


A black and white photograph of a man in a white shirt and tie standing in a garden. He is looking towards the camera. In the foreground, a small, fluffy dog is visible. The background consists of dense foliage and trees.

# 10 JEWS AND THEIR INTERNMENT IN DACHAU

Excerpts from the Centropa interviews

Compiled and edited  
by Nina Andro

 centropa

## Introduction

Centropa is a Jewish historical institute with offices in Vienna, Budapest, Hamburg, and Washington. In 2000 the first phase of our activities began with a ten-year-long oral history project that collected interviews with 1,200 elderly Jews still living in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Baltics, and the Balkans. Rather than focus solely on respondents' experiences during the Holocaust, Centropa asked respondents to share their memories of the entire 20th century – just as they lived it. Centropa digitized 24,800 family pictures and documents, including annotations from the interviewee. Please visit Centropa's website, [www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org), to find English translations of our interviews and annotated photographs. For academics wishing to access transcriptions in the original language, please contact our office in Vienna ([office@centropa.org](mailto:office@centropa.org)).



**Image:** Dachau Concentration Camp after liberation. April 1945. (*Attribution: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Holocaust Museum Houston*)

**Cover image:** Ivan Moshkovich in Dolgoye Pole after returning from Dachau in 1945.

## **The Concentration Camp System**

Beginning in 1933, the Nazi party built numerous camps intended to detain so-called “enemies of the state.” In the early concentration camps built in Germany, most detainees were political prisoners (i.e., communists, socialists, and social democrats) or ‘asocials,’ a term Nazis used to refer to criminals, homosexuals, Roma, Sinti, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Nazis created different kinds of camps, including forced labor camps (where Nazis exploited forced labor of prisoners for economic gain), transit camps (temporary holding facilities for prisoners), prisoner-of-war camps (which were used exclusively for Allied prisoners of war), and killing centers (whose sole purpose was the systematic execution of large numbers of prisoners).

In many forced labor camps, prisoners were systematically malnourished, exposed to lethal working conditions, and subject to brutal violence. Camp authorities intended to overwork prisoners to death while extracting the maximum amount of labor out of them. Prisoners were sometimes leased out to private firms, with their wages paid directly to the SS. This served the dual purpose of meeting labor shortages while also economically benefiting the German Reich. In many camps, Nazis conducted medical experiments on prisoners. Many victims of medical experimentation did not survive or became permanently disabled. In 1934, the concentration camp system was reorganized under the direct authority of the SS and police. This meant that the concentration camp system was no longer subject to judicial or administrative review beyond the SS and police structure. The Nazis could imprison anyone indefinitely without charge and treat prisoners in any manner. After the outbreak of World War II, Heinrich Himmler forbade (except under extraordinary circumstances) the release of any and all prisoners for the duration of the war.

After the implementation of Hitler’s “Final Solution” in 1941, the Nazis began to build large killing centers in occupied Poland, the country with the largest Jewish population in occupied Europe. These camps were designed to murder large groups of people as quickly and effectively as possible. The earliest death camps used mobile gas vans, which utilized carbon monoxide gas from the van’s exhaust pipes in order to murder prisoners. Later death camps used gas chambers and pesticides like Zyklon B. Only a small number of those imprisoned in Nazi camps survived.

Conditions in concentration camps declined rapidly in the last months of the war, leading to mass death due to severe overcrowding, disease, exposure, and starvation. As Allied forces began to surround Germany at the end of the war, Nazis sent thousands of concentration camp prisoners on forced ‘death marches’ by foot and ‘evacuation transports’ by vehicle toward camps further away from the front lines. The true number of victims of the concentration camp system is difficult to estimate, but historians place the number between 1,885,889 and 2,045,215. By the end of the Second World War on 7 May 1945, the Nazis had murdered more than six million European Jews.

**Sources:**

*Nazi Camps.* Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-camps>

*Concentration Camp System: In Depth.* Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/concentration-camp-system-in-depth?series=10>



**Image:** Aerial view of the Dachau concentration camp. 20 April 1945. (Attribution: Colin Smith)

## **Dachau, the ‘Model’ Concentration Camp**

Established in March 1933 as a camp for political prisoners, Dachau concentration camp was built on the site of an abandoned gunpowder and munitions factory near Munich, Germany. Dachau was the longest-operating Nazi concentration camp. Although initially its prisoners consisted of chiefly political enemies of National Socialist rule, such as communists, social democrats, and trade unionists, the prisoner body later expanded to include other groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Roma, Sinti, homosexuals, so-called ‘asocials’, and criminals. Dachau became infamous for its brutal strictness and severe punishments for the smallest transgressions. The total number of people incarcerated in Dachau between 1933 and 1945 is estimated at over two hundred thousand, with the death toll between 1940 and 1945 totaling at least twenty eight thousand. The number of those who perished there between 1933 and 1939 is unknown, as is the number of unregistered prisoners, which will likely never be known.

Dachau was designed as a ‘model’ concentration camp upon which the layout, function, and routines of other camps could be modeled. The camp also acted as a training center for SS guards, who would later be deployed in other concentration camps all over Europe. The number of Jewish prisoners in Dachau rose dramatically after ‘Kristallnacht’ in November 1938. Following Kristallnacht, eleven thousand Jewish men were deported to Dachau, most of them were released after a few months on the condition that they would immediately emigrate from Germany.

Dachau was divided into two main sections: the camp area (containing thirty two barracks) and the crematoria. Within the camp section, there was also a kitchen, laundry, showers, workshop, and prison. The central courtyard between the prison and kitchen was the usual location for executions of prisoners before the later construction of a SS shooting range for that purpose. The crematoria area was constructed in 1942, but prisoners who were judged too ill or weak to work were usually transported to the Hartheim ‘ethanasia’ killing center near Linz, where they perished in the gas chambers. Dachau was infamous for its mass executions by shooting, in which thousands of prisoners were killed.

From 1942, Dachau was also the site of numerous horrific medical experiments on prisoners, which often caused death or permanent disability. These trials were carried out by German doctors and included high-altitude, hypothermia, and pharmaceutical experiments. The majority of Dachau’s prisoners were used as forced labor, first in construction projects in and around the camp itself, and later by the German armaments industry. By 1944 Dachau also boasted approximately one hundred and forty subcamps (mainly involved in the arms industry), where prisoners suffered from horrific working conditions, often dying as a result thereof.

Towards the end of the war, as Allied forces advanced closer to Germany, many concentration camps located close to the front were ‘evacuated’ to prevent their capture by the allies.

Thousands of prisoners were transported to camps within Germany and Austria. These ‘evacuation transports’ arrived continuously at Dachau during the last months of the war, causing a dramatic deterioration in the already awful living conditions. As a result, the death rate soared.

On April 26th, 1945, as Allied forces approached Dachau, at least twenty five thousand prisoners were forced on one of these so-called ‘death marches’. Many did not survive the journey. The U.S. Army liberated Dachau on April 29th, 1945. At this time there were 67,665 registered prisoners in Dachau and its subcamps. 43,350 of these prisoners were categorized as political prisoners, 22,100 as Jews, and the remainder belonged to various categories. After liberation, many prisoners died as a result of illness, malnutrition, and exhaustion.

Between 1933 and 1945, at least two hundred thousand people were interned in Dachau. Of this number, over forty thousand were murdered, and more than one-third of them during the last six months of the war.

**Sources consulted:**

“Dachau”. Holocaust Encyclopedia. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/dachau>

“Dachau Concentration Camp 1933-1945”. KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau.  
<https://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/en/historical-site/dachau-concentration-camp-1933-1945/>



**Image:** U.S. soldiers guarding the main entrance to Dachau concentration camp after liberation, 1945. (*Attribution: public domain*)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Meer Kuyavskis	p. 7
Egon Lovith	p. 9
Hannah Fischer	p. 14
Gábor Révész	p. 16
Helena Kovanicova	p. 17
Jiri Munk	p. 19
Laszlo Ladislaus Bernath	p. 21
Ivan Moshkovich	p. 23
Photograph: Ivan Moskovich	p. 25
Photograph: Alexander Rosenzweig	p. 26
Photograph: Jakub Nojfeld-Grinfeld with his friends	p. 28

## MEER KUYAVSKIS

**Kaunas, Lithuania**

**Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya**

**Date of interview: June 2005**



*Meer Kuyavskis in Kaunas, Lithuania, in the 1980s.*

[Read Meer Kuyavskis' biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Meer Kuyavskis was born in 1925 in Łódź, Poland, which at that time had the second-largest Jewish community in Europe. His family was sent to the Łódź ghetto in 1940. Later Meer and his twin brother were sent to Auschwitz for two weeks and then to various subcamps of Dachau (where Meer lost his brother) in 1944. He was liberated by forces in 1945 and returned to Kaunas. Meer was the only member of his family to return to Poland. He went on to meet and marry a Lithuanian woman, Stephania Vakayte, in 1949, and together they had a step-daughter and three sons. In 1956, Meer was overjoyed to receive a letter from his lost brothers, with the news that three of them were alive and well, one in Israel and two in Canada. He was reunited with them in Israel in 1988, after perestroika, and in Canada in 1995.*

“In two weeks, we were placed in railway cars and taken to Western Germany, where there was not only a lack of soldiers but workers. Before departure, we were given bands with numbers and were told to sew them on the collars of the clothes. We came to Landsberg, which was fifty kilometers from Munich. There was one of the Dachau camps, where the prisoners worked on the construction of the underground aerodrome. Those were the most dreadful days during the war. It was real drudgery – fifteen hours of work per day breaking slabs in the mine. We slept underground on earth. We were barely given enough food to be able to hold a sledgehammer. We were involved in this construction for a couple of weeks and then we headed towards the west, to another Dachau subcamp. We had been moving from one Dachau camp to another for several months and very many people died in the meantime. I do not know what helped my brother and me, probably it was because we followed our mother’s last words: to stick together. The trains transporting the prisoners were bombed by American planes a couple of times. I was struck by that. They saw the striped clothes and knew that they were bombing the prisoners.



In April 1945 we happened to be in Landsberg. Here Benjamin [his brother] was affected by typhus. He and the other sick people were separated from the others. They merely were left to die. The Nazi Fascists were escaping to the West, and they did not even have time to shoot the sick people. I was afraid to part with my brother and went to the place where the people suffering from typhus were. Benjamin told me to leave, he just asked me for water. When I came back from fetching the water, my brother was not there. I thought he had been shot as I'd noticed the policeman who did the mopping-up. Then I darted from the barrack to the heap of corpses and it saved me as I was taken for dead. I fainted and when I came around I was in the camp among Americans, who liberated us. It was on 27 April 1945. By that time I was absolutely despondent. I became numb, having neither fear nor joy when I saw the Americans. I did not even go up to them as I was indifferent. I was grief-stricken after having lost my brother. We were housed in the former barracks for soldiers, and we were fed very well. I was surprised by the fact that Americans did not only feed former captives but also Germans. For them all people were equal. They thought that German women and children were not to blame, and thus they should not be refused any primary goods. Some of the former captives, especially Jews, were bothered by that. So they just opened up another buttry hatch for the Jews and Germans not to bump into each other. Then we were housed in German barracks in the city. Here we lived like lords. German captives were there to serve us. We had great meals and we were given cigarettes, chewing gum, and cigars. Americans talked us into going to the West, America, and Canada. Many people decided to leave. I just dreamed of finding my elder brother and hoped that my family had survived the war in the Soviet Union. When I was in the camp, I met some Jews from Lithuania who lived in Kaunas before the war and I decided to go with them. In autumn 1945 we took the train to Lithuania. It was strange that they did not even check who was getting on the train. We had to stay in the barracks for a while, though. We were called for interrogation several times.”

“Now I am unwell. I became disabled after the operation. I am bedridden. I live pretty comfortably – I get 400 Euros per month [German pension paid to former camp prisoners]. There was a time when I received compensation from Switzerland as well, for being a Dachau prisoner. All of that helps me and my daughter, Aldona, to get by. There is enough money for food and medical care. However, no money can make up for all those people I lost during the war: my dead parents, my brothers whom I haven't seen for many years and won't be able to visit in the future. I will not survive a trip to Canada, and they refuse to come to Lithuania. Moishe had a strong distrust of the USSR and I cannot convince him that we are living in a different country now, which is free. Benjamin is not willing to come to Lithuania either. But my brothers are helping me. They call me. I am still hoping that I will see them again.”

## EGON LOVITH

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Interviewer: Molnár Ildikó

Date of interview: March 2003



*Egon and Margo Lovith in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in 1946.*

[Read Egon Lovith's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Egon Lovith was born in 1923 in Romania to Max Lovith, from Ukraine, and Berta Pardesz, from Lithuania. His father, Max, was a Swiss-trained watchmaker, who fought in the Russian Army during World War I. Max emigrated to Mexico in 1922, and Egon and his mother, Berta, joined him there in 1925. After his father died in 1934 of stomach cancer, Egon, his mother, and his sister Irenke (who was born in Mexico in 1932) returned to Romania. Egon experienced anti-semitism as a child in school and as a young man in the workplace.. While working several odd jobs between 1938 to 1944, when he was deported,*

*Egon painted and sculpted after hours in the hopes of someday becoming a painter. His grandmother, mother, and sister were killed during the Holocaust.*

We arrived in Türkheim in Germany. It was nighttime and there was a great clamor: barking, screaming, shouting, not much light, and a pine forest right by us. We were on foot. We passed a concentration camp. 'Raus, raus, schnell!' [Out, out, fast!], and I was hit and kicked. The concentration camp seemed to be empty, and we didn't see any prisoners. It turned out to be a new concentration camp. I still remember the smell of resin. The barracks only had a roof slightly above the ground, and we had to go down under because they were built into the ground. In each one was a miserably small stove and a small window on the ground level, from where the only light came in. They weren't big barracks. The beds, which were planks of wood, were lined up along the two sides of the barracks. I think about thirty of us were on one side and there were fifty or sixty of us together in one barrack. Altogether there were about two hundred to two hundred and forty of us forced laborers in the camp. The guards had their barracks there as well. The Germans appointed Greek Jewish prisoners as our guards. They beat us really badly and

treated us very roughly. In the camp, there was also a big kitchen, the (*Kranken*)*revier* [the first aid place] and the offices. There was a barrack where the Germans only collected clothing. I think there were about eight to ten barracks altogether. The camp was a labor subcamp of the Dachau concentration camp. At first, there were only men but later they also brought women.

They took us to a factory, to big bunkers where they were making airplanes. It was incredibly dark – light could hardly be seen. We were tiny people in there, bringing sandstones and other building materials back and forth. We didn't want to hide or only pretend to be working because it was so ice-cold that we would rather work than be so cold. In the factory, we were under German guards and we had to work wearing our armbands. Even though I was lanky, I was a resourceful and tough guy. Having to work hard and lugging things at home had made me more resistant, and I held up pretty well. Soon the factory was closed down and we were transported to Dachau.

Dachau was an awful place, and they had a crematorium as well. In those awful, dirty circumstances, because of my unhealed wounds, I got typhus but didn't tell anybody. I didn't want to reveal my sickness because no one knew what happened to sick people. It was a horribly exhausting seven-kilometer march to the worksite in the snow, wearing wooden-soled shoes. We had to walk the seven kilometers back to the camp again in the dark. If the snow caught somebody's wooden-soled shoes he twisted his ankle and fell down to the ground screaming. The next thing we would hear was the firing of bullets. The person was shot down. We didn't even have time to see who it was because the guards were driving us on, '*Los! Los!*'. I was trying to walk as fast as I could because whoever got behind had something bad happen to him. I was a fit guy and marched at a good pace, but I was getting so dizzy from my illness that I bumped into the first officer guard. This was a tragic mistake because he turned around right away and hit my mouth with the butt of his gun so that all my teeth fell out. Since then I have had dentures. I felt something salty and warm in my mouth, and I thought I was going to pass out. Later I found out that this officer was a Dutch fascist who had joined the SS.

One time when we came back to Dachau we were really lucky. The Führer of the Türkheim concentration camp, where we were stationed before, knew that the war was coming to an end. The Allies were constantly bombing everything, and he wanted to have a chance after the war so he was very protective of his laborers. This Führer took us back to his camp. If I compare it to Dachau I would say that we lived a normal life in Türkheim and they didn't beat us there. When we had to line up for food they only screamed at us or pushed us or said something rude. I don't even know if there was a high voltage gate around the camp. The soldiers who guarded us were not SS soldiers, they were Wehrmacht guards. The camp had a tailor and a shoe workshop, and German soldiers came to ask us to do something for them and they even gave us some cigarettes.

When I got back to Türkheim I had to admit immediately that I had typhus. They took me into (*Kranken*)*revier* [the barrack of the sick] where there was some sort of doctor, but there was no

disinfectant. Within a short time, I caught a fever and they could do nothing about it. In the meantime, a death barrack was put up for prisoners with typhus. It was surrounded by cables and the guards had their spotlight on us. We couldn't move, and we didn't receive any treatment. We even had our own latrine dug right next to our barrack. At first, there were twenty to thirty of us. We got some food and the guards checked on us, but later nobody came to see us and we stopped getting food, too. Only two of us survived: Sandor Schwartz, a talented young businessman from Kolozsvár, and me. We felt a constant weakness, and we weren't really aware of what was happening around us. After a while, it became very peaceful and we heard cannon fire coming toward the camp.

The guards weren't there anymore, and perhaps the light was out as well. There was a slightly uneasy silence in the concentration camp, and we didn't see anyone else so we decided to escape. We were very run-down, but at least we were over our illness. We knew that we were caged in by wires. We decided to dig ourselves out below the wires, and that's how we escaped because, naturally, we couldn't have just walked out through the gates. It was a little foggy, and there were some clouds in the sky. We crawled by the garbage – because they collected the garbage and leftovers from the kitchen there – until we felt that the ground was softer. We tried to figure out whether the wires were electrically charged but we thought they were just plain wires because there were usually tunnels between the electric ones. We scraped out a hole and crawled through. The forest was about fifteen to twenty meters away from us, and we wanted to get there in one run when the spotlights weren't on that part. There was a muddy village road. We got up and started running. We ran into the forest but we were so tired that we just fell down there and were gasping on the ground. But we had to get up straight away and we walked all night. I think it was my idea to suggest that we continued separately because we only had one chance to escape if we remained together, but two if we split up. Sandor agreed and then we said goodbye. It was extremely cold and dark in the Bavarian forest. This was at the end of April.

There was a small town with pretty houses on the other side of the forest. I was too scared to start on my way. Where was I going to go? Right then I spotted a big furniture-transporting truck. It looked dodgy because it had a broken axle. The truck had straw hanging out of the back, one door open and seemed empty. I was terribly weakened and my first thought was to climb into the back of the truck and sleep. Suddenly, I heard a voice behind me, saying '*Jude*'. The voice belonged to a German. I saw a man in a black uniform of about forty and I thought I was done for. Then he said to me '*Schnell, schnell, komm!*' [Quick, quick, come]. I didn't understand what he meant when I heard '*Komm*'. In such a situation they would usually push me while saying, 'Go', and we would keep on marching.

The German and I set off. When I stared at his back with the black uniform, I started wondering why I was at his back, and him in front of me. The guards were always at the back so they couldn't be attacked from the back. But I had no strength to run away with my clogs, and he would have caught me easily. '*Schnell, schnell!*', and the man was saying something else to me

in German. He turned out to be a railway worker in his black uniform. He took me to his place on some back paths. His house was a little further away from the village. We entered through the garden. A woman came out and said immediately: '*Nein, nein! Du bist verrueckt!*' ['No, no! You are completely crazy' – she was referring to Egon coming from a concentration camp]. 'I know, shut up!' He took my clothes off and threw the clothes out of the window into the garden. Meanwhile, the woman brought some warm soapy water, and they made me lie down, naked as I was, and washed me. I don't know more because then I lost consciousness.

I don't know how long I slept, but I woke up from the dawning light and realized that I was in a basement. I felt very hot. It turned out they put me in some kind of bed, and they put an eiderdown blanket on me. They came down and took me upstairs to the kitchen. They neatened me up again and gave me some clothes. I immediately got coffee and some bread, and they started to feed me. I slept in the basement, and once in a while they would come and wake me up and bring me up to the kitchen. Once, while I was up in the kitchen, we heard somebody banging on the door. They looked out – the German soldiers were retreating, and they just wanted to come in to get warm. There was no time for the master of the house to hide me, so we agreed that I was going to be an Italian prisoner whom they had let in. The Germans came inside with their guns, as they were. There was a great discussion. I told them something like, '*Ich bin Italiener, io sono italiano.*' They also tried to talk to me in Italian, but they couldn't. But they weren't too curious to find out more about me since they were in pretty bad shape themselves – thin, with beards. Soon afterward they left.

After a while the neighbors accepted that I was there, and others also received some concentration camp fugitives into their houses. This wasn't anything unusual. I spent two weeks there. I went to the small town to see what the situation was like and it was a big mess there. French prisoners who had been freed from the concentration camp had gone into the city and broken into all the stores and shops. One of them saw me just standing and staring at them, and said, '*Viens avec nous!*' [Come with us]. It turned out they had broken into a shoe store and plundered it. It was full of Dermata shoes and boots from Kolozsvár. They grabbed about twelve pairs of shoes and put them on my shoulders and I thought I was going to collapse. I took all the shoes back to the German's house and gave him all of them. One of the French people saw that I needed some clothes too, and there were also some Romanian fabrics – brand new with the trademark of a famous Romanian textile manufacturer – and he ripped off about 3 meters and put them on my shoulders as well.

We didn't leave the town until the Americans arrived. Afterward, I went back to the camp at Türkheim. The barracks of the German soldiers and prisoners were empty. It was only then that I realized that while we men had been in Dachau, the camp had gotten female workers, but by the time the Führer brought us back the women had been taken somewhere else. However, some of them escaped and came back to Türkheim. Margo, my future wife, was one of the women who had escaped and come back. The women slept somewhere in the barracks. There was some food

left in the kitchen, some potatoes and such, and the women were trying to make themselves something to eat. I met Margo when I saw smoke coming out of the kitchen and I went to see what the source was. I saw two girls and an old man making some food in a great cauldron. I went in and yelled at them, 'Don't you know the war is over? Leave this place right now!' Margo explained to me in a few words that the Germans had wanted to take them away but that they escaped, and that they were hungry and would rather cook something than leave. Later I found out that these two girls could have gone to the town and their hunger wasn't the only reason they stayed in the camp. After a short conversation, I found out that they were cooking for twenty to twenty seven ill people.

Margo had undergone horrible treatment in Ravensbrück. They sterilized her. The women were stripped naked and their hair was shaved. When it was Margo's turn to be shaved, the SS woman suddenly told the barber, '*Nein, dieser nicht die Haare schneiden!*', don't shave the hair off this one. Margo later told me, 'I was almost on my knees begging her to cut my hair because I couldn't stand to have lice. The SS woman couldn't be convinced.' Margo stood in line and went to the shower. After being liberated it was a great surprise to see Margo with long thick black hair among all the women who had short hair. I didn't see it at first when I saw Margo in the kitchen because she was wearing a kerchief. But suddenly she took the kerchief off and shook her head and all her long black hair fell down. 'Oh my Lord, why do you have so much hair? What happened?' and so she told me.

The former male laborers also started to return to the camp. Sandor came back from somewhere too, and he told me that he had been taken in by a German as well. We stayed in the SS barracks, and at night we even had some blankets. If I'm right we stayed in Türkheim for another three weeks. By then the guys had got together – there were some guys from Maramaros who were all very handy – and we supported the girls and did all kinds of things. The Americans didn't pay attention to us, they kept moving forward since the war wasn't over yet.

In exchange for some cigarettes I managed to get engagement rings, and Margo and I got engaged in front of everybody. People arranged a separate little bungalow for us by the forest. It was beautifully painted white, and I decorated it with figures of Indians. We lived there together, and everybody looked at us as a married couple. We even put together some sort of a bed. There was a small Mexican guy in the American army, and we found out about each other – we both spoke Spanish. He really liked the painted walls of my house, and whenever he had time he came to visit me. He saw that I didn't have any proper clothes, and he was the first person to buy me a green T-shirt and brought me underwear, hankies, and things like that.”

## HANNAH FISCHER

**Vienna, Austria**

**Interviewer: Tanja Eckstein**

**Date of interview: August 2004**



*Hannah Fischer on her 12th birthday in Vienna, Austria, in 1937.*

[Read Hannah Fischer's biography here](#)

[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

*Hannah Fischer and her twin brother, Rafael Erwin, were born in Bratislava in 1925. When she was about ten years old her family moved to Vienna, Austria, where she experienced the rise of antisemitism which culminated in the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938. Her family home was repeatedly raided, and her father was imprisoned in Dachau from 1938 to 1939. Her father was a rabbi and her mother was a political journalist with communist leanings, which made them both targets of the regime. Hannah and her brother, Rafael, escaped to London on the kindertransport in 1938 - their mother joined them there later to work as a maid. Hannah finished school in the UK before returning to Vienna, where she worked as a preschool teacher and later a psychologist. She has also completed her studies in medicine. She has received awards for her pedagogical work and continues to participate in humanitarian training projects for Sahrawi women. Hannah has one adopted son.*

“My father was a handsome man with thick, black hair. For as long as I knew him – that was until he was fifty eight – he had a full head of black hair. People said that his hair was white upon his release after a year of imprisonment in Dachau.”

“At the end of March 1938, my father was arrested. The neighbor of the property in Essling was a Nazi – we knew that. And this neighbor wanted our property.

My father was thus summoned and asked to sign off that he was giving his property to the neighbor. My father refused to give his signature with the argument that he had purchased the property and was on the deed and didn't see any reason to hand it over to the neighbor. He

thought that as a former front-line soldier he would naturally be respected by the Nazis. The Nazis respected nothing. They arrested and interned him in the twentieth district, in a school on Karajan-Gasse.

That's where Jews were collected and deported to Dachau. My father was on the so-called "Prominent Transport" to the Dachau concentration camp on 1 April 1938. Among the one hundred and fifty prisoners, there were well-known politicians and opponents of the National Socialist regime, as well as Christian Socialists, Monarchists, Social Democrats, Communists, and around fifty to sixty people of Jewish faith or background."

"My brother and I never saw our father again. When he was released from the concentration camp we were no longer in Austria. My father's letters from the camp were an upsetting experience for us since they sounded like this: 'Dear Liesl, dear children!'

Then a large portion would be cut out, and at the bottom it would say: 'Greetings and kisses from your father, Bela'. I can't imagine what my father could have written, conscious of the fact that he was imprisoned in a concentration camp and knowing what he wouldn't have been allowed to write.

We sent packages to him in the concentration camp in Dachau. Maybe he wrote that he received the packages. I don't know. But in any case, it was something that very powerfully demonstrated the nature of the new regime."

"Maybe my father was released from Dachau because of the permit, but when he was back in Vienna – that was in July of August 1939 – the British Embassy didn't officially exist anymore. Officially they were on holiday – since that was time for holidays – but they never returned, since war was foreseeable.

For some time my father stayed in Budapest illegally but was then deported and returned to Vienna. In Vienna, he lived with other Jews in a so-called "collection apartment" [*Sammelwohnung*]. Since the Jews had their apartments taken from them, many Jewish families lived together in one apartment. I think my father was in the second district. In September 1940 he was able to board one of four ships attempting to reach Palestine illegally."



## GÁBOR RÉVÉSZ

Budapest, Hungary

Interviewer: Czingel Szilvia

Date of interview: September 2006



[Read Gábor Révész's biography here](#)

[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

“First they put us in a wagon somewhere near Vienna, I don’t know where, and took us to Dachau. If you look on a map, you know that the second front was already approaching from the direction of Normandy. The British-American troops were advancing from the north, and the Soviet troops were attacking from the east, so the Germans were wedged in. But they still busied themselves with us. We were in Dachau for two weeks, in a camp called Landsberg. Then they transferred us to another camp. It was called Seestall. We still wore our own clothing there, and from time to time our food was acceptable, too. For instance, I remember how surprised we were that they gave us jam, which was commonly called “Hitler bacon”, to go with the bread. It was a concentrated jam in a box. So things didn’t seem so

hopeless there. They gave us hot soup once a day and black coffee once a day in the morning, with bread and something to go with it.”

## HELENA KOVANICOVA

*Prague, Czech Republic*

*Interviewer: Terezie Holmerová*

*Date of interview: February 2006*



*Helena Kovanicova as a little girl in Prague, in 1930.*

[Read Helena Kovanicova's biography here](#)

[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

*Helena was born in 1924 in Prague, the eldest of three siblings. Her parents, Adolf Munk and Olga Nachodova, also had two younger sons: Viktor and Jiri. Around 1929, the family moved to Brandys nad Labem—the same city where Olga had been born. Helena recalls a childhood filled with studies, reading, friendships, and family hiking trips, although these experiences ended as the war approached. Helena was fourteen when the Germans arrived in March 1939, and her family remained in Brandys under German rule until they were deported to Terezin in January 1943. While in Terezin, Helena met her husband and they married while imprisoned there. Helena's father was murdered in Auschwitz, but Helena, her husband, her mother, and both of her brothers were reunited in Prague after the war. Her brother was sent from Auschwitz to a subcamp of Dachau at the age of fourteen and survived until liberation. However, his time there left him traumatized. Helena and her husband had one son, Jiri, in 1952, and their*

*granddaughter Helena was born in 1983. Helena also worked at various companies as an office clerk and accountant.*

“When my brother Viktor went to Auschwitz, he wasn't even fourteen yet. Some SS soldier on the ramp apparently asked him how old he was, took his watch, and advised him to say that he was a year older, and only thanks to this was my brother saved and didn't go directly into the gas. From Auschwitz, he got into Kaufering, which was a branch of Dachau. [Editor's note: Near Dachau concentration camp, the Nazis erected two huge underground factories – Kaufering and

Mühldorf – where they then transferred the chief portion of arms manufacturers; mainly Jews from Poland, Hungary, and the Baltics worked there in inhuman conditions.]

There he got typhus. Apparently, they left him lying with the others in some pits, and then they loaded them onto open wagons and were taking them to the gas chambers. In the meantime, the Allies bombed the train, so it remained standing somewhere on the track. My brother's friend from Prague died there in the morning and my brother was found by the Americans, who dressed him and sent him to a hospital, where he spent a long time. They found him looking like a human skeleton, he weighed twenty eight kilograms.

For a long time, we had no news at all of him, not until sometime in August 1945 when he wrote to Mrs. Krejcova, our family friend and household helper. My brother thought that none of us had returned. Mrs. Krejcova immediately let us know that my brother was at a sanatorium on Sokolska Street. His nerves were completely shot, and he was in horrible physical shape. For a long time after the war, he didn't want to talk about anything that he had lived through.”

## JIRI MUNK

*Prague, Czech Republic*

*Interviewer: Terezie Holmerova*

*Date of interview: January 2006*



*Jiri Munk as a high school student in Prague, 1947.*

[Read Jiri Munk's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Jiri Munk was born in 1932 in Prague, to Adolf Munk, a lawyer, and Olga Nachodova. Jiri's parents came from the small town of Brandys nad Labem, but they raised their children in Prague. Jiri was the youngest of three siblings and reminisces about a happy childhood with a nanny, cook, and servants. He remembers the German occupation of Prague vividly, even though he was only seven years old at the time, and still regrets how it interrupted his schooling. In 1939, Jiri's father was forced to stop practicing as a lawyer due to the new anti-Jewish laws passed, and he took on the undesirable job of being president of the Jewish community of Prague during the war. In 1943, at the age of eleven, Jiri and his family were deported to Terezin. Jiri, his mother, and his sister survived their imprisonment in Terezin, but his father and brother were deported to Auschwitz. There his father perished in the gas chambers, and his brother was sent on to Kaufering, a subcamp of Dachau. He survived and returned home to Prague in 1945, albeit scarred from his experiences there. Jiri went on to become a devoted member of the Boy Scouts and a fervent opponent of communism in his teenage years, before going on to study architecture at university. He met his future wife, a journalist, in 1945, and the couple went on to write and illustrate a series of popular children's books together. They had one daughter together in 1965, who also lives in Prague.*

“My brother survived thanks to a coincidence, which is tied to one previous incident. My brother had a bar mitzvah in 1941, which oddly enough we celebrated, even though we didn't usually go in for Jewish celebrations much. My father had an old Swiss wrist watch hidden away somewhere, and he gave it to him as a gift on this occasion.

When in 1944, at the age of sixteen, my skinny but tall brother was standing on the ramp in Auschwitz in front of the selection, some SS man noticed his watch and asked him, 'What kind of watch is that?' My brother answered something back, and the SS-man said to him, 'OK, give it

to me!' My brother gave him the watch without hesitation because you had to give everything away anyway. But the SS-man then also asked how old my brother was, and when he answered that he was sixteen, he gave him this advice, 'During the selection, say that you're already eighteen.' And my brother has always been convinced that this incident saved his life because if he would have said that he was sixteen, he would probably have gone straight to the gas.

My brother lived through horrible things. Our father evidently went straight to the gas in Auschwitz, but my brother passed through Auschwitz and went to another concentration camp, by the name of Kaufering, I don't know for sure. [Editor's note: Near by the Dachau concentration camp, the Nazis erected set up two huge underground factories --- Kaufering and Mühldorf --, where they then transferred the chief portion of arms manufacturers; mainly Jews from Poland, Hungary, and the Baltics worked there in inhuman conditions..]

At the end of the war, my brother ended up in a death transport. They loaded him and other half-dead prisoners onto a train, locked them in, didn't give them anything to eat or drink, and for several days they traveled. Half the people in the wagon died during the trip. What's more, they were attacked by Allied planes who thought that it was a military transport. They shot the locomotive to pieces, so the train remained standing on a track somewhere in a forest.

That was already at the end of the war, sometime in 1945. Viky said that he was almost dead. Some friend of his managed to pull him off the train where only dead bodies were left, and they went into the forest, where the Americans found them. But the Americans weren't familiar with what kind of state they were in, so they gave them normal meals and many people died because they suddenly ate too much. After the war, my brother had serious health problems such as tuberculosis among other things, and he had to be treated in a sanatorium for a long time.”

## LASZLO LADISLAUS BERNATH

*Vienna, Austria*

*Interviewer: Zsuzsi Szaszi*

*Date of interview: November 2001*



*Five of the Bernath siblings in Kiskörös in the 1930s. Laszlo Ladislaus is the boy in the sailor suit.*

[Read Laszlo Ladislaus Bernath's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Laszlo Ladislaus Bernath was born in Hungary on October 21, 1925, the second-youngest of eight siblings. He had a happy childhood in a well-off, religious family. His mother and father, Adolf Bernáth and Nelli Jungreis, owned a shop for building materials. At the age of seventeen, in 1942, Laszlo was conscripted into a labor camp before being deported to Dachau in late November 1944. There, he experienced the horrifying last days of the war in Kaufering, a subcamp of Dachau, until its liberation by the U.S. Army in May 1945. When he returned home to Kiskörös, he found out that he was the only survivor of his family: his siblings and parents had all perished either in the army or in Auschwitz. He married Izabella Friedmann in 1946, when he was just nineteen years old, which he recalls helped him deal with the grief of losing his family. He rebuilt his family's successful building material business but struggled to find work after the company was nationalized at the end of 1948*

*under communism. Laszlo and his wife decided to flee to Vienna with their two young daughters, where they started the first business importing jukeboxes from America to Austria. Later, they owned a shop where they produced and exported children's clothing.*

"At the end of November, they dragged us on foot to the Czech border. At the Czech border, we were loaded into wagons and taken to Dachau.. On the gate was written: 'Arbeit Macht Frei'.

That was actually already at the end of 1944. Dachau was the headquarters, everyone went to Dachau. We were in Dachau for about two weeks, and from there we went to the surrounding labor camps. The labor camps were merciless. We hardly got anything to eat or drink and had to carry two sacks of cement on our shoulders until we couldn't take any more.

If we fell down, they poured water on us or beat us. Many fell down and died. That was the beginning of the end. We were in the most terrible camps there were in Germany. We came to Kaufering [note: concentration camp branch of Dachau], where typhus was raging.

I caught it, too, and they put us typhus patients in quarantine so that the poor Germans wouldn't get sick. We were isolated, but we still had to work. We had to take the corpses to the barbed wire, open their mouths, pull out their gold teeth and throw them into SS hats.

Mühldorf is not far from Munich. In Mühldorf we were first put in one quarantine, then another. Almost all of us died there. Only a few survived. When the Americans came, the Germans shot us in the legs, and then they threw those who were still alive onto open wagons.

They filled the wagons with oil, let the wagons go, and set them on fire. Everyone who could jumped down. That's how the Americans found us. That's what I experienced, I don't like to tell it.

That was in May 1945. I couldn't go home because I had a bullet wound. The SS doctor wanted to amputate my leg. The SS hospital was still there, but the Americans wouldn't allow it. So my leg was saved. I stayed in the hospital until August 1945. Then I went to Kiskörös.

We went to Budapest in a freight wagon. On Yom Kippur I was in Bratislava. I got off the train so that I wouldn't be on the road on Yom Kippur. In Budapest, I went to the OMZSA [Note: Nationwide Hungarian Jewish Action or Relief Action], which was in Bethlen Square. You had to register there. The one who took my details was a Schwartz daughter from Kiskörös.

I thought I would see someone again when I got home. But no one was there. None of my brothers, none of my sisters. Irén lived in Sárvár with her husband, who was an insurance broker, and her son Lacika, the other two, Emilia and Erna had stayed in Kiskörös. Márta, the eldest, already had two children. All of them had been taken away. None of them came back.

My oldest brother Miklós died in Russia in 1942, and the second oldest Karóly died in Bor, Yugoslavia, in the camp. All the others died in Auschwitz along with my parents. A terrible thing, I don't like to talk about it, but unfortunately, it is so."

## IVAN MOSHKOVICH

*Uzhgorod, Ukraine*

*Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya*

*Date of interview: April 2003*



*Ivan Moshkovich during his army service in Belarus, 1950.*

[Read Ivan Moshkovich's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Ivan Moshkovich was born in 1928 in Uzhgorod, Ukraine, but grew up in the small village of Dolgoye Pole, close to his grandparents. He was the youngest of four children, having one brother and two sisters. His father was a cattle dealer and his mother, who came from a wealthy family, was a housewife. The family had a religious home life, and Ivan recalls never experiencing antisemitism before the arrival of the fascist Hungarian army in 1938, which passed anti-Jewish laws. In 1944, the occupying Germans deported the Jews of the area to a brick factory in Uzhgorod, which became a temporary ghetto. In May 1944, Ivan and his family were deported on cattle cars to Auschwitz. Ivan stayed with his father, but they were separated from his mother and one sister, who would both perish in the gas chambers.*

*From Auschwitz, Ivan and his father were sent to Dachau and separated. There he was liberated by the Soviet army in May 1945 and reunited with his father. They returned home to Dolgoye Pole to find his brother and one sister already returned. In 1949, Ivan was recruited to the Soviet army. After the compulsory four years of military service, he became an engineer in a car shop. Ivan married Faina Shystman in 1958, and they had one son and one daughter. Today, Ivan Moshkovich is chairman of the Jewish community of Uzhgorod.*

“We traveled from one camp to another. It's difficult for me to recall our route. We stayed a few days in Birkenau and from there we moved to Dachau. My father and I were separated. Old people and young people formed separate groups. We didn't get any food there. Hundreds of inmates were dying. Every morning there were so many dead bodies that the others had to walk



on them! All our emotions atrophied, and we were indifferent to our surroundings. When I think about it now I'm horrified. Recollections of this time are unbearable for me.

We didn't get any news from the front. When we saw that the Germans were changing into dead inmates' clothes we wondered why they were doing this. The day came when there were no guards left, and there were no Germans left in the camp. All the inmates gathered. We didn't know what had happened, and we saw planes making rounds over the camp. We thought that they were going to drop bombs on the camp until we noticed the red stars on their wings. The planes began to drop things that fell to the ground but didn't explode. We came closer and saw packages with bread, butter, and chocolate. The starved people greedily grabbed the food. Somebody told me that we had starved too long and couldn't eat too much. I was angry with him at that moment, but later I understood that he was right. Many people died from eating too much. So much food happened to be deadly for people that had only eaten miserable stuff for so long. In the first days of May 1945, Soviet troops came to the camp. This was the long-awaited freedom. It was a happy day in my life that I'll never forget. We cried out of joy and kissed our liberators.”

**Photograph: IVAN MOSHKOVICH**

*Photo taken in Dolgoye Pole, USSR, 1945*

[Read Ivan Moshkovich's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)



“This is a picture of me after I returned from Dachau. The photo was taken in the village of Dolgoye Pole in 1945. After I was liberated I didn't have any information about my family. I didn't see my father and thought that he had perished. After liberation, I decided to go home. I didn't know the way and just followed other people. In a village, I sat down on a bench to rest when somebody called my name. I looked up and saw my father! It was a happy reunion. We walked on together. We hoped that other members of our family had also survived. I don't know how long it took us to finally get to Dolgoye Pole. My older brother Mayer and my sister Clara were at home. They told us that my mother and younger sister Olga had perished in Auschwitz. My grandfather Eikef and my mother's sisters also perished in Auschwitz, and so did my mother's older brother Ignas. He was the strongest man in the village. He could do any hard work. He would have survived in the camp, but when the Germans took his little son to the crematorium my uncle went there with him. They both perished.”

## Photograph: ALEXANDER ROZENZWEIG

*Photo taken in Vienna, Austria, 1937*

[Read Paul Rona's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Paul Rona recalls that his father was born on 13 April 1890 in Kolta, and that he was the youngest of five siblings. He moved to Vienna from Kolta with his wife shortly after they were married. Paul recalls that his father was religious and "rather nervous, irascible and quick-tempered". He was deported from Vienna to Dachau in 1938, where he died of pneumonia.*



"

***Extra information from Paul Rona's biography:***

"This is my father. He only had his beard removed shortly before 1938. I remember him with a mustache. My mother sent this photo to my father in the Dachau concentration camp so that he would sign it.

My mother tried to find a way for us to escape, and together we would probably have escaped to Shanghai, because she sent this photo to my father in Dachau concentration camp for his passport or his visa to Shanghai, so that he would sign it. He also signed the photo and sent it back, because a visa would have released him. I think on 23 or 24 December 23th or 24th, 1938, some prisoners tried to escape from Dachau concentration camp. Then there was an overlong roll call until they caught the escaped prisoners. It was cold, and my father got pneumonia and died of the consequences on 2 January 2nd, 1939. We received a message from the concentration camp saying that my father had died and that they wanted to know if we wanted to bury my father in Vienna. We made a point of burying my father in Vienna, and he was returned to us in a zinc coffin. We had to pay for the transport to Vienna. Then we buried him at the Central Cemetery in the grave of his brother Josef. I can still remember the funeral very well."



## Photograph: JAKUB NOJFELD-GRINFELD WITH HIS MATES

*Photo taken in Munich, Germany, 1945*

[Read Jakob Bromberg's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)



“This is my friend, Jakub Nojfeld-Grinfeld, the first from left, with his mates after the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp near Munich. In this picture they are making fun of how the Germans used to punish prisoners – they gave them a thrashing. I don’t know the names of the other people in the picture. I received this photo from my friend, Jakub Nojfeld-Grinfeld. I don’t know where it was taken, somewhere near Munich, but I don’t know where exactly or when. It was sometime in the 1940s, after the war.”

*Former inmates of Dachau concentration camps making fun of how guards used to punish the camp's inmates, 1945(?).*