

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Nazi Germany Project

Germany, 1930's to 1940's

O.H. 373

MARTHA KONRAD

Interviewed

by

Steven R. Ard

on

July 15, 1981

MARTHA KONRAD

Martha Konrad was born in Romania on November 29, 1921, the last child born to Johann and Rosa Thoïs. Her parents had a small farm and rented additional land to support their large family of eight children. As Germans living in Romania, they sent their children to a privately supported school. There Martha Konrad completed seven years of education. By then she was the only child left at home and so she helped with the farm in the summer. In the winter months, she found other employment.

On June 13, 1943, she married Karl Konrad. Today they have a son Karl. They moved to the United States in 1952. She is a member of the Honterus Lutheran Church and the Saxon Club of Youngstown, Ohio.

Martha Konrad recalls that the Russian army encircled her town to collect laborers for their industries. Chosen by a Romanian official, she was one of the Germans taken to Russia to work. On the journey to Russia she met her brother, who had been taken earlier. She feels that if a Russian worker had not brought her milk every day she would have died in the camp. She remembers that the Russian army officials would not let the factory foremen abuse the German workers. Their food consisted mostly of bread and cabbage or onion soup. The workers were supposed to stay for five years but she was so malnourished after about two and a half years they sent her back to Germany. Her brother stayed the full five years. Her brother-in-law died at the camp, probably of starvation.

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INTERVIEWEE: MARTHA KONRAD

INTERVIEWER: Steven R. Ard

SUBJECT: German life in Romania during the 1930's and
1940's

DATE: July 15, 1981

A: This is an interview with Martha Konrad for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Germany in the 1930's and 1940's, by Steven R. Ard, at the Saxon Club in Youngstown at 710 S. Meridan Road, on July 15, 1981, at approximately 11:15 a.m.

Martha, do you want to begin by telling me when and where you were born?

K: In Rosenan, Romania. Now, of course, in Romanian it is called Risnov. The German name of it is Rosenan. All of our cities had three names, German, Hungarian, or Romanian, which has changed now, of course; it is only Romanian. I was born the last child of eight children to Johann and Rosa Thoiss, in the outskirts of Risnov, just about the last house in the city. I went to school over there, and grew up there until I had to leave there for Russia.

A: What did your parents do?

K: My father was a farmer.

A: Did he have a large farm?

K: No. It was a small farm, just enough to support the family. As a matter of fact, he had to rent some property in order to make a living, support the family.

A: And your mother was a housewife?

K: My mother was just a housewife doing her work around the farm.

A: Can you tell me a little bit about your school days there?

K: Well, most of it was good memories. I liked to go to school. I always went early in the morning, as soon as possible. I always, my life long, went early everywhere. High snow, we had a lot of snow over there. Many times we went to walk through the deep snow all the way up to the school. As a matter of fact, I was one of the farthest away . . . like I say, I lived on the outskirts. I had one friend, who had to go farther than I. School itself . . . we had seven grades and each grade had a teacher except one grade; there were only six teachers. One grade, each teacher would take an hour with the children, depending on the subject. We had German and Romanian history, geography, arithmetic, reading, German and Romanian; we also had gymnastics and singing hours, depending. By the time I finished school we had more Romanian classes than German. We kept our German history, German language, and our arithmetic; it was done in German, we didn't bother doing it in Romanian. Of course, Romanian history had to be really strict. I hated it.

A: Was it a large school? Were there a lot of kids?

K: Between 200 and 300 children in our German school. Of course, in Risnov there was a Romanian school too. We had to pay for our schooling because German people supported their own schooling and church. If you didn't support that, then you would have to go to the Romanian school. There was hardly anybody who would, but I had a friend who was in my class who switched back and forth. Her parents didn't want to pay the taxes and she would have to go to a Romanian school and then they would pay the taxes again and she would come back to our school. We always teased her about it. I loved school, I really did. I think if I would have ever had a chance for a higher education I would have gone for it. I know you didn't have a chance then, unless you had money. Schools were awfully expensive after we got out of what we call folks school.

A: Can you tell me what you did then after you got out of school?

K: Well, after I got out of school, I had to stay with my father. My sisters and brothers were grown up and I had to help on the farm which was mostly during the summer. In the winter months, he didn't need me because there wasn't that much work. Then I would go and work someplace and when spring would come, I had to come right back and start on the farm. When I was growing up it was only my father, my mother, and myself. My brother,

the one ahead of me, was at that time in the Army. After he came back, he got married, so he was out of the house too.

A: How old were you about this time?

K: Fifteen then.

A: And what time period, what year?

K: 1937.

A: As World War II approached, how did the people feel about this?

K: We didn't really believe that there was a possibility of war, you know. To us it was something. Why should there be a war? There was no reason for it. That is at least the way I felt. Why should there be a war? Hitler tried to get the Germans. My opinion of him, the way I feel, he tried to get the Germans together into Germany, which was impossible of course; they needed to spread out without taking everything away from somebody else and why have a war for no reason. Of course, our German people always felt that they would like to belong back to Germany; not the land itself necessarily, because after all, there were two countries between us, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, on the northern side, which is, if you think about it, pretty impossible. How are you going to get part of the country now and put it into Germany? I don't think anybody was willing to move from there, because the country itself was beautiful and good. I don't know, there were mixed feelings. There were very mixed feelings with the people.

A: Had people followed the political events of that time?

K: Not the way it is in Germany. No, like I said, the feeling was that you wanted to belong to that, but not the political events. It seemed like it might be something good, maybe. This way we could combine with Germany. We wanted to belong to what we called the homeland. After all, we were German people immigrating to Transylvania. I don't think anybody knew exactly what was going on in Germany. The feeling was just if there is a possibility that we would join Germany, it would be just to be in a German country, not for any other reason; not politically, that is beside the point. Politics . . . our Saxon people have never mixed much in politics. They lived their lives in a normal, everyday way, and followed the rules that were given. If there had to be something done, well, they did it. They never objected to the country, which was Romania, and before

Hungary. Our state never objected to anything except to fight for the right to stay German. After all, the German and Saxon people were immigrating there too and occupied that land that was supposed to be theirs. It was kept on putting back from Hungary to Romania and from Romania to Hungary, which was a little irritating. After so many times back and forth and they fought the wars for the land itself, and they were pushed back and forth, it was the irritation, the one irritation that just came up there, nothing else. To fight against a country, or to stand up against a country, like you find over here now, a riot or something, that's impossible. You just didn't think about a thing like that.

A: Had you ever heard Hitler speak on the radio?

K: Oh yes, we heard him speak on the radio, and the screaming he did. We heard England too. The only good thing is, like I said before, you were hoping, because of his power, maybe one of those days we would belong to one of those places we should be. That is the only reason, we tried to listen to him and see what he said about it. Of course, when it came to the war, that is a different story.

A: Do you want to tell me a little bit about what happened during the war to you?

K: Not very much. During the war I lived my regular life. We had young people that would try to organize us too. There was an organization, and the temptation of the things they told you or showed you seemed to be big with some people. You think, this is a lot of fun, and it could be good. I never joined any organization. Anything that wasn't in that group, it was out. It is as simple as that. We just stuck together the way we were before. We have been organized in a way, but not politically. As soon as you get out of school you join a sisterhood, which is not a sisterhood under a monk's way, you know, a shut-away place or anything. We just organized and that was a group. You had to do your share of work. Since we have to support our church and school you had to do your share of work for it. That is the only way we could do it. The boys, what we called the brotherhood, had different customs and that was a sign that we belonged together. It was church, religious men. Of course, you would do your own share. Whenever they needed something to be done, you know, the churchyard needed to be cleaned, well, it would go this way: We would send a note out to the first girl up on the Main Street. This girl would go up to the next and so on. It was just passed on up to the last one. Tomorrow you are going to be there and we have to do such and such. We just lined everything up, the same with the boys.

A: Which church was this affiliated with?

K: Lutheran.

A: A Lutheran?

K: Yes. The Saxon people down in Transylvania all had the Lutheran faith. There were very few of them that didn't.

A: Now, this other organization that you were talking about, do you remember its name?

K: Political.

A: Political, yes, that you said tried to organize things.

K: I don't even know what they called themselves at that time. They had what they called the Jugendbunol, which was in Germany too, the young people. I think that is about the one thing that they had going as far as I know. I know there was a group in my hometown, about ten or fifteen young people were there. I must say it was tempting once in awhile; they would come and say, "Oh, why don't you come too? We are going to go such and such a place." It is tempting. It seems to be interesting. In the beginning of 1939 is when the political part started in war; there were leaders and so on. They tried to combine the whole thing. Now that is where the trouble starts. I don't mean the trouble, but the religious leaders against the others were not agreeing. They tried to get us, all the people, into the group. It was planned by the political leaders, not by the church leaders. You were torn apart, either one way or the other. We had some gymnastic things going on, just competition, things like that, nothing else. It was just about the only thing. The thing they interfered in was your churchgoing. They always organized things when church was on. That pulled some of the people from church away. That was where the irritation was. Why did we have to have these things just when church was on? Churches were starting to get empty because of that. You tried to stay in it because if you didn't, then they might not take your child to the school, and the other things.

A: Did your church leaders resist verbally, did they talk against it?

K: Yes, yes they did.

A: Was anything done to them because they resisted in this manner?

K: No. I read the article not so long ago, which I never knew. There might be a single in this one and it seems

to be true. Single things like a handful of cases where it might have been that one political leader had pushed a minister down the stairs, physically.

A: But nothing like that happened in your hometown?

K: No, no. We had a very strong religious minister, very strong. I admired the man more than anybody in the world.

A: Do you remember his name?

K: Lesophin. He died quite a few years ago. He came to our hometown when I was in fourth grade and he stayed until he died. He was a very good man. That was one person I would follow.

A: As the war got into the 1940's, how did that affect you?

K: In the 1940's when they came in, the Germans into Romania, there was an agreement with the Romanian government. They were there, and there was no other effect except that you had some German people there and they were going forward towards Russia, like I said, still foreign the same way. The only hope that we had was that maybe because of that we were going to belong to Germany. You had fun with the Germans; you had to entertain them while they were there. They would go on and the next trip comes on and so on. Otherwise, it was just a war for us because, after all, our boys were in the war. Personally, I have to say, we had nothing from the war times because we were hardly out of school and then our boys, the ones that were really boys, that should belong to us, or should be married . . . our class, the one before, and maybe the one after us had the least out of that because we never had the chance to get married at the time when everybody else was getting married. In the first place, they were there doing their normal military duties in Romania and then the war came and they had to go on and didn't have a chance on things like that. There were several years there where the girls were just plain alone at home.

A: You mentioned that you had to kind of entertain the soldiers, did you have parties for them, did you feed them?

K: Yes. They would come into town and they would be put into the different homes. They would sleep there as long as they stayed there, and of course, just to pass time we would have to dance or something, just to give them some entertainment. After all, they were coming or going to the front.

A: Who had this organized?

K: Those who were the political leaders. There was one man in charge of it and he would come with them to show them where they would be sleeping.

A: Did the war ever come to your hometown itself?

K: The war itself . . . we didn't have any other connection with the war except we had some bombs come down; American bombs fell right in our town. They were between my hometown and Anistian, the big city then. We were bombed, as a matter of fact, on Easter Day. Easter morning we were in the yard and in the kitchen cooking and all of a sudden we saw some planes coming. Of course, the war was going on so you didn't know what was coming or going. It was too far away that it could be the front. All of a sudden my mother said, "Those are not our planes, those are nonfriendly planes. Let's go down in the basement." We went right down the basement and we were hardly there, closed the door, and the bombs fell. They fell no farther away than from here to Mahoning Avenue. There were seven bombs like that. My brother and brother-in-law were out in the field, right there, right smack between the bombs. They had to do a little plowing with the tractor, so both of them were out there. They were doing some plowing when the bombs fell; they were lucky that they got away.

A: Okay, they fell in the field?

K: They fell right in the field. Nobody was hurt. We had right at the end of the town where I lived a military soldiers camp. About two kilometers, down there is the next little town and they have theirs. I don't know what they were aiming for. Our guess is that they used to come over the mountains because about four miles away there was an ammunition factory. They were trying for that, but never did get it. It was a German built ammunition factory. I have never seen it, but we knew it was there.

A: Those were probably stray bombs that just missed?

K: Stray bombs that never hit that and missed, yes.

A: Was that the only time that the city was ever bombed?

K: My hometown, yes. In the city Brasov, about nine miles away down there, they were bombed several times. We felt sorry for those people because it was the workers' section which was bombed. There were some factories down there and the railroad station nearby, and a nice new section where the worker people had built themselves some small homes. The whole section was bombed out. They had been bombed after I had been gone. I never knew that that railroad station had been destroyed completely, but it had been then. How often it had been bombed, I couldn't

tell you .

A: Okay, that was in your hometown or next door?

K: It was about nine miles away from us.

A: As the war started to come to an end, when were you sent to the labor camp?

K: The war wasn't at an end, Romania had joined Russia then, turned their backs on Germany and joined Russia. Romania and Germany were together working against Russia. On the 23rd of August--this I remember because I was shaking like a leaf--all of a sudden they announced on the radio that Romania was going against Germany with Russia. As a matter of fact, I was alone. My husband was in the war already. I was alone and my mother-in-law came home from my sister-in-law's--they lived across the street--and said, "Did you hear the news on the radio?" I said, "No." I was in bed. She said, "Turn it on." I turned it on and we heard our king capitulating right there and then. He was saying that they joined the Russians. I said, "That's not him; he is as old as I am and that doesn't sound like him at all." It sounded like somebody was just holding a gun at his neck and he had to say it.

A: Had you heard him speak before?

K: Yes, but you could hear that he was very tired and very shook up.

That was in August, and we didn't dare move out of the house. It was a terrible time to move about, the bad time before the worst. We didn't dare move out of the house since we knew that the Russians would come. Then the Germans started to get out of there. They tried to get out. At night a lot of people fled with the trains, with the German soldiers. Of course, some of them were on the way and couldn't get to the train station on time. They didn't have any orders; they couldn't get away from there. It was human beings that were standing there and didn't know which way to turn. I didn't know what to do. As a matter of fact, we had a small group in my hometown; they were in schoolrooms. Since there was no school, they were sleeping in schoolrooms. They didn't put them in homes, private homes. They were sleeping there because they didn't know which way to turn. They were ready to march on, but they didn't know where to. They just took off, and we never knew where they ended up. It could have been Russia; it could have been in anyplace. From then on we just imagined that the Russians would come. They didn't come right away. We kept on thinking, since they turned and the Germans had moved out . . .

At this time Transylvania was parted in two because Hitler had divided it, which was awful. It was a bad thing he did to us, that is for sure. Transylvania got all their stuff together in every which way and all of a sudden he divides Transylvania giving half to Hungary and half to Romania. Now the front wasn't too far away from us and we were waiting for the Russians to come over the mountains and the war would start over there. We didn't know which way to go. We had been thinking that maybe we should march on and get on the other side of the front. Everybody was telling terrible stories about the Russians. Now you didn't want death and you didn't want the other, but maybe over there it is better than over here. We didn't know which way to go. Nobody moved, except a few of them that got on the train and took off. They didn't come, they didn't come, the Russians. The mountains, they didn't trust the mountains. They went around it and went all the way in what we called the Banat where the mountains slope down. That is where they could come through. Then they turned back east and came into Transylvania.

It must have been about October or something when we saw some Russians over. There was no fighting where I had come from. Then after awhile you could hear the fight going on. Then it went farther and farther away from us.

The farmers had a terrible time. At that time, my father wasn't working anymore on the farm; he gave up the farming. My brother, of course, had a lot of farms to take care of. The carrots and beets were not all out yet. Finally, in December believe it or not, I think it must have been the twelfth or thirteenth of December, we went out and my brother said, "Okay, let's go out and maybe we can get those carrots out." I went with him that day and we tried. We kept our doors locked and closed. Nobody would walk on the street unless they had to. In December, we all went with my brother. We all went together and we tried to get carrots out. Wouldn't you know it, there came some Russian soldiers right then to the field. We were shaking and wondering what they were going to do. You heard some terrible stories. You couldn't talk to them, we didn't know anything. They just made some big oafs of themselves; they just talked and giggled and then took off again. It is a terrible feeling you have when you know that they are there, and yet they are not and you do not know where they are at. My cousin's husband came home, and like I said, we kept the doors locked all the time. He comes and just pounds on the door. My mother says, "Hide everybody!" They were hiding and trying to hide whatever place you could. Every time something like that happened we would just hide. My mother said, "I am going." I said, "No you

are not!" She said, "Oh, yes, I am the only one who is going to go and nobody else is going to show their face." She went out and there he stood, my cousin's husband. When he came in I said, "Now why didn't you say it was you? Don't you know what a terrible feeling you give us when you just pound into the door?" He said, "I am sorry, but I just didn't think about it." My sister . . . they came at Christmas. My sister lives about nine miles on the other side of the city that I was talking about. She lived in Codlea.

A: The Russians came in?

K: Yes. My sister came at Christmas for a visit. All right, they said, we are going to trust ourselves and go see mother and father and the family. They came, and she said when she left, "We'll see you in Russia." My grandmother was there too, everybody was there. I said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "Well, they are having various talks that they are going to take us to Russia." I said, "Oh no, you don't believe that?" She said, "Oh, yes I do. They are talking very strongly about it." I never believed it. I never did believe it until the twelfth of January.

They came and pounded on the doors. Every city or village was encircled. I tell you, there is no way you could get out. Like I said, we lived on the edge of town and my mother said that maybe we could get through over the little river behind our back yard and walk away so they don't find us. I went in the back and every five yards apart there was a soldier. I mean they were right one after the other. You just couldn't get through there. I said, "I'll go back in again." We stayed in the house and waited. About seven o'clock my brother told the soldiers that he wanted to say good-bye to my mother. They brought him. They brought him to our house. He was married and had two children. He had lost his wife in September and in January they picked him up. He had two children, one ten and the other thirteen. He came and said good-bye to mom and while he was talking to her, he whispered in her ear to see that they didn't get Martha. She said, "I'll try my best." He went, and I was hiding in the basement. Then there were stories still going on; you could still hear them. That one or the other would slip through and they would tell you things like, if they didn't find the person that they wanted, they would take someone else. There was my mother-in-law, my mother, and my sister-in-law with three children. My father wasn't home. It was all the women that were left there. My father was at my sister's. I said, "No, I can't do that.

If they take my sister-in-law, she has three children." I came out then. When they came to pick me up, mother said, "She isn't here; she is at her sister's." The officer, the captain then, said when they left, "You better see to it that she is here when we come again." He knew that I was there, but he wasn't about to let them know. "You better see to it that she is here, otherwise, they're going to pick somebody else, or they will do something to the property that you wouldn't like." When I heard that, I said, "I am going because they are probably going to take my sister-in-law." I came out and prepared myself to go. When they came back again it was about one o'clock.

A: How old are you at this time?

K: I was twenty-three.

A: Okay.

K: They got us together at the movie center, movie house. They had cleaned the pews out, the chairs out, and made it empty, and they got the people together. We were then shipped into buses and then from then on drove to the railroad station. There we were shipped into cattle cars in the train and taken to Russia.

A: Can you tell me what the ride in the train car was like to Russia?

K: Terrible. (laughter) Terrible. We just had straw on the floor and they had made some bunks a little higher. I think there were about eight or ten of us laying across on the bunks, and on the bottom, the same way. The rest of them had to go into the middle, anyplace, to lay down. It was terrible.

A: How many were in a car, would you say?

K: I can't remember; I can't tell you. We did have two cars two different times. When we left Brasov, there was a group in. Then in Jasi, which is close to the Russian border, we had to switch trains because the Russians had tracks too narrow. Then a different group came and joined us. First it was our hometown and there were a few from Brasov and a lot from the other little towns there around. In Jasi they switched us around and it was still our town and a few from Brasov. Then they put some other people from the other side of Brasov in, some people that used to be German and are still German; their blood is German. They had to change into the Hungarian language. Hungarians were in then and there was no other way; they had to do it in order to make a living. Most of them hardly

spoke German; they knew some of it, but they spoke it again. Their names were all German. That group came in then in our car and they were on the other side, so I can't really tell you. I think it was thirty-seven and forty-some, something like that in one car.

A: From your hometown, did they take just the German population?

K: Yes, just the German population, men from 15-45 and women from 18-35. Now we have heard, but I couldn't prove it, that they took some Romanians too. The agreement with the Romanian government with Russia was, "Give us some people to work." Then of course, Romania says, "Okay you can have the German people." As I understand it, they didn't have enough so they took some Romanians. They took a mound of people and shipped them into Russia.

The train ride was cold. Of course, we had warm clothing as much as we could. Nobody knew what to wear or what to take along. When I got ready, one of them said, "Take a suitcase." The other said, "Take a knapsack." You wanted to take something to eat, you wanted to take some clothes, but you couldn't take too many because if you walk too much . . . you never knew if you had to walk. Maybe you would have to drag all of that and that wouldn't be good. I was always a skinny little thing, I couldn't drag very much. I had to make a decision, either one or the other. I had just a change of clothes over everything. Underwear I had more than one, but the clothes itself, I had just a change of it. I took some food along just to be able to eat something on the way in case they don't feed us. They did give us something to eat. They brought in a bucket full of soup, some sort of Russian soup, cabbage soup, which is what we are in Russia most of the time. That is what they brought in and everybody got a dish full of that. If we didn't have enough then we would take some of our own food and eat, which was good on the way. As long as we could save it, we tried to save it. If we had enough of that we just . . . we never knew where and how long we had to stay with our food and had to survive off of that. It took us over two weeks until we got to Russia.

When we got there, that is the funny part about it, we got into industry just like here, the steelmills. There was so much snow, and it was so black. I said, "Gee, here not even the snow is white." I always said all through the years that I was there and on the way back and afterwards, "I never want to go to a place like that again." Where did I end up, in Youngstown!

A: What was the name of the city, do you know what city you were in?

K: Makeyevka.

A: And where is that?

K: It is about 800 miles into Russia. That is about how far it was. It was in between the mountains, and all the coal mines and steel industry are around there. Most of the people were in this section. Of course, there were some of them that were put into a different section again. Again, a lot of industry.

A: What did you do there, specifically?

K: I worked in the mill, specifically. Very, very old and primitive machinery, and we had to do a lot of things by hand. It was in the mill, they had the rolls; they were going and the man had to push the steel through by hand and they would push it back and up again; I was helping on that. The modern mills had been bombed out and destroyed. We had to get the hot steel on a cart to the mill and then they would work it through and then we had to help tighten it down; you know, tighter and tighter they would make it.

A: To the thickness that you wanted?

K: Yes.

A: How long did you do that?

K: I worked two years and two months on the same place.

A: What kind of living quarters did they provide you?

K: Just a camp. They have all buildings for these kind of workers always, every place. Even the Russians, if they don't have their own home they live in those camp homes, those block homes. The Russians were separated. You would go in one way, an entrance, and you would come into a big room and from the big room there were two rooms on the side. That is the way it was. In the smaller room there were about twenty to thirty people, and in the big room they had between sixty and eighty, depending on how they had to organize them. We had bunk beds, you know, the steel bunk beds, and just enough room to pass each other by.

A: How did they treat you?

K: I have to say we were lucky, in our camp. We had field captains, Russians, who were doing a very good job in that way because they were telling the big shots in the mills and in the shops and so on, "Now don't you touch our people." We were lucky we had not been mistreated. As far as mistreating goes or rape or anything like that, we didn't have that where I was. I have heard it has happened. We would go every morning to work and we had three shifts in the mills and factories. There were some of them that just worked on the roads. They had the day shift of course. I felt sorry for them; in the winter they had to be out there. Then there were some of them that were on a farm. They would come in in the evening and some of them stayed out. I just found out not long ago about that.

My brother-in-law was in another camp away from us and my brother was with me in camp. We happened to meet on the train when we went to Russia, yet in Romania I think it was. We came off the train; they would let us off of the train sometimes to do our jobs, answer nature's call and so on. As I came down I thought, I have to see who is here from my hometown, yet besides the ones in our cattle car. My brother is standing there and said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, same thing you are." He said, "I told mother to hide herself and to hide you." I said, "Well, the hiding didn't help; I had to come out." He was shocked to death; he just couldn't help it. The two of us were together for the two years.

I had a chance to come out because this one worker that I worked with . . . I have to say that I am living because of him. He told me, "Do you want to go home?" I said, "Well, sure I want to go home, do you think I am here for pleasure?" He said, "Yes, you can go if you want to; I can arrange it for you." I said, "How?" He said, "By train, you just board the train when I tell you. The fellow is going to take you right down to Romania." I said, "No, you are lying." He said, "No, I can arrange it for you." I said, "Can my brother come along?" He said, "No, I can't do that; I can send you." Well, I wasn't going to take the chance of being raped or anything on a train and doing what they wanted me to and I said, "No, I'm not going. If my brother isn't going then I am not going." So I didn't go. That was only about three or four months after we got there. I didn't go. We had one girl from my hometown who just left one night. Just like that she took off. She got home; she was fine. Nobody knew what she had to do in order to come home, but she did come home.

Like I said, this fellow there, he was our heater who was trying to get the steel heated up. He would come every morning and bring me a bottle full of milk. He said, "You have to drink it." He had a cow. He was one of the fellows who had a cow. I said, "How do you feed the cow?" He said, "Well, there is a little grass around the house, and I have a little home; I have a little resident house with the hay. I have to cut where I can or buy it later on in the winter, but in the summer it is no problem. He brought milk every morning and I had to drink it. He said, "You have to drink this or you will never survive." I told my husband, if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here. That milk helped me really a lot. That is all there is to it, he just saved me. For a short while they took me away from that place because I was getting to the point where I was so weak that I couldn't work. The boss decided, "Well, she could do the other work." She took me to some other place to work. Then he would come and bring me some milk. There was more workers with me and you didn't dare because you never knew when somebody was talking. They couldn't do it; they weren't supposed to do those things, give us food.

We didn't get any letters from home, no mail whatsoever. Once in awhile there came a letter, but very seldom a letter came from home. Then of course it was in all of the camps that such and such got a letter from home and everybody knew what was going on at home because of that. One time I got a letter from my mother. I got just one letter in those two years. This was towards the end; it must have been in 1946 or something like that. I can't remember it. Then this man said to me, "Why don't you tell us, since you don't get any mail, why don't you write to my address? They just take them away from you when they get to the camp. Why don't you write through my address and you can get mail? I will just give the letters to you and you send them and that is it." I said, "No, I won't do that; I know you could get into trouble." He said, "No, no, go ahead." He was anxious for me to write so that I could get mail. The other girls went ahead and they wrote home and they got letters back, but I never did. I didn't want to put him in any trouble. They got letters back and wouldn't you know, two days after the police were there, right there in the mill. They were asking him what he was doing. He said, "Working, of course." He was not a Communist, that is one thing for sure.

A: But he was a Russian?

K: He was a Russian, yes. He said, "Working, of course." They said, "No, no, no, we are talking about the letters you are getting to your house for these girls over here." He said, "So what, those people need news from home. They don't have anything." They said, "Oh, okay, we'll let you get away this time." They told him right there, I heard it. "This time you get away with it, but if those people send some more letters through your address, you know what happens." He said, "Go ahead, I don't care, even if they put me in jail." I said, "No, it would be silly for us to do that. You have been so good to us and then to go ahead and send a letter and get it to you and then you are going to end up in jail. You are going to work in Siberia. You have a family, you have two grown children." Both of them were very strong Communists and he said, "I can't talk to my children." He told me that. He said, "I can't talk to my children because they have their own meaning, I have mine, and that is it." He was about to go to jail because of that. We never sent any letters after that.

There were some good men and some good people there among them. One that was working with me, oh, he was another one. He was a real Communist. There was nothing one could say against communism. You really just wouldn't dare say a word about it. I never agreed with him. The two of us were like cat and dog. He was so mad at me one time. We were working and I had pulled the lever a little bit too tight and the sheet was going crooked through the mill. We had pliers in order to pull the sheet. It had to be even on the sides of two of us and he had long pliers to push it through. He was lifting the long plier up, and he was looking at me with big eyes and just about to let go, and I looked him straight in the eye. He put it down and let me be. (Laughter) My friend said, "You wouldn't have dared hit him." I said, "If he had tried to hit me, help me heaven, I would have hit him too." Oh, I was so mad at him. He was standing there ready to hit me.

There had been a case where one of the fellows had hit one of the girls because she had one of the hand cranes, to handle with your hand. She was delivering steel to the ovens in the mill and she was coming and had looked the other way and then she saw the crane was close to the fellow, to the Russian fellow--who was another one like my co-worker there--and it had touched him slightly. It didn't hurt him, but it had touched him. He turned around and slapped her. She said, "Okay, if that is what you want, you are going to do your own work." She was a very stubborn girl. She was one of the girls from my hometown. She was a very stubborn one. She said,

"That is it, now you do your own work." It was just about time to finish; she was in a different shift, the one ahead of me, and shifts were changing. When we got there, all of a sudden she stands there and she cries and cries. I said, "What happened?" She told us. I said, "Well, go home and tell the captain about it." She went home and she told him and you know while we were still in shift the captain came to the mill and he said, "If anything like that happens again, you are not going to have any of these girls here with you." Then they never touched us again. He was a Jew, but he helped us. He was a very good man, I have to say so. On the way back, if he had been with us, we would have gotten our food the way it should have been. They put another officer on the train with us and we didn't get the food. When we reached Germany they loaded half of the carload out with moldy bread, and we never got the bread.

A: Why did they send you back?

K: Only when you were incapable of working anymore. That's when they would get their people together from all of the camps and they would send them back. What I never understood is why they sent us to Germany. After all, it was all people from Romania, most of them rather. They released us to Germany.

A: Now did your brother go back with you at that time?

K: No, my brother stayed five years.

A: Five years?

K: Five years, yes.

A: In other words, you were in such a physical condition they said that you couldn't work any longer and so now it is time to send you back?

K: Yes. This girl who was slapped was home; she had been home in camp because she lived at home, in camp, for a couple of months. When she picked up she felt better, and she was not that weak anymore. The doctor felt that she didn't need to go home. She stayed five years.

I worked until the last day. A couple of weeks before we left, they would come with inspection. You would just undress, like in the Army, completely. You undress completely and you march in front of them and they would look you over. If you looked good enough, they kept you, if not then they let you go. Our interpreter, who was a girl from Brasov, grabbed me once more and turned me all around and let them look me over. I was so sleepy; I had night shift and I hadn't slept all week long. That

was the only day I slept and I had to get up for inspection. I was so sleepy, I was glad to get out of there. I went right back to bed. A few days afterwards they all came in and screamed, "Martha, you are going home, you are going home!" I said, "No, I don't believe it!" They said, "Yes, you are going home!" Then I heard it, of course. They only told us just shortly before, unless you were weak enough to have to stay in camp. Then they would have to put you in the infirmary or in bed or something like that. They told us only a few days before. As a matter of fact, two days before they said to get ready to go home.

We went to work and those girls who had written home, who got letters from home, worked with me on the same shift and we told this fellow who let us write home that we were going home and asked him if he had any bread for us to take because we never knew what they were going to feed us on the way. He didn't believe us. He said, "I don't believe it. You are working and I don't believe it." He didn't give it to us. He said, "Even if I had it, I couldn't, because they are on my toes." They were right after him. He said, "I don't have it; if I had it I would give it to you some way or another." We went home and got ready and we took off. The next day we didn't go to work and he said, "Where are the people?" There were three of us leaving on the same day from the same shift. They told him that we were going home and he said, "I don't believe it." "Yes, they are going home; they are going to leave tomorrow morning. Today they are off and tomorrow morning they are going to leave." He said, "I don't believe it." He came to camp and looked through the fence and he wanted to know if it was true that we were leaving. He didn't believe it.

(Laughter) I was so weak that I couldn't say ten words without being exhausted. If I hadn't come away then, I would have never made it because they would have kept me working and I would have just collapsed. As a matter of fact, on the way back, the train ride was fine, I did fine on the way, but then when we were in camp and had a different diet and moved about and this and that, I collapsed a few times. Then one of my friends just grabbed me one day and said to me, "This can't go on like this anymore, you are going to the hospital." I said, "No, I won't, I am fine. I am not dizzy now; I am fine." She said, "Nothing doing, just put everything down and come with me." She grabbed me, and led me right to the doctor.

There was always, every day, several of them standing in line waiting for the doctor to examine them. She walked past everybody and stood right in front of the door and as soon as the patient came out she pushed me in. He said, "You can't do that." This was in Germany now. She

said, "Yes, I can, because if you don't she is going to collapse right here again." He took me and he kept me right there. He didn't even let me go to the room again, but put me in bed and I got better food. I got a dishful of mashed potatoes with a lump of butter, which you couldn't get in Germany at all. Everybody looked at me like I was special. This picked me up again, enough to be moved away again. If I hadn't gone to the hospital I would have died there in the first camp.

A neighbor of mine died on the way home. We met some people from his camp. We were asking each other, "Where are you from and where have you been?" They told us. I said, "Well, do you know anybody from my hometown?" They said, "Well, where are you from?" They said, "Oh, yes, there was a fellow." I said, "What do you mean there was a fellow with you?" They said, "Well, he died on the way home." He was just fine, they were getting the meal and he was ready to eat. It took awhile, they didn't bring it right away and he died right there before he got the meal, on the way home. I couldn't believe it. I never knew that my brother-in-law had died. We had come away in March. I had talked to him once in awhile when we met on the road. He would come to camp and look through the fence, he never did come in, but he would come look through the fence. Then somebody would tell me that my brother-in-law was at the fence. Then I would go. The hard workers would get a kilogram of bread. The ones that were not hard workers would get light meals and so on, just on the road or something. They would give almost everybody 750 grams of bread a day. My brother-in-law got the same because he was in camp. Now and then I would have a little bit left over and I would give it to him. I would say, "Wait a minute, I am going to get it." Just what I had left over I gave him because I knew the man needed it more than I needed it, even though I could use it too, but I gave it to him.

One time, the last time, I had just eaten my bread, all of it. I was getting to the point where I was weak enough myself and had eaten all of the bread. Then somebody told me, "Your brother-in-law is at the fence." I went out and I felt so bad. I was ready to cry. I said, "I don't have a piece of bread to give you." He said, "Never mind, I am not coming for the bread. I came to see you, to see how you are and how's Mish," my brother. I said, "He is all right, but I would have . . ." He said, "No, don't take the chance because you never know when somebody is going to come and see us." We just talked and I didn't give him any bread and shortly afterwards he died. I always felt terrible because I couldn't give him a piece of bread; maybe it would have helped him. I still carry that feeling with me, because I always say if I had had a piece of bread maybe it would have helped him. When

I had more bread I would give it to my brother in camp.

They gave us hard workers now and then a little meat. The rest of them didn't get any meat. In the mill itself, we would, if we had bonus, maybe get some soup that you could eat in the cafeteria. Now and then they would boil some fish with cabbage. That's about it; that's all that was in it. That piece of fish, I would take and give it to my brother because I never ate fish. Then in later months they would give us, every morning, a bowl full of fish for eight people. They put it smack in the middle of the table and you were supposed to eat from that. Everybody would get a little bit from this bowl of fish. We never ate the fish, the girls. The men were sitting at the next table, and as soon as we got up, they would eat fish like there was a war going on. I felt so sorry for those fellows sometimes, but I couldn't eat them. They were those tiny little fish, just like the minnows. They were just thrown into a barrel and given to us. On the way back we got the fish once and that is when I started eating fish. That was the first times I ate fish. (Laughter) I suppose the fish helped. They didn't give us the bread that we were supposed to have because they had a lot of bread left. There were several other things that I could probably tell you.

My brother, for instance, stayed five years. Within the first couple of months, he worked in shipping, unloading coal and things like that. He was in a draft more than I was and he got himself sick and stayed home, heart trouble. There is a word for it. He ended up with heart trouble. He died on that after seventeen years at home. He was never a man anymore. He worked a little bit, but not much. He lived that long, anyhow. He saw his children growing up and having his grandchildren, but my brother-in-law never had a chance like that. He left a little girl at home. She was three years old, and the girl never knew him because she was too small. She never remembered him.

A: When your brother was released at the end of five years, was that because he was . . .

K: No, everybody came home.

A: Oh, everybody came home.

K: I hear there are cases where they probably have married a Russian and got themselves out of camp and things like that. A few of them, not from our camp, but I hear that it has happened. The rest of them came home after five

years and they told us this right in the beginning; they said for five years. Just writing home, I never believed it . . . we had one case, I'll never forget this, the woman was a very, tall, husky farmer's wife, more like a man. She came because of her daughter; she didn't want her daughter to come and she left the daughter at home. The woman wasn't there three months and she was dead. She was just melting away. She was such a tall and husky, very strong woman. In three months she was just gone, it's as simple as that. I said that that was really worthwhile, her coming and not the daughter. The daughter might have gone to a camp at home because they did take them there in camps, the ones who were hiding. I had a friend, she was hiding too, and they never got her, and then later on she had to go into camp at home, in Romania.

A: Who was running the camps at home?

K: I couldn't even tell you, probably the Russians, because the Russians were in there. Probably the Russians, I couldn't tell you. I don't know anything about that.

A: When did you leave and come to the United States?

K: Well, on the way back, like I said, they had released us all to Germany, and I didn't know which way to go or what to do. We were released and put in camp awhile and then they let you go in a week or so. They had to see how your health was, and then they would let you go. They would let you go to any kind of farm, a section where the farmers needed workers, or small towns, if there was a possibility that there was work, that you could work. They had arrangements with the people, they needed so many and so on. They let us go and there was a small town where there were mostly farmers and nothing else. It was very close to Dresden. Dresden had been bombed out completely. They could tell us how they saw the flames. We got there in the beginning of the month and we were supported since we didn't have any money or anything. They would give us the ration cards. They gave us some money so that we could buy the food that we were allowed to get. Within two weeks we had used up the money. We were so hungry and eating everything together that we could. The people, they were very unfriendly over there, I have to say. I stayed only the two weeks. They had put in a normal, beautiful, not big, but nice room, and they put some straw for us there for four girls to sleep on. We weren't allowed to cook anyplace. They had one of the heating ovens there and there was just a little platform where we could cook something. It was terrible. After all the Russian experience we had and then we came to a place where we thought we were free and we had some people that spoke

our language and we had some people that have some hope. That was, of course, in the eastern zone yet. You still had some hope and you talked to people that spoke your own language, and then you got treated that way. They were very unfriendly.

We were supposed to look for work and see if we could get any work someplace. There was no definite thing, you go here or you go there. You can look for your own work. Some of the girls took off and they looked for work. One of girls said, "Martha, I have a job for you with this farmer just at the end of the road here." I would say okay. To me it didn't matter, anything at that time, I just didn't care at all. As a matter of fact, when we got off the train, when we were shipped to the different villages, there was a group of people from my neighbor town and they hollered at me and they kept on hollering at me. I was just getting off and I sat down; I didn't care what the world was going to, I was simply exhausted. By that time one of the girls was trying to get my attention; she said, "Hey, they are calling for you. Why don't you go and answer them?" I didn't know, I didn't hear or see anything. I just didn't know anything. I just sat there and thought anybody can do what they want to.

They had the group ready and the farmer took the girls along and I was too late, the attention, I was too late for him too. Then I went with these other girls there, strange girls; I hardly knew them but I was with them for the two weeks. Anyhow, after awhile those girls were trying to look for work. I stayed home; I didn't even care anymore. They said, "I found you a job if you want it. They need two of them and you can come with me if you want to." I said okay. The other two girls went to town and were looking for a job over there in the city. They came by and they found work. They both had work and this girl had two jobs for us too. I am laughing, the other girl says, "I would rather work on the farm than go into the city." I said, "Well, what is keeping you?" She said, "Well, you got the job with her." I said, "I don't care; I don't like to go on the farm that much because I am not ready for heavy work like that." Then she said, "You want to trade with me? All you have to do is go into town and tell them that you are trading with me; that's all there is to it." I said sure, because I would rather work in a hotel than on a farm. She was so happy. She said, "Boy, am I glad you are going and I am staying here. At least I have milk and food here." I said that I didn't care what I had; I just didn't care anymore.

I just worked in a hotel for awhile. She was nice to me. Of course, we were entitled then for the next months ration cards and then you would get them. She said, "All you do is give me your ration card, and I feed you, and you work here and I give you so much money." I don't even remember how much it was to tell you the truth. She kept the money until I was going to leave for anyplace I wanted to.

I wrote home and they wrote back and I got the news that my husband was in West Germany. I wrote back to them and then him and from him I got in no time a telegram saying that he would see to it that I got over on the other side. I just worked there and just waited for the time that it would happen. At the same time, I could have had a chance to get my release papers through the police and they would make another transport for us to go down to Romania, the people who were from Romania. Like I said, I got the telegram sooner than I had decided to give my papers to the police, and I waited again. I had a good time as far as it goes. She gave me a good meal once and the next time it was not much because they themselves didn't have much. The meals that she cooked, she cooked very good. She gave me good portions of soups, but I was still losing weight. I was coming down more. Every time the girls would come in, they would say, "Martha, you are looking even skinnier than you did before."

This took only a couple of months and then my husband said, "Now, I tell you what, you come and get on the way and come." I said that I wasn't going to the Russian zone because I never knew what was going to happen to me when I got there. There was a fellow coming and going on the black market, back and forth to the Russian zone. He said, "He is going to meet you in Dresden and you come with him." Now that was an experience itself from then on, I tell you. I told the lady that my husband wrote and that I could go over there. She said, "How?" And I told her that I was supposed to meet a man in Dresden and he was going to take me with him; he knows the way and he knows how. She said, "You are coming back?" I said, "No, I am not coming back, even if I walk over I am not coming back." She said, "I know you will like it but I do not feel that you are not coming back. There are worse things than this." I said, "I know that, but if I can I will not come back." She said, "Okay, Martha, you go ahead." She saw to it that I had some food and said good-bye and good luck to me and she let me go.

I reached Dresden and never found the man; I couldn't find the man anyplace. Maybe we had missed each other.

He was going someplace else at the time I got there and we just missed each other. I stood there like a lost sheep. I didn't know what to do. Some of these girls who had been with me in Russia were there too. I said, "Where are you girls going?" They said that they were trying to go to the west zone. They were trying to get away from me; they thought I was going to go along with them. I said, "I am going too, but I have arrangements." They asked how. I told them and she said not to go with them. I said, "Okay, I am not coming with you; I am just going to go my own way." I stood there again like a lost sheep. They didn't want to sell me a ticket. You had to have a reason to go towards the Russian zone. There has to be a reason for it. Now this short distance from this little town to Dresden is all right, but from Dresden on toward the west zone, you had to have a definite reason or some kind of paper to be able to go there. They knew that everybody would get to the border and then walk over. I didn't have anything. I didn't have any identification except my release papers, nothing else. Then there was this man coming down, standing there looking at me. He said, "What are you doing?" He was a conductor in the western zone on the train. I said, "I don't know which way to turn because I am lost. No one will sell me a ticket and I can't go on from here and I don't want to go back either." He said, "Don't worry about that. I am going to get you to the border." I said, "Are you sure?" He said, "Never mind." I said, "Are you going to be able to get me a ticket?" He said not to worry about it, to come with him and follow him. I took my chances, I tell you, I took my chances. What else could happen to me except they ship me back to where I was before. He said, "Come with me." I followed him into this conductor compartment. All of these officials were in that room. I thought, how am I going to go to that border without a ticket. He told me to sit on the window and he would sit on the side. I sat. In the meantime, somebody stole my food. Some men snatched it and it was gone. I sat down and the conductor came and punched the card, and he said, "This is my wife," and gave him his identification. I thought I was going to faint. Well, so far so good. (Laughter) We got to the border and he said, "Trust me, we are going to go on the other side. I'll get you over the border and from then on it is up to you." I had the money that she had saved for me and at the same time, they had the same kind of money; they still had the Reichs marks. We came off the train and everybody was trying to go over the border. They just took off and wandered off to the hill, and on top of the hill was the border itself. They went in there and there was always a guard. Somebody was leading them

and somebody was supposed to know and so on. We could see them just go, ducking and jumping. He said, "Look at them how they go." That is not good. If they see them, they are just going to shoot them down. Settle down and just sit down." There was a family that just hung on to us, a man and a woman with two children. They stayed always about ten yards away from us. Whatever we did, they did. We sat down, we ate. He gave me some of his food, and we ate. Then he said, "We'll wait an hour or two and then we go over." We waited. He said, "I wonder if these people are going to go without us?" I said, "How do I know?" He said, "Those people are going to wait for us and they'll follow us." They did.

After about one and a half hours he said, "I think we can go; everybody else has gone over or stayed here." We just walked over; there were no guards anyplace, we just walked straight as if that was our own home and our own property. We just walked across. When we were on the other side of the hill, we had just passed the top of the hill, and he said, "Now we are safe; we are in West Germany." I said, "You are kidding?" He said, "No, that's where we are. They are not allowed to shoot us any more even if they see us." It wasn't but about a hundred yards away the English police, the English section, at that time, were coming. I said, "Oh!", there goes my heart again. I said, "Geez, here comes police." He said, "Don't worry about those, they are not doing anything." That family, they just followed us. As soon as we were in West Germany then they started passing us. The police came and said, "Where are you folks going?" He said, "We are coming from the East. I am going home and this young lady is going to go to her husband in Frankfurt." They said, "Okay, go on," and they let us go. I thought this was the first friendly face I had ever seen. (Laughter)

We came to the train station; of course there were hills of people. I mean they were just one next to the other, sitting and standing. The whole surrounding of the railroad station and the inside was just filled with people.

A: Was this at Frankfurt?

K: No, it was just on this side and I couldn't tell you the town, I really wouldn't know. It was just this side of the East zone and the English zone. He said, "It doesn't make a difference, when we can, when we have a chance, we'll take a ticket. You are going to take your own ticket and go to Frankfurt. I have to turn the other way; I have to go home from here." I did. We had to

stay through the night; we had to stand wherever we could through the night. Then when morning came, four o'clock, people started moving, getting their tickets and moving out. He said, "You better go and get your own ticket and you might not get a ticket in time, by the time the train comes." We had checked the train schedule, I think it was about 6:30 my train was leaving. His train was leaving about twenty minutes before that. He said, "I have to take off, from now on you are on your own."

I had my ticket and I was waiting for my train, and the train came and I got on the train. I had the ticket and nothing else. When it came, at this time they had four zone sections, Russian, English, French, and American . . . You had to pass through the railroad station, there was a four-zone control. Now on this spot they checked your identification, your ticket and everything. It was just like going into another country. You are going through a control. The conductor came in and said, "If anybody has any trouble or does not have any identification, come and see me." I had to, there was nothing else I could do. I went down and I said, "I have nothing except my release papers from Russia and a ticket?" He said, "Oh my gosh, what am I going to do with you?" No identification of any kind. Everybody generally had an identification card. There was the station and the offices besides the railroad station. He said, "You go ahead and stand behind that door until the train starts moving and then you get on the train again. If you have luck, you will make it." I went. I stood behind the door and waited until all the control was through. I stood there and just waited. In the meantime, somebody came out of the offices and said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I just have to fix my stocking." (Laughter) I don't even know where that came from, but I did it. He said, "Well, do it someplace else." I let him go out and as soon as the train moved I ran and jumped on the train. My whole baggage, I didn't have much, it was only a bundle, was already on the train.

I got on the train and I got to Frankfurt without any trouble. That was a spot where I didn't know what I was going to do. I had some tough spots, but this one was a tough one. Everybody says to me, "Well, how did you ever do that?" I said, "I didn't care anymore, that's how I did it." I got to my husband and from then on of course, we lived in Frankfurt for awhile. Then we moved away from there to Bavaria. From there we decided to come to America, because he had an uncle over here. He said, "Why don't you come over here?"

A: When did you come here?

K: In 1952.

A: And you came right to Youngstown?

K: Right to Youngstown. Yes, when we got by the railroad station, I saw the mills. (Laughter) Did I want to come here? It's terrible, I had a terrible sight. Of course, we lived the first three years in Poland, and the rest of the time in Youngstown.

A: Well, is there anything else? I think that about concludes it.

K: It covers everything. I did make a long story of it.

A: No, that's fine.

END OF INTERVIEW