



Margit in 2002, showing students the number tattooed on her arm.



Margit's family in 2000: left to right, son Joseph, daughter-in-law Julie holding Zachary, daughter Tina, Tina's daughter Caryn, Joseph's son Joshua, Margit, and Margit's husband, Harvey.

CHAPTER

7

From Hell to Recovery

Though we knew little of the developments as they occurred, the war was coming to an end. A few months after the beginning of our second stay in Auschwitz, in the early winter of 1944–45, my Aunt Elizabeth, Sari, and I became part of a group selected to be taken to Eastern Germany, to a subcamp of Gross Rosen, a place called Grunberg. Grunberg was one of many such subcamps of Gross Rosen, a huge complex dedicated largely to the production of armaments. At first we did not know the purpose of the selection. We were simply rushed into showers, disinfected, and given clean clothes for what was to be our journey into Germany.

Two thousand Polish and two thousand Hungarian women were sent to Grunberg from Auschwitz. There was already snow on the ground. As the war was coming to an end, the Germans, realizing that defeat was imminent, desperately sought slave laborers to work in the ammunition factory. The factory workers were primarily Hungarian. At least life in Grunberg was considerably better than that in Auschwitz. There was less harassment, cruelty, or brutality; we were less frequently beaten. One distinct advantage to Grunberg was that the food was more edible and the portions were larger than anything we had experienced before. It was to the Germans' advantage to

keep us strong so that we could produce more bullets for the *Wehrmacht* (German army).

Every day we got up before dawn and went through the interminable roll call. After our morning meal, we were marched to the factory in rows of five, and were beaten if we got out of line. In the factory we sat at tables, each one of us mechanically and rapidly functioning as part of the process of transforming lead into bullets. If we slacked off, we were beaten or slapped. The punishment came not from the foreman, although he was German, but from the S.S. guards who were always nearby. I was slapped several times for being "too slow" or "too clumsy." The Germans were deathly afraid of sabotage.

There were residents of Grunberg who worked in the factory, too. They were, of course, paid employees who had privileges and benefits we lacked and were, for the most part, indifferent to our plight. They did not have the menial task of cleaning the work areas as we did. In fact, we had to clean their areas as well as ours! However, there were atypical incidents of cooperation on their part, particularly when we were in the bathroom; one or another of the German workers, usually an overseer, might secretly follow us in and pass to one of us an extra piece of bread they had hidden underneath their clothing. If we were lucky enough to experience this act of kindness, we had to eat the bread immediately lest the S.S. guards see us consume it and inflict punishment on both the giver and the receiver.

The Russians, enemies of the Germans, were now approaching us even more rapidly than before. We could tell that from the fact that the Grunberg S.S., both men and women, seemed uneasy. Soon they were ordered to move us again, but this time no transportation of any kind was supplied. We had to go on foot. My aunt and her sister-in-law were, of course, still with me. Although none of us knew it at the time, the Polish women

were being marched in one direction, toward the Czechoslovak border, and the Hungarian women in another, toward Bergen-Belsen.

It was the dead of winter. We had no boots or winter clothes to protect us from the elements. The roads had not been cleared of snow from the constant snowfalls, so we were mired in the snow practically up to our waists and could barely put one foot before the other. For us it was literally a death march. There was no way in which we could keep up with the barking orders of the Germans, and those who collapsed under the weight of the struggle fell by the wayside and were left to freeze to death in the snow. Others who could not go on were shot to death. We had plenty of water, because we drank the melted snow. However, we had no food. On a few rare occasions we came across property on which there were farms, and we were allowed to spend the night in a barn, while the soldiers went into the farmers' houses. I could not understand at the time why they left us unguarded at night while they enjoyed the farmers' hospitality. But I realize now that they assumed we would perish from frost or starvation, fatigue or illness.

Since I had spent my growing-up years on a farm, I knew where to look for food. At home we had had no refrigerator or freezer where food could be stored, and I remembered how in the wintertime we would store vegetables underneath a cover of hay in order to keep them from freezing. So I rummaged busily to find what we could devour: beets, rutabaga, kohlrabi, and potatoes, whatever came into our hands. I would always find something, and we would eat it there in the barn. In one of the places we even found some live chickens. We grabbed the chickens, twisted their necks, plucked their feathers, ripped them apart, and ate them raw. Most of us got very sick as a result.

In our hunger, especially after the experience of Grunberg, where we had been comparatively "well fed," we found ourselves reduced to a primal state. Our starvation forced upon us an abandonment and a desperation most of us had not known before. Food was almost the only element of life that mattered. Yet despite our condition, we tried as much as we could to share what we had, and never, even in the horror of those last desperate days, did we resort to a consideration of cannibalism. I know that there are people who claim that some survivors indulged in the eating of human flesh, but never, never in my experience did I encounter its presence in thought, word, or deed.

Among the Polish women in Grunberg had been a young girl named Gerda Weissman. I had not met her in the camp. She was among those sent to the Czech border. In 1989 I attended a United Jewish Appeal fundraiser in my community of Bridgewater, New Jersey. The key speaker at this fundraiser was a survivor by the name of Gerda Weissman Klein, a writer who had penned *All But My Life*, her autobiography of her years in the Holocaust and after. While she was speaking, I listened as though in a stupor. I realized that we had been in Grunberg together.

After the program I approached her, introducing myself as a fellow survivor from Grunberg, and we embraced and shed tears. The audience was bewildered at what they saw, and we had to explain to them the reason for our emotional state. All these people, whom I knew so well myself, began to cry.

At another time, following this presentation, Gerda spoke at the annual Holocaust and Genocide Seminar at Raritan Valley College in Branchburg, New Jersey. Once she spoke by herself and once with her husband, Kurt Klein. Kurt had been a lieutenant in the American army that had liberated the area of

Silesia, where Gerda was at the end of the war. He had been a young German Jew but had been able to emigrate from Germany before World War II. He had desperately tried to get his parents out of Germany, but had been tragically unsuccessful. He and Gerda fell in love after he had discovered her, and they married.

After marching for countless days, we arrived at our final destination: Bergen-Belsen. No words can convey accurately or graphically enough the horrors of that place. As we entered the camp, we saw piles and piles of bodies rotting away. The biting winter cold was still around us, and the bodies were already frozen. Nevertheless, this did not retard the decaying process. We had never before seen so vividly the results of mass murder, and it shocked us that these corpses were not accorded the dignity of burial, even in a mass grave.

I can close my eyes today and visualize everything as it was when I entered the camp for the first time. We were all weakened, hungry, and sick from our long ordeal on the death march. We surely did not expect to find a God-forsaken, death-filled hell such as this at its end. In virtually no time at all, though, we absorbed and became part of this environment.

Inside the camp the inmates were suffering from typhus, dysentery, and diphtheria; their bodies were covered with lice. The entire group of women with whom I had arrived were suffering from lice less than twenty-four hours after arriving at Bergen-Belsen. The lice began to attack with a vengeance the moment we arrived, and ate away at us continually. No sooner had we removed them than they came back over our bodies.

There were no sanitation or medical facilities. My Aunt Elizabeth, Sari, and I all contracted typhus and diphtheria. We were soon in such a weakened condition that we hadn't even the strength to go outside when we were allowed to in order to relieve ourselves. We lay literally caked with excrement, which

we could smell on our own bodies and on those of others. But there was nothing we could do, so debilitated and feeble were we. As we observed the death and dying around us, we finally lost our will to live, feeling that we had been abandoned by the world.

Sari was the first to die. She was small and not very strong. She lasted no longer than a week. Then my aunt went, probably no more than a few days before liberation. Aunt Elizabeth had been a beautiful and vibrant woman, and she had lasted through all of the earlier horrors. In those terrible days, she had been my link to my past life and my family. She had been my constant companion through the nightmares of Auschwitz, Cracow, Grunberg, and the death march." Now, at what was to be the terminus of my ordeal, I was alone. My only connection to the world of my past was some fellow survivors from Hungary, who still managed to cling to life.

Whatever "nourishment" we received from the rotting potatoes we found strewn about the camp was so sparse and so miserable that the strongest among us could not be sustained by it. I watched my rabbi's wife die, along with her younger daughter. Hundreds died daily. Those of us who managed to evade death and were physically able to do so would take the bodies and put them outside the bunker so we would not have to sleep next to them. In the process we took some of their clothing and their shoes. We didn't think about the "rightness" or "wrongness" of what we did. All that mattered to us was survival—not our mere physical survival, but survival for the sake of showing the world what the Nazis and their surrogates had done to us, when all the while the world had remained silent and indifferent.

On Sunday, April 15, 1945, at about 3 P.M., liberation came. It arrived almost by accident when the Eleventh Armored Divi-

sion of the Second British Army came across the camp in their push through northwest Germany. My personal recollections of that episode are almost entirely bottled up in my memory and simply refuse to open themselves to expression. I remember a commotion, a great deal of yelling in English, and even some Yiddish, especially the words "*Frei! Frei!*" There were men in uniforms, but only some wore German uniforms. The rest, we learned, were British.

The British soldiers were handing out chocolate and other delicacies and trying to get people to talk. They were attempting to pull us out of our barracks, which were infested with bugs, germs, and lice. They were trying to pull those who were still alive and mobile away from those who were already dead or near death. All the while the British were trying to penetrate our consciousness with words like "Free. Free. Don't you know you are free?"

Once the British soldiers had pulled us out of our barracks, they began working on us to rid us of all the filth and infestations our bodies had acquired during those days in Belsen, and even before. I can recall that we were sitting outside the barracks as the area around us was being hosed down. As the water came streaming out of the hoses, those inmates who were strong enough ran through the streams, trying to scrub their bodies and their hair and get some water in their mouths. I remained in a sitting position, and when the water hit me I was able to wash myself. The soldiers were able to clean us off, but the barracks were another matter. There was no way they could get the bugs and germs and disease out of those. They had to use flame-throwers to burn the barracks down.

I recall now how, after the soldiers pulled me from that God-forsaken barrack, I wanted only to crawl on my hands and knees to the corpses stacked so high and start looking for my beloved mother and father. I must have snapped for a

while, but then I realized that I was being pulled away from the corpses by other survivors who were huddling close to each other, crying and praying, "God, help us!"

Fewer than twenty-four hours after liberation began, units of the Royal Army Medical Corps arrived, evacuated the camp, and established a hospital within what had very recently been the German Army barracks. Typhus control was also begun. It was necessary to bury the dead.

By this time all the German S.S. who had been trying to escape had been rounded up. The British general, Brigadier General H. L. Glyn Hughes, made those in German uniforms do the same dirty work the British soldiers had until now been forced to do. He wanted the Germans to see what they and their leaders had done to us. The Germans were made to clean up the camp. They were also compelled to dig graves and to bury the rotting corpses. Many of these "strong," "heroic," and "dedicated" Germans found the task too much for them, so a bulldozer was requisitioned to push countless anonymous, unrecognizable bodies into mass graves. The chaplains and rabbis of the British Army conducted services.

To this day I remain amazed and appalled that the horrors of Bergen-Belsen could have existed in the vicinity of the pleasant towns and cities of the Rhineland, and that no one would have been shamed or shocked by the deeds of their compatriots—or even aware of them! Just a few days after liberation several *Bürgermeister* (mayors) of neighboring areas and a number of *Wehrmacht* officers were taken around the camp to be shown the horror that had existed in their midst. Of those who were forced to view the remnants of horror and suffering, only one or two showed any degree of indignation or revulsion. Most simply shrugged to indicate that they had not known. Surely one cannot deny that the press had been held captive by the Nazi regime, but for these otherwise benign

and civilized people not to know what was going on under their very noses was inconceivable.

Those of us with sufficient strength were allowed to go into town to ask if we could take some food. A few of my friends from the camp went in and brought back some packs of beef, vegetables, and potatoes in order to try to cook a stew. The candy bars and other foods that the soldiers had distributed to us were too rich for most of our systems; many prisoners contracted terrible diarrhea and stomach disorders that, in several instances, proved fatal. There was a terrible and poignant irony in the fact that so many prisoners, after suffering from malnutrition and starvation, should now die from overconsumption. But such was our situation. Some of us realized we could digest only the simplest of foods.

We got some twigs, made a small fire, and put a pot on it. Suddenly there was an explosion. The cause of the explosion was some live ammunition buried under our fire that the Germans had planted before escaping. They had wanted to cover up the evidence of what had happened in Bergen-Belsen, but didn't get to finish the job before the British arrived. They had also attempted to sabotage the water supply. They wanted to make certain that we did not enjoy the freedom we had finally found.

I had been sitting near the explosion, and ended up with a piece of shrapnel on the left side of my head, underneath the skin. Fortunately, it didn't penetrate anything vital; however, I can feel it to this day. I also had a piece of shrapnel under my left arm near my breast. My left thigh had a large hole in it. I called my wounds Hitler's footsteps on my body.

I was taken by the Red Cross into the army hospital, and thereby lost my new-found freedom. I was sick; I cannot even say how sick. I came down with pleurisy and pneumonia. I

remember that I was burning up with a fever, but I got very skilled and caring treatment from the Red Cross.

I felt great desolation in the hospital. The wounds on my body could be cleaned and bandaged, but not the wounds on my psyche. I was all alone, filled with sadness and bewilderment, loneliness and terror. I was fifteen years old. I did not know the whereabouts or fates of my family; I did not know where I would go or what I would do. I had been brought up to have a deep sense of spirituality and a strong belief in God. Eventually I began to pray every day that one day soon my mother and father would walk into the hospital room where I was staying and whisk me away to our home, where our normal life would resume. But they never came. Nothing happened, yet I began to feel less alone, so the prayers must have done some good.

When I recollect my time in Bergen-Belsen, I think of Anne Frank, whose birthday I shared. I truly sensed that we were connected to one another. She, too, was an inmate of the camp, but she did not survive. She died of typhus before she could experience the sense of knowing again what it meant to be free. We were exactly the same age. I will always feel that our fates could have easily been interchanged.

While I was in the hospital, an extraordinary thing happened. One day a young woman walked through the doors of our hospital ward. Speaking in a gentle and cultured voice, she informed us that there were ships waiting to take us to Sweden. This woman, we were told, was a member of the Swedish royal family, and I had to rub my eyes to make certain I was not dreaming. Her name was Princess Bernadotte. Was this some kind of fairy tale? Was it a dream in which one's hopes and fantasies would be fulfilled?

Sweden had had a checkered history vis-à-vis the Jews. Jews were not permitted in Sweden until the eighteenth cen-

tury. The influence of Luther's anti-Semitism was very strong before and during that period of Swedish history. The first Jew to enter the country was a renowned Jewish physician named Benedictus de Castro, who was called in to treat Queen Christina in 1673. For a long time after the first Jews were allowed into the country, they were governed by severe limitations as to where they might live, whom they might marry, and to what professions they might belong. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was a gradual loosening of restrictions that culminated in the establishment of full civil rights for Swedish Jews in 1870. Jews gradually began to be assimilated into Swedish society. They inhabited, and continue to inhabit, large cities like Stockholm, Malmo, and Gothenberg.

Sweden's sheltering of Jewish refugees from Germany had begun in the 1930s, although under very limited conditions. For most of the Hitler years and World War II, Sweden had maintained the same neutrality it had practiced since the nineteenth century, but now the nations surrounding Sweden were under Nazi occupation and were less inclined to help in the way they had during the refugee crises in the 1930s. In 1938 Jewish refugees trying to enter Sweden were sent back to their home countries, and were thereby doomed to death. During World War II, Swedish "neutrality" had begun to crumble, and sympathy had tilted toward the Germans.

However, in the fall of 1943, when the Jews of Denmark were about to be deported, Sweden was called upon to give asylum to some eight thousand Danish Jews, and it accepted that responsibility.

In June of 1944, King Gustav V of Sweden sent a letter of protest to Hungary's regent, Admiral Horthy, regarding the persecution and deportation of Hungarian Jewry in the spring of that year. This letter, as well as pressure from the Allied governments, ended the Hungarian deportations early in the summer

of 1944, weeks after my family and I had been removed from our village. At the same time, Raoul Wallenberg, an attaché to the Swedish legation in Budapest, was helping to rescue thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian Fascist Party. The Swedes also rescued several hundred Danish Jews imprisoned in Theresienstadt. At the very end of the war, even Heinrich Himmler, the head of the German Security Police, met with leaders of the World Jewish Congress and Count Folke Bernadotte of the Swedish Red Cross to discuss the release of Jews from German concentration camps. In the weeks following the end of the war, thousands of Jews were taken to Sweden for physical and mental rehabilitation. I was one of those Jews.

I remember the journey from Germany to Sweden. Aboard ship many of the passengers, including myself, were suffering from pleurisy. I could not breathe; my lungs were filled with water. I was suffering both from the water in my lungs and from the wounds incurred during the explosion. But I sensed that God was watching over me, and that the Swedish people who transported us were our "guardian angels." Upon our arrival in Sweden, we landed in Malmo. Ambulances were waiting to take those of us to who direly needed medical attention to Carlstad, where there was a hospital. None of us could really understand Swedish, but we knew the people were helping us.

When we arrived in Carlstad, we were put in a hospital setting, in a large ward. I discovered that I was suffering from dysentery, typhus, diphtheria, and loss of hair. Like so many others, I was cleaned and cared for. Nurses put their arms around me and calmed me down. For the first time in over a year, I felt what it meant to be hugged and comforted, to have someone reassure me with words and gestures. Whatever fear or trepidation I might have experienced, even after the liberation and the journey to Sweden, was now being washed away in the tide of affection and caring that now swept over me.

Some time went by. I am not even certain how many weeks. People came from within the city of Carlstad and from other parts of Sweden. They brought us food, clothing, and other items we needed and even "luxury" items that made us believe we were human again. It felt to me as though Heaven were opening, and the certainty that there was still goodness in the world overwhelmed me. It also restored me to sanity. In the hospital I was interviewed by someone from HIAS (the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigration Society), the organization that worked with Jewish immigrants, helping them to cope with new surroundings and the adjustments made in their lives, and also helping them to find out what might have happened to members of their families. It was there and then that I found out what I had most dreaded to know: that my parents and nearly all the other members of my family had perished, with the exception of my uncle Henrik, who had survived and returned to Hungary. In that shattering moment of revelation, all hope of return to the familiarity and normalcy of my childhood world vanished.

To me, it was unthinkable that I would ever return to Hungary to live. So I was virtually alone. The sorrow that I felt at my loss of family and other close connections was at least accompanied by a sense of closure. Until that time I had known nothing and could only speculate about the fates of those dear to me. I could only continue to hope, against all signs to the contrary, that I would be reunited with them. But I was also experiencing a terrible enlightenment. One ought never to experience at the age of sixteen, my age by then, the sadness and bewilderment of being alone in the world.

The first six months of my stay in Sweden was spent in the hospital in Carlstad. With the help of the caring Swedish doctors and nurses and the kind citizens of the community, I gradually regained my health and became a "normal human

being" all over again. The people who visited me every day—total strangers—brought clothing and food, but mostly they brought welcome hugs and kisses. There was no real verbal communication because of the language barrier, but I did not need it. I could feel the love that came from those people. To this day I call them my guardian angels.

It was during this time that I began to think and rethink my past. All that had been precious to me—my mother, my father, my grandmother, and my home—had been lost to me. I was not alone in this loss. Like thousands of others, I had been wrenched from familiar surroundings, from the love of family, from preparations for a bright future, by a bestial wave of terror. I was now haunted by memories of lost traditions of the Sabbath and festivals, of the varied seasons, of the animals with which I had played as "friends," of joyous family reunions and the comfort of the known. I had dreadful flashbacks of familiar surroundings suddenly becoming alien and sinister, of neighbors becoming strangers. No rescue came from the liberating armies, from the democratic nations warring against Hitler. The question "Where was the free world?" echoed and reechoed like a persistent drumming in my head.

When I was again ambulatory, I was given twelve-hour passes to see what "normal" life was like. On days like these, townspeople used to come to the hospital and pick me up and take me to their homes for the day. I was seldom without the help, guidance, and encouragement of one or another of these fine Swedish people.

When I was finally discharged from the hospital, I was given a factory job, along with several other survivors. We spent our time together not only at work, but during leisure periods as well. We lived not in overcrowded displaced persons camps, as many other survivors did, but in individual cottages, where we enjoyed both the privacy of living on our own and

the camaraderie of each other. It was my first "home" since leaving Tolcsva two years before.

Because the Swedish government was highly efficient and well organized, it was able to watch over me even after I was dismissed from the hospital. Although the wounds of war and the sense of personal bereavement were still with me, I felt at home in that wonderful country. I even learned the Swedish language well enough that I could understand it when I went on a visit to Sweden two years ago. I was certainly not alone in my affection for the country and its people: approximately one-third of my group of survivors elected to remain in Sweden and to become Swedish citizens.

There were not only Hungarian Jews in Sweden. There were Greek Jews, Italian Jews, and Jews of many other nationalities in this country, where they had found a haven. For the first time I truly had a sense of the breadth and depth of experience of other European Jews during those terrible days.

I never expected to return to Hungary, especially after I found out that all of my family had been killed. I was planning to make *Aliyah* to Israel, which meant to become an inhabitant of the Jewish land (which was yet to be formed, but whose formation was being discussed) and to give it my full loyalty.

I was already booked on a boat when I received a telegram from my aunts and uncles in New York. An uncle on my mother's side, George, who lived in Brooklyn, had spotted an advertisement placed by HIAS in the Hungarian-American newspaper, with my name listed as one of those seeking relatives in the United States. He informed my aunt, my father's sister Hermina ("Minnie") Buchhalter Boehm, of that fact. Just before my Aunt Elizabeth had died she had told me that if I survived and everyone else perished, I should look for my Aunt Minnie, her older sister, and she would care for me as a mother. She passed away in February 2000. I used to visit her

as often as I could, and when I was with her I seemed able, by simply looking into her face, to recreate my father and the lost members of his family.

My Aunt Minnie, my Uncle Fred (her husband), and their daughter Clara had been going regularly to HIAS headquarters to find out if any names of family members were listed as survivors. While there one day, they encountered Uncle George, who was also seeking family survivors. He carried a newspaper written in Hungarian to which he pointed and said, "Our niece is looking for us." My Aunt Minnie tells me that at that moment, they all realized they were all connected by blood to the same person. They began to weep with joy and to embrace one another. There was at least one survivor from their families in Hungary!

Almost immediately my American relatives wrote to me, asking me to identify myself and my Hungarian family so that they would know I was truly their niece. Not for a moment did I hesitate. I knew then and there that the decision to respond to their letter would be my most profound decision and would begin my boldest journey.

On October 3, 1945, in response to their communication, I wrote the following letter to my Aunt Minnie in Hungarian (my Cousin Clara translated it from Hungarian to English):

Karlstad, October 3, 1945

Dear beloved Aunt Hermina and kind family,

I received your letter this very day, and it was with great happiness that I read it. I already sent you a telegram and another letter, which I hope you have already received. Thank God, I now feel much better. Your letter poured new strength and hope into me.

I will now write of other matters. On March 19, 1944, the Germans came into Hungary. That was the day when our lives were marked. We were then living in Tolcsva. Soon after that

they gathered all the Jews together and took us to Ujhel, where we remained for six weeks in the ghetto. We were quartered together with Uncle Henrik, Aunt Elizabeth, and grandmother, in the ghetto. We went through countless hardships there. After that we all went to Auschwitz, and there we were sorted apart; men, women, and children were separated. There I was parted from my mother and father, and put together with Aunt Elizabeth and her husband's sister, Sara Grunhut. I don't even have to write of it, most certainly you must have heard how we starved, suffered, and were forced to work dreadfully hard. My dearly loved ones could not bear the work and starvation as I could.

They both died in my arms on April 27, 1945. Therefore, I am now left completely alone. I cannot write you anything at all about anyone else. I have written several times to the Consuls to inquire about my beloved ones. They took all the particulars and said they would make announcements over the radio, and thus try to find them if they live. After we were liberated from Bergen-Belsen, I was wounded by an explosion caused by a fire, which left me with four shrapnel wounds. I was laid up for six weeks, but I am now much better. We will discuss all this in person.

You ask whether I want to come to you. What would I go home for? I haven't anyone at all to go back to. I couldn't exist alone anyway in this large world. I'm still young, and have the need of a mother's love and care, which you, Aunt Hermina, can supply. Beloved Aunt Elizabeth's dying words were, if in any way I survived I should contact you at my first opportunity, because you would be a second mother to me.

I'm writing this letter, but I'm crying so, that it is very difficult for me to continue. I can't possibly write down what heartaches I feel.

You asked about Uncle Henrik's two little girls. Edith was fourteen, and little Elizabeth was nine years old, when I last saw them a year and a half ago. Since then I know nothing

of them. I'll give you my vital statistics. I, Margit Buchhalter, was born in Budapest, June 12, 1929. My last address was Tolcsva.

I can hardly wait for the moment when I can hug you in my arms Aunt Hermina. Clara, darling, I was able to read your handwriting very easily. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kind invitation.

I would love to see you all already, then we will talk over everything together. Your family picture came out very nicely. I sent you a picture of myself, but it is not very good. I will send you a better as soon as possible.

Clara, dear, you ask me what I need. I have no desires left at all. The Germans killed everything inside of me a year and a half ago. The Swedish people gave me one each of every article of clothing. Clara, you probably can imagine what I could use. Clara, dear, please send me my Uncle George's address. I would like to write to him also. I would love to be with you as soon as possible. Now I won't write more. I am together with a girl from my hometown.

With all my love and kisses to you all,
Your little sister,
Margit

Aunt Minnie Boehm, particularly, was so anxious for my arrival that she was willing to have her son, who was in the U.S. Army stationed in Europe, marry me and bring me here as a war bride. This proved to be unnecessary. There were also three brothers of my mother living here: Morris, Sam, and George. Sam's wife's sister, who was connected to HIAS, helped them to obtain affidavits attesting to the fact that I would not be a burden to the U.S. government. Finally, after several months of delay and anxiety, hope, and fear, in the summer of 1946 I was prepared to set sail for what would be my new home in the United States.

No one can fully understand the feelings of excitement and fright one experiences at moments like that. My fellow survivors who were with me in Carlstadt gave me a going-away party. We cried and made promises never to forget one another and what we had been through, and they all accompanied me to the place from which my boat was to depart. They stood there waving as the ship pulled out of the harbor. My emotions were terribly mixed: while I was both terrified and happy for myself, I was melancholy for those of my friends who still had no place to go and no one to go to.