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Eugene Krauss

Rose Mary Lawson

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Interview with Eugene Krauss:= EK

Date of Interview: May 7, 1979

Interviewer: Rose M. Lawson = RL

SERIES: SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcriber: Gert Kohn

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

EK: My name is Eugene Krauss. I live at 1245 Cumberland Avenue, Dayton, Ohio. I was born in Hungary 1915, 65 years ago. I had four brothers and two sisters. My father lived in a small town in Hungary and we children grew up in that little town and I went to Budapest to study, to become a teacher. I was a teacher in the same town where I grew up. The name of the town is Sharvar Vashmar, so I became one of the few who could become a teacher in the same town where I was myself a student.

Of course we had a fairly peaceful life until 1941, when Hitler occupied Hungary. The Nazis marched in and the whole life turned and changed. At that time I served in the Hungarian army in 1939 and 1940 for two years. I became an officer in uniform, and after Hitler marched in they forced me to take off my uniform and I had to change into civilian clothes with the yellow arm band. I became a forced laborer. From that time on, we changed places wherever they needed us to work in Hungary.

At home, the Nazi laws came into effect and gradually the Jewish population were forced to move into ghettos. They had to give up their homes, they had to leave all their properties and little by little they took away all their possessions and all their pride and will to live.

We heard all the news, of course, in our forced labor camp. We were in contact with our people and we knew that my older brother had to go into a forced labor camp also. My younger brother was already serving in Bor* in Serbia in a German forced labor camp. That was a copper mine where he was working for the German army. My other younger brother was already taken to Russia near the Dan river, where he worked until finally they were liquidated, and we had a report that he had disappeared. Of course, later on we found out that the guards were given the order that the faster they get rid of their people the faster the guard can come home. They were not only shot by the enemies in the front line and the fireline between the Hungarian and the Russian armies, but also their own guards were shooting them at night while they were working in the foxholes and in the fortifications where they had to do their work. So that was the fate of my younger brother Alex who died in Russia. My older brother Emil also had the same fate during the winter 1942 when they didn't have any clothing and didn't have enough food. He died in Russia.

My younger brother was lucky because he was serving in Serbia in Bor. Later on, when Tito and the Russian army

*Bor is located at 44.06N, 22.06E.

was forced out of Serbia they had to march north through Hungary. During that march, in Chervink, in a village where the population was mostly Germans, they surrounded this little factory that was a brick factory where they had sleeping quarters over night. They surrounded them with machine guns and executed about 5,000 boys there in one night, and my younger brother was among them. How they did it was they marched thirty or forty people in one group to the ditch where they used to dig the clay for bricks and the machine guns shot them. After they finished this group, the next group was marched in. They also ordered them to take off their clothes, everything, and then they mowed them down with the guns.

My brother escaped from that execution. Later I found out how. It was a miracle. He jumped into that ditch before the shooting began and he was was not wounded but buried with his comrades and their blood soaked on to his body, and even when they threw grenades later on in the morning, they couldn't reach him because he was completely covered. In the morning when he climbed out, he came out from that ditch, alive. At that time the shooting was already stopped. Boys who ran away and the people who survived, they forced them to continue the march. Among them, my brother, who was forced to march to Flossenberq to the concentration camp where his suffering continued. Over there it was a lager (camp) where they had the crematorium and the weak and the sick were executed and gassed and burned in the crematorium.

That-was already the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945. During that winter it was when the English and the Amerian army were close, they were evacuated and marched toward Czechoslovakia. During that march he escaped. And that's how he lived. He's alive today.

RL: Where does he live?

EK: He lives now in New York. Of course, I didn't know this story until later. By that time I was in Bucharest, also liberated, and I worked for the Joint Distribution Committee as a Social Worker. I met all these boys who came back from concentration camps, from Auschwitz, from Flossenburq, from Idoneck and Treblinka. I met them at the hospital sick and in run down condition, and I was the one who had to supply them with food from the Bucharest Joint Distribution Committee and also from the Ladies Auxiliary. I brought them additional food because they were in very bad condition.

I met there a boy whose name was Meyer Wolfe and I talked to him and I found out that he also worked in Bor in Serbia where my younger brother had a job as an electrician. While he worked on the electric line everybody got in contact with him and knew him, and he told me that he knew Karl Krauss

very well when he was in Chervinka and he was executed there, he was killed. At that time it was Januray 1945, when I found out that my younger brother was killed. Later on, this boy left for Hungary. He was a tailor by profession, and I asked him to make a suit for me, I had some material. He asked me to write down my address in his notebook. I wrote down my address with my own handwriting, my Bucharest address in Romania. He left for Hungary and I didn't see him for another six or seven months. After about six or seven months when he returned to Bucharest, I met him in the synagogue while I went to the services. Then I recognized him and he recognized me, and I was very glad to see him and his face was lightened up when I met him and he told me he met my brother Karl Krauss in Budapest. I never heard that. He told me that he met him there, and I told him don't make any joke because you are the one who told me he is dead, he was executed in Chervinka. No, you don't want to believe it, and he took out his notebook and on the same page where I wrote in my own handwriting my address, he let my brother write his address in Budapest in his handwriting. So the same man who told me he is lost, the same man told me he is alive. That's the only brother I got left from my family of six children, except my sister who had already left from Hungary before the war in 1939 for Israel. She had to go through without this Nazi misery.

RL: Did she continue to live in Israel?

EK: Yes. She had a family there and she has already two grown up daughters. They are married and they have children.

RL: Now you then were in a forced labor camp?

EK: I was in a forced labor camp. All right, I'll go back to my own story. I worked in a forced labor camp in Hungary at the beginning. During that time, we made all kind of air force bases and winter houses for the army, and we quarried stones for the houses and buildings and fortresses that we built in Hungary. Little by little, they shipped those groups to the Russian front. Earlier shipments were the unluckier ones because they didn't come home. The later they were shipped, the luckier they become because they had a better chance to survive.

We were the lucky ones because we were shipped to the east front to work in the German army in June, 1944. I remember when we were embarked into the cattle train to be shipped to the east, we saw liberators' planes fly above our town toward Austria and Germany. One of the American planes was damaged and was left behind smoking. The fliers parachuted from that airplane, and at that time we looked up and saw that the Germans with their Messerschmits were buzzing around the parachuting fliers, and they were shooting them with machine guns. These people were helpless and they just

wouldn't let them reach the ground alive, they shot them and killed them while they were floating down to the ground.

We were shipped to the front. We met trains full with civilian people, mostly old women and children going to Auschwitz. When we arrived at Miskolc* that was one of the border towns, the last town in Hungary, we met a train also with cattle cars full of people, about 60 to 80 people in each car. It was June and very hot and they were crying and asking and hollering for water and complaining. One of the women at the station, a gentile lady, ran for a pail of water and a cup to give the water. I remember seeing people are reaching out for the water from the cattle car and there was a small window with iron bars. This lady was serving the water to an old lady, her arms were reaching out for the cup of water and the police came there, the Hungarian MP's, and chased the gentile lady away and hit with his gun on the old lady's arm. Of course, it was broken and that was my last farewell to my country, Hungary, when I left to see that broken arm hanging from that cattle car window.

I left Hungary and I was transported to Dismelicha, a small Ukraine village where our first duty was to go out to the big square grounds where an execution was supposed to be taking place. Why, because they wanted to show us what would happen to boys who try to run away to the other side. Three Jewish boys were executed and we had to look and see how they were punished. Three boys were led out with handcuffed hands and they were put up on the big tree with nails on it to be hung up on the three wooden beams. One of the volunteers of the Hungarian soldiers was supposed to do the execution. He was not experienced, of course, and he didn't know how to do it properly. The boys had to suffer a lot and the commander who read the verdict couldn't stand to look at it any more, because the execution was started already, and one boy was already hanging and suffering a lot. His face was turning blue and his tongue was out and he was hollering that his name was Bun of Durnich. They covered his face and the guard who helped the executioner tried to pull down his cap to cover his face. Then he pulled out his shirt and put it over his head. The reason I'm telling this is because the third guy is supposed to look at two of his friends while they're dying. He was so cold blooded and didn't give a damn. He took out his handkerchief and put it in his outside pocket to be ready and prepared for the executioner to be able to cover his face.

Of course when the Russians noticed this assembly in that square, they sent the planes and machine guns. More Hungarian soldiers died than the whole thing was worthwhile to do. This captain was displeased with that kind of theater, and did not order any more theaters like this showplace. From that time on, they made it real short when somebody was punished, they were shot on the spot without

**Miskolc is located 48.06N, 20.47E.*

any word with anyone. That's what happened to most of my friends who I worked with. Little by little, I lost my company, my group. We shrunk smaller and smaller and other groups came to fill it up to make the quota of 200 complete.

RL: They came from many areas.

EK: Yes. As we worked, we had to retreat toward Hungary as the Russians pushed the army back. We heard the news from home that somebody had wanted to kill Hitler.

RL: How did you get this news?

EK: We heard from mouth to mouth. Later on that our own Admiral Horthy had abdicated from the leadership, and a Nazi quizling took his place. Then we knew that everything was going to be kaput in Hungary because everything was going the way the German's wanted it to go. We didn't hope anymore for anything good. I was looking how do I run away, how do I hide? I didn't know the language of the area yet. We moved backwards toward Hungary, but I hadn't reached the country yet. So I thought maybe if we arrive inside Hungary, I might have a better chance to be able to talk and people to understand me, to find a place where I could hide until I would be liberated. This is what I did. I'm alive now because those poor people who hid with me at the time, plus another group some time before, hid and were liberated. The rest of them were all shipped to Austria and over there during the winter of 1944, they were all killed or died of typhus and other sickness.

RL: This interview was made May 7, 1979 at 3:30 in the afternoon in the home of Eugene Krauss at 1245 Cumberland Ave, Dayton, Ohio.

EK: So I said that we were marching and carrying our tools on our shoulders plus all our belongings. We were walking and marching with the retreating Hungarian and German army. The moment they needed us, we stopped and started to work. Whatever they wanted, we did. Unloading trains, or loading food, or baking bread, or slaughtering animals or taking care of them, or building the roads, fixing the roads, or helping them to push up the vehicles which sank into the mud on the bad road. It was a very rough very hard life. Boys were falling back and forth, they got sick and injured and were shot. Especially when we had to do the road work, we became sick. We had to build our own material by cutting down the trees in the mountains and carry them down. Building inside the river some great big caves as traps which we filled up with stone in the hope that the Russian tanks wouldn't be able to get through. So this is what we did.

We had lice at that time already. We didn't have enough opportunity to be clean and we didn't have any clothing to

change. We just had one set, and that's it. We couldn't change. There was no hope to get rid of them. My back and chest were all infected from scratching and from the wounds and it was very very painful to carry my knapsack on these wounds and infections.

But slowly we already stepped over the Hungarian border. It was already September, 1944. We walked and marched backwards in Hungarian territory while I was looking for a hiding place. We stopped once for lunch in a village Domultze was its name. I ran into the one house, it was the biggest house in the town.

Later I found out that the teacher lived there whose name was Isthvan Steven Gombush and his wife was still there. She was an older lady with her grandchildren. I met the oldest grandchild, Mary, inside, while I was filling up my water canteen and I asked her if she has any food since I was hungry. First I asked her for water. Instead of water she brought me an apple, a Jonathan apple.

It reminded me of that Bible story of Galia who was the leader of the army when the enemies of Israel came in, fleeing from the retreating army, and he asked Deborah for some water. Instead of water Deborah brought him milk to build up his confidence. Of course, Deborah later on killed this general, the leader of her enemies, with a big nail.

So, I wasn't afraid from Mary that she's going to kill me, but since she showed me her goodheartedness, I dared to ask her to hide me. I found out she was a student in the nearest town in a school where they are training teachers, and I told her that I was a teacher myself and she told me that there are already three boys hiding in the garden in an air raid shelter and if you want to you can hide upstairs in the loft, in the attic. She told me not to come down in the daytime when everybody might notice you, but to hide somewhere else outside and come in at night when nobody will see you. I asked her if I can bring my friend. She agreed that I can bring him. We were hiding in the garden and we didn't march with my group any further. They didn't notice that we were hiding inside of the garden.

RL: Didn't they pay attention?

EK. They had, but in the village a lot of people were running backwards. The Russians were right on their neck and the whole order and the discipline had already disintegrated. We had a chance when we were sitting on the bench along side the road in front of the houses, that two or three people could sneak into the garden without anyone noticing them. To make sure, for if somebody noticed us or they found out or if they come looking for us, to have an alibi we went in the back. Most of the boys had diarrhea, a reason to go to the garden to hide behind the haystacks to do their

emergency. That was our excuse if we had been discovered. They didn't look for us and afterwards they marched away.

At night when it was dark we went into the house and we went up to the attic. During the day, and the next day and the following day, they were marching and retreating and running because the Russians were coming right on their backs. We thought that after three days, everything will be over and we can come down as free men.

But it happened differently. The Russians had a different plan. They wanted to encircle this area and they moved in the north and moved in the south but they didn't move into that area. They stopped at the river of Tisza and we were stuck there. The Russians didn't come and the Germans started to move back. The first day, it was already full of Hungarian soldiers in that village Domultze.

Grandma, Mrs. Gombush came up to the loft at night and told us that we should move and go away, because if they discovered us they will be punished too. They would kill them too, since everybody that hides a Jew was shot on the spot. She was scared and we could understand her. I asked her to let me hide somewhere in the yard because Mrs. Gombosh had two small buildings in the yard, a small one where they used to bake their bread and another one where the chicken and cows stayed, a stable. She didn't have cows, but she used the place for her firewood, not to get wet inside of this building.

When I went at night to look for a place to hide, I decided not to go on the top of the oven because it was a small place and there wouldn't be enough room even to stand up. I decided to go on top of the chicken coop and the stable to hide there.

Finally, Mrs Gombush agreed that we can go there at night but if we would be discovered she wouldn't know about us. So she would rely on us not to tell that she gave the o.k. That meant also that she was not going to take care of us, to feed us or anything like that.

Here we started in that little loft where we moved, all four of us, three friends and myself. We moved there on the fourth night and we had to stay in that little attic where we could hardly sit up. It was very cold already, it was October, no straw, no nothing there, Just what we had on. We had to stay there for 30 days until the Russians finally decided to move in that place.

RL: Did you go on?

EK: We were liberated on November 27.

RL: Did you get to get food or anything?

EK: I went down. I was the only one who moved around. The other three were fairly sick. I only had the heavy infections on my back. I wouldn't be able to walk and march any longer, so I had to stay behind. But the other men were even in worse condition. I went down at night and looked in the garden for some food and I found some raw cabbage and potatoes. Once I discovered that Mrs. Gombush baked some bread in the oven and I went down at night and the oven was still hot, I could put in my potatoes. It didn't bake through, but it was hot at least. That's what we had for food.

After the village was full with soldiers, they put up guns in the garden and the officer was living downstairs in the house, because that was the best house in the village. M.P.'s came looking for runaway soldiers and they came into that stable too. They Jumped on the oven first to look up on that loft where I had considered to hide. Then they came to the stable to look. They could not imagine that Jewish boys were hiding, but many soldiers were found and they were shot.

There were a good many who had gotten tired of fighting. They felt that it was useless and hopeless and they don't want to do it. They went into hiding. That is where they came and they asked the grandmother how to go up there where we were. I heard every word up there. The grandmother said that she does not have a stepladder, that she had to borrow one from the neighbors, if she wants to go up there. While I was listening to every word I was biting my finger and later on I found out my finger was bleeding. Grandma said that there was nothing up there.

In the meantime, they noticed grandma's chicken the cock's tail feathers, so they wanted to have the feathers. So while they were chasing the grandchildren including little Johnnie who was four years old to get them the tail for the M. P., they forgot about the ladder and they only worried about the feathers. Before they left they told the grandmother "the next time when we come, we want to have a ladder there. We want to see what's up there."

There we were the four of us. There was another way to get up to this place, through the chicken coop. The chicken coop had a wire path where the chicken could climb up. That's how we also went up. We could climb through a very little hole. We took out a little piece of wood on the ceiling and we climbed in. This is the place where Johnnie used to hide also. He used to play with his friends. Once I discovered Johnnie was looking up there and saw us.

RL: Had he been looking for you?

EK: No, he found out about us while he was playing "hide and go seek" with his friends. He came up to the chicken coup to

hide and he noticed us. He went and told his grandmother. "You know Grandma, Jews are hiding in the chicken coop." Grandma later gave him the equivalent of a half dollar in Hungarian money not to tell, because the officer in the house was nasty.

He used to tell stories to Mary in the kitchen, which we heard, about how he used to send Jewish boys to the trees to crow until they froze to death and fell down because he never let them climb down; and how he used to pull sick people from the underground shelters, the sick people who were lying there and could not go out to work. He laid them on top of the bunk and if they didn't die fast enough, he spilled a little water on them so that they would freeze faster. Those are the kind of stories with which he entertained Mary. We heard every word. He was bragging about how many boys he had killed at the Eastern front while they were working for the Hungarian army. So of course, we knew that we had very little chance to get out alive. We never knew when this Johnnie was going to tell him since he, the officer, was playing with him all the time. Johnnie was just a four year old boy.

Once at night, soldiers came up to the chicken coop. They were looking for eggs, they were hungry. We froze, motionless. We couldn't make any noise because if they will discover us, they would shoot us right away. Somebody always had to be up (acting as a guard) in case if something happens, they wake up the others, not to breath loud or snore or anything like that. We were afraid that the M.P. would come back again and look for us, because we heard that they discovered many others, soldiers and forced laborers, who were hiding. They were all shot without any trial, without any charges made against them or any other form of justice. That was the order (which they had received) that any run away has to be killed. I went down at night, since I had to look for food. We were very very hungry.

RL: They weren't looking that closely and constantly.

EK: No, no. I went to the garden to look for food and once I slipped into the kitchen also, risking that they would hear me, and I took some bread from there, and also some kind of meat, and took it to my friends. That's how we survived. Once when I Jumped down through the chicken coop entrance, suddenly a voice said to me, "What are you doing". That was the volunteer civilian, who lived in the house. The grandmother had told me about him. She warned me about that guy because if he discovers you, he will finish you up. He's a notary from the next town. He is a refugee from the Russians who are staying at this house. That is enough. I told him that I was there because my friends are sick and I want to find something to take care of them. He went to the kitchen and got some things and came back to me and gave them to me. He said "give them to your friends, but don't come back anymore, because the Russians are nearby. Be

patient. So I was encouraged, because new life was given to us. I had never expected that kind of treatment.

I visited the boys there in the shelters, who were hiding there and their location was even worse than ours, because they had just a small little place underground, with straw underneath. and they just could stand up a little bit, but they couldn't move all day long and all night. I saw two boys there and I asked them for medication. They gave me some disinfectant, but they didn't let me in because they were afraid of my lice, that they would get them and then it would be unbearable for them. They didn't have lice.

Later I found out that when one of the officers walked in the garden, and heard some noise, he mentioned it to grandma and she told him that some of the neighbors dogs went there.

RL: How old was Mary?

EK: Oh she was about 16, 17 or 18, a beautiful girl. They were hiding us in hope that we will be able to protect them from the Russians when they moved in. They were afraid of raping, and robbing, which they heard about. They said if we were dead, we couldn't protect them. That is why they were taking this kind of chances to hide the four in the attic and three in the garden.

RL: There was just the grandmother and the two children?

EK: Right. So, we somehow survived the thirty days. We had heard the movement of the retreating army, and downstairs saying goodbye to Mary. She said "we wish you could stay", but they ran away that night.

The following morning the Russians marched in. We took out one of the pieces of wood and we looked down and saw the Cosacks, you know the large looking soldiers with fur coats and boots in which they marched all day long. Now we finally realized that we are liberated. Right away I went down, jumping down through the chicken coop, and I found the notary there. His name was Uncle Charlie, that is how the grandchildren called him. He was standing there. When he saw me he introduced himself to me. He said "my name is Lieberman. I'm a Jewish forced laborer just like you are and I advise you to go back again and not to show yourself, because the Russians are not too friendly towards the Hungarians either. If they capture anyone, they don't make any differences whether Jewish or not Jewish, whether you were a victim of the Hungarian army or not. They will take you just the same to the coal mines or to some prison.

"So, this man was the third boy who was supposed to hide in that shelter, but he got somehow a false document which established him as NAEI, as a gentile, so he lived in the house with the officers, as a Jewish boy, and he played cards with them. He was the one who fed the boys in the garden at night. When I met him that night, he was at that time, also bringing some food to the shelter for their survival. That is how he also gave me something, as well as encouragement. Later he became an officer in his own town. He was a very able go-getter.

RL: Did he face the Russians then?

EK: I don't know what he did. He stayed back with the family. He really wanted to repay them for what they did for us, to make sure that no harm was done to them or against this family. He knew Russian very well because he came from the territory of the border. He told us that we should go at night. We didn't want to go anyway because we were all full of lice, so we slept in a spare room. At night the Russian soldiers came looking for Axis soldiers to be captured and sent to prison and took whatever I had left. However, I was happy that they didn't take me, because I was completely spent. I had caught an infection from those lice scratching all over; they were sitting in the chairs and they were afraid to touch me, they thought that I had syphilis.

RL: That is what saved you?

EK: Yes, that is what saved my freedom again.

RL: This is the end of the first one hour interview with Eugene Krauss on May 7, 1979.

RL: This is an interview with Eugene Krauss at his home at 1245 Cumberland Ave, in Dayton, Ohio. It is May 17, 1979.

Do you wish to start with something else. You finished the last time when you were talking about the Russian army coming in. We are interested in what happened after that also.

EK: Oh, I didn't know that.

RL: We are also interested in your leaving Hungary and in your coming to the U.S.

EK: OK! So that is what you want to talk about. So, after I became free again, I had the choice where to go and what to do. I had my country, where I was born, Hungary, which was now half occupied by the Russians, the other half by Germany, and the part which was right in the center, around Budapest, a no-man's land.

I was wondering what to do. My plans for my country and myself had somehow evaporated during my experience in the World War. Then I had the experience that my entire country not only forgot its duty - the most important duty for a country is to protect its own citizens - but they foolhardedly tried to get rid of their Jews right alongside the Germans.

I realized that I was not going to be protected, so I decided to go to Israel. I heard that the way to get there was through Constanta*. You know that is where boats were running from a port in Romania to Israel/Palestine at that time. So I tried to get to Bucharest. It wasn't that easy. The trains were not running yet and in the daytime I didn't want to walk because the Russians still were looking for deserters and other manpower for their forced labor camps. They were gathering people in the entire country. So I only walked during nighttime and finally arrived in a city which had already been liberated for awhile and they had some water so that I could get rid of my lice. I disinfected myself and cleaned my clothing.

While I was waiting for my clothing to be disinfected, I remembered that hospital I was in at the Russian front. That was a field hospital where they had about 400 or 500 sick Jewish boys. Most of them died there, some of them were not even given a chance. Sick people just couldn't always make it, but they had some straw collected for the patients. Their own doctors certified Jewish boys for forced labor camps and a German officer came along one day. Later on, I found out that he gave the order that this camp had to be absolutely clean. So the Hungarians had a problem, what to do to get rid of these sick people. So he had the bright idea to get rid of the whole camp by surrounding it by machine guns and put the whole camp on fire at night. The entire camp was burning and the boys were running in all directions. Some of the boys were with their clothes afire, and the guards with the machine guns started shooting. Very few escaped. This another of the many experiences I had, which I remembered during this time of the war, as they were associated with my history.

This is what I associated with my disinfection. At that time I was in Romania-Bucharest. People were already much better off in Romania, they didn't have as much suffering as they had in Hungary.

They had a group of the Joint Distribution Committee. So I could continue my journey in a train. It was a train which was delivering some food. That was the train I got a lift from. That is how I made my way to towns which were on the border with Hungary. I crossed the border with the train. I met some people there who came from the same town we had liberated, and we made our way together to Bucharest, where we arrived in January of 1945.

**Constanta is located 44.11N, 28.36E.*

There was some used clothing there and they gave us some food and I was lucky enough to get a job too. I could ride around, and I could take care of distributing clothing. We had a warehouse of used clothing for the Joint Distribution Committee for displaced persons and refugees.

Later on, I took care of sick people who came back from different concentration camps. Therefore, I had the opportunity to hear the stories from all the different sources. There were people from the concentration camps in the East. Treblinka, Auschwitz and others and from the West. They came out with all kinds of stories. Very few came home. Very few survived. Those I visited in the hospital were in really bad shape. There were many cases of tuberculosis and all were suffering from malnutrition. They were in very run down condition. These were the people who depended upon the Women's Auxiliary of the Bucharest Hospital for donations.

I met a friend from my home town who told me how they beat him before they put him on a train to Auschwitz, because he was a relative of the mayor's son and they suspected that he was hiding his valuables. So they hit him and broke his toes and burned him, so that he would tell them where everything was. He told me exactly how they went about it. He was blind and also told me that my father and my mother had sewn in his shoulder all his possessions, about \$300 of value. He left all his earthly possessions before they embarked on the train for the concentration camp. They found his money in his jacket and they beat him, a blind man. That was not necessary.

RL: Were most of the people from your village shipped away?

EK: Yes, the male people they were shipped to Russia all of them without exception.

I found another friend who had a dislocated joint, so that he could hardly walk. He informed me that he worked under the same conditions I did, on the Eastern front, when his spine was dislocated. They tried to strangle him by pushing him down under the water. That is how they handled his pain, by forcing him down under water. He also told me that he had to draw the artillery wagons (i.e. the gun carriages) and the canons, because the horses couldn't do it. That is hard work, especially in the mountains and over the muddy roads. The Jews were used as auxiliary in the artillery. So, after I heard all the stories and many more than the ones I related here, I didn't have too much hope that I would see my family again.

In Bucharest I registered at the Joint Distribution Committee to travel to Israel. Then I was waiting for my turn when, in Constanta, the Russians stopped the boat just as I was ready to go. After that, we could only go

illegally. When they took the risk and went without permission, the Russians shot them and sank the boats. We heard how many people - you know there were 300 or 400 people in a boat - sank and perished because they wanted to emigrate to Israel. So I was stuck in Bucharest waiting, waiting to get permission.

While I was waiting there, I got a visa from (probably not actually a visa, but a blank to request a visa) America with a letter from an Aunt and Uncle that I should come to America. I also received a letter from my sister in Israel (still Palestine at that time). She had emigrated to Israel in 1937. They were anxious about the family, and they said how happy they were that I was alive and they would be more than happy to see me. But my sister advised me that in order to prepare for a profession, since I was a teacher and they did not need teachers in Israel - I would be better off if I would listen to the advise from my relatives in the U.S. and go there.

So I was hesitating about what to do and I previously explained how I found out that my brother (Karl) is in Budapest. That gave me the final push since I wanted to see him. Since I couldn't get a boat ride to Israel, and I lost patience and didn't want to wait any longer, I turned back from Romania to Budapest to meet my brother. By that time, the war was over and my brother could go home to my home town of Sharrav Voshmar where I grew up and where I used to be a teacher and that is the place where I also wanted to go. We were very happy to see each other and we waited further for our family to get home, to get back to our village. Then we had to realize that this is it, that the two brothers and one sister is all that remained out of all these family members. Actually, there was my brother and myself and one cousin who came home, three of us who survived.

RL: Did you own property in your home town?

EK: Yes, we had a store, a yardgoods store. We owned a house also, but I think that this house was sold before the war. We had a store all the time, we sold clothing and that kind of thing. Yes, my mother had, just a few weeks before the ghetto time (when we were forced to move into the ghetto), sent me a package. At that time she was still expecting me to come home, she wrote to me: "I am sending you your shirts with the patches on which are a little worn, because I am saving the better ones for the time when you come home". At that time she was still hoping that everything would be all right. I was in the forced labor camp and she sent me this letter and the shirts and I knew that these shirts which she was saving were going to be lost.

RL: So you and your brother were back in your home village.

EK: Yes, we decided the three of us, that we should go to the U.S. zone in Germany. That is the place where I could be able to get the visa to come to the U.S.

I had another cousin with whom I used to teach, who also had come home by then. He had only one foot. He lost the other foot while he was driving with the other boys back from Russia after we had been taken prisoners. The Russians didn't make any difference between forced laborers and soldiers - they just sent them all further back for forced labor. Anyway, he marched also with the rest of them and they were hungry and they marched at the edge of a potato field. They wanted to dig out some potatoes from the field. The Russians shot at them. That is how he lost one of his feet. He came home with one foot.

After a while, while he was waiting for his family to get back, within a few months, he lost all of his desire to live. He caught some kind of illness, I believe something like pneumonia and died at home. He was a young man, 26 years old. Many of the boys, after they realized that there is no hope to get their family back they didn't want to live anymore and any kind of small sickness was enough for them to lose their life. Well, that is what happens when you just don't have any more desire to live - without husband, without children, without father or anybody. That usually goes too much to their heart. Only the toughest could survive.

RL: Was your brother in very good health when you met?

EK: Oh, this is the brother who came back from Bor and the copper mine, from Chervinko and Flossenburq. He weighed 110 or 120 pounds when he came back. However, he recovered fast because he was still younger and he was optimistic. He was in the open air.

RL: So the three of you went to Germany together?

EK: Yes, that is what we decided on. It wasn't that easy. The first attempt did not succeed. My brother still wore his military pants because there was not too much civilian clothing. Of course, after we got to the border with Austria, the guard stopped us and told us that we were not allowed to cross the border. First they put us in jail in Austria for five days. Then they forced us back to Hungary again. In Hungary they got us back to the border again and they gave us six months sentence. I was lucky, the prison has an officer who was a schoolmate of mine in the Hungarian officer's school in 1939. We were friends at that time, so he let me go in one week.

RL: All three of you?

EK: Yes, of course. That was not about to hold us back. We didn't want to stay in Hungary. We just couldn't stand it. We had too many very bad memories, you know with Gentiles and neighbors. They had promised that they would help us after my mother gave them clothing, dishes, everything, so that they should do something when there was a need. Of course, I can also understand them, they were also under strict orders not to communicate with or to help Jews, particularly not to give any food or medicine. Jews were deserted, isolated.

RL: Had the village been primarily Gentile or had it been half Jewish and half Gentile?

EK: About fifty percent Jewish. The village had contained about 10,000 people. I had fifty kids in my class.

RL: Your school had been all Jewish?

EK: Yes, it was a private school.

RL: I know that the Synagogue had been very important to you.

EK: Yes, it was. You mean the status of my synagogue. Of course it was, and the school also. First they used it for the soldiers to sleep in.

RL: You really weren't very anxious to stay on in your home town?

EK: No. You can imagine what kind of disillusionment we had. We made any agreement with the soldiers that they would use the garden and the yard. However, around the latrine there were scattered all over pieces of sacred prayer books, Talmuds, and other small books in Hebrew. And leaves were all over the place, which had been torn out of the books. That had been done by the soldiers. That is what they used our books for.

RL: Where did you stay for the short time you were in your village?

EK: A few Jews came home and they reestablished homes. When somebody else came home, they were really happy and they were invited as guests. However, they all left. One Jew is left in the village, he is 72 years old. He was my school principal. He was my boss. He is an old man already.

RL: You have not gone back since you came to the U.S?

EK: No, not since 1946. I flew over it when I went to Israel.

RL: Did you come straight to New York when you came to the U.S?

EK: No. We went first to Vienna. The truck which we had hired to take us to Vienna did not take us there. He threw us out on the roadside. You know, our agreement was not fulfilled and they just unloaded us. They were afraid to go any further because we were entering the Russian zone of occupation in Austria. They forced us to get out along the way on the side of the road. We went into the woods to hide after we got out of the truck, so we would not be stopped again.

My brother was at that time really the best. You know he went to the highway to stop somebody. Finally a truck stopped which took us to the Rothschild Hospital. At that time, that was the center for displaced persons. After a wait of about ten to twelve hours, we got somebody to take care of us. We had to wait in Vienna after registering. Some people went to Israel from there, some to Italy, some to Germany and the U.S.A. We first had to go to Salzburg, Austria. From Salzburg, after waiting for three months in a displaced person camp, they took us to Darmstadt in West Germany. So this was the time when we crossed the border between Austria and Germany and there it was rather dangerous also to be discovered.

RL: You had papers all the time?

EK: We didn't have any. That had all been arranged by the DRICHA. That was an organization from Israel who, for money, organized trips across the borders. You could opt for a trip to Israel, without papers. These were the boys who led all the young children, and whoever came and wanted to go to Israel, to help them to the borders in the Alps to Switzerland, Italy and France from Germany and Austria. These boys were well acquainted; they had made friends with the guards of the border patrol. They also had their own guns, and they did real work. That is what was needed, to cross the borders.

RL: So they moved you to Germany?

EK: They moved us to a displaced persons camp in Darmstadt, where we registered again to go to the U.S. Of course, they told us that we would have to wait many, many years until we received our permission. However, fortunately, Truman came up with the "D.P. Quota" (special legislation to allow for the entry into the U.S. of people who were displaced persons). These quotas recognized people not by birth (as the Immigration Laws of 1921 amended in 1927, which established the quota system had done), but by district of application - you know, like someone who was in the U.S. zone when he applied. Before that, people had to wait until their turn came up according to their place of birth, because the U.S. had a different quota for each country. Germany had a quota of a lot of people and the English quota was even larger. However from Hungary there was only a

small quota of only a few hundreds. That quota was filled very fast, so we would have been stranded there for many years without Truman's help getting through that D.P. quota bill, that extra quota so that people would be allowed in.

RL: Even though you had an aunt in the U.S. as a sponsor? Did she need to sponsor you?

EK: Yes, that had been necessary. They first had to send us the papers. However, after the DP quota was established, that was no longer necessary. You only had to wait six months. Our conditions in this DP camp were not bad, but it wasn't as pretty as in America, but we still enjoyed the life. We had our own bad times, just as is the case in America, but we were happy.

RL: You had been able to get an education. Did your other brothers who were younger, have that opportunity?

EK: In Hungary there was "Namerus Clausus" which means that Jews could be accepted in university or colleges according to the proportion of Jews in society. Since there were about 57% of Jews in the population, the proportion of Jews admitted in the universities could not exceed 5%. They always had at least 29% or 30% of the candidates who were Jewish. So there always was a surplus.

So, when I finished the special school for teachers in Budapest, which took me five years, the school I attended was a Jewish school into which I could be admitted if my grades were adequate. At that time about 300 to 320 applied to this school and 13 were accepted, or maybe 14. It was very hard to get in. So I wanted to continue, as I had finished with very good grades. I wanted to be a high school teacher or professor.

RL: Now would there have been a chance of your being a professor in the general school?

EK: No, I couldn't get in. They wouldn't accept me. I applied. I had all kinds of recommendations, but only one person was accepted who was at the bachelor level. At a higher lever it was like a winner of an olympic game for teachers. If you had a gold medal to be accepted to get into that school. So I think my chances were nil, since I din't have a gold medal. So I was not accepted, but I became a teacher nevertheless and I was happy.

RL: So then, as far as the other things which happened during the war, I think that you have pretty well discussed them. But the three years in the D.P. camp were not very pleasant either I don't imagine. (There is a discrepancy between the D.P. period of three years mentioned here and even the sum of the various periods in the camps. This may be understood either by the poor quality of the tape which was supplied or

a slip of terms on the part of the interviewer - most likely since three years is a long time indeed - or a failure to clearly understand or remember what the interviewer said). Was the food adequate there at all?

EK: When you're in the open, the fresh air and working doing hard labor you could always eat more food and other supplies, but it wasn't bad.

RL: Then, when you did come to the U.S., your aunt still needed to sponsor you? Was that right? Were you able to live with her?

EK: Oh when we arrived, the HIAS helped us. That is the organization which helps Jewish (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) immigrants to settle in the U.S. My aunt gave me a room in which I could live for three months. She sponsored me.

RL: Did your brother come at the same time?

EK: No, my brother came first.

RL: And your cousin?

EK: My cousin came next and I was the third because I had difficulties at the consulate. Somebody wrote a letter to the consul that they should not give me the permission. They investigated until they found out that it was some kind of joke.

RL: Since you were not able to teach, were you able to find a job when you came here?

EK: When I came here I went to night school courses for English and I also looked for a job. My cousin was working in a temporary job as a shipping clerk. So he got this same kind of a job for me. In that job you didn't need any English to pack the lamps in a mail order house. That is the job I had when I first came to this country. That job was only temporary, the job lasted only until Christmas, for two months. We worked a lot of overtime, so we did all right financially. We worked twelve hours a day. I did not mind. With that kind of money I could save some. I could use this savings to see the country after three months, when I lost the job.

I went with a friend I had made when I worked for the Joint Distribution Committee in Romania. His name was Clarence Grent who still lives in Florida. We thought that we better see the country first before we settle down, since we were single men. First, we went to see Miami down in Florida. I liked it so much that I didn't want to come back to New York anymore. So I looked for a job there. I got hired in a

restaurant as a busboy and later on I became a waiter. Then I got hired in a hotel for a better Job.

RL: Was this still in Miami?

EK: In Miami, Florida, and I worked there until the season was over. Then I moved on. After Easter, I came back to New York and I continued to work as a waiter in the Catskills resort area. I continued to work as a waiter in the summertime in the Catskills and in wintertime in Florida. The first time I found my transportation through the New York times. Somebody was looking for someone to help drive a car.

RL: When did you come to Dayton?

EK: I did this alternating between summer and winter Jobs between 1949 and 1962. Then I had a variety of jobs including working for a farmer's market until I got to be assistant manager in a discount store. I had been a salesman. My brother worked in several stores including in Springfield and Marion, but I can't tell you the name. At that time, he was manager of another store. He told me that I should apply at an Ontario store which was being opened up in Springfield. So, I became assistant manager of the Ontario store in Springfield. When they opened other stores here in Dayton, I became the area assistant manager. Then I started to work regulary for Ontario and for another store which my brother-in-law had. When my brother-in-law sold that business to open up his own, and later opened up three stores under the name of Omar Discount Stores, I went to work for him. At about that time, I became a U.S. citizen. In a few motnhs, I should retire.

RL: Where did you meet your wife? In New York?

EK: Oh, this is a most important point. During the third year, after I had arrived in the U.S., I worked in a restaurant in Manhattan. One of my co-workers introduced me to one of his relatives. It happened that within a few days (after this introduction) I had to leave to go back to Florida. I was moving back and forth at that time. So she asked when she was going to see me again after I said good bye. What happened was that she had an uncle who lived in Florida and had a hotel. He came to visit in New York. He advised her to come down. She came down to Florida. We met again and I liked her very much. That was in 1950. We got married after a three months courtship.

RL: Since you have lived in Dayton, and particularly in this area, do you feel that your life-style is much different from what it would have been in Hungary or Romania, discounting Hitler? Comparing the European way of living to the American way.

- EK: I think that it is much better. In Europe, of course, we did not have these kinds of standards of living, with these kinds of luxuries, it is quite different. We have more family life in Europe.
- RL: You said that you had a good family life there. Do you have children?
- EK: Yes, we have two.
- RL: Do you feel that your family life here has been a good life?
- EK: I was lucky. I really was. I just got the report card from Loyola University (that is Loyola University of Chicago, Illinois) for my son. Straight A's. He is going for a double curriculum in Chicago. He is studying at the School of the Yeshiva in Talmud to get the ordination to be a Rabbi and also he is going to Dental School at the same time.
- RL: You have been very active in the Synagogue here.
- EK: Yes, I am the Administrator of the congregation and the Treasurer. I do all the bookkeeping and all the shopping for the Synagogue. I am also doing the cantorial duties there. I am pretty busy.
- RL: The last question we must ask is the question; "what experience of your life would you choose to pass on to future generations?" That is a big order.
- EK: I think that everyone has to decide what to do and to decide about a certain goal for your life; you have to put everything you have into it. Then there is no limit about what you can accomplish if you really have the desire and the will power to do it. That is why I always mention, set the highest goal possible for yourself, because you can accomplish anything in America. Just use up all your potential and your talent and give 100% toward the accomplishment.
- RL: You really feel that you haven't been held back that much?
- EK: Oh, that is a different question, to overcome the handicaps, but you can get there.
- RL: I know that your religious experiences were strong in Europe. Do you feel that the terrible things you went through strengthened matters? Did you go doubting and come back to it (religious experiences)?
- EK: Thank God I bounced back. There was a time when I saw so much suffering. You have to realize that there is no reward here for being righteous, the same way that there is no explanation why the other way accomplished any success. You Just have to hope that someone above us will watch over us.

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We can not expect anyone to be rewarded or punished. We have to do our best to do our duty. That is what I am trying to do.

RL: This concludes the interview with Eugene Krauss which was made at his home on May 17, 1979.

GLK

12/27/89