamber—that was a real shower. I'll never forget it. Two American MPs were standing with guns. Two high Germans—they were colonels or whatever, in German uniforms—and [the Americans] were watching them. I was laying all undressed, a skeleton, that's all I was. First of all, they wake me up, they put me on the scale, but I couldn't move. And it weighed exactly fifty pounds and I didn't believe it. And then they took me and they started scrubbing me and washing me, and for the first time in five years I had a shower. After the shower was done, then they put me in a hospital bed.

After spending two years in a hospital, Gordon was taken to a camp for displaced persons at Bad Wörishofen, where he met and married a Polish survivor, Genya (Jean) Letonick. In March, 1949, the Gordons immigrated to the United States and settled on a milk farm belonging to Harry's uncle at Bear Lake, Pennsylvania. After several months, the couple moved to New York City, where Gordon found work as a garment cutter. Dissatisfied with life in New York, the Gordons moved to Madison, Wisconsin, in 1951 and had three children before divorcing in 1969. Harry Gordon held a number of jobs before becoming a self-employed scrap metal dealer; he retired in 1992. Gordon has published an account of his Holocaust experiences, *The Shadow of Death: The Holocaust in Lithuania* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1992), and he continues to speak about the Holocaust at schools.

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Lucy Rothstein Baras

Lucy Rothstein was born on August 15, 1913, in Skalat, a half-Polish, half-Ukrainian town that was part of Poland until 1939 but is now in Ukraine. Her family consisted of her father, Wolf, an orthodox Jewish leather

merchant; her mother, Gustat; and two younger brothers, Joe (b. 1919) and Milo (b. 1923). After graduating from high school in nearby Ternopol, she attended law school in Lvov. In 1933 a law banning Jews from the legal profession forced her to abandon her schooling, and she learned the tailoring trade, returning to Skalat to open her own shop.

If you went north of that marketplace [in Skalat], that was the nice street, the nice neighborhood, and they called it the Corso. When evening came, you know what young boys and girls did for entertainment? They put on their better clothes after supper and they went for a walk. And they walked on that Corso from one end to another, sometimes ten and twenty times during the evening. If you were a little courageous, you walked out a little farther to the north, where there was no more sidewalks, and these couples who went a little bit more, they were already suspicious. People talked about them because they left the sidewalk and went out to the north. Of course, it was that kind of city where people didn't have much to do and developed lots of talk. Gossip was a great part of entertainment. If somebody saw a girl with a boy once, they said, "Oh, they probably date." And if they went off the sidewalk to the north, they probably have kissed already. And so on and so on. You can imagine. That was the kind of life that people lived in those days, and that was entertainment.

Did you attend synagogue on a regular basis?

Not the kids, but my father went every Friday evening, every Saturday evening. If he could, he would go on a weekday, but most of the time he prayed at home because he didn't have time to spend time on the weekday, had to go to the store. Women didn't go to services much. My mother went only on High Holidays.

Did you keep the traditions in the home?

Kosher, yes. Everything was kosher—two separate dishes, and [we] celebrated every holiday and every semiholiday like Chanukah and my mother cooked and baked the traditional dishes for the holidays. . . . In fact, in those days there were very few people who did not keep kosher. Among the 3,000 Jews that lived in Skalat, I doubt ever there were more than ten families who didn't keep kosher, and there were very few who would use a carriage on Saturday, who would drive on Saturday. There were very few cars. No Jew had a car before the war. There were some gentiles who had cars but very few also.



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Rothstein family, Skalat, Poland, 1925: (l. to r.) Wolf, Joe, Rifke Feige (grandmother), Lucy, Milo, and Gusta.

Were any members of your family nonreligious?

No. They were all religious—in fact, very religious. . . . The younger generation did not wear beards but they all kept kosher homes and had kosher meats. It was a very, very rare Jew in Poland—not only in Skalat, in Poland—who did not buy kosher meat.

You attended a Hebrew school?

I started Hebrew school when I was five years old. I started it before I started public school. But the Jewish community was so poor they could not keep a teacher all the time. So whenever they brought a teacher he would stay like one year and he'd leave because they didn't have money to pay him. A year later they brought another teacher, or two years later. So I had started at Hebrew school many times. Every time there was a teacher my parents never failed to send me. But I had to start from the beginning because every teacher who changed started a new class. . . . Once I started high school, I couldn't go to Hebrew school because I didn't have the time. When I was in high school, I had to teach other

children from my same classroom so I get paid because tuition was very high and my father couldn't afford to pay all that. So I couldn't go to Hebrew school.

Were most of your friends Jewish?

Yes, yes, definitely. The groups were very divided and in grade school, if we sometimes had non-Jewish friends, we had to bribe them so that they don't tell the boys to hit us. The girls and boys had separate schools in grade school, but it was in the same building. As I told you, Poland was poor and they didn't build schools. So it was a grade school probably a hundred years old. The first floor was for boys and upstairs was for girls. And if some girls didn't like some [other girls] they would tell the boys, "Beat up this girl." So very often we had to bribe the gentile girls, and we were not close with them.

In September, 1939, the Russians occupied Skalat and the condition of Jews in the city improved. Rothstein acquired a position as a credit officer in a bank. But circumstances changed rapidly after June 22, 1941, when Germany declared war on Russia and moved troops eastward. In July, 1941, Nazi forces overran Skalat and murdered about 400 men, including Rothstein's father.

[The Germans] came in the middle of the night, Friday to Saturday. In the morning my father got up, and he put on his Sabbath clothes—he wants to go to synagogue. In order to go to synagogue, he has to cross through the marketplace, and we had a gentile friend—he was a customer of ours, he used to buy a lot in the store. He was a shoemaker, and he used to buy a lot of leather. And he was a very nice man, real premium. And early in the morning he knocked on the door and said to my father, "Don't dare to go anywhere." My father and my brother, Milo—Ioc was at that time in the Russian army—they were going to go to services. And he told us the story. He said the Germans came in the middle of the night and this morning they killed already a few Jews in the city, among them a boy who was eighteen years old, had just graduated from high school, from the Hebrew high school in Lvov, and was the only son of a widowed mother, a very good-looking young boy. So he said, "Stay home and hide, because they are running from house to house and taking Jews to work." So my father and brother took off their Sabbath clothes and we put them in the basement. That basement had a trap door from the hall, and we closed the door. What else could we do? Mother and I were upstairs, were in the house.

And then the German soldiers started to come in with young Ukrainian boys, because the Germans didn't know where the Jews lived. Don't forget that they don't speak same language, the Germans and the Ukrainians. The Ukrainian knew only the word *Jude* [Jew], so they showed them with a finger where a *Jude* lived, and of course they broke into our house and there were no men. They didn't ask questions, they just opened the basement and hauled out the two men. And the shoemaker came and told us that they take men to work, so my father and brother put on strong clothes, and we also heard about concentration camps, so we thought maybe they take them into concentration camps, so they put on good, strong clothes. My brother, I remember, wore riding pants and good, new riding boots and a new shirt and a suit coat. And my father was dressed about like that, too. And my father didn't wear riding boots, but good clothes. And that was in the morning, Saturday morning.

In the afternoon they were not back, and we talked to all the neighbors. They had taken all the men from them and nobody was home, so women started to run around the marketplace and look for the men. And of course there were already all kinds of rumors that many Jews were killed and some are working hard. Oh, about four o'clock in the afternoon my brother came back in his pants and barefoot. So what happened? Where is father? "I don't know," he said. "Right away they separated us." My brother worked washing cars and trucks, so the Germans took off all his clothes, left him only his pants. They said a Jew didn't need such good clothes, and then one German told him he may go home, sent him home. But he said not everybody was sent home. That was Saturday. My father didn't come back.

Sunday morning, we heard that there were bodies in the basement of one of the towers [of an old castle on the outskirts of the city]. And one young boy came out and told the story. They put in a few hundred men—statistics later showed it was 400—they pushed all these men inside and threw a few hand grenades. And that boy was not [dead]. He came out in the morning. Nothing hit him. He just lay about among those dead bodies the whole night—he was afraid to move. In the morning when day broke, he saw it was quiet, so he crawled out, of course all bloody, but he wasn't even injured, and he told how it happened. . . . At that time my father didn't come back, but they started to bring every day, the Germans would catch a group of Jewish men to dig graves and bury those, and at the end of the day they shot these. That was going on for a few weeks until finally they formed a *Judenrat* [Jewish Council, the Nazi-appointed governing body of the Jewish community, responsible for enforcing Nazi orders, including rations, labor, and deportations].



*Lucy Rothstein, Ternopol,
Poland, 1932.*

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German persecution of Jews increased, and a ghetto was established in Skalat. Nazi troops would periodically sweep through the ghetto and forcibly removed people. Fearing for their lives, many people, including the Rothsteins, constructed hiding places in their houses. The Rothsteins constructed a bunker under a false outhouse attached to their residence. Upon hearing that the Nazis were rounding up Jews in Skalat, the Rothsteins and a neighbor boy named David entered the bunker.

Milo was the last one [in] and he put the board on top of the hole from the bottom, put the pail back on, and closed that side board, and we sat there for two days and two nights. Mother had prepared water and bread and a candle and matches there. They were always in there. And we heard upstairs, they had broken into the house and they broke dishes and there was jingling and clattering and everything else and then we heard screaming. Where our basement was, on the other side of the wall was the basement of David's family, and they were taken out and we heard them scream. Imagine what was going on. And of course [we] covered the boy's mouth so he doesn't scream because he heard all that.

That started in the morning. So the first day and night and other day. The second night it was quiet. Early in the morning the same man who recommended us who should build the bunker came. It was also prearranged. He knew where the bunker is, in which part of the kitchen. It was under the kitchen. He started to stand with his feet on the floor and started to yell, "Mrs. Rothstein, you may come out. It's over." And we came out. And then we found out that 2,000 Jews were taken out on that day.

A labor camp was established in Skalat in early 1943. Lucy Rothstein was appointed personal seamstress to the local Nazi overseer; her husband-to-be, Edward Baras, was the overseer's farm administrator. Several months later, Lucy, her mother, and her brother, Milo, fled the camp and hid in a nearby forest because of rumors that the camp was to be liquidated.

Milo and I and mother started to walk toward the forest; where should we go? The forest was very, very close to the village and was also great danger because it was close. First we stopped in the house of the forester. There was a tiny house, a very small house where a very poor forester lived and was right next to the quarry where the Jews worked. And he was known that he used to help the Jews. Was a very nice, very poor man but a very good man, and he would help the people who worked on the quarry. I don't know how he helped them, but somehow he did. He had a good name. We peeked into his window and saw a candle and his wife was feeding the baby, but we figured she would not let us in because every Jew would go to him. There are so many working on the quarry he knew all of them. How could he hide all the Jews?

So we opened the door to the barn and there was a cow. And it was at least warm. It was summer, but it was a very cold night. So we huddled down next to the cow, and we spent the rest of the night there. In the morning the forester came in and he was very scared. He said, "I cannot keep you here." He said, "I have already Jews in my attic. I can't [keep you, and it's too dangerous] here in the open barn." So he took us to the forest and showed us a cave that we should get in there. We still had a little money that Milo hadn't lost. The money was in a different place than the jewelry, and it was not very much anyway, so we gave him whatever we had, to the last penny. We stayed three weeks, and he would bring us a bottle of water and a half loaf of bread, about once a week, sometimes once in five days, so after we had stayed there a few days, I said, "You know what? I'll go and see where Eddie is. Maybe he can help us." I didn't know that he was not on the estate anymore.

I wore that farmer dress still—I didn't have anything else, so I wore that outfit, and I said, "You know, in the evening, I will go." And we were not supposed to be outside when it was dark because there were militia—Ukrainian militia—and the Ukrainians were very bad toward Jews, most often much worse than the Poles. The underground belonged to them—the Poles didn't have anything to say.

So I cross a little bridge and I see an old man with a cane walking, and I give him the Christian greeting. They say Jesus is great, or something like that—I can't translate it exactly from the Ukrainian language. And he answered me in his own language, so I figured somehow, with my glasses, he is not suspicious at all. But he was old, with a cane, he thought that I am one of the village. And I went to Eddie's house, and the front hall—to the right was his door, and straight ahead the gardener lived. And there is a padlock hanging on this door. So I thought, "What should I do?" If I go into the gardener, it's like I mentioned before. He can right away go to the village and bring the police. But we are so terribly hungry that I figured I have to do it. I went in. They talked very nicely to me. They said, "Baras is gone. He had to go in hiding. . . . [The Germans] put a price on his head, and we don't know where he is." I didn't say I'm hungry, but he gave me bread. I didn't tell him that we are hungry, I told him that Mother and I are in a cave. I didn't tell him where. I said we are in the forest, but he knew that every Jew is hungry, so he gave me a half a loaf of bread.

And I go back with that half a loaf of bread under my arm, and here I see the militia, and they are right in front of me, and they recognize me [as a Jew] right away. . . . [They said,] "Let's take her to the office." And I started to bargain with them. I kept on saying, "Please tell me, what will come out for you, what will you gain from that." And you know that I persuaded them. We bargained like that maybe ten minutes, and one of them said, "Let her go."

So I came back to the forest, I couldn't find my cave. I remembered I bent in a little tiny tree that I know where the entrance is—I couldn't find, absolutely. I had to wait until daylight. And of course, my mother and Milo worried inside that I will not come back. . . . Most people when they left did not come back. More not than yes. In the morning my mother crawls out. It was still dark but then I knew where it was. So we had food for another day or two.

After about two weeks in the forest, Lucy's mother returned to town to dispose of some of the Rotbstains' goods so that they could buy food. She never returned. Later the forrester told Lucy and Milo that their mother had been captured by the Nazis.

Then that forester said to us [that] he simply cannot feed us. He was a very poor man, I knew that. So he said, "I'll show you where Jews live in the forest." He took us one night and drove us directly to the Jewish group. Many people knew where the Jews lived, but probably very few were willing to show it. . . . [That forester] took us to another forest, quite far from the city, which was much better. And there was another forester, who knew about us. Without the help of outsiders and gentile people, nobody in the forest would have survived. You had to eat—that was the main problem. So he brought us to the group, with which we stayed to the end. Of course, we had to change places very often; there was danger in the forest, too.

How many people were there then in that group in the woods?

A different number of people all the time. When I came to that group, there were maybe ten people. And we also kept on changing our way of living. Like with that first group you would sleep daytime and live nighttime because these people thought that at night when you cook they don't see the smoke in the village. Then we moved to another group, there was just the opposite. They said, yes, you can see smoke, so we changed to normal life. Most of the time I would say the groups were about seventeen, twenty people, twenty-five were some groups. There were a few groups, not many, a few groups in each forest. There were groups there were only six, seven people. Were all sizes. There was danger.

Like summertime we just lived among the trees. At one time we had built from brush, from wood, like a little tent, but you couldn't do it often because we didn't want to break the trees. The more trees you broke, the more bushes you broke, the more footsteps you left, the more danger it was. . . . When you went out you wanted to carry as much as possible so you don't have to go often, because every footprint was a danger. Like one group was once discovered because they carried straw from somewhere. I don't know if it was stolen or maybe some farmer gave it to them. They wanted to sleep on straw. So the straw gave them away. They left marks somewhere. You had to be very careful how you lived.

What kind of daily routine did you have?

Eating was the whole routine. See, when there was a group of twenty, twenty-two, you had to cook. We were a lucky group. We were

comparatively the richest group in the forest because there was one family with us who supplied the food. They were quite wealthy and they had connections in the city. They would buy a whole sack of potatoes, these small salad potatoes, . . . and the farmer would bring it to the forest. Of course, every one of us would go once in a blue moon—even I went, my brother and I went, to the city where we had stuff hidden away from the farmers, at the gentile houses. I once tried to go to [a family friend] also, never found the place. I didn't go alone, I went with another man who said he knew the place, but we never found it.

So there were many people who knew that you were hiding but did not turn you in?

Yes. There were four gentile farmers on the edge of the city, four brothers had four cottages. The rich ones never let us in, never sold us anything, not never gave, never sold us anything. But the poorest one of them would always supply, and if one of us didn't have enough money or goods to pay, he said to forget about it. But none of them gave us away. That was besides the forester.

Why did you take that risk?

We had to take the chance. There was no doubt about it. We had to take the chance, yes. When we went to the city, we took a terrible chance, because many of them were killed going to the city. But what else can you do—starve yourself? There was one in another group, but in the same forest, who was afraid to go out for food. He only ate what somebody gave him. People had pity on him and gave him something. Finally, everybody was starving. People didn't want to share with somebody who wouldn't go. So finally he decided he will go. The minute he went out of the forest he was killed. One German and one local man, a gentile, were going hunting. They had the guns with them, and they saw him and they killed him. So it's luck. He never went out; that was the first time he went out. So everybody who went out searching for food risked his life. But still, we considered instead of starving it's still better to die a different death than starving is the worst death. The slowest and the worst.

Were you able to get any additional clothing to help you get through the winter?

Clothing, yes. I went to another farmer, another man, another shoemaker who used to be our customer and also used to help us and I knew that my father's clothes was there. Lots of my father's clothes was there. So Milo and I went to him and he gave us some. So the rest of the war I wore my father's pants and my father's shirts and so did Milo. We went to him and he gave us some clothes.

Did everyone in the group have adequate clothing?

Oh yes, everybody had something in the city, and if [what you were wearing] wore out completely, you'd go and get it. But we all were in rags. For instance, I went to a few places where I had, and once I picked up my good black coat, woolen coat, and it was not the smooth material, it was wool. It had a knotty material, and we walked off into the branches. When we walked in the woods we didn't go on the main road. Of course, we tried through the thickest to go. We hid always only in young forest because the older forest have big trees and it's far from one to the other, like a foot or two. So we looked for those young forests that hadn't been thinned out yet. And you tore your clothes terribly. Especially with that coat that the material was not smooth. I had all kinds of colors of patches on that coat. I had green patches and blue patches and everybody looked like that, and you wore coats, so around the waistline you wanted to have something tight. So you had a rope if you found one, or a string or whatever. If you had a loose coat, you froze. So we really looked something, believe me. And the feet, rags of course. Nobody had shoes anymore. You had your old shoes with open soles and you wrapped them around with rags and rags on top of rags. That's what you all had. Nobody had a decent pair of shoes.

Did you have any kind of religious life in the woods?

Yes. Somehow they always knew when the holiday was and they even had a prayer book with them. I don't know how they got it, but there was a prayer book, and when the holiday came, [they prayed]. I don't think Saturdays, not. Saturdays there was nothing. But we were there during the High Holidays, and they prayed, yes. That was only time as far as I remember, holidays. There was Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

Did you discuss how God could be allowing this to happen?

No, this is funny. Let me see, I cannot remember. You know what the main discussion was? If I had a tub of milk I would put myself inside, something like that. And white rolls and milk or a cup of milk and a cup of chocolate and cake and something like that. But discussions about God, no, there were none. Not in our group until after the war. During the war nobody mentioned God. The prayers were mechanical. But after the war there was an awful lot of discussion. Suddenly he came to life, and the people that I knew after the war kept on asking, "Where is God?" That's all. Very few would say God punished us for that or God punished us for this. They only asked where is God. Is he somewhere or isn't he at all? That was constant. But during that time it seems like unimportant. In fact it seems like nonexistent. Besides those mechanical reading of the prayers on High Holidays, I don't recall anything else. It just seems like it doesn't exist. People only talked about food, that's all, about shelter.

Did you talk about liberation or your possible future?

That was constant. The funny thing is, I wouldn't say everybody hoped. There were always two points of view. There were some who kept on saying, "We'll never survive, nobody will survive. Germans will kill everyone to the last one." And there was always from the opposite tent who would say, "That's impossible. Somebody must survive and tell it to the world." So there were completely opposite.

I'll never forget when I went the first time out on a trip to the city and I wouldn't even say I was scared, not at all. Because I figured there's no difference. Most of the time Milo went, he never let me go. He went with other boys. But there were quite a few girls in the group and others went, too, so finally I persuaded him, and I went with him once, only the two of us. That was my first trip, and I remember it was very tiresome, of course, and with those torn shoes to walk and your feet are cold, wet, and when I saw finally, on the horizon, the black outline of the wood, I'll never forget that feeling—"Oh, I'll be home soon, and I'll be able to rest." All we thought about was food, shelter, rest, get rid of the lice, get rid of the vermin, get rid of the rags. That was all. Nobody had serious discussions. About [the] future, of course, everybody hoped, but not many believed. In fact, I myself did not believe that I'll survive. I think it was more luck. Some people say the strong ones survive. Like the saying—Nietzsche says only the strong survive. That's not true. It's not always true; it's a matter of luck also.



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Edward, Victor, and Lucy Baras with their landlady and her son, Bamberg, Germany, ca. 1948–1949.

Lucy and Milo Rothstein hid in the woods until the winter of 1943, when they were liberated by the Russians. Milo joined the Russian army and was killed in March, 1945. Lucy returned to Skalat and married Eddie Baras on April 7, 1944. The couple had a son, Victor, the following January. The Baras family left Skalat in late 1945 and made their way to a displaced persons camp in Bamberg, Germany, where they remained until May, 1949.

What did the camp look like?

It was barracks also. German soldiers used to live there. So like a family didn't have a room. You always had to have somebody, another family or at least a single person. We always had a single man, a stranger, in the room. There were not enough rooms. But we didn't stay there long because people who had a child had priority to find an apartment in the city. We never found an apartment—a room. So in fact when Joe came back we didn't live in the camp anymore. We had a room with a private family.

How long did you stay in the camp?

[Until the] summer of 1946. Eddie was longer there because he was on the police force of the camp. They had their own DP police, so he

went to work every other day—twenty-four hours work and forty-eight hours off. It was like institutional life. You went down to the breakfast in the dining room and then down for dinner. Frankly, I don't remember. He probably would remember better. When we came in they would give out clothes. There was a warehouse, and I think we had mostly dry food, because I think once a day we had only cooked meal. In other words, they would give us packages, those Red Cross packages, where there was cheese and chocolate sometimes and crackers. Oh, now I remember, I'm mistaken, because I remember that we got once a huge can of tomato sauce, like restaurant size.

I had a stove in my room where I could cook one pot. . . . I remember that the baby would get every day breakfast, like in the dining room, we cooked cereal and whole milk. I can't recall exactly how it was, but I know that I was able to make something in the room, too. See, the food was so funny. A family would get such a huge can of tomato sauce. What would you do? It was not organized. You would get more chocolate than the useful stuff. But I don't remember if it was only a supplement to the meals. I can't recall that.

What about religious life in the camp?

Oh, they had services. Not many. . . . I think the Hungarians had the very religious group. But at that time, as I told you, Jews weren't religious anymore, at least not Polish Jews. . . . Most people can't get over it, after all those losses that they suffered during the war. So I don't know which God is better. I wouldn't say there is no God. But if there is, there's only one, so how can he—I keep on thinking, if that one prays on Friday and this one on Saturday and that one Sunday, this one prays standing and this one prays kneeling and this one prays doubled up in half like they're Muslims, what's the difference? You pray always to the same God. And I think most survivors think like I do. You can believe only in one God, you cannot believe in many.

After leaving Germany, the Baras family spent nine months in New York before moving to Sheboygan, Wisconsin, to join Eddie's brother and sister, who had been sent there directly from Germany. The couple's daughter, Ellen, was born in 1954. Eddie Baras worked as a machinist at the Kohler Company in Kohler, Wisconsin, from 1953 until 1974; Lucy Baras worked part-time as a seamstress until her retirement in 1987. Her son's death from leukemia in 1977 devastated her, but she has remained active in writers' groups and has written her memoirs and several articles on anti-Semitism. Eddie Baras died on February 28, 1995.

Koplin fled Czechoslovakia in April, 1946, and worked for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee while in a displaced persons camp in Germany. He came to the United States the following year and enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in September, 1947, receiving a degree in pharmacy in 1951. After graduating, he moved to Milwaukee, where he married Lorraine Eder in 1954; the couple subsequently had three children. Koplin opened his own pharmacy in Milwaukee in 1957, operating it until his retirement in 1992. Lorraine Koplin died in 1992.

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Magda Moses Herzberger

Born in Cluj, Romania (Transylvania), on February 20, 1926, Magda Moses was an only child. By 1940, Transylvania had a population of approximately 200,000 Jews, more than 160,000 of them in the northern part of the region, which was annexed by Hungary on August 30, 1940. Life for Cluj's nearly 17,000 Jews subsequently worsened, and the Moses family was forced to move into a small apartment. When Germany occupied Hungary in March, 1944, the status of Jews deteriorated even further, and by May of that year the Jews of Cluj and outlying areas were enclosed in a ghetto. Within a month the ghetto was liquidated, and the Moses family was sent to Auschwitz. Only a third of the ghetto's inhabitants survived the war.



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*Magda Moses with her parents, Herman and Serena,
Cluj, Romania, ca. 1931.*

We realized in what circumstances we were when we were taken into the cattle wagons, and there were huge lines, many people. It was like a madhouse at the cattle wagons. Pushed into those wagons, so many we could hardly move, . . . and they were dark inside. Then they closed the door, that hard steel door, and they locked us from outside. We didn't get any food, we didn't get any drink, nothing. I remember after they locked the doors, my father said, "We were fools." He said, "We are trapped." And it was too late to escape. We realized and he realized and everyone realized that we were trapped. The first time that we had no hope for better, because we did not receive humane treatment. And can you imagine when somebody had to use the restroom? There was no restroom, we had to do everything there in that wagon, and the men had to turn away, and you had to do everything. [The train ride lasted] three days and three nights, [and during this time] they didn't let us out. . . . We thought that we are going to be taken and annihilated. Otherwise why would you treat a person like that? We knew that we were not going to go into the place where we were promised to go. . . .

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

Then when we arrived, it was horrible. Some were exhausted; others cried. There was somebody having a nervous breakdown there. We were uncombed and unkempt and dirty and feeling like a cattle. That's the way we arrived to Auschwitz. First thing, I can never forget that feeling, when the train stopped and everything was silent, and it's just like in those moments you know something is going to happen and you don't know what exactly it's going to be. And then soon after, you hear the voices of the German soldiers and boom, [the door of the wagon was] opened with force. Everything was [done] in a shocking way. Nothing was done gently. But in the moment that [the doors] were opened, there came in the violence. The monster of hatred and violence was coming after us. Then we heard the voices of the soldiers and they came in, and they were really treating us brutally, pushing us, coming with the

short rubber sticks. We had to go fast. If you didn't get out fast from that wagon, you got hit in the back. And we had to leave everything inside, and then you got out of the wagon, and the first thing that struck us [was] the huge flames belching from big chimneys. We could see them back in the distance. But it was such a strange sickening odor of burning flesh. We did not know what that was at that time. I had no idea that those were the furnaces, because no one could imagine such a thing.

And then right there, you see the German officials and you had to form rows of five and then they look at you, they point you left, right, left, right, and you had horrible scenes. Children being snatched, babies from their mothers, the mothers were running crazily after them and then you see the mothers who run crazily after their children [being taken to the gas chambers with their children]. When the men were separated from the women and families separated, there was a painful cry. People were running, there were shots in the air, then people were beaten up. I was so shocked that in the first moment I could not imagine that this is true. I thought I must be dreaming, this cannot happen to me. And you know in those few minutes things happened fast. Many of my family members were pointed to the left, all the little children in our family. All the uncles and aunts of my mother's were pointed to the left. We didn't know at that time where they go.

The ambulances came, with red cross, all the older people, all the invalids or people who were sick were taken in. The guards were lying to us, "They will be taken to the hospital." Little did they know that they are going to be taken right to the gas chambers. So they looked for help, they mounted those trucks, [and] you never have seen them again. And then within minutes I was all by myself. I can never forget that moment. I looked and I was separated from my family. There I was, standing with strangers and I was looking for a familiar face, and I have seen my father walking with my uncle. I looked back, there they were. I never have seen them again. That was the last glimpse I had of them. And then, what happened after that? After that, the trains left.

When we were separated and already I was there by myself, [I started paying] attention to my surroundings, because in those few moments [at the beginning] I couldn't even pay attention to my surroundings or where I was because there were so many painful things happening. Then I paid attention, and I have seen the barbed-wire fence of Auschwitz. There were posts connected with wire, and at the top of each post there were huge lamps projected at you, like a big watching eye, peering at you at all times. And then I have seen people, women, coming to the

fence, begging for food. They looked insane. I thought that this was the insane asylum, I really did. They were shaved, in rags, looking terrible; they looked like insane people, and I had no idea that within a few minutes I would be there just like them. . . .

And then the first thing what we did we had to strip naked in the front of the shaving room and we had to leave everything behind. I was eighteen years old. I don't think anyone had seen me naked except my mother. And I remember the shame I felt. I remember I was hiding my breasts. We were naked and the German soldiers were lined up and laughing at us. Can you imagine that? I was hiding between the other women, I was covering my breasts. I can never forget that. I felt so terribly humiliated. . . . Not enough you march naked, but they laugh at you.

And then, the shaving room, where they shaved you in all your places. First they shaved our heads. I had long hair, I had thick braids. I didn't cut my hair since the first elementary grade. And then I could see—I can see now even—I go back in time, I go through terrible emotions right now because I remember the SS woman, the first time I have seen an SS woman. They were just as cruel and heartless as the men, and she was there in the shaving room, courted by an SS guard, and they were laughing and making jokes. But I came there and then she put the shears and I was pleading, "Leave me please just a little hair." I was so naive, so young. And she was laughing with her boyfriend. There I stood naked, and they [were] laughing, and she goes for the shears and shaves my whole head. I was so horrified, I was in shock. In the first hour in Auschwitz, I was in shock. I couldn't cry, I couldn't think this through. I thought that I'm going through a nightmare and soon I will wake up. . . . Finally, I could hear the little noise and I glimpsed back—you were not even allowed to move this way or this way—and I glimpsed back and I can never forget that my whole braid, my beautiful long hair, was in one piece on the ground. I was shocked, like you pause a moment, like you feel paralyzed. You don't even want to go. It's like a feeling that you don't want to go a step further.

And then I felt a brutal blow in my back, a guard hitting my bare flesh with that little rubber stick and pushing me toward the shower room. And then the shower room, pushed, fast, fast, fast. [We were] brutally treated. And then out from the shower room, [we entered a dressing room, where they threw] you some rags, really. All the good things were taken. I got a long, dark blue, dress down to [my ankles], twice as big [as needed]. No underwear, nothing, just that thing. It [looked] like a sack, and then I got the wrong shoes, high shoes, [with an] orthopedic [insert]. I could hardly walk with it. And then from there they pushed

you into the paint room. . . . The back [of the dress] was painted with a red stripe so that if you try to escape they can see you from far, the red strip of paint. And then they pushed you out from that room, and I was so horrified, I came out and I was still in a daze. . . .

And then finally we got to the barracks, and I have seen the barracks [and] my fellow prisoners eating grass. We were pushed in that huge barrack, 500 people. We had nothing in the barracks. There were no more bunks. Other barracks had just pieces of wood where many people were lying. But we had nothing, just the barren floor of that huge barrack, and I tell you we had to sleep crouched, like when you are an embryo. That's the way we had to sleep through the night. And then five people got one blanket. . . . In that moment I think I have seen something that really shook me as a person. People were fighting for the blanket. Everyone wanted that same blanket. I still was not myself. We got no food, nothing, until the morning, when we had black coffee. [At the end of my first day in Auschwitz], I lay down [in my barrack], gradually it dawned on me that [all the terrible experiences] were real. There were hours and hours passing by. [Everything] was real. . . . I pinched myself until it hurt. I hurt myself until I felt a sharp pain, and I told myself, "I feel pain. This is real. It's not imaginary. It's not a dream." . . . I started crying and crying and crying. All this was coming out, out, out, and finally I fell asleep. And when I fell asleep I was at home, and I was combing my long hair. Because that was a terrible shock. I was dreaming with my hair.

I must have slept a while and then it was around four o'clock, when suddenly out of that dream I heard the word—it was dark in the barrack—I heard "Heraus, heraus! [Get out, get out!]" and just like a raid coming in, like a madhouse, the guards coming in, the SS, with the little rubber sticks, taking us out for *Appell* [roll call], to count us, to see if everyone is there, if no one escaped, who is alive and who is dead. So we had to get out. It was cold, we had no underwear. That was my first morning in Auschwitz, standing in line for hours and hours until they counted us. After a while you really got tired, because you were already emotionally exhausted. So some [people] started slumping a little. There came the guard, hitting you in the face. You had to stand up. You [slump] twice, or three times, you are slapped, you are punished. Because two people in our lines were slacking, three times we were punished and we had to kneel in clay and in stone for hours. There was a physician next to me who during the night tore up a little piece from her blanket because she was cold, and put it around her breast. While we were kneeling one of the SS women observed that she is hiding something.

and she took [the little piece of blanket from] her and she was slapping and slapping and slapping her. And I remember her face was getting red and red and she just had to stand [there getting slapped]. . . . After a while she just couldn't take it. She got up like in a frenzy, she started beating the SS woman. They took her away. We never have seen her. I realized what happens to you if you just show any protest. That was my first morning in Auschwitz.

During her six weeks in Auschwitz, Moses encountered a young woman whom she had befriended years before in school.

When I was in the first grade, there were two girls in the classroom, and they were really very poor. It was customary there to bring something at ten o'clock, a little snack, and then we got milk in school. My mother always prepared me a little snack, because in the morning we usually did not eat very much—I would only drink a little coffee and have a crescent [roll]. Then at ten o'clock the children had recess and then we would eat. . . . One day I was just about biting into my little snack when suddenly my eyes fell on these two girls, and I could see two eyes staring at me. They were looking [me intensely]. In that moment that bite got caught in my throat. I just couldn't swallow it, and I thought, "Well, at home I'm going to get a good meal, and I'm not sure what these girls are going to get." So I gave them my bread and I would have some sandwich, some meat or something, egg in it, and then I would come home and I would feel ravenous, I would eat everything. . . . That was my little secret for a while. And then one day my mother came to me and she said, "You have to tell me the truth. What do you do with your snack?" And then I confessed it to her. My mother said, "Why did you have to wait so long? From now on you will take [something] every day for those girls." So she packed [a snack] every single day for those girls.

Now, this time passed and I was in the camps and a strange thing happened. One of the girls was in Auschwitz, in the same barrack with me, and I was very pleased to see her. . . . One night I woke up with such a heavy feeling and a terrible depression descended upon me, and [for the] first time maybe I was questioning if it's worthwhile really to survive, if it's a possibility to escape and if it's worth to fight for. And I thought, "Well, I'm going to find out if I go out and look at the wire, see if I can touch it or not and end my life." . . . [I left the barrack,] and I was standing there and thinking—to touch it or not to. I really was pondering with the question, to be or not to be. As I was thinking, suddenly I heard somebody coming, footsteps, and somebody putting

a hand on my shoulder. And who do you think it was? My friend. She said, "Magda, what are you doing here? What kind of thoughts do you have? I woke up and I have seen you crawling and I was worried for you. Don't you know that you are the only child and what are you going to do to your parents? What happened to you? Did you give up fighting?" And she was standing [there]. Finally we ended up both crying. But she never forgot that I helped her, and she had the possibility now to help me. We went back together. That was the last time I was thinking of doing something like that.

I was taken to Bergen-Belsen then, and I never have seen her after that, and I didn't know what happened to her. And my mother said one day she [was shopping] in Tel Aviv [after the war] . . . and she heard somebody calling her name. [The girl] recognized her. She was grateful to her. Something like that you don't forget. And she was telling my mother about this night. This is the mitzvah. I think that what you give, you get it back.



WHI3187/HZB/1/14

*Magda and Eugene Herzberger at the time of their wedding,
Cluj, Romania, November, 1946.*

After six weeks in Auschwitz, Moses was moved to Bremen, Germany, where she endured forced labor. In March, 1945, she and the other surviving prisoners were marched about twenty miles to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, where she was liberated by British troops three weeks later. She returned to Cluj in late 1945 and was reunited with her mother. In April, 1946, Magda Moses began medical school, where she met Eugene Herzberger, whom she married in November of that year. The Herzbergers and Magda's mother fled Romania in 1947 with 16,000 other Jews and lived on the island of Cyprus and in Israel before immigrating to the United States in 1957. The couple and their two children settled in Monroe, Wisconsin, where Eugene Herzberger worked as a neurosurgeon. They moved to Dubuque, Iowa, in 1976 and retired to Arizona in 1994. Magda's mother lived with the Herzbergers until her death in 1994. Magda Herzberger has spoken extensively on her Holocaust experiences and has published a memoir, *Eyewitness to Holocaust* (Mattoon, Illinois, 1985), and a volume of Holocaust poetry, *Waltz of the Shadows* (New York, 1983). She has also composed musical pieces on the subject.

rationale for mass deportations. Beginning in the summer of 1942, men, women, and children were sent first to Westerbork and Vught, concentration camps within the Netherlands; from there, they were transferred to Auschwitz, Sobibór, and other camps in Eastern Europe. Of approximately 107,000 Dutch Jews who were deported, only 5,200 survived the war.

About 25,000 Jews in the Netherlands—the most famous of them being Anne Frank and her family—went into hiding with the aid of the Dutch underground, which was quite active. Roughly two-thirds of the Jews in hiding escaped detection and survived the war, among them Herb DeLevie and his family and Flora Bader.

Herb DeLevie

Born in Rhine (Westphalia), Germany, on May 7, 1934, Herb DeLevie was the second of two children born to a German mother, Hertha, and a Dutch father, Nathan, a prosperous cattle dealer. The DeLevie family, which had roots in Holland dating from the 1600s, moved to Stadskanaal, Holland, in 1936 to escape the growing persecution of Jews in Germany.

Were your parents friendly with non-Jews?

Yes, you would almost have to be. The Jewish community was very small, and our synagogue, which was relatively small, could seat maybe a hundred people in the High Holidays. They would come in from all surrounding towns, small towns, very much like a small village does here in the States. In our town, like I said, we were only three Jewish families, or four.

What was the population of Stadskanaal?

About 8,000. So the entire Jewish community, gathering about seven small towns of equal size, would fill the synagogue, but that would be about it.

Was there anti-Semitism before the war?

Not until about mid-1940s. The Germans invaded Holland in 1940. They did not really start making their presence known in all parts until the middle 1940s. The very first thing I remember is my mother crying and my father saying that he would have to make preparations to go into hiding because he felt that the Jews were going to be gathered like in



*Herb and Edith DeLevie ice skating,
Stadskanaal, Holland, 1940.*

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Germany and there was no way out. And in the 1940s is when I remember—that exactly I don't recall. I was what, six, seven.

Did your schoolmates tease you?

The Dutch, not at all, no, not before the war. Before the war, in general, the townspeople were very anti-German. Our friends were very pro-Jewish. No, I never felt anything before the war.

In late 1940, Nathan DeLevie went into hiding; his wife and children joined him six months later. For four years the family hid in one room of a small farmhouse on the outskirts of Stadskanaal together with an uncle, an aunt, three young cousins, an elderly couple, another cousin in his twenties, and several people in transit. To keep occupied, Herb sketched his surroundings and read more than 3,000 books provided by the Dutch underground.

What was it like when you joined your father in hiding?

We arrived at night and we were very excited, and I remember running to say hello to my father and running through the place which was going to be our home, and we knew it was going to be. For how long, we didn't know, but we knew we were going to be there for quite a while. And this house was a very typical farmer's helper-type house. It was one building. We came in the back door; the front door, I guess, was never used. I don't ever remember it being opened. When you walked out the back door, immediately to the right was the outhouse, which was the only toilet in the place, and from there when you walked past, if you made a left turn you walked into a small barn, which contained a horse pen, a pigpen, and two cattle stalls and an opening space large enough to have a little bit of hay and one wagon.

It was a very small farmhouse. That particular barn was on one side of the house, and then if you walked to the back door instead of turning left you went straight ahead you went into the main kitchen, which was also the main living room. It was a combination kitchen and living room, and it had two bedsteads in it. These were big closets that open up and had the built-in beds. From there you walked straight ahead and to the left there was their formal living room, which also housed two bedsteads. That was to be our room. And immediately to the right of that corridor was another bedroom, which was used for the people who lived there. It was a relatively small room. And that was the extent of the house. There was no attic and there was no basement. There was crawl space

and the rafters were right up to the ceiling. There was nothing there, just a little typical Dutch farmhouse. Dirt floor in the kitchen and the barn and the room we were in and the front room had a wooden floor with about a foot and a half, two feet of space underneath it when we got there. We made a trap door into that room and made a big hiding place underneath the floor, but that happened while we were there.

Who owned the farm?

A family by the name of Drente. A man, wife, and two daughters. He was a day laborer, very poor. He used to make his living off working on farms for people, seasonal, and running a *bagger* [dredging] ship, which is a flat boat that would mix up turf that you burn for fuel. . . . When I say run, that means you load the boat and the man pulls it with the rope, or you have a horse that pulls it and he drives the horse. You pull this through the canals, which was quite common in Holland. So the family was very poor, the house was a very poor house, very simple, again, very low class, bottom of the scale Dutch type of living.

When did other people join you in hiding at the farmhouse?

My father's brother was the first one to come. The timing, I guess, was about two or three months where my father's brother was in one place and his family was someplace else and they couldn't stay where they were. First, my father's brother's underground contact came to find out if he could be hidden with us, and I recall that being discussed. First he came, and then within a very short time thereafter the rest of the family joined by the wishes of my uncle. Again with the agreement that, okay, a few more doesn't make any difference, it isn't going to last very long anyway. So his wife came with three children. The kids were all within one year of each other up and down. One was one year younger, one was my age, and one was one year older. Two boys and one girl. The girl was the oldest.

Who else joined you?

After they had joined us was an older couple, Dalsines—they were like a second cousin to my dad—joined us. They were considerably older. He had a very bad case of asthma, and he was in his middle fifties, middle to late fifties, and they came and joined us and that was about

two months after my uncle did. Then there was a family that lived with us for about four months. That was a temporary—they were only going to be there for a week. It was a man and wife and three children again, and they stayed for about four months before they were moved elsewhere. Then a cousin from my father, a single man, came and joined us. He was about twenty-one, twenty-two, and he stayed for the duration. This gentleman took care of our education when he came. He had a college education, and he was the one who taught us. He stayed for the duration.

How many children were in the house?

At one time there were eleven kids. It was a short time while the family with the three kids were there, another family came in with two kids, and then there were two kids by themselves that came, without parents, for a short period of time. They were there for six weeks, two months.

Did this become a common place for the underground to bring people?

Not really, considering the amount of people that had to be hidden. I'm saying this all as if it happened all at once; it really wasn't so. For about a year, it was just my father's brother and his family and us. Then after about a little less than a year, the old couple joined us. Then for four months then the single man joined us and just about the same time the family with three kids were there for four months. For about two weeks before they left, the two kids came and joined us by themselves, and they were all removed again and put elsewhere. I have no idea what happened to them, just lost track. The nucleus of the group was for about two years the adults, the older couple, the single man, my father's brother and his wife, my parents, and us five kids. Those were permanent residents, so to speak.

And all of these people were living in that one room?

That's right.

How did you deal with so many people in such a small space?

First, it was no problem, of course, even with all the people, because everybody is fresh. Usually when you arrive you have some amount of supplies of some kind, whether it be food, something to read, these type

of things. The biggest problem at first was the children, to keep them quiet and from fighting, and you played games and you did odds and ends to keep occupied. So the first five, six months were no problem. Then the little bickering began. Each group as they arrived had a different source of the underground and depending what the source is your supplies would be different. So what everybody got would not necessarily be the same as far as food and clothing or whatever the underground would bring in or be able to bring in. The first six, seven, eight months weren't too bad.

We were told to be absolutely quiet, the children were. My father insisted I learn how to draw and he stood behind me with a stick and made me draw, copy things, whether it be a bird or a building or a tree or draw a cow or whatever it was. And we had sufficient games to amuse ourselves with for the first period of time. Also the first months, not knowing how long it was going to be and having been separated for some time, there was a lot to talk about.

After a while, the talking ceased and the nerves began to set in. The food became more scarce, small illnesses began—small colds—and you couldn't cough so you coughed in a cushion. And privacy became an irritant—going on the potty in the room, people became a little pickier. Everybody became a little more on each other's nerves. One of the main sources of irritation was the older couple that joined us. The gentleman had asthma. He'd be burning something in a little cup that would smell up the whole place and be coughing like to clear your throat and his asthma condition and that would be done in a tent because it had to be kept quiet.

The biggest argument I remember was that after he'd been there about six, seven months he got a couple of eggs from one of his sources and my father felt that the eggs should be cooked—this happened a couple of times—and they would eat the egg, this older couple, and us kids would be watching. And my father was kind of temperamental anyway, so he lost his cool one time and said, "The least you can do is give the kids the egg instead of eating it yourself." And that led to a big argument with the result being that we got, in turn, first was the youngest, which was my cousin, got a little top slice of the white, and he ate that, and the next time there was an egg we all had the rotation. It was this type of a thing that became a very great irritant.

Also, the other kids became very bored. They were not as self-involved, I guess is the word, as I was. I did a lot of reading. There were always plenty of books, and if I'd read them once I'd start over again, and I was drawing and I enjoyed it. None of the others did. This

period was all before the single gentleman joined us. After about nine months that we were there, this younger man joined us.

Just before he arrived my aunt had a nervous breakdown and just about the same time that she had a nervous breakdown, the SS decided that there should be a watch at the road that went past the place that we were in hiding, and they set up a permanent watch to check everybody going back and forth there because they decided there was smuggling going on from Germany into Holland. So now we were faced with having two Germans sitting by the back door who often came in for coffee in the one room, and when they were there, of course, we couldn't even as much as whisper. They would sit in the main room, which was the kitchen/dining/living room for the people, and we were in the next room over. It was visible if the door was open and you could see two doors leading from the corridor. Luckily they never really went in because the people we were hiding with were kind to them, so to speak. Also the owner, the man, had gotten a job working for the Germans and the older girl was dating some of the Germans and worked as a secretary for them and they were generally considered by them as being traitors and being supportive of the Germans and against the Dutch. So they were treated by the Germans as more or less special people, which made it a little easier for us because they were not considered a risk anymore.

The first real illness was the nervous breakdown of my aunt, which lasted for almost two or three weeks. I remember her having to be tied to the bed because she wanted to move around and wanted to get out and my mother and her husband and my father putting a pillow over her head so nobody would hear her screaming and so on. Right after that my sister had a nervous breakdown, wanted to get out, wanted to kill herself, and while she was having that, the oldest girl of my father's brother ended up with the measles and that became the biggest fear, fear of the different sicknesses and how to treat it because there was just nobody you could call in so you did the best you can. Luckily things worked out.

But these things added that much pressure to it at the same time the food became scarcer. It was harder and harder for the underground to come in and supply on a regular basis, and of course the people who were hiding us could not go in and purchase sufficient food to feed that many people without [people] asking questions. So we basically at that time started and continued to have a steady diet of brown beans with no meat and water, and that lasted for just about the duration. Occasionally we had a little piece of *spek*, which is pork fat. And when I say little piece, it would be about a centimeter square and we'd work on that little tidbit at a time.

After we were there about nine, ten months, just about when my sister was so bad, this single gentleman joined us, and there was a lot of discussion as to whether we wanted him or not and it was decided that we would take him in because he was more educated. He was a second cousin of my father, and he would then educate us and keep us busier with schoolwork, which is the way it worked out to begin with. However, at first he slept on the floor like everybody else, but he got close to the [Drentes'] oldest daughter and ended up sleeping with her. . . . After he'd been there for about four months he started sleeping with her and nine months later she had a baby, which everybody said was an SS baby, but this caused some additional crises because now this young man was living more or less with the family and eating better and sleeping better than the rest of us. He was still teaching us, but now he was treated more or less as the husband of the older daughter. During that entire thing, the discussions that went on about this, the arguments, the discussions or fights my father and his brother had with this fellow, Benny, were very severe from the standpoint of "How can you do this at times like this, number 1. Number 2, you're Jewish, she's just a *shiksa* [non-Jewish girl], how can you? You lower yourself." You know, "What about your parents' memories," et cetera.

Just before the baby was born my mother came down with a nervous breakdown, and that lasted for about thirty days. In between that time the Dalsines, the older couple, were offended by the different problems we would have and the older man was feeling kind of sickly but they had gotten to the point that they would just sit in a corner and hang a sheet around them and didn't want anybody to approach them. That was their corner, they wouldn't talk with anybody, they wouldn't share with anybody. They'd get books to read—they wouldn't share. They got very impatient with the kids and apparently we got on their nerves like they did on everybody else's nerves, and they would begin to hit out at us and then my father would get back at them and it got to be a very stilted free-for-all. That was the general atmosphere, and it pretty well continued. Every adult during those three years was ill and three of the children. I myself stayed healthy and so did my oldest cousin.

Occasionally there were notifications, just about once a month, every six weeks, of house-to-house searches and depending on how or who was conducting these, we would either hide underneath the floor in a hiding place that we had dug out or go out in the field at night and hide out there and sometimes we were out there for four or five days not knowing when [we would be able to go back].

Did the Drentes bring you food at night?

No, there was no way to do that because we had to sneak out when the Germans were either being kept occupied or would not be there for a short period of time and then they would reappear and we'd have to wait until they leave. At one time we were out there I think for twenty-two days. This was during the fall and we ate the corn that was there and grass and whatever we could find, drank the water that was running through the little moats that are very plentiful in Holland. Actually, there was never a house search at this place, so even though we took the precautions, as it turned out, the house was never searched. Once somebody came in and when they recognized that [Mr. Drente] was working for the SS, they just said, "Well, how are you?" and had a cup of coffee and left.

The day-to-day stories are pretty much a repeat of the generalization. I can't remember all the little fights and all the little things, but the general atmosphere was one of this kind of fear, nerves being shattered, weakness because of lack of food and lack of exercise, and a continuing feeling of helplessness as time went on and on.

How did you receive advance notification of these searches?

Because [Mr. Drente] worked for the SS. Since he worked for the headquarters, which happened to be in our [old] house—they had occupied the house that we lived in as the SS headquarters—since he worked there he would hear or see the bulletin or know that this was going to occur.

Did Mr. Drente ever bring you reading material?

No, no, he never brought anything. He was sort of illiterate, so his daughters would bring. But the underground, when they did come, would come in with thirty, forty books at a time.

How would they bring books?

In the evenings by prior arrangement, by leaving them on the boat that this man had anchored in front of the house and this man then would go out and bring them in. Occasionally they would bring it in themselves. A few times medicine had to be gotten and this man would know who



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Herb, Hertha, Edith, and Nathan DeLevie, 1946.

to contact and somebody would bring it. It was never the same person; it was always somebody different who would do this. On two or three occasions I did actually see the person who brought something.

What type of reading material did you get?

You name it. I went through an entire library from children's stories to philosophy, geography, you name it. I must have read over 3,000 books in that period of time, most of them twice. And to this day I can pick up a book I haven't read, but it's an older book and I read it and I know I've read it but I just don't remember where, the particulars of it. Yes, anything that was printed, we read. Didn't make any difference.

Did reading serve as an escape for you?

I would assume so. There is no doubt that—what was there to do? You either sit and do nothing, you either get into an argument about who was using what for that time, toys were being destroyed, you get sick and tired of playing Monopoly. And besides my drawing, which I liked because I was good at it, and the reading, there was nothing else to do. And this was twenty-four hours a day. You can only sleep so much and after a while you can't sleep, you can't move around, there's really no

place to stretch out, you can stand in the corner, there's not sufficient chairs to go around, what do you do? You do what you can.

Could you get any exercise at all, even just pacing around?

How do you pace around a small room filled with that many people? When we first were there, yes, we did some morning calisthenics and so on but after a while there's just no way. There's too much stuff laying around, your bunks, even though you roll them up and put them aside during the day, you still—six, seven adults and five kids and a small confined place and there's just no place to move.

Did you have a daily routine with the tutor?

To some degree. We continued to get up when it got [to be] morning because people got up, you woke up, and you had to go to bed when it got dark because you couldn't afford to have a light be seen from the outside. So we had some flashlights and some candles but basically you could not do much at dark. So the daytime hours was the only time to do something. In the morning we had a washbasin, we washed ourselves. The pail of water was brought in usually, and then we had whatever breakfast there was, whether it be a piece of bread or leftover beans or whatever was there, and then we would study or read or whatever. So we had a couple of hours of what was called quiet time. The education, because of the different ages, was very general, and this fellow was fairly good in math and the languages but the other things didn't amount to that much. So what we ended up doing is discussing the books that we read and whatever we got out of the library and this was done for a couple of hours a day. At first it was much more intense. You'd do two, three hours in the morning, two, three hours in the afternoon. But the fellow couldn't take it and us kids couldn't take it and the parents couldn't take it because they had to be quiet while we were doing this. They couldn't go anywhere either, and they got bored with it, and it got on their nerves. So it became much more on a one-to-one basis where you could quietly sit in the corner and do something. So that way everybody got an hour, two hours a day, but not at the same time.

What did you study?

Math was organized. We studied philosophy, discussed philosophy, and that was based on the books that were available. Geography was an open

discussion as to what everybody knew about the world. You played games like naming the countries of the world and their capitals, the biggest river, the biggest mountains, and these type of stuff, and we had an atlas and we looked them up—these type of things. The physics and biology were again—outside of the basics, were based on what we could understand from the books that were coming in. Some of the concepts were very far out and some of them were totally erroneous. A formal line of education wasn't there after the first six months, because basically we had exhausted what he knew because of the concentration. I mean it was an ideal learning situation if you had the mental ability, and the mental ability is very surprising, but the power of concentration is very, very difficult. It seems to become less and less even though you have nothing else to occupy your mind. It seemed that your mind is so occupied with your physical discomfort and the negative vibrations, I guess is the modern word for it, that float around you that you're constantly a bundle of nerves. Every sentence you have to read twice and nothing seems to stick, and that was the case in almost all of us.

Were you afraid because there were people constantly in the house?

That's right, and it was a very small house. Everything could be heard, like you could hear everything that happened in the kitchen and you never knew who would be coming in. It was just established. You talked in a whisper. If somebody was there you didn't talk at all.

Did you know if someone was in the kitchen?

You could hear them come in, yes, and like I say, you could hear almost everything. So, yes, we talked in a whisper. When I say whisper, it was a whisper. You could not cry. If you were punished and you cried, your head was stuffed in a pillow. If you were in pain, if you had stomach cramps or any kind of a pain, whether you're an adult or not, sound was something that just could not be made. The rule was adhered to. It was necessary.

Was there a semblance of a family situation? Did the parents still act as parents?

Well, your parents remained your parents. The problem was more [with] the overriding what the other adults would say to the kids that were not

theirs. My father and his brother were very close all their lives, but for my uncle to say something to me, that was like waving a red flag in front of the bull. Especially after a while, "How dare you pick on my children! Look at your own," and vice versa. So everybody kind of did their own thing and everybody was afraid to go over a mark of criss-crossing. You had to keep some kind of discipline. My father was fairly well in charge for most of the time because he was the strongest willed, and that of course led to arguments also. But he still was the strongest and he did lay down the rules and kept them enforced and that, too, was necessary because without it we never would have made it either. Everything kind of interlocks. You do what you have to. You face the circumstances and you must live within it or leave it. And if you're leaving, all right. We didn't because we felt the choice was not really there.

Did you maintain any religious practices while in hiding?

Yes, we did. As a matter of fact, we *davened* [prayed] every morning [to have] something to do. Yes, we kept the holidays the best we could, at least observed them by name. The religious practices, the *davening*, morning, evening, doing Shabbas services, filled time, therefore they were done. Religion was discussed quite a bit, again as a time filler. The big problem was that nobody that was with us knew much from anything because all of us, my parents and us kids, were too young to know much, and my parents were also educated by indoctrination. My father could read [Hebrew], not well. He knew what to observe, what was the proper thing to read, but not a word was understood. He had a couple of *tefillot* [prayers] that were translated in German and Dutch but everything was Hebrew to Hebrew so it was just a question of reading and no way to understand what you read and recalling what it was about because of their prior education. It was quite limited. It was more a dogmatic adherence to tradition, which we did.

What happened when you heard about the Normandy invasion?

By the time that we had the news of the Normandy invasion, they were already in Belgium, and then the next news was they were already in Holland, and we figured that at this pace they'll be there within a week. Then they were stopped, but now there was hope. I mean, here was freedom so it was like a resurgence of everything and no matter what happened, we were going to make it.

How did you get that news?

This came at first from the man who was hiding us and then an underground person came in again. As a matter of fact, at one time, when we heard that news we were already packing up ready to go and we thought the Germans were leaving and then it turned out that they were reinforcing and more Germans came in. So we had to go back in, and that lasted another five and a half months. . . .

The actual liberation was that the Canadian tank division had arrived in one part of our town and they were held up—our town was predominantly made of canals and bridges—and the canal where we were in hiding was one of the major canals that went into the Stadskanaal main fare and this had a big bridge on it. The bridge was blown, and when we heard that the Canadians were at this bridge we figured that it would only be a matter of moments. For three days they couldn't cross that bridge and then again the man who was hiding us told us that the Germans were packing up and leaving. That's when we packed up and went to the point where we felt we could make contact with the Canadians, and we were ready. We took the bicycles and left, all these people [on] a couple of bicycles, and we packed what little we had and us kids were going to run out except we couldn't. And we were going to scream and we couldn't. We had to go about two kilometers up the canal and we couldn't make it. We met some people we knew about the last quarter kilometer and they practically carried us to where the Canadians were, but the bridge was gone and we could see the Canadian tanks. So the Canadians had a raft and they came and one by one took us to the other side and that was the actual liberation. It took another four days before the Canadians actually were able to cross this particular stretch of canals and secure our city and the rest of Holland.

Could you communicate with the Canadians? Did you speak any English?

No, no. What is there to communicate? You get a big hug and I remember getting a candy bar. But then you didn't need to communicate. They could see with their faces that it was worth it to them, and what we felt, I can't really describe.

After liberation, the DeLevie family returned to their home, and Nathan DeLevie resumed his cattle business. The family immigrated to the United States in December, 1949, and settled in Madison, Wisconsin, where Herb DeLevie attended high school and enrolled in the University of Wisconsin.