

EI-1406

ADELE STRUMMER

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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PORT:

RESIDENCES:

- **AUSTRIA: VIENNA**
- **US: NEW YORK, NY; BALTIMORE, MD**

LEVINE: Today is April 4th, 2006 and I'm here in Baltimore, Maryland and I am with Adele Strummer, who came here in 1951 from a displaced persons camp. She came through Ellis Island and at the time she were twenty nine years of age.

STRUMMER: There's one mistake in it.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. We are going to put a correction here. Ms. Strummer were not in a displaced persons camp, she were a displaced person coming from Vienna, Austria and she were twenty nine years of age at that time.

STRUMMER: Twenty eight.

LEVINE: Twenty eight?

STRUMMER: I think so, I think. '22 -- '22-- '22, what would that make it? I were born in '22.

LEVINE: You were born in May and you came here in March so you were not yet twenty nine, you were clo--.

STRUMMER: I were close to it (both laugh). That's why I always say twenty-eight, you know --

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine from the National Park Service. If you would start please by saying your birth date and where you were born.

STRUMMER: My name is Adele "Deli" Strummer. My name by birth is Aufrichtig and I were born May 2nd, 1922 in Vienna, Austria.

LEVINE: And could you just spell your maiden name please.

STRUMMER: [Long pause] A-U-F-R-I-C-H-T-I-G

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

STRUMMER: Anne Türck, T-Ü-R-C-K

LEVINE: Ok, and your father's name?

STRUMMER: Rudolf.

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents growing up in Vienna?

STRUMMER: Yes. I have on my mother's side, gra-- grandparents Anne Türck and Johann Türck T-Ü-R-C-K and on my father's side I did not know my grandfather but my grandmother were Wilhelmina Aufrichtig.

LEVINE: And do you know if the family had been in Vienna or around Vienna for generations or not?

STRUMMER: My family basically were in Vienna for generations. My father original came - I think his parents came from Czechoslovakia but my father were born in Vienna. My mother's history goes back very, very far. My mother were by birth a Christian woman and turned towards my father's religion the age of seventeen and became very devoted to her family. And anyhow her -- more the less, her family history goes back for generations to Vienna, Austria.

LEVINE: I see, and how about brothers and sisters? Did you have brothers and sisters in Austria?

STRUMMER: Yes, I had brothers and sisters. I had my sister "Lizy", Alise, "Lizy" and my brother Fritz, my brother Julius *und* [and] myself.

LEVINE: And were you -- where were your birth order? Where you the youngest or the oldest or the middle?

STRUMMER: I were the second, the second. Lizy, my sister Lizy *oder* [or], by -- actually here name is Alise, Alice -- were two years older than myself.

LEVINE: Let's see, you were born in 1922 so there were a period of about lets say eleven years before things started to change, I would imagine.

Those first – those first years, what are the things you remember most about that early childhood in Vienna?

STRUMMER: I had one of the most wonderful childhood a child can ever have. My dad were a very successful business man and my mother were a singer by profession. There were music, there were love, there were good understanding, there were an enormous amount of relatives. I had uncles and aunts. I had cousins and especially on a Sunday they all came together and we had really some -- every Sunday were a celebration in my childhood. There were -- between the holidays of Christmas and *Khanukah* there were *Khanukah* candles, there were a Christmas tree. My parents believed very much bringing us children up – respect for religion meant a lot in my upbringing.

And I would say, I -- on a Sunday -- on a Saturday I went with my Jewish grandparents, the grandmother I should say, to a synagogue. I learned about my own religion. On a Sunday, I went with my mother's parents to a church. So I had it all. I were a happy, happy girl who loved chocolate, you know, and I must say that I were lucky enough. My grandfather in his lifetime had stables in Vienna, what were a very big thing in those days. And so I -- my father and his twin brother kept some of it, so I had a pony.

And I ha-- I had just a wonderful childhood. I remember mostly -- riding on my grandpa's neck, on my mother's side, in those Alps in Europe and I thought I must say that every time I approached people from other parts of the world with very, very proud feeling. I used to tell them, I am, I am a Viennese. I just loved Vienna and the old city. I would say that [clears throat] I were fortunate. I had as long as I could, as long as I were allowed to, I had a wonderful education over there. And we -- I finally got into Junior College after having a special exam out of the last

year of high school. I went into Junior College, what they called Gymnasium. And it didn't take long. 19-- 1938 Hitler occupied Vienna, Austria and I would say my life changed dramatically.

LEVINE: Yea, before we talk about how it changed, how would you describe yourself as a young person, as a girl growing up? What kind of a little girl were you?

STRUMMER: Well I were very, very mischievous. I tell you I think I were -- I were a problem really to my -- to my parents in a sense that I were very determined to make my own decisions, you know. I -- I wasn't a bad child but I had for instance a sister who were two years above me, and were absolutely a priceless student. Und very, very petite and very out -- for instance, her shoes were always clean, my shoes were always dirty. You know things like that. And I remember when I came into school, you know. In my very low -- lower years of learning, my public school, I -- everybody remembered, "Here comes Litzzy's sister." I didn't like that.

So I became really a student who were revolting against it. And then there came one teacher who were smart enough to realize this. And asked one day to write a special composition and that would go in the showcase. So I wrote a little story about a big, big shoe -- about a boots and a ballet sh-- ballét shoe, you know and well I made first prize. *Und* it went into the showcase. *Und* from that moment on I really became an unbelievable student because I finally made it own. And those are the sort of things, you know. I became so close to my sister in our later years but I often, often remember this. I also were a child who loved chocolate, you know.

And on the High Holiday mother had those – had those chocolates and she made those *matzo* balls, not *matzo* balls, she made those chocolate balls and put them up on the high closet. Every time I passed with my little carriage with my little doll, that I managed to get up there and take a handful. And finally it came the day when one of my aunts came to visit and Mother wanted to show off we had dessert. There were only one left. (both laugh) Well I would say that I were a kid full of mischief but for some odd reason I – my -- I never got – I never got punished in the sense I never got hurt. I don't ever remember that my parents for instance raised their hands against us, you know.

But I had my punishment in for instance my allowance were taken from me *oder* something like that. And as I got older and older, I realized -- I know that my parents were my educators, they meant it well with me. But in many, many ways I just, I just were a little – a little tomboy, you know. I mean, I really -- I wanted to do things my own way. Interesting enough, I still have that. I still --I learned to cope with the world and I learned to listen, to listen good. But I also know when I am convinced that I am right, I'm right. Takes a long time to convince myself, when even as a child I thought about myself a great deal, but for some odd reason I wanted to be sure that I'm right.

LEVINE: Ok, so you went through, you went to Junior College and that were --

STRUMMER: Just the beginning – just the beginning. Because at – at -- at 1938, remember my years -- you know --. [clears throat] Immediately my – my education, you know, were interrupted. I were fortunate and lucky enough in 1938 by the time I were about fifteen years (s—s-- something a little bit more than fifteen years old) and I could enter a nursing training. I must say that even we -- I were little, I were always driven by medicine. Kids usual play with toys, I played with the stethoscope. I

examined my sister Litzy's toys and if I couldn't get a heart beat, the toy went to bed, you know. I had this me-- this -- this drive for medicine always in -- in -- in -- in my feelings.

And I would say that it paid off in -- in 1938 because I could enter in nursing training. I were still allowed to enter nursing training. Not every Jew could be deported immediately so I went in a very, very difficult nursing training [coughs] and of course by 1943 I were taken with my very ailing patient to my first concentration camp. During this time, in one of my shifts, I met a woman who felt that I were much stronger. She had a daughter who were a trainee, who later on became a nurse like myself. Nita became my adopted sister. And I would say with Nita together, we faced in 1943 this hard route, what basically took us for the next two years from one camp site to another.

We started off in Theresienstadt what were in 1943 a very glorified ghetto. You felt there -- you came there with two suit cases. What were -- we were allowed to pack this up in about an hour's time in Vienna. And one were taken immediately from you. I want you to know that what ever were in that one suitcase left, that were yours. Yes indeed. But still I feel--(I don't know how long you want me to talk about Theresien--)

LEVINE: Umm.

STRUMMER: I still feel that Theresienstadt were the place -- well perhaps in my days, in my days in '43 -- it were a glorified ghetto and you had the feeling maybe, maybe you make it. There were a time when Red Cross became aware of us and [coughs] overnight this ghetto turned in -- in a showplace. We had some good Viennese pastry, we had Viennese music. And then they came *und* marched through this -- through the

campsite and I could just hear 'em, "It's not so bad here, it's not so bad here" but how little they know. By the time they left it were six hours, six hours out of my life I really felt human and ah --

LEVINE: When you left for that camp, did you know what you were going to?

STRUMMER: No, we did not know because in 1938, what I would like to put on this tape – *kristallnacht* - or the night of the broken glasses is I guess, very familiar to the world. Well at that time, I were about nineteen, (I were born in '22, so you know how old I were in 1938). I saw the synagogue of my childhood in flame. As wonderful my childhood was, I became just overnight -- I became a very, very, very matured teenager. I realized what it meant to look danger in their eyes. I saw people were taken street by street. I saw my own father thrown out of his business. It wasn't enough they took his business but they forced him on the street of Vienna, hit him in his head, like kicked him with a -- like a football -- in his head.

The man were -- from that day on brain damaged for the rest of his life. I saw my mother, this proud girl you know, who loved Vienna and were loved by Vienna. I saw her being taken into a house of what they call Elizabeth Promenade, a house of what the Nazis used as investigation. They put her hands in a vice and tightened the vice and wanted to force her to let go of her because, remember my mother's --. After all, my mother were Christian by birth and mother said no. And when I think about myself -- where my strength came from, what is -- that's from my mother – she's my role model. By the time I saw my mother again, saw my parents again, Mother were a broken woman with very, very bad injured finger.

LEVINE: When they put her finger -- her hand in the vice, what were they trying to get out of her?

STRUMMER: They were trying to get out -- to let go of her family, to -- to dis—they would get go /o-- of my father, of us. They wanted to separate those women. This were a very important thing for them. My mother's blood according to Hitler's theory were pure. Pure down in generation, you know. Now mine wasn't. But my mother could have helped herself and she just did the opposite, you know. So I would say that if I -- if I think about my mother, I think about the biggest role model a child could ever have. With all those feelings, I finally got in as a -- cried, cried, cried -- all of a sudden matured young woman to my first ghetto life. Theresienstadt were also the place where I found a young man there, my husband Ben.

We became man and wife, blessed by an old rabbi in an attic with a broken window, surrounded by about eighty people. And I felt, all I could think is, that -- you know -- it would be good life, it would be a life one day in peace. It would be a life one day in freedom. We thought about peace, we thought about children. We dreamed about a better world, you know. We had so many plans. Between the two of us we were forty four years old, you know. Unfortunately, my husband were -- after three months -- he were taken from me. And he were -- we were told the fellows first, the women will follow. I don't have to tell you that it didn't work out this way.

We followed after three days and then I got into Auschwitz, Birkenau-Auschwitz. To speak about my marriage is a tough thing to do. My husband Ben survived like myself, however he survived as a complete different human being. He were tortured very badly and became a split personality. I tried to keep this marriage for a year. I loved this guy. It

were the first involvement in my life. I thought if anybody in the world has to help him, I have to help him. I have to understand him. By the time, it became so bad -- he became so abusive -- that I were told, my medical advice was, "You don't help." He will be in jail and he will be dead.

LEVINE: When did --?

STRUMMER: The second time in my life I really lost this man what meant the world to me. I -- I don't even want to speak much about this because it still hurts but I can only tell you that I consider the breakage of my marriage just a victim of this time. And I know how he used to be. I know this lovable, caring, wonderful human being turned in -- in a very abusive man.

LEVINE: When were you together? After he went first to Auschwitz and then you followed? When did you get together with him again?

STRUMMER: After two year of time -- after one year. That were 1944. 1944 we both were transported. Now he were transported first to Auschwitz and then to Dachau. Dachau. *Und* I were transported -- I once—I were transported to Auschwitz. In -- when you came to Auschwitz in 1944 --. To speak about Auschwitz, you know, there's a lot known. There's a lot -- the destruction, I -- I can only --. *Und* I -- I like to tell you a little bit about my own feelings. Our arrival *waren* [were] hundreds of us. Immediately we were driven in -- in a very, very large room and told all we had -- we had to leave all the little belongings we still had. We had to leave it in -- in -- in more the less in that train *wo* [where] we arrived. There were an SS man in front of the train and he signaled just with his --. He never spoke, he signaled -- left, right, left, right. Left meant I kill you immediately, right meant I will work you to death.

I were young so it were neither. My passport into Auschwitz were my face. My face, my youth. In a room (oh, I would say very, very large room) we had to take off all our clothing, our shoes. I bent down pick up my shoes and immediately I got hurt for that. So I know that were a no-no. Then came that Auschwitz haircut -- done not by a caring beautician. The next thing is we were driven into a room -- *und* interesting enough in 1953, *wo* I could investigate in the archives of Auschwitz when I filmed over there. There were separate rooms. There were rooms, they all look alike -- had pipes on the ceiling. Some expelled the deadly gas and some expelled ice cold water. However, you never know, you never knew.

There were hundreds of us naked women pressed tightly together. We felt each others sweat, we felt each others fear. And if you really ask me when I really learned to pray, that were the time *wo* I prayed. It wasn't Moses, it wasn't Jesus. I prayed only to this one God, who still is my -- the best thing in my life. God, you know -- I mean -- I --. In all my troubles and in all my life's ups and downs, I always turn to God. I ask him. I remember so well, so well I remember, ahh arguing with him. "Why?" But the same time I apologized. That's all I had -- God. And I prayed and I prayed and then came this ice cold water, *und* that meant life. In that -- interesting enough --

[equipment problem, long pause]

LEVINE: Okay

STRUMMER: Whoever listens to this tape, I want you to know in a concentration camp, there were some good Christians too. There were nuns, there were monks, there were priests. Unfortunately, there weren't enough. We lost eleven million people. And who were those people? They

were mentally ill, homosexual, Jehovah's Witness, political prisoners and of course the Jews. Jewish people in those days were there for annihilation. Hitler wanted to annihilate a race and so therefore it were really a tremendous--. I always felt that non-Jewish people who touched a concentration camp deserved a lot of credit because they probably wanted to help us. And so therefore we have to honor them. I couldn't he-- I were a Jew. And I must say if I were ever, **ever, ever** aware of my religion and developed a certain pride of my religion -- it were during the time in such a young year who I were labeled as a Jew. And even today with pride I say, "I am a Jew".

I fight for the good things of life. I wanted to exchange the traumatic -- traumatic time of my life to a message of hope and peace. Mostly what I have learned -- what I have learned in my early childhood, respect for relations is the answer to many, many, many, many situations. Ah, that interesting part in Auschwitz, that the interesting part but most cruel part, and this is probably the only thing I would like to take -- talk about Auschwitz. I became -- I became a more the less -- I saw children being killed in Auschwitz. I'm a witness and I witness for that. On a day, there *war* terrific noise in the -- in the far distance but I could see that there were children lined up in double rows *und* people with guns. [not understood] SS with guns used those little hats -- those little children for target practice. It is hard to explain -- it is hard to explain my feeling at that moment. Because as long as I live, I will never forget that moment in my existence when I basically saw those [tears] little bodies thrown in to the ground. In my positive way of thinking, I feel that those children will a route for peace. Those were the pioneers, they didn't want to but they pioneered the road for peace. If today, we wanna -- if there were one child in the world who deserves to live a free life, you have to remember the children of the Holocaust.

LEVINE: I'm afraid I interrupted you when you were talking about the Nun that you met, did you finish saying everything about that?

STRUMMER: Uh huh.

LEVINE: And were you with your friend this whole time?

STRUMMER: All the time I spent years -- the next from 1944, I mean from 1943 to May 5th, 1945 -- I were together with Nita and we always helped each other. When one got weak, the other one were strong. But I realized -- and in her lifetime -- unfortunately, I lost Nita two years ago. In her lifetime, she used to say, "Deli who kept me alive". Yes, indeed her dying mother were probably right. I ha-- I had this unbelievable fight -- to will, to live (probably given to me in a very, very early stage of my life, wo I were a little thief and stealing from my mother's chocolate ball). I must say, that I.....

END SIDE A, TAPE 1 BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE1

STRUMMER: I had this terrific occasion in 1998 to go back to Europe and film about this time. There were fifty three years, as a well established and really grateful American citiz -- citizen. I came, I went back, to bring back the documentary for a time when I shall not be here anymore. That people know how important it is that we never, never, never forget the atrocity of the Holocaust. Most of all, what it can do. What it did to a world of two thousand years of history and Europe will never be the same. Yes indeed, [clears throat] my journey took me in '44, in -- from Auschwitz to Flossenburg, what were a hard labor camp. In Flossenburg I worked for quite some time on airplanes. Airplanes and I made a little comb out of a piece of metal and I found a saw -- a saw blade what is still marked. Those two items I really took tremendous risk to be caught with it.

Became the talisman for so many of my comrades and myself. The knife were really not used to kill.

We had to stand roll calls in bitter cold weather for hours and hours. When, as it finally became spring we could bend down pick up a handful of grass. And this is what we ate like the finest pastry. And finally have we had an equipment -- to cut. This little comb reminds me of a time -- well it were so important to me as our hair grow back when it reminded me of civilization. I had no knife, I had no fork, I had no soap, I had no towel, I had nothing. Nothing than myself for almost two years, well I would say at least one year. Theresienstadt were a little more -- we still had knife and forks there. So eh, I must say from -- from Flossenburg] finally, that were the beginning of '45. We went on an eighteen days, what do they called an eighteen day death march. In cattle trains being taking for eighteen days and that were really, really a challenge.

Hundred -- hundred people pressed in a -- in a cattle train. There were no water, there were only a pot in one corner that were used for everything. You had no civilization, you had no dignity. You were just robbed of everything you could think of. And if we speak about -- if we speak about the Holocaust and you ask me today, I think the worst thing is hunger, thirst, punishment. But you were -- you lost your dignity -- life's dignity and that were hard to take. We came close to Czechoslovakia *und* I -- like I say -- I speak about the beginning of '45. And close to this train -- to this cattle train, when the war were really all around us. Certainly I'm speaking about the Second World War, you know. A slot of this train -- people from the outside, partisans, people who fought for freedom, came close to the train and opened it.

Many of my comrades escaped into that dreary night out of that train. I had my leg already outside that train and then I remem—then I realized Nita wasn't strong enough anymore – she couldn't. It didn't take me a minute to remember my promise. I stood in that train. By the next day we get open that cattle train. There were a very small amount of people left. And I would say this is a time where I received a lifetime injury because I were really, really, really, really tortured for that. Always with the same question, "What happened here?". Where are they?" You know? By the time, finally there were another air raid and they had to let go of me. And we left that train it traveled up -- even today, if you see the route from Mauthausen] what is very, very – is about 2-3 hours from Vienna where I were born. And a camp in the Austrian Alps and Mauthausen were considered before then – before this time really the Alcatraz of Europe.

Well it's still there, I filmed there in '53. It can never be destroyed because it is – it is between mountains, houses. You know – it can't be. Otherwise they would dynamite the whole neighborhood there. And the people are too close, the mountain people are too close, they live too close there. So today it is kept like a memorial for there were people from all over Europe in prison there. And I would say that we -- I filmed there in 1998, at the time of remembrance when I were honored to lead in a big, big procession. This route wo I were taken basically – for how close I came for extermination in 1945. When I listened, I listened to the sound – I listened to the sound of people, the mourning of people. There were thousand people following me. Were always the same – *"Niemals [never] again, niemals again."* Never we'd – never – never. *"Niemals wieder" and never again,,never again.*

And I raised my eyes to god, you know, and I said, "Thank you for letting me live that long and really giving me the hope that one day this

old glorified world will enjoy peace again.” Yes indeed. May 5th, 1945 I became a free woman in a concentration camp. What were really a smaller concentration camp, were one of the worst in cruelty. People were basically put it in cement mixers. People were forced to chop off cliffs and told, “What you still have those pits there – those pits there with the people [not understood]. “You can fly”. That were oh a wonderful entertainment by the S.S., by the guards. The cruelty of this time is hard, hard to talk about it because there were such --such unbelievable cruelty there. But then came the day, then came the day wo I saw we were driven up those 186 stairs – what were built by people like myself. And down those routes on that I were standing, which is still there, that little – what they call *Gas Kammer* -- gas chamber and I really didn’t know what will happen.

And then I saw that white flag. *Und* I saw immediately that beautiful flag of the United States raised over that one. And there were another flag -- the 11th division of the United States who freed me. And I couldn’t believe you know, I – I see that even in that little clipping I give you out of my documentary -- how I really felt. To remember all those things – to remember it after so-- fifty three years. Where I thought it would be a breeze for me to do and how I suffered up there. So, anyhow, I know where my love affair with this country become -- began. There were that soldiers who came running down the hill. All I could think is to take my very, very, very ill sister back those stairs and we had there what they called a *Wiener Graben und* is basically a Vienesse death hole.

That were our camp site, wo we lived now for some time. And then I saw those faces, -- those faces coming down the hill. But their uniforms were different. It wasn’t their uniforms – it were their faces. Hardened American soldiers, who fought a war, who were told how to kill – they hardly could face us. And unforgettable to me, they looked at us and

were the first respect we received were from those boys. We were almost naked, we had so little clothing -- so nothing. Our bodies were injured, our bodies were burned, our bodies were misused. Eh, then I saw this one soldier who took off his gun, and I feared that. Then he took off his shirt and then he throw his shirt over the fence. And I caught his shirt and I could cover my so humiliated body after all those years with the warmness of his shirt. I know when I learned to love this country you know.

Yes at the time of our liberation we caught some of our guards and we put them down in the same pits wo there were the remains of our unfortunately dead comrades – dead prisoners. We had no weapons, but we had stones. We marched around, just a handful of us, there were so little left. That stone -- everybody throw that stone. As it came to me the stone sunk right by me. I couldn't do it – I couldn't do what they did for so many years to me. And I always feel this is the moment where I returned to the human race again. I were strong enough-- strong enough not to kill. I didn't want to do what they did to me. And whoever listens to that tape, I hope you understand I wasn't a coward. I think I --that were the biggest -- the biggest achievement in my life. I could not throw that stone, I could not kill.

So all in all -- I would say that I were fortunate to be alive today, to be able to express myself, to be able to exchange this terrible time of Europe history to a message of hope – for peace. Yes indeed, I speak a lot now a days about the Middle East. I don't like wars. But I know how important it is – to keep -- to work danger before danger works on you. Terrorists are dangerous people. People in Iraq deserve peace and freedom. *Und* terrorists should not conquer the world. I know because I were a victim of this particular time. Nobody ever believed in

1933 that this could happen. Nobody believed that Europe really will never regain the strength it once had.

Europe will never be what it were when I were a child. Two thousand years of history. Two thousand years of good art – good music – good medicine down the drain, only for dictatorship. It is very, very important that we remember the price for democracy is high, very high. But there is only one way you can live in peace. To believe in democracy, believe in freedom of speech and most of all remember that every one of us -- **every one**, old, young, very young, whatever it is -- can make a difference. If you really – if you really want to work for peace. In your own world, in your own saying, in your – in your own strength, you can make a difference.

LEVINE: Why don't you say a little about what you have done to make a difference since you've been in this country.

STRUMMER: Well, I must say I came to this country in 1951 after again, one job I had in Europe. I made it my business always to find – always my devotion to children. I found in – in looking for people – in looking at that time really for my young husband, ah I found children. Children hidden in bushes – children survived like, like, like, wild animals. Mostly by Polish decent. Their parents put them in the attics and so. Eventually they had to come out their room to sleep. They survived. It were a – it were a tough job to get them – to get some trust between a couple of my people – a couple of my comrades and myself. We did this work. We had I should say about – about – about – we had about 50 and 60 children. We had to find homes for them. We had -- in my earlier days, I were a -- my sport activity belonged to a Jewish organization called Hacor[ph]. And we still had our more the less -- our home up in the Alps, very close – at more the less outskirts Vienna. And eh, of course

the Nazis took this away from us and of course we got it back. And here again we rebuilt this because it were – it were badly injured by -- by the war.

And again the Americans helped us. Anything I want for those children -- there were a fellow by the name [ph] Trocke. He were the commander – the commander of the affair for – for -- over there, for the joint committee. When he saw me coming, he run, but he always did what I ask him to. He gave us – Americans gave us blankets and gave us pillows. Gave us some money and we could really create a home atmosphere for those children. I did this work because people of – of— very often ask me, “Why did you come to '51 to Europe?” I didn't leave right away -- I had a job to do, I had a commitment. I wanted to be sure by the time my last little boy left for the state of Israel that I can follow my own journey.

LEVINE: When would you say you made that commitment?

STRUMMER: That commitment I made in the most terrible time of my life. When I were really tortured badly – very tortured badly during my time in prison. Every time some humiliation were put on me. I would - eh – what would help me is my unbelievable strength or my positive attitude. Always remain positive. But I sw-- I swore – I swore to God and myself if I live, I will make it to my – to my – job to make this, to convert this world. Whatever I can do as a single person, I wanted to live up to my commitment. I have today a small organization what is called Zokhor, *zokhor* means to remember. I am the President of a very small non-profit organization and we work very, very, very pensively on that to keep the honor of the Holocaust alive. To do something good with it, you know.

I-- I'm really having support on this with all Americans who really believe in what I am doing – in what we are doing. This is not one m-- one person's job. But it is my com-- what we do – Zokhor means – that means commitment. My commitment for peace, my commitment to convert this time to a message of hope. To stand up and explain to anybody who wants to listen to me how important it is to understand freedom – peace of freedom. But how hard it is to really see it in time, you know. And that is, is, is – just my – I would say -- my lifetime's aiming. I am not really – we -- I came to this country, came as a displaced person. Couldn't speak the language. All I know is I were that – that over indulged youngsters who spoke hardly Latin, German but not that dreadful English, you know.

So Berlitz School in New York were a blessing to me. Helped me. I went for my technology degree in New York. I started off -- my first job *wie* [how] I came to America was--. Basically one of my colleagues – I, I did some nursing – nursing work in Vienna before I left, you know. So one of the doctors gave me a little recommendation for friend he had her. I took care of an old lady who were really on her last – she died very, very quickly.

Nita and Gary when they came here, I never spoke about Gary – Gary were Nita's husband who were [not understood]. He survived in good shape. So Nita and Gary and their little son, Paul, left Vienna a year before I did. And by the time I arrived here and I had letters – we're going in in a very light part now --- I had letters from Nita *wie* how wonderful this country is and how precious everything is. And every time I ask her, "How do you live?" "Wonderful." Well, by the time I arrived *und* I saw Nita were a superintendent on the East Side in New York. When I walked into this house – *und* all I can say – can tell you --

there were a kitchen and the bathtub were in the kitchen and at night we took off the board and in the daytime it were the [not understood]]

And then I found one large bed and my first night were sleeping between the two of them and I said, 'Now I'm going to ruin this marriage, I'm not going to do this.' So I looked immediately. My mother, God bless her, my immediate family survived. My sister Litzy had almost the same, same experience that I had. She escaped to Belgium. had about one year - two years in Belgium. The she were caught in Belgium. Litzy's – Litzy's situation were unbelievable because she had – she had a child. Jeanette were born when she came to Belgium. She met a hus-- she married in Belgium. And Charles were bo-- and they took her husband in Belgium. Then hap-- by that time, she were pregnant again and little Charles were really an infant. He were saved. He were prematured – prematured labor and he were saved by good Belgium people. Because Litzy were taken right after her-- after her giving birth into a concentration camp in Belgium.

More the less – going back to the United States. Mother, God bless 'em, who saved my two little brothers and my brain damaged father under very, very difficult circumstances. Partly in hiding, partly running but always, always trying to keep them together. My brother Julius were born --my brother, Julius, were about fourteen months old. My brother Fritz were six years old. As I told you before, my father were of course brain damaged. It were mother who really – who really brought them through. She told me that she had a friend who were with her on stage in Vienna years ago -- her name were Freddie Broger. And you will find her, and you look up and she will help you. Well believe it or not I were insistent enough, I looked in New York.

On the second day on my arrival in a Germ- in a Viennese coffee house I found Freddie Broger. She were a prima donna here -who work – who had every year in the Catskill Mountains – that wonderful place in the Catskill Mountain. and she asked me if I like to come with he. Make the story short, I became a chambermaid. I cleaned toilets, I became a painter. I did anything you could think of, you know what I mean – I made beds, you know. I thought this is America. I cabled to my mother to Europe – this is *wo* my baking comes in. *Und* II se-- cabled her, “Please send me every one of your recipes, I need them.” Well I got the recipes and then I got the letter. “What are you doing?” You know? Mother couldn’t understand that at all.

Ah, the bakery had [not understood] us Decoration Day and of course I advanced by that time. I remembered one cake -- one cake. The people ate them three days with different icing, you know. (both laugh) When [not understood] I had mother’s recipes. So than we opened a -- an old barn because we had to get--. I became really -- there really – that were in Haine’s Falls and Grossinger’s were very close to us – became very comp-- (laughs) big competition to them. I baked and they ate, and I baked and they ate. I were fortunate enough *wie* I came back to New York to finally getting in a little apartment where there were some furniture and I felt like a queen, you know. I mean, that were time --. But I also had in -- had responsibilities in Vienna. I had a mother who I supported from the day on. I were lucky. In that same house there were a little - you know, a little fountain shop. And in those days you could have for .25 cents, you could eat a scrambled eggs (laughs).

The only thing is I can tell you between Berlitz School and of course going – I were fortunate in the Catskill mountains where it worked out there. I found a woman approached me and she said, “Well you’re baking so well but that’s not your profession.” Then-- you know – I say,

“I’m really (coughs) medical [not understood].” She had a labra—she had a chief position in the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital in New York. She told me to look her up when I come back. Well between going for my technology degree, I became -- I worked my first eight years I spent in anti-biotic research. And I had – I did good *wieder* [again] not that I --- you know, I fought with this language. I remember so well that, for instance, I sent this porter – I worked ghastly hours and I sent that porter one day I needed guinea pigs. And I said, “Now go down, it’s going to be late and bring me some skinny [sic] pigs. Well, well, well, he marched right into my boss and said to him, “Where can I get skinny pigs?”

LEVINE: (laughs)

STRUMMER: Well, the next day I found on my board, “Dele, skinny pigs is guinea pigs. “ You know what I mean? Things like that. I traveled – she were very, very nice to me and I traveled with her. She took me back over the Triborough Bridge. She were a hell of a driver. “Son of a gun, son of a gun”, whatever came out, “Son of a bitch.” You know.

LEVINE: (laughs)

STRUMMER: I said to myself, “Peach [sic], fruit, crazy Americans.”

LEVINE: (laughs)

STRUMMER: Son of a fruit. (both laugh) I came home, what did I do? I don’t have to tell you. The first one who came in I called him a son of a fruit, you know. “What did you say?” [not understood] I remember it so well. “Son of a bitch?” “What did --?” “Why are you so excited, it’s just a son of a fruit?” Well I learned, I learned the hard way. I learned not to be

sensitive. I learned to --when I saw a smile, over my -- over my to take that. God bless Berlitz School, you know. I told them in '53, *wie* I filmed -- I went there a little bit and I said, "You guys were the savior of my existence."

LEVINE: Uh huh, uh huh.

STRUMMER: So all in all the first year were rough. It were rough. It were really rough for me in the sense I -- I had to get used to it. I wanted to be an American very, very quick, very fast. And after -- after I finished -- after eight years, I finished anti-biotic research. I were hired at Memorial Sloan Kettering I wanted to do some -- I wanted to do some blood research work and I did. What really finally changed my mind, at James Ewing, you know what James Ewing is, this is the attachment to Memorial hospital. James Ewing.

LEVINE: Oh, uh huh.

STRUMMER: We, we did a lot of -- when I saw those dying leukemia kids and it really, it got to me. Then I were hired again coming down here to Baltimore. That were Sinai Hospital. A very, very, very -- they just moved -- in maybe two years before I came here. They moved in a new location. It's up by Park Heights Ave around there. Well not Park Heights, its off Northern Parkway, big hospital. And I could open Obstetric and Gynecology Research Division there. My chief came from New York. Myself came from New York. He came from Philadelphia matter of fact. And I would say I opened with one little laboratory, in technical capacity, and by the time I left we had seven. We did good work. I'm very proud what I did -- how I could help you know in a sense of mostly my diabetic mothers. I worked intensively on the problem of the non born child. That were my- that were my forte.

LEVINE: How long were you there?

STRUMMER: Twenty six years and I can tell you that even today -- I finished as a medical research associate there -- and I even today, I -- I have still affiliation. You know, with -- with the [not understood] board over there but I don't particular - not crazy about it because I don't like to. But I -- I , they use me as a more the less person who you know gives that approval to certain work, you know.

America were -- America were always good to me. America were good to me because I met some very, very decent Americans. There's one sitting out there. I -- I were fortunate. I don't know how much I could have really made it in the beginning by myself. But there were -- you know -- my friend Vivien, my friend Holly, my friend Doris and her family. People who realized the -- the value in me. What I wanted to do. But I needed help.

LEVINE: Um. Hm.

STRUMMER: *Und* this is -- this is *wo* I -- I have forever -- I -- forever I will be grateful for that. They are all now in a good age, need help. So that the -- the ship has turned. But --

LEVINE: We're at the end of this tape. If you don't mind, I'd like to close this tape and put in another one and we'll continue. OK. I'm speaking with Adele Strummer and I'm gonna -- this is Janet Levine and this is the end of Tape One.

END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1 BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2

LEVINE: Beginning Tape 2 here and I'm speaking with Adele Strummer. OK. You were saying what it were that – how you had the strength to undergo all that you did.

STRUMMER: Well. I spoke mostly – but I'm really about America. Right?

LEVINE: Yeah.

STRUMMER: I wanted to, I wanted to be sure that I won't repeat myself. But what I really like to tell to anybody who listens to this tape – it is hard. You beginning in this, in this wonderful world here is hard. You don't find the money on the street. This is – this is the very wrong, very wrong feelings you have that America is--. You have to work hard for it. But if – if – if you willing to work for it – if you willing to, to educate – then you will make it here. You will – you, maybe you will never be --. It depends what you want to do. You might not be ri– be rich. But for some odd reason, you will certainly – certainly remember that your life is -- is different. Your life you can live in peace, you can live in freedom. You don't have to worry if somebody knocks on the door at night. That somebody's going to carry you off to concentration camp.

All I can say "53926"-- my number what I carried for almost a year. I lost my name. And I'm very proud to tell the world today. I'm Adele 'Dele' Strummer. I'm very, very known as 'Dele' because I carried this name 'Dele' for a long time. My parents gave that name to me. And I'm very proud of it and I use it a great deal. I want – I want to tell you about probably my organization, Zakhor. I'll tell you how wonderful it is to have an – just a small group around me and feeling the support, feeling the giving and feeling the interest. And most of all, educating those people and educating them that the life in America is really the

best you can have. That is, for instance, I'm the president of this organization.

There is my vice-president who is a youngster. Brooke Parrish [ph] who I met in my speaking about this atrocity of the 20th Century of European history. I met him many, many years ago as an eighth grader in – in one of our schools here. Today, Brooke is my vice-president. Today Brooke is the one who is finishing very, very soon college. And is going in, probably – I know he is going in for higher education. But most of all, I feel if I close my eyes today, Brooke will carry on for me. It is important to me that I have touched young lives through Zakhor – have touched young lives in a sense that I know I can go in peace when my time comes. And my message will not be buried. My message for hope, for a world in peace.

I have a lot to say about this time and I hope whoever listens to this tape understands this is a yearning --. "Why did I survive?" Why did I survive?. Probably for the same attitude I have today. I'm a very positive person. I always try to exchange the negatives to positives. I believe in that. I believe in every thing in your life, there is something decent. Maybe I wouldn't be today like I am if I wouldn't have gone this terrible crucial time in – in my young years. I believe in God. I believe in a power who is leading me and telling me every day how to conduct my life. How to keep on going. And to help others who are in need. I'm happy.

I'm happy with the way how my life turned. I have my trial tribulation like anybody else. But I always thank God for the goodness of life. But mostly, my deepest thank goes to the United States of America who helped me when I needed it so badly. *Und* let me be a really proud American. Many, many things I could say probably about my past. But

I wanted to really (so far it concerns this interview) I would like to close *mit* [with] the reminder that every one – every one can make a difference. You probably have to be willing to work for peace. Please learn and accept this tape as something what it is – what it is – what it – what comes out of my soul. A message of hope for a better world. Being so grateful most of all that I could make this tape. I'm grateful to –

LEVINE: Janet.

STRUMMER: --Janet Levine who came and is giving me this opportunity. Of course, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island means the world to me. I remember when I came in here as a very, very, very confused young woman twenty-eight and a half years old *und* I saw this great lady looking at me *und* I felt she's telling me, "Welcome, Dele. Welcome to your new world." I felt that so strong. I looked at many, many times up to this Statue of Liberty and I -- in my own world -- in my own words -- in my own feelings. I know what that statue means to people like me who needed help. Who came here with so -- so full of heart. But not knowing what will happen in this new world to me.

But for some odd reason, this great lady gave a lot of courage -- what we so badly needed. And for that feeling I want to thank all the people who work so hard on this particular project. Ellis Island to me was my first -- my first step. Yes, indeed. I was a scared, confused and lost displaced person, An immigrant. But this country helped me *und* I think the moment I felt this help was looking up at Ellis Island *und* seeing my name -- hearing my name. I just looked for the 'S' but then it came. *Und* then I saw a face, a friendly face. Not that I could speak but they spoke to me. Their faces spoke to me. So after all those years (over sixty years now) I would say it is -- it's a long time since the Holocaust

ended. But still in my heart, it is a life. There always will be. But for some odd reason, I will never forget my arrival at Ellis Island. I will never forget my feeling the Statue of Liberty – this great lady – gave to me.

I came on a boat called General Sturgis in 1951 and unfortunately, we had some trouble. We – the boat was overloaded. We really have a little trouble coming in and we pushed this boat in the last probably miles just to get to Ellis Island. But it is unforgettable day in March --- March 19, I believe – will be never forgotten in my life. I thank this country. I thank Ellis Island. I thank Jane Levine for being with me and anybody who really is responsible for this project. Only God will bless you to do that – to keep the history, this history alive. The history *und* the binding between Europe and America. God bless you.

LEVINE: I think that's a wonderful place to end.

Strummer: Yeah.

LEVINE: OK. We'll close -- . [Not understood] after a little bit about the human nature involved in – in being a prisoner in these camps and also being the keepers of the prisoners. What do you think you could say about human nature given the atrocity of the situation?

STRUMMER: In all my existence, especially in this last fifty –sixty years, I spoke a lot. I always get this question. Was there ever any human feeling, Was there ever any God who touched your life? Who let you feel like a human being? Und I hate to say that: not, not in my existence. There were an unbelievable cruelty – unbelievable, sadistic (almost sadistic) feeling. It was just more or the less, you know, when you – when you are in charge. And believe me all my life I had this [not understood]

being *Und* in prison. I had dogs around me. I love dogs. I – I would not treat an animal like this. What I really like to bring out here so – so vividly is that you had to feel this time to be able to speak about this time. You had to be there.

We have today, we have films. We have some – one (I would say) one piece is really to me – this is almost historic -- is Schindler's List. Schindler's List is – is a classic. For one reason, because it shows --. There is one scene. This little boy running from one place to another – this SS man half-drunk – stays there *und* shoots this kid. That's what all about it. This absolutely cruelty of this time. I am the master. I can do with you what a – what you -- what I wanna do. *Und* to really – to really speak about this, you had to be there. I mentioned that before. I certainly feel very strong towards people who work so vividly on history.

But to touch -- to touch the cruelty, the atrocity, the hopelessness, the more or less being robbed of your dignity. This feeling cannot come from a Meryl Streep [sic] in a movie. It has to come in a documentary. For people, for instance, like myself. Whoever is willing to do it. Because – because it can't be. You can't put yourself in this particular time when -- when I ate grass and you ate scrambled eggs in the morning. It can't be. I'm – I -- I saw – I -- . Interesting enough, one of the youngest just two weeks ago asked that question. What you think about movies who are made in Hollywood about the Holocaust? I told him as I will tell you now. There is no doubt in my mind anything what brings this time alive is valuable. But if you ask me, Meryl Streep [sic] can't be me. She is an actress and I am not. I am the victim and she is trying to play me. She can't. I can understand that. Because, thank God, she wasn't there. But there is only -- . It isn't just myself. I speak for anybody who survived this time. Please listen to them --

LEVINE: Um. Hm.

STRUMMER: -- on whatever they tell you. Just believe me. It was worse. Because we all had no -- notebooks. We all had no pencils and papers. We work with our mind, what we remember. *Und* if somehow we really trying to push away the major atrocities . You know. Because our -- our heart and soul isn't strong enough to -- to really re-live this. You know, this is why this documentary was really hard. And I would say that I was very fortunate -- he's one of my good friends -- to have a young producer with me. I gave him only pieces of my life *und* he made a award-winning documentary out of it. What we'll eventually -- you know, we have to refine a little bit of it. It will be -- will be . It was shown already and it will be shown again.

LEVINE: Um. Hm.

STRUMMER: My ambition -- I want to go back. I want to once go back to this specially hills of Austria -- to this Mauthausen. There were hundreds of children who followed me during my filming in 1953. Always with the same question. "We don't understand. Please tell us. Please tell us." I wanted to speak to the kids of the world. I know their language. I can speak to them. It isn't only that we have to learn about this time, in the United States. To the youths of Europe today, has to be educated. *Und* they're different now. They are different now. They want to learn.

I filmed in the Dissection Room in Mauthausen *und* I had about hundred kids standing around. You could hear a needle drop. "I told you -- if you be quiet you can listen." I had them in front of -- of -- of the gas cha--of the ovens in Mauthausen. *Und* I always heard the same. I saw those faces with tears. *Und* that, "Why, Dele, why? Why did it happen? Why?" *Und* I was -- I was able to sit with them on those

stoned walls up there. Und tell 'em why. Und this is -- this is what I want to do before I can't do it anymore. This is a very, very -- und I -- I hope I -- you know -- this is -- I hope I be strong enough. I hope my financial situation somehow will give me a boost for that. But I want to do that. I want to speak to the children of the world.

LEVINE: How do you account for the fact that you couldn't leave the boxcar where your friend was too weak -- and your husband became abusive. You both went through the horrors of the situation --

STRUMMER: Well --

LEVINE: -- and you came out one way and he came out another.

STRUMMER: There is -- you know -- there is two possibilities. Take it one by one. I gave Nita's mother a commitment. Und as long as I live; if I will give you a commitment today, I will keep it. I wouldn't have left Nita for anything. Und she couldn't anymore. She absolutely -- she couldn't even stand up. I carried her like a sack of potatoes in -- in my last concentration camp. While I always carried her with me. Und I wouldn't have left her. That was why I didn't escape out of this cattle train.

So far it concerns Ben -- he was , as much as I know, he was tortured very badly. He was put in -- in one of what --. They -- they trying to escape -- Gary told me that. And they were caught. And -- in Dachau. They did hard labor on the outside Dachau -- you know. And they pleaded with the military people who caught them, who shot them. They wouldn't. They got 'em back to the campsite. Und the boys were very -- very, very, very badly -- badly -- you know . Really I would say ,they got on the bad treatments. There was something what they called

at that time a *stehbeuge* that is just a closet und you couldn't move in it. And – and there were rats. Matter of fact, Gary – who was still – he has a big hole in his legs. What was done not particular [bitter laugh] an operating procedure -- you know.

Ben's mind snapped. Why it snapped, I can understand it. I care. He – he tried -- . They found him (as much as I learned). They found him *wie, wie* – the Russians liberated Dachau, I think. They found him by a wire – he wanted to go over that wire und they found him there -- you know what I mean? Got him in in a hospital. It took him a year to come back to – to Vienna. I mean, It would ta—I nursed him in a hospital, things like that. Jane, there is no – there is no parameter to tell you why some people came out with a stronger mind – with a – with a --.

I just think what helped me the most was my positive attitude. I wanted to live more – und I have taken an awful lot of punishment. Starting with my leg, which still reminds me. But I just know – I just know if anything I can, I would try to fight for my life. I -- I believed so strongly in God that I know that – in all my arguments I had – I know he was my best friend. That was my name. I -- even today I call him. He's my very, very best friend. This is God. I don't believe in – in – in something like a – somebody sitting up there with a beard. I don't believe in that. But it's in me.

And – and obviously, Ben – he just didn't have it. Maybe he was too sick. He must – he must have --. You know – he was – he was without -- obviously without oxygen *wie* he was lying there, probably a long time. Whatever did it to him – I had him under -- you know – neurologist. They worked in Europe on him. I mean, everybody felt the same way. You know – he -- it was the shell. It was the face was looking at you. But he wasn't, you know. That wasn't – that wasn't the

young husband who went out in, in, in Thereienstadt. The fellows were forced to work outside – outside the campsite. And they had to do all sorts of work and he came back in his trousers with potatoes. You know, to bring potatoes back for us to have something to eat. He was so full of life. He was so full of hope. He was so full of goodness. And only – .

LEVINE: Hm.

STRUMMER: It's -- I can't tell you particular how it happened, why it happened. But was done to him.

LEVINE: Um. Hm.

STRUMMER: Und he became really a victim of Hitler's time.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STRUMMER: He really became a victim of Hitler's time. Still. I hear he's still living. He's living someplace – I think. In Canada -- . I don't know. People told me he's on his third – third marriage. I – I – he has moments, you know, moments *wo* absolutely everything is (at least, this is how I remember him. You know, that this goes back now to '45. '45 – '46.). He had – he could have been the most lovable guy and he was a --. And then all of a sudden, he snapped. You just never know. He was like a – like a--. I – I have my – my certificate (my divorce certificate). He's saying –you know, he confesses to all those things. What I – I don't even want to talk about it because I know , I know why it happened to him. And I can't --. I hear this very often. Like you say, "Why are you – why you came out this way und he didn't?" We have to ask God. I don't know.

LEVINE: It's not a --. Right.

STRUMMER: It just a – it just happened and --. Maybe. You have to realize, Jane, that in those days in Vienna -- . If you have this particular problem – I mean – I'm pretty well medicated. You can use some Lithium. You can [not understood]. We didn't even have a hospital over there. There were nothing. You couldn't help anybody. I mean, you know – my—my—my return – my return to Vienna was really --. You know, we have finally became a free person in Mauthausen. I was two and a half hours away from Vienna, you know. And I know it was – it was – I had no possibility --. Finally I remember that Mauthausen used to be basically a very, very, very known prisoner camp. Und two criminals took mercy on me – on Nita and me. And they carried us down to the – to the station. And here were the Russians, you know, they want to put us in prison because we were Germans, however, sudden. So we traveled on top of a train. We were lying -- because there were no – there were no – no possibility. I came in to Vienna about – this is the first time, after –after too long. I – I saw a clock. I saw a time. I couldn't believe it. I remember that was ten minutes after two --

LEVINE: Ohh.

STRUMMER: -- in the morning, you know. Und here und Vienna was so destroyed. So destroyed. And we – we – the first night I spent in, in, in one of their houses. They ta-- took us to their family. And he whistled on the street. The woman opened the door and, "What are you doing here?" And, you know, this is how Nita und I – she had a bed for us up there. And we couldn't even sleep in that bed. We couldn't sleep in that bed. We took – we went down on the floor and slept on the floor. We weren't used any more to a bed. When you – when you think about those

things. The next day, you know – we lost the – the more the less our two *Kriminals* and they sent us off with a couple of – couple of – couple of dol — couple of schillings, in those days.

And I sta—we start walking. Vienna was destroyed. So destroyed. We came – we came --. Matter of fact, I remember in – in – in realizing wo I was; I remember that my Grandfather lived in a certain section of Vienna. And I went there because this was the first section what we approached. And, of course, there were no house there. There were – everything was bombed. There was an old lady -- you know – I realized that maybe I can get some informations. Und I knocked on her door. Und of course when she saw what I looked like she said, “Oooh! Get away, get away.” So I spoke to her in German that I am the grandchild of Johan Türck. I hope she can tell me -- . Und she looked at – and she, “Oh, my God. You must be Dele.” And, you know, all those things is – is --.

And then she told me that she thinks my parents might live but they are on the other side. You had --had to gross – cross over the Small Danube. That's – that's a side arm of the Danube. You know, the *Kanal* really. Well, we walked again. Und we walked und walked und walked und. Can you imagine what we looked like? We came finally (because you asked me that) we finally came and I saw *Friseur*. *Friseur* means beauty parlor. I said to Nita, say,” You know. We – we got to get a haircut.”

LEVINE: (laughs)

STRUMMER: Well, I walked – walked in to this guy. Here were all the ladies sitting in front of the store because there was no electricity – drying their hair. And he looked at us and he grinned at me. Und that did it. I just took –

took his coat -- *sag ich*, "Listen, if you wash my hair und you wash my sister's hair, I think you better do it -- I think you style it a little bit." He realized -- even though we were one of the first prisoners who came back to Vienna because we were so close.

END SIDE A, TAPE 2 BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 2

STRUMMER: Well, he washed our hair. I felt better and -- and after all those years. Can you imagine that -- the first hair wash. And then he shaved us a little bit, you know, so we looked a little bit more -- I had a rag on my -- because I always covered up my head. And we marched again and then we came to this *Kanal* and there were no bridge. There were no nothing, everything was bombed. To make the story short, *mit* [with] the last punishment I received in Mauthausen were -- my ribs were broken, you know. And I found an old towel and I put this arou-- I know this is the only thing is what can help me. Anyhow, we had to get over there.

So I took Nita und I found a rope and hung her on to me und then we got--. How in the world I ever managed this -- between parts of -- floating in the water -- we crossed the *Kanal*. Of course we were wet but we crossed the *Kanal*. It's -- I was a pretty good swimmer in those days. So then here again we start marching -- back. And then finally I saw this house *wo* I think that was my parent's home. And will you -- God bless my mother -- the house was bombed. But she was determined to hang on because that was her home. So I went up three, more the less three stairways, you know, and then I saw a door hanging like this and I thought -- I thought that must be, you know. Well I opened that door and here was my mother.

LEVINE: (gasps)

STRUMMER: Oh my, I never – I never forget this. I never forget this as long as I live. Here she was so – so aged but still had some sense of humor. Well, the first thing she asked me if I'm hungry. (laughs) What we did in camp basically, we cooked in our minds. I made for years the best dumplings I can ever make because that's what I made. And I told that to mother. So the American Joint Committee gave them a little flour prior to this. Mother made on this old little gasoline stove she had there – she made those dumplings. We cried -- we ate the dumplings, the best meal I ever had in my life. Those sort of things you know, you have to – so how-on-earth, tell me, can somebody, like any actress in the world who didn't go through this, how can they do that? How can they? How can they really tell you, how can anybody tell you if you don't have it? How – how difficult.

And in the end, I remember the first Khanukah I had with my family. Prior to this, years ago, there were lavish candle lighters. There were – there were everything was in style. Here we were – my brain damaged father, my two little brothers and Litzy just sick back from *Belgien* with two little kids who couldn't speak, you know what I mean. She found those kids, she traced herself back in -- from her concentration camp in Belgium. And she traced to find her children. She found her children – they were, they were saved by Belgic [sic] people.

We were standing around those, you know. There were just a couple of candles and a piece of wood, you know and --. But It was quite, quite a moment to remember. The blessing, the blessing of God. We were all there, you know. Out of – out of ashes, out of this terrible time there were faces. There were faces, ah not very – (laughs) not very much in style, but faces. You know today, you have the candelabra again and you have all those things and you say to yourself, "What means more to

me? The memory of this particular time in 1945 *oder* [or] today the beauty, all the wonderful things you know.” I want to show you that.

LEVINE: OK. We're gonna—[long pause] What I wanted to ask was, so you was reunited with your family in Vienna and then how long was it before you went to work with the children and where was that again?

STRUMMER: In Vienna in '45. I started – I, I was -- you know *wie* I came back, I realized that my family needed help tremendously, you know, I saw that. There was still a very quick rebuilt [sic], small hospital for the people who sick back. Und remember, before I went, before I was taken in prison, I was a nurse there. Of course there was another building. But I went there and there were an old professor who recogni- - he didn't recognize me really. But I – *wie* I start speaking to him -- I told him who I was. Well, he hugged me. Then I says to him -- but at the time remember I had those broken ribcage and I maybe needed help. *Aber* [but] -- so he looked at me and, I remember very well, examined this.

Then *sagt er* [he says], “Look.” “I think I have to be hospitalized?” *Sagt*, “Are you kidding?” *Sagt er*, “Here is a – here is a uniform.” I immediately started working. Broken hip – not me. Put a circleom [ph] what they call a circleom [ph] around my – my cage and the next day I started nursing. I could , of course, find a little – a little stuff – a little--. There were always some extra food. They came by friendly with our kitchen. I could get this to my family. And from there in Vienna, in '45,'46, I realized -- I was looking at that time not really for Ben. I told you that, but I found those children. Those children – this is where I found the children and I started working with this organization, what we called “Bring Them Home.” Well I, it was my organization really. You know, I was -- I didn't do it alone. There were couple of people, you

know, who -- survivors like myself -- who helped me. And in that bringing --and bringing -- to bring them home we rebuilt a home again in that -- in that sport facility we had prior to that Hacoah [ph] in Vienna. And we could more the less bring them back.

You know we had them basically in homes. People who had still homes, they took care of those kids, like foster homes. But we took them out there and we had -- we had really for -- for -- for a time; we know we had to get -- we had to get them together in a family surrounding and in more the less a group surrounding. And eh, you couldn't -- you couldn't speak to them much about -- about anything because those kids really you know --. Give you one ex--one sample. I had --. One day I discussed it with some of my friends and helpers that we needed some food -- we had to go shopping. So this little Heinz realized, he listen to that. The next day he came down in those mountains, they right next to the camp, with two chickens in every arm. You need food -- here's food. That all they know. I took more time of myself to apologize to the people up there and get back the chickens.

LEVINE: (laughs) Uh hmm.

STRUMMER: So, It was a tough job to teach those kids. To be sure, we had some doctors who help me, you know, health. It took still to '51, from '46 till '51, they came some - you know what a *sheliach* is? No? A *sheliach* is -- basically some guys from Israel, he came and he taught. They lived there on a kibbutz and he came and he wanted to help those kids and things like that. But I was -- I was not - I wanted to be sure those kids had a good home, you know. It's -- it was a tough time. Some of them we got affidavits for them, we got certificates for them, but most of them went really to the state of Israel. So it took time and it took really -- I never forget -- for instance, remember that I always worked.

I used these on the side. So sometimes I – I-- I really -- my – I had a very, very difficult and busy life. So my vacations went always into those kids and during the – during the time in Vienna we got them together as a group. We had -- and I want to make sure before we sent them away that there were no parents living anyplace. That was a – that was a unbelievable. Some of them found, you know – some of them really came and und –und, “That’s my kid!” But most of them we couldn’t find any – any relatives, we couldn’t find anything und finally --. They went their ways and went into it -- to Israel. Went to -- most of them went in a kibbutz, in one of those mass things what they have there.

LEVINE: Did you see them turn from being kind of wild little animals to being children again.

STRUMMER: Well, yeah, we worked very hard with them. We had for, instance what you call an *Oneg shabat* . Friday night – we tried – I realized the best thing is to -- songs. God was indifferent, you know – don’t tell me about God. So through sport – through sport you could really you know --. You made ‘em – of -- interesting enough. I had this idea – I coached them a play. We needed some money, so again the Americans gave us ---gave us -- helped us with the – with the trucks, with Ameri—trucks. Took all those *kind*—all those children to the first, what was [not understood] -- also in – in -- near Vienna. for instance *wo* that was – you know – they had all the people there who didn’t have any homes. It was more the less the really a – a -- transit – a transit situation *wo* people came back from – from different concentration camps and they had to somehow --. I – I knew I had a family in Europe so I – I went to Vienna but there was so many without any identity, without anything. So they had those transit homes.

So we went there with those kids and put up a play and made them -- for some odd reason, you know. At least, again, American -- Americans helped us. Always a Joint helped us -- to make a little money. To -- to -- to -- to keep -- keep this thing going. You know, I mean you have -- you have to feed fifty faces, you know. (laughs) It wasn't an easy time. But it was a challenging time and as I always say, I needed those kids as badly as they needed me. Here I was, you know, pretty hurt by myself. I felt terrible about my unfortunately broken marriage, but I needed those kids too. Really, this is why God works in some unbelievable ways in my life. He sent me that job to make me grow out of it.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about -- I don't know quite how to -- can you say anything how you came back from the situation of having --. You did retain some dignity through everything, but how you then came back to a life ...?

STRUMMER: It was uneasy, for instance, I remember very well when I walked -- that was quite some time -- when I walked the streets of Vienna. I walked and I always looked back -- I always looked back. I always -- I always watched where I was -- where I was go-- more the less my steps take -- took me. Because it was very important to me to know what's behind me. That was one of the things I had. Of course, the nightmares -- the nightmares and I still have them occasionally. We just lost our little dog two weeks ago. He was really, every time I -- it hit me hard at night. He started barking so I know everything was fine, you know.

It isn't easy to go back but I didn't give myself much time. I realized immediately that I was needed. I was needed by my family, I was needed by those children and I wanted as best as I could to get back to

a life. And of course I had a profession. This old professor told me as much, "Never mind, Dele, we can have a patient but we need a nurse." So that's it, you know. You do basically what you have to do and I must say that -- I'm very grateful the way I came out of this life. Maybe it made me a better person. Maybe it gave me some understanding what I might not have had. I could have done very easily without it. But if it has to be, if it has to be. People always say, "Why me?" Why not me? What's so different about me? I'm a Jew, I suffered with the rest of them, you know. It's -- It is all depends how you see it, how you take it and what you make out of it. It is your approach, you -- you're absolutely positive. There is only one life God's giving you and you better make the best out of it. I have done *wie* I was a little toddler in school, and I have done it *wie* I was a prisoner and I have done it *wie* I came to this country and I'm still doing it.

LEVINE: Okay, I want to thank you very much for a wonderful interview.

STRUMMER: Oh, it was my pleasure. I hope it will help.

LEVINE: Oh, it is a very big asset to our collection. Thank you. I've been speaking wit Adele Strummer.

STRUMMER: Dele

LEVINE: Dele Strummer and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW

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