



Alice's story

A Jewish family on the run from the Nazis, from Vienna to Ferramonti and Bergamo

by Riccardo Schwamenthal

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Introduction

Alice Redlich was born in 1908 in Vienna, to a Hungarian mother, Emma Hungar, and an Austrian father, Riccardo Redlich. She spent her childhood between Vienna (where her family lived) and Budapest (where her maternal grandparents lived); when she was only fifteen, she had already started travelling alone to Budapest on the boats that crossed the Danube. Her mother became a widow when Alice was only twelve years old. Alice loved travelling, she could already speak three languages by the time she finished school, and would later learn Italian perfectly.

In 1932, she married Leiser Schwammenthal in Vienna; he had been born in Vijnita in Bukovina in 1900. In 1937 she gave birth to their son Riccardo and in 1938 went to Italy with him. In 1944, a year after the family had secretly moved to the Bergamo area, her daughter Liliana was born.

After Liberation, the family moved to Bergamo, and Alice worked alongside Leiser in his clothing business until he died in 1981. Supported by her many close friends in her changed circumstances, Alice was respected and well-loved for many years, until her death in 1991.

What follows is the transcript of a recorded interview with Alice Redlich conducted by her son Riccardo Schwamenthal in Bergamo, 14 and 15 August 1986. Taped on UHER Report L. Nastro Ampex Audio Mast. Tape 407 - vel. 4,75. two tapes in total.

Transcribed by Riccardo Schwamenthal.
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Interview 14 August 1986

I was born on 16 September 1908 at Purkersdorf, ten or fifteen kilometres from Vienna, which is where we moved when I was six years old.

How did Nazism come to Austria?

On the evening of 13 March 1938, I had been to the Josefstadt Theatre, where there was a performance by Werfel, a beautiful piece, but we realised, the public knew, that something was happening, because the actors were more nervous than usual, and at the end when they presented themselves at the front of the stage to thank the audience, they were very emotional, and crying. Amongst them was the famous Jewish actress Elisabeth Bergner, who was crying, along with other actors, and we understood that something had happened. Coming out of the theatre, we suddenly noticed lots of swastika flags on view, and the SA in their brown shirts marching through the streets. People were saying that at Parliament, the Rathaus, the Nazi flag was already flying.

The next day, people who were hostile to Jews - for personal motives (real or imagined), or maybe they were in competition with a Jewish business, anyway, whatever the motive - they started to have Jews evicted from their homes. They were taken to the Kommand, there were already groups of Nazis gathered there who would beat the Jews up, and sent them to Dachau. One of our Jewish neighbours owned a shop selling cleaning products, and he was very unpopular with his competitors because his prices were low. He was one of the first, he was picked up immediately the morning after the Nazi takeover and sent to Dachau. Another Jew was a man who owned a fabric shop, he was another neighbour of ours. He shared his house with a female Aryan friend. The first thing she did the following morning was to go to the Kommand to report him: he was picked up and taken to Dachau, and the shop was given to the Aryan woman.

Moreover, people out on the streets who did not appear to be Aryan were also picked up and forced to clean the pavements. There were due to have been national elections, and so on the streets there were the slogans of various political parties written in chalk: "vote Christian Social", "vote Socialist" etc, and so the Nazis arranged for a corrosive liquid, a sort of caustic soda, which they forced people they had arrested to use to clean the pavements of these slogans, with brushes, on their knees. Naturally, they also took the opportunity to throw some of the liquid over the prisoners, so that the hospitals were soon full of people suffering from burns to their hands, knees and legs. Many had to have a leg amputated.

We owned a chocolate shop, we also sold sweets and confectionery, but it was not a cake-shop as we have them in Italy. We had many clients, we sold many items at good prices, and our products were good quality. One of the first things the Nazis did was to write on the windows "Jewish shop". Sometimes, they would force the owner himself to write "This is a Jewish shop" on the windows, and they tried to stop people from going in to patronise those shops. This was in the run-up to Easter, and usually that was a very busy time for us: even despite the slogan written on the window, and the presence of the SA outside the door, people still came in and still bought our goods. So the three or four SA members outside got angry, and they called for reinforcements: they came into the shop, and abruptly ordered everyone out.



The people were scared: only one woman stopped, she absolutely refused to leave, she was an elderly lady. One of the SA said to her "But you are German, you should not be buying from a Jew". And she replied "I am not German, I am from the Sudetenland", which was still part of Czechoslovakia at the time. And he said "It will not be long before you are also under Hitler's rule, under our rule".

left: Alice's shop in Vienna: in front is one of the staff, Alice's husband Leiser (or Leo, as he came to be known in Italy), and her mother Emma Hungar, wearing a type of dust coat.

And in fact, that was what happened. One of Hitler's first invasions was of the Sudeten German territory, where there was a Czech population, but also many Germans. In the shop, we only kept one young girl on as staff: before we had had more, but now just one was enough. Some days later, while my father was out, two people came to our house: one was an SS officer, and another was dressed in civilian clothes and wearing a badge identifying him as a member of the "covert" Nazi Party [i.e. from the days when the Nazi Party had been illegal in Austria - English translator's note] - there was a special badge for people who had been members of the banned NSDAP. They came into the house, and the SS officer asked for my father - I explained that he was not in, and he replied "We would like to officially inform you that the shop is no longer yours, it has been requisitioned, and now belongs to this gentleman." I said "You can't do that!" and he replied "Yes, we can".

I did not know what to say to them, and I was scared. They went, and as soon as they had left, I went to the shop: there was the assistant with fear in her eyes, and seated at the till was a woman. When I entered, she said to me "Good day, how can I help you?" I replied "Listen, this is my shop". "No", she said, "this shop belongs to me and my husband". I said "You cannot do this, it's not possible". "No, you listen, this shop is mine, now please leave".

I went home, and when my father arrived, I explained what had happened. He decided to go to the Kommand. He was always very brave, I would not have had the courage to do anything. Later he told me that at the Kommand, he found some people whom he knew (since the Kommand was in the same neighbourhood as our house and the shop), and these individuals (who had been clandestine Nazis) had been customers of ours, and knew us well. And so he started to explain to an officer there what had happened, and while he was speaking, he became aware that behind him was another Nazi who was motioning to the others "let's beat him up, let's beat him up".

The officer in charge withdrew with some of the others to discuss the matter, and clearly some of these ex-clandestine Nazis spoke well of us, because when the officer returned, he said "Ok, for the time being, the shop remains yours, but we will see... we will see". And in fact, that Nazi woman left the shop which we now found free again, and we were able to keep it, but not for long, as it was soon handed over: we were forced to sell it to one of our ex-suppliers who had been a closet Nazi. A price was set, but the Nazi never paid, and yet the shop still passed into his hands. After the war, my mother returned to Austria from Italy, and she kicked him out, and then sold the business to someone else, who did actually pay... there was one thing that I would like to mention before I forget: the physiognomy of the Jews was in fact a little different from that of the Aryans. The first Jews who left for Italy would say to themselves "this is like being amongst lots of other Jews!", as the Italians are a little similar in looks. One of the sales representatives who came into our shop was a Greek who looked southern Italian: he wore the badge of the covert Nazis, and yet he was still taken and beaten up three or four times because people thought he was a confidence trickster. So he got hold of some official papers that he would pull out of his pocket whenever he was picked up to show who he actually was.

Why do you think they decided to give the shop back to your father? Was it because he was not involved in politics, or for other reasons?

He was not involved in politics, but he had also always been a good citizen, he was not a confidence trickster. But maybe also at that time, they didn't have the legal force to take the shop off him like that. Anyone who did not react, anyone who let things just happen to them [would be swept aside], but he was very energetic, and they had nothing on him, so they gave him the shop back.

Can you tell me the story of the dentist?

Dr Ehrenfest had been at university with my father, he was a dentist, and had long been a friend of the family. Even after my father died, he remained our dentist. He had a daughter a few years older than me, and then I heard that she had got married, and had had a daughter. Two or three months followed, and someone told me that Ehrenfest's daughter had had twins. "I thought she had just one daughter", I said. "No, there were twins". Some months passed, maybe a year, and someone said to me "have you heard, old Mrs Ehrenfest has had a daughter?" I said "Really? Is that possible at her age?" "Yes, we saw her with a baby girl in a pushchair.

Some time later, I had to go to the dentist, and I congratulated him on becoming a grand-father, and he told me the whole story. His daughter had been pregnant with triplets, all girls, they had been born very premature, and the doctors did not think they would survive. The mother had been shocked by all this, as she had wanted only one baby, not three, and now she wanted to keep only one. And at first, that was what she did. After some months, her parents managed to convince her to take the second triplet as well. The third one had weighed only seven or eight hundred grams when she was born, and so she had had to stay in an incubator; she could not be taken home, and in any case, the mother had said that she did not want her, and that the doctors should

do what they thought best with her.

So the parents had decided to bring her up as their own. After nearly a year, the little one was finally allowed to go home, she still appeared just like a new-born in fact. But quickly she started to grow stronger, and became a perfectly healthy, normal child. She stayed with her grandparents. The child knew the situation, and about her parents and her two twin sisters. She grew up well, and the grandparents were almost rejuvenated by the experience of bringing her up. They took a small house by the Danube, they went swimming in the river, and they lived happily with the child. When she was older, maybe ten or twelve years old, her parents asked to have her back, to go and live with her sisters in her biological family. But the grandparents refused, saying "she will always be your daughter, but she will live with us because you did not want her when she was born".

She was 13 or 14 years old when Hitler carried out the Anschluss, and Dr Ehrenfest's son-in-law managed to get permission to emigrate with his family. Dr Ehrenfurt said to him "In which case, we will return the child to you, so that you can save her". "And what you will do?" he asked. "Don't worry about us", the doctor replied. He went with them all to the station on the day they left, he waved them goodbye, and then returned home. He and his wife retired to bed, turned the gas on, and killed themselves. They could not stay in Austria (or to be more accurate Germany, since Austria no longer existed), and they were under no illusions about their prospects. There were constant deportations, and people being beaten up. He could not longer run his business, they had no way to support themselves, they were not allowed to own an apartment, and right from the moment when Hitler had come to Austria, after the Anschluss, there had been large numbers of people queuing up at European and foreign embassies: everyone wanted an exit visa, but there was nowhere for them to go. Switzerland was closed off, Hungary and Czechoslovakia only accepted people who had previously lived there in the past, and even if there was some possibility of getting into Belgium, the chances of making it anywhere were slim. You needed an affidavit to get into the USA, some guarantee from someone there; there was an official US annual quota for people leaving European countries, but since Hitler had been in power in Germany since 1933, the numbers permitted had already long been reached. Due to the pogroms in Poland, the Polish quota had been reached years previously. To get to England, you needed to have a job already arranged there, so that was a remote possibility.

Strangely, the only country where there was a real chance of getting in was Italy. If you arrived by air-plane, there was no need for a visa, simply a valid passport would suffice. My passport was due to expire on 30 June 1938, and your father had never had a passport (he had never needed one): so he went to the Romanian consulate (he had Romanian nationality), where they advised him to get me out fast, as his passport might only be ready when mine was already expired. But he never did receive the Romanian passport, and it was only after a year and much difficulty that he got a German passport for stateless people. My mother still had a valid Austrian passport. Two days before my passport expired, I got my plane ticket, and left with you, you were maybe 15 months old, and we went to Italy. The air-planes were not as comfortable as the ones we have today, they were fitted with a sort of bench without seat-belts, so when the air-plane banked, we would slide around inside it from one side to the other.

We were on the plane, and next to us was a man, his wife and a girl of maybe ten. Suddenly the father was called off the flight to have some details checked, and because he did not return immediately, the girl became hysterical. "They're not letting father come, they are keeping him there, they are keeping him there!", she cried. So the hostess and the captain went to her, and said "Calm down. This air-plane is Italian, there is no need to be scared". And in fact, her father soon returned, and the plane took off. Before we left, you and me had had to undergo a very rigorous security check, very personal. I had to undress completely. I had a fabric diaper on, which I had to take off and bang [to show there was nothing hidden inside], and I had to remove my socks and shoes to show that there was nothing hidden in them. We landed in Venice. My mother's sisters lived in Milan, and it was decided that I should go and live with them, and wait for my parents.

On 21 September 1938 - usually I do not remember today's date or yesterday's, but this one I have never forgotten - Mussolini's racial laws were issued, according to which all foreign Jews had to leave Italy within six months, that is by 21 March 1939. Naturally, everyone was terrified, all these people who had had no difficulty getting into Italy and suddenly did not know what to do. In fact, neither my mother nor your father had managed to get out of Austria yet, as it took longer for him to get his passport.

Then the Italians decided something new: they would allow entry into Italy only for people who had a visa for another country, and wanted to "transit" through Italy. This was naturally very difficult, since no country was handing out visas. But some clever ones found a way: at Milan, it was possible to get a visa to visit Tangiers, but you had to buy a return boat ticket, and people who had these tickets could get a transit visa for Italy from

Austria. So I sent this type of ticket for Tangiers to your father and my mother. Naturally, I had already agreed with the travel agency that they would take back the tickets, earning themselves something of course. But as soon as I sent the tickets, the rules were changed again, and they no longer issued those visas: you needed just a one-way ticket, and the only place that you could go to was Shanghai, and you could actually make it to Shanghai. So I got a ticket for my husband and my mother, and I sent them over to them, and on that basis, they were able to get a visa, and same to Italy. But ever so, going to Shanghai was far from easy, so we stayed in Italy, afraid of what would happen on 21 March. "They will kill us all, they will round us up, who knows what they will do?", we thought. But in fact, in typical Italian fashion, they did nothing at all. Neither the authorities nor private citizens did anything. Nothing at all happened, whoever was still here just stayed here.

When the war started, things were different. In September 1939, a decree was issued requiring all Jews to present themselves at an office in via Della Signoria [in Milan], where they were to state "we are Jews, originally from such-and-such a town..., living in Italy, in Milan, in such-and-such a street etc etc". And they all went, just like sheep, maybe 90% of the Jews, went to present themselves at this office. There were some more cunning ones who did not go, and no-one ever looked for them, or found them. They spent the rest of the war like that, undisturbed.

In 1941, when the war had broken out, the first thing they did was to grab a few Jews, above all men, but also a few women, and send them to the prison at San Vittore for a few days. From there, some were sent to Salerno, others to Manfredonia, or other places, as prisoners-of-war. But in reality, they were practically free even in these places: they had to be available, they had to live in certain areas, and once or twice a week they had to present themselves to the local barracks. And so it was that your father was picked up in July 1941. They came to the house to pick him up, they took some other people as well, they were taken to San Vittore, and I went with some other women [whose relatives were in prison] to see him in jail. He stayed there for eight, ten days. It was a very very hot summer, and later he told me that at night the prison warders would open the [cell] doors to allow some air in, telling the prisoners "at the end of the day, you are not criminals". The doors were left open, and the prisoners were treated well. From there, they were sent to different places, and your father was sent to Eboli in the province of Salerno. He was accompanied on the train, and later he told me that each prisoner had his own "guardian angel": he was with a guard who said to him "keep your hand close to me, we can pretend that you are handcuffed, I won't put them on you, that way we can pretend". And this is what he did, and during the voyage, they were completely free, and the guards were kind and understanding with them. He stayed at Eboli until March 1942.

Then one day, while I was still in Milan with my mother and you, they came to the house one morning with a document ordering my mother's deportation to Germany (as Austria no longer existed).¹ I begged them "But why, no, please". "No, no, she must go home, she must go back to Germany". So I went to the Questura.² The official in charge of the office for foreigners was, if I remember correctly, a certain Ferrario, well-known as one of the worst swine in the whole Questura. In fact after the war, his relatives placed adverts in the newspapers, looking for him "Anyone who knows anything, anyone who has any news of him [please let us know]". But it is clear that the partisans executed him immediately after the end of the war. In any case, he said to me "no, your mother has to return to Germany, she must return to Germany", and he gave me three or four days to organise my affairs.



above: Leiser, first on the right, picture taken at Campagna.

¹ Ilona Ungar was the only one with an Austria passport.

² Regional police headquarters

So I went to the Jewish Community office, where they had an emigration department, and they advised me to go to the Foreign Office in Rome, to speak to a particular individual, and that way to try and get my mother placed in a concentration camp in Italy. I left immediately, and in the morning I saw the individual suggested to me, and he said "come back tomorrow and we will see what we can do". So the next day I went back, and he told me "your mother will not be sent back to Germany, she will have to go to Ferramonti. But you will have to go with her, and so will your son". And then he added "your husband will also be transferred to Ferramonti, so that the whole family can stay together". They gave me, I think, eight to ten days to sell my furniture etc. I managed to sell everything, and then I travelled down with my mother, and we met your father there.



above: Alice with Riccardo, her husband and her mother at Ferramonti.

At Ferramonti, there was a collection of huts and barracks, large ones for the women, others for the men, and smaller ones that consisted of a small "apartment", you could call it two compartments with a kitchen in between which were assigned to families. For families of two or three people, there were barracks with only one room, but larger families would be assigned housing with two rooms. There were no longer facilities left by the time we arrived (they had all been allocated already), so they gave us a very large barracks that we divided using curtains, and in this way, we created a sort of bedroom. The barracks next to ours housed the Fascist militia. In front of it was a small piece of land, and my mother had brought some seeds from Milan, seeds for flowers, vegetables etc, and so she had started this sort of allotment.

We had quickly made friends with the militiamen, there was one from Cosenza, and the others lived close by; when they went home in the evening to their families, they would bring us back other seeds to plant. We made good friends with them, they were very kind and considerate, and life in the camp was quite well organised. There was a hospital ward, as there were many cases of malaria, the area was ugly and there was a marshal, and the camp director who lived in a separate barracks with his wife. There was a "market" where every now and again you could buy things. But in addition, farmers would secretly come from the surrounding area, as Jews would naturally pay more for their produce.

And what did they bring by way of food?

Food? They made holes in the barbed wire to bring us food in, they would bring us eggs, sweetcorn, fruit. And one of the first days that we were there at Ferramonti was your third birthday, and you were outside playing with the other children, when I saw a vehicle circling. The camp director was driving around the camp in what seemed to be a jeep, I am not sure what it was: next thing I knew, he was gathering all the younger children up into the vehicle and then he drove off out of the camp. I was horrified: "what is happening?" I ran outside, and asked someone I found there "What are they doing?" He replied "Why are you so upset, what's the matter with you?" "The director has taken the children away", I said. "Yes, he is taking them for a ride", he replied. And in fact after an hour, the children all returned, happy and merry because the director had taken them out to get an ice-cream, he had bought ice-cream for everyone. He was a very understanding person, very kind.

There was a Jew who was working as a cobbler, naturally everyone was doing jobs that they had actually never done before: one was a cobbler, another sold second-hand goods, bought things from prisoners and swapped them with members of the militia, and so on.



above: Riccardo Schwamenthal - first on the left - with other children at Ferramonti, June 1941.

What did father do?

Strangely, he did nothing. There was one from Vienna, one of the few who had been a worker, who had mended roofs, and in the camp, he worked as a tin-smith. He gave us the old milk-tins. Then there were the kitchens where some prisoners would prepare the food for the rest of us. We paid a small amount for this food, as the [Italian] state provided a small subsidy, so we paid a small amount for each meal. Some ate alone, and others who had small kitchens at their disposal would eat there. The tinsmith would get old tomato tins, and would make splendid metal items for us: I am sorry that I do not have them any more, he would make pans, pans, colanders, kitchen containers. He made a samovar, in fact he made two or three out of tin-plate, and there was a prisoner who made tea, he sold tea. So it was better not to light the fire and make tea yourselves, it was worth going to him for a cup of tea, he charged very little as well. The tin-smith also made candle-holders and I had one that could hold two candles, but unfortunately, I do not know where it ended up. There was a prisoner who had been a lawyer in Vienna, who would go around the Jewish families with a suitcase, asking "does anyone have any books they no longer want? Give them to me". And in this way, he created a mobile library, he charged a small amount, and lent the books out, [which was good since] we were all very used to reading. People would give him a book, he would lent it free for a week or two, and so we had our very own library at Ferramonti, which was a very beautiful thing. And then sometimes, we would organise concerts, events, we had musicians...

How many of you were there in the camp?

Around 2,000. Once, while there was a celebration, I was doing a very good impersonation of Hitler, and right at the best moment, the marshal had arrived in the camp. Everyone was terrified. Instead, he came over to listen, and enjoyed himself as well!

But those who had imprisoned you, they were Fascists, correct?

Yes, they were Fascists.

But were they genuine Fascists?

I think they did believe in Fascism, but they were still human beings as well. I don't think you could become head of a concentration camp if you were not a trusted Fascist, I am sure. They were genuine Fascists, but for them, as for so many others like them, Fascism was one thing and Nazism was another. They had not absorbed Nazi racism so quickly, and so they behaved [in a certain way]... I heard that at the start, before we arrived at the camp, there had been some insubordination by the prisoners, and some Jews were punished for something or other they had done.

In the camp?

Yes, in the camp. I personally did not see this in the eight, nine months that I was there, but they told me that at the start, punishment meant being tied to a tree for two or three hours, but the guards made very sure that the tree was in the shade, that the prisoner was not in direct sunlight etc. Things like that.

And what did you say that father did?

Well, oddly, nothing... strange for such an active man. He helped a little at the firms that sold second-hand clothes, he acted a little as a go-between, but it did not amount to much. Strangely - for someone who had very few friends - he had a friend there, an extraordinary person. He was a young Pole who had studied medicine, he had gained his degree in Italy, but he had originally started his studies in Vienna, before he had had to flee. And guess where he ended up? Right there [in the camp]. Those who stayed were able to escape. Some Germans did come after a day or two, but the Fascists had already fled and there was no-one left to oversee the camp, and so everyone just went. By now the Americans were close by, the prisoners went to the

Americans, and this man, he was called Jsu Klein, later he ended up in Israel.

Did father have any more contact with him?

No, we didn't; we did try, we wrote to him, but we heard no more of him.

What else can you tell me about the camp?

I think I have told you everything there is to know. There were some cultural events, people would write, once there was a writing competition. We had to write something about the camp, and one prisoner won first prize with a description of the camp, very beautiful: I have a copy of it somewhere, it will have to be translated since it is in German. It is a brief summary of our life in the camp.

How did you get it?

Because they sold copies. It had been typed, and whoever wanted to, could buy a copy.

And it was written in German? Did a German win the competition?

But everyone spoke German: most of us were Germans, maybe 90%. There were some Hungarians, some Poles, but the language in the camp was German. We would speak Italian with the camp authorities. I think it was August or September 1941, the Pope (I don't remember which Pope there was at the time), sent a Papal Nuncio to see how things were in the camp. This Nuncio came, and naturally was treated with respect by the authorities. He organised for all the prisoners to be brought together, and then he distributed, I think, some wine, some food and some commemorative medals. There were some baptised Jews amongst us, there were some English Jews too. The Pope then managed to get a concession out of the authorities such that family groups would be interned as "free prisoners", they would be sent to other places as "prisoners". We fell into this group, and we also tried to add Dr Klein to our party, claiming that he was our cousin: we made the request, but since we could not prove anything, naturally they did not let him come with us.

At first, they sent us to Trescore [Balneario - in the province of Bergamo]. Other groups were sent to different provinces, I don't remember which, but we were sent to Trescore and stayed there maybe five or six days. But there they could not find any lodging for us, so the Foreigners' Office in Bergamo arranged for our transfer to Clusone. There was a family of furriers with us, two brothers and a brother-in-law: they were very rich, and so they were able to smooth things somewhat: they were sent to Rovetta, where they had asked to go. They had a workshop, and they worked there, and their wives would come down from Milan, bringing raw materials and taking away the finished products. They were called Divalt, very nice people who helped anyone [they could]; they were very popular with the local population too, they did not restrict themselves to their "own" people. Every now and again, they would come down to Clusone to see us [and the other Jews].³

There was a cafe/cakeshop in Clusone, run by a certain signor Mantegazza. Aside from the parents, it was run by a daughter and her deaf brother. It was winter then, winter of 1943, a very cold winter. The apartments and our rooms were very cold, so sometimes we would go to the cafe: we did not have money to spend, but the owners were very good, very understanding, there would be three of us and we would order one coffee, but they understood that we needed to warm up, and they didn't say anything. The son was maybe 30 years old then, and they said that he was exempted from military service because he was deaf.

The Mantegazza family behaved in an exemplary fashion towards us Jews. Sometimes, the Divalt family would come down from Rovetta: they had a horse and a small cart, they would come to the cafe, and pay for everyone. That was lovely. Naturally, there was also the people of Clusone who used the cafe, including the local doctor, the head of the hospital, a lawyer, these three were the local big-wigs. They were not just Fascists, but also racists, and they would give us dirty looks, and we understood that they were unhappy [that we were there]. They went there to play cards, and even though we tried [not to bother them] and stay out of the way, for them our presence alone was already enough of a problem. One day, an order arrived, officially from Bergamo, but we knew that it originated with these local Fascists, that stated that since the Jews were a public nuisance in Clusone, we had to leave. As a result, some of us were sent to Branzi, some to Lovere, we went to Gromo and only one or two [Jewish] families remained at Clusone. The Jews at Rovetta were left in peace, since they generated wealth for the local area [with their business]. Naturally, we were disappointed to leave, since at Gromo there was only us and an elderly Jewish couple, she was seventy years old, he was maybe seventy-three, seventy-four, Austrians. There was another couple of more or less the same age as us, still quite young, but they escaped to Switzerland after 8th September 1943.⁴

³ In 1943, there were ten families of Jews at Clusone.

⁴ When Italy surrendered to the Allies.

Tape recording made 5 August 1986

So why did we leave Clusone?

All the Jewish prisoners were sent away from Clusone, because some local Fascist big-wig complained about our presence.

And how did we end up at Gromo?

I don't know. They sent some people to Val Brembana, to Lovere, to different places, and we (my mother, your father and you) were sent to Gromo. Then there was another couple, aged over seventy, and a couple who were roughly our age, from Berlin. The people in Gromo were very kind and understanding to us. We were required to present ourselves once a week to the Carabinieri, but even the marshal himself did not take this very seriously, he would see us around town most days anyway, and we were broadly speaking left in peace. As I have said, the local population was very decidedly on our side, there were some Fascists obviously, but we never encountered any hostility, or had problems with anyone. Your father would wander the mountains, gathering wood or mushrooms, he would wander about, go on walks, and on the road from Gromo to Valgoglio, there was a small area called Colarete, no more than three or four houses and a food-shop. It was owned by a certain Mr Draganti, whose wife was a retired school-teacher. They were Fascists, he was a convinced Fascist and talked endlessly about it, but with us, he was so good, so kind, and he would help us in any way he could. So that was how we lived at Gromo.

What work did father do?

About ten kilometres from Gromo, heading towards Clusone, is Ardesio: there, there were two shops, two haberdashers. One was owned by an elderly widow, Mrs Filisetti and the other haberdashers also sold clothes, it was owned by the Zucchelli family. There was a certain rivalry between them, stiff competition, but they both did everything they could to help us. Clothes, thread etc was all rationed, but both these shops had hidden supplies: clothes, material, fabric etc, and both of them would give your father a certain quantity to sell without the ration book. They trusted him, as he would take the items away, and only pay for them when he had made some sales, so they clearly had a great deal of trust in him.

Had father done the same at Clusone?

No, no. He had not worked at Clusone, because there were so many swine amongst the local population. There was a police officer who would happily have eaten us alive if he could have done so. He caused trouble for the whole population, but clearly he was worse with the prisoners. There was a bakery just as you entered Clusone itself, run by a man from Milan: he and his wife and son all helped the prisoners in so many ways. Local farmers would bring him flour, and he would bake the bread, and sometimes it might happen that a little extra would be produced, and he would slip it over to the prisoners. More than that, they agreed to the prisoners' request to put white flour on the ration book, instead of bread, as so many of us mixed potato into the dough, as in Hungary for instance: this makes for excellent bread, and we would take the dough to be baked in at the baker's shop. It happened quite a few times that that policeman, who was called Doro, would lie in wait for prisoners coming out of the bakers', he would search them, go through their bags, and they had to explain [what they had]; he would make them explain how exactly they had got hold of the bread. Then he would go and check what was happening in the bakers', and when they explained the situation, he said "If it was down to me, I would not even give them a ration book". That was the type of person he was.⁵

I would like to mention something else about Clusone: that famous cake shop, Mantegazza, where we used to go, was run by the parents, a young lady and a son about 30 years old, who had been exempted from military service because he was deaf. After Liberation, we learnt that actually that was not true, instead he had managed to convince everyone that he was deaf: he had had to endure very difficult times, since he had to submit to medical commissions [to confirm that he was deaf]. At other times, people standing behind him would drop something on the ground, or they would fire [into the air], to see how he reacted, but he always managed not to react to the sound, and so he avoided military service completely.

Anyway, going back to Gromo, your father would take his materials and fabrics to the farmers on the outskirts of Gromo, to Boario, Valgoglio, to Ripa, and the farmers were pleased and bought his goods willingly.

He went about on foot?

Of course, there were only the rough tracks at that time, the roads were made much later. And so we went like

⁵ Clarification on the police at Clusone was provided by Bepi Lanfranchi, then commandant of the Garibaldi partisan brigade "G. Camozzi", in an interview held at Bergamo with Riccardo Schwamenthal on 15 June 1987, and in a letter he sent on 17 June 1987, again to Riccardo Schwamenthal.

this until the famous 8 September 1943. Of course, we were all pleased since it seemed that the war was over, and then just a few days later, we found out that Mussolini had been freed from Gran Sasso by the Germans, and so the war would go on. There were Italian soldiers who were withdrawing, who refused to serve in the army any more, who had escaped, they were known as the "imboscanti" (the "draft-dodgers") and they formed themselves into the first partisan units in the area. After 8 September, we started to become very scared, knowing that the Germans were advancing into the valleys as well, and were making their presence felt. So we decided to flee and hide elsewhere: one day, we left, and ended up into a tiny hamlet of maybe two houses above Ardesio, right at the peak of the mountain, an area called Botto Alto. The area was full of flies, it was dirty and it was not a nice place at all. I was waiting to give birth to Liliana, and one day we decided to go down by night to Gromo, to get some things we needed, some clothes and other items. So we went down and reached Gromo: the lady of the house where we had stayed saw us, and in order to help us, called the marshal of the Carabinieri. We were naturally very scared when he came, but he said to us "But why are you hiding up there, with you" - he pointed at me - "in this condition? Come down into the valley, there is no reason to be afraid". And I replied "I am not scared of the Italians, it's the Germans who frighten us". And he said "I give you my word in front of these witnesses" - there was the landlady, an elderly lady, and her children present - "I give you my word that if there is anything happening in the area, I will let you know in good time".

So after this, we came down from Botto Alto, where we had really suffered, and settled in again at Gromo. But in the last few days of November, we heard that the Germans were approaching the area. We heard that one Jewish family who had been living in Albino had fled, and we decided to do the same. You, Richard, you had by now started primary school. That morning, it was 1st December 1943, father had gone down to Ardesio because he had earned some money and wanted to hand it over to Mrs Filisetti and Mrs Zucchelli, and you were at school: I was going towards town with my mother, and we had decided to leave in the afternoon, together with your father, to head up into Valgoglio to hide out there. While I was headed for town, the marshal approached me with a corporal, and asked "Where are you going?" "I am going into town to do some shopping", I said. "And your husband?" "He went into the forest to collect some wood". "And where are those two old ones?" (referring to those two who lived in the same house with us).⁶ "Oh, I don't know", I said. "Well", he said, "you have to go back". "Why, why do I have to go back?" He replied, "you have to go back home, an order has arrived, this afternoon you will be taken to Bergamo".

"Right", I said, "in which case, I will go and get my child from school", and he replied, "No, don't bother yourself, I will send the corporal to collect him". And I said, "No, he will get scared if he sees a policeman coming to collect him. I will go". "OK", he said, "you go, but I will have you accompanied". And so, me and my mother came to get you from school. When I went in, I explained to the teacher - she was an elderly lady whose name I don't remember now - what had happened, and there were tears in her eyes, and she said "I am a Fascist, but these things are horrible. I don't like these things, they should not happen".

She waved you goodbye, and we headed towards home. Passing in front of the baker, I went in and said "I would like a bit of bread, please". The Carabinieri followed us all throughout this. I went into the bakers and asked for some bread, and the lady, who was called Sara, looked me, and understood what had happened, and there were tears in her eyes too, and she gave me more bread than she should have done. We left the shop, and I said to the Carabinieri, "Listen, people will think that perhaps we have stolen a chicken, with you walking alongside us", and he said "Don't worry, I will hang back a bit". But he followed us nonetheless, he never left. So I said to my mother, "Look, we are going to run for it". "No, you are crazy", she replied. "No, no, we have to run for it, we have to do something".

And so we went home, and there was already the marshal there, who had gone upstairs to the two old people, and said "today, I will take you, you have to come to Bergamo with me". They were very religious, and would start celebrating the Jewish sabbath on Friday evenings. And it was a Friday, so they said "No, we cannot, we cannot travel on Friday evenings, it is not allowed". So the marshal started shouting, at me as well, saying "you have had plenty of time to escape, but now I have my eye on you. Don't even try escaping". Then he looked at me, and said "No, actually, who is thinking of escaping? No, I don't think so". And so we went down into the landlady's kitchen, and I had an idea - between her kitchen and mine, there was a small corridor, and from there you went down into the cellar: that had an exit, and next to my kitchen were the two bedrooms. And at first the landlady was crying, and said to the marshal "come on, do you really want to take a woman away in this condition?" (referring to the fact that I was one month from giving birth).

⁶ This is a reference to an elderly couple of Polish origin, Kris Markus and his wife. Alice remembers that they were taken to Bergamo and imprisoned in Sant'Agata prison, only to be released and then re-arrested. After another stay in Sant'Agata, they were sent to Fossoli concentration camp. Alice never found out what happened to them after that.

And he said, "but why are you worried? They are coming... they just want to gather all the Jews together. They will be taken to Alto Adige. There they will be placed in hotels, and they will live there, and the lady will be taken to a clinic, and looked after. There is no need to worry". And this poor old woman believed him. Then he went, but the corporal didn't. I sat down next to him, and started chatting as if nothing was wrong. And after a while I said, "Now I will go and prepare our cases, the things we will take with us". I went into the kitchen, leaving the door open, and that of the landlady's kitchen such that the policeman could constantly see me, and in my room, I said to my mother "now, we have to flee".

The landlady's daughter was there too, and she said, "no, you are mad. Didn't you hear what the marshal said?" And I said, "let him talk all he wants, he can say what he likes, I want to escape from here, and you, Angelina, go now, because I do not want to drag you into this when we flee". And in fact, she left. We got dressed, putting on as many clothes as possible. At first, I got going backwards and forwards to the kitchen, and then to my room, backwards and forwards, always with some clothes in my hands, and I saw that the policeman watched me once, twice, three times, four times, and then he saw that I was getting things ready... at a certain moment, he wasn't looking at us, so I grabbed you by the hand, and mother, and down we went, down the stairs into the cellar, and out. We ran towards the river Serio, and I had wanted to cross it, and make our way up to Boario. But then I changed my mind, as the road to Boario was a dirt-track and completely exposed, no trees, nothing, so you could see a dog making his way up from Gromo, it was that open. So I changed my mind, and we crossed the Serio twice, back and forwards, and we were soaked through.

How old was my grandmother then?

She was 75 years old, if I remember correctly,⁷ but she had a form of osteoarthritis in her leg; she had been operated on her leg when she was young, and she walked with difficulty. And so we came down to the mountain along the Serio for some way, which we still had to cross. I wanted to cross the main road, and so make our way to the other side of the road where there were two farmers' houses, to take refuge there, but they were not far from the house where we lived, less than a kilometre. So, close to the Serio was a small forest, and we went through that, I looked left and right, and then "Now, run, let's get across". On the other side, there were some nut bushes, and we crossed there: while we were crossing, there was someone nearby [who was tending some animals] and he let loose his whip, and mother shouted "They are shooting at us, they are shooting at us!". "No", I said, "They aren't shooting, keep running", and we made it to the first house, which belonged to a farmer. We knew someone in the area who had a daughter, Amelia, who was very kind. We told the lady what had happened, and she took us up into the rooms: we were soaked through, so she lit a fire, brought us up some foot warmers to warm ourselves and dry out a bit, and she said "don't be afraid".

We had been there maybe ten minutes, no more, when we heard dogs barking, which told us that someone was approaching the house. In fact it was Amelia, the daughter, returned from the village, and she explained to her mother that the house where we had been [previously] was surrounded by police officers. The marshal was shouting and screaming, saying "the Jewess has escaped, but she cannot have gone far, we will find her." And then he said "She told us that her husband has gone into the forest to gather wood, so he will soon return". The marshal was sure that he could pick us up, so immediately I begged the lady to send someone to Ardesio to warn my husband not to come back up, for the love of God, not to come back to Gromo, because they were looking for him. And in fact, she agreed to send her son, and I told him to look for my husband at the cobbler's signor Giudici, and at Mrs Zucchelli and Mrs Filisetti. The young boy found your father, who was hiding out near the farmers' houses on the road outside Ardesio. The young man came back and explained where your father was waiting for us, and I wanted to make our way down, to find him. We would have had to take the big road that went from Gromo to Ardesio, but naturally we were scared. In any case, we had already heard that the marshal was in the square awaiting the arrival of the bus, thinking that your father had been to Ardesio and would be returning to town that way. There were other police officers out and about, so we could not use that road. Amelia suggested preparing a cart full of hay, we could hide in it, and she would take us in that way as far as Ardesio. But her mother advised against it, saying that sometimes the Germans and the Fascists would pass that way, and if they saw a cart full of hay, they would bayonet it to see if there was anyone hidden inside.

So there was only one choice left open to us, to cross the mountain, and take the "mountain route" from Gromo to Ardesio. But everyone advised me against even this option, as it was a very very steep pass; it was known as the "scalecc" [local dialect for steps, in Italian "scalini" - English translator's note], and in fact not long before, a woman who had used that pass had slipped, and died from the fall. It was December first, and there had been some rain and some snow, so it was slippery - that pass was definitely not recommended. But on the other hand, there were no other option, so a young boy came, he would have been 13 or 14 at the time,

⁷ This is clearly a mistake: in fact, Ilona Ungar, who was born in 1885 in Budapest and died in Bergamo in 1954, would have been 59 years old in 1944.

called Battista: he was the son of another lady who lived in a farmhouse near to where we were living at the time. That lady - I think she was called Bigia, was the sister or sister-in-law of the person we were living with, and her son said "I will accompany the lady and the boy, I will take them to Ardesio". His mother and her sister did not want him to do so, they were scared, but the boy was sure of what he was doing, and so we went together, and he guided us across the mountain, and we came down the side in front of Ardesio.

We met up with your father in a stables. We spent the first night there, but the farmers who owned it were scared, as both their house and the stables were right on the road, and German soldiers would pass by all the time. They were right to be scared. So we took a path next to the road that went to Valcanale. Nearby was a path that took you up, there was a wood, and in the middle of it, was an old house and a stables, all run-down and dilapidated - an old lady lived there with her son and daughter. They no longer kept any animals in the stables, but there was hay, and so we could sleep there. The old lady let us stay the night. We spent a few days there, until one day your father went down into Ardesio as it was getting close to the time when I was due to give birth. So he went late one evening to the obstretician's house: he did not know him, so father explained the situation, and asked him if he would be able to come and help me if the case arose. He immediately said that he would like to, but he would be obliged to report the birth as well to the local council, which we could not allow since the authorities were not supposed to know of our presence [in the area]. But nonetheless, he said to call him when the time came, and he would decide what to do. In fact, the labour pains began on 2 January 1944, and it was already dark when father went to the call the obstretician: Liliana was born at 10pm. The obstretician did everything that needed to be done, and then he said "I have to go, I cannot and I do not want to report this birth. I will not report you to the authorities, but unfortunately I cannot be seen here again. I hope that everything goes well, but I cannot come back here again".

And that is how it went, I was OK for four or five days, and the little one was well too, but let's face it, I had given birth in what was practically a stables, and you can imagine the sanitation there, even if we had had no other choice. When the little one was ten days old, the old lady with the children, i.e. the owner of the place we were staying in, began to get scared. It is clear that in the town people were talking about reprisals, they were talking about Germans and Jews etc, and so they were scared, and made it clear that it would be better if we left. At first, we went back up to the same place we had been in before, after Valcanale there is a small suburb called Bani di Ardesio, and we went up there. But I don't remember any more why we stayed there - maybe we had not found any other rooms? So we came down, and decided to try on the other side of the road. So we crossed the main road very very early one morning when everyone was still asleep; my mother, your father, me with Liliana and you, we went to a small area past Ardesio, called Botto Basso, where there were two or three houses. One woman rented us out a room, and we slept there.

One day, a man came from Gromo, he was the brother-in-law of the son of the man who owned the house we had used, so we knew him and trusted him: he sold black-market soap, and was passing through the area selling. So your father, who was always thinking of business and work, spoke to him (he was called Trifola) and offered him some fabrics, the materials that we had received from the lady in Ardesio: since he was able to move about the area freely, he would be able to sell the fabric easier, and so he would make something and so would we. He took the goods and left. Afterwards, he made his way towards Gromo, and two days later, on the main road, he was stopped by the Carabinieri: they looked in his rucksack, and found the fabrics. When they asked him where they came from, he replied "They were given to me by a Jew in Botto Basso". So they took him to the barracks in Gromo, and the marshal said to him "Good. The Jews escaped me once, but not this time. However, you must stay here tonight - tomorrow morning we will go together to get these Jews, you will show us where they are, but for now you have to stay in the barracks". So this Trifola started screaming and shouting "I have to stay locked up inside here, just for these Jews, why should I have to? No way..."

There was a very old lady you went to the barracks in Gromo to do the cleaning, prepare the food etc, and she had heard Trifola screaming and shouting, and had understood what was happening. So she called her grandson and told him to run as fast as possible to Ardesio, to the cobbler's signor Giudici - he was well-known as an anti-Fascist - to warn him what was happening, that tomorrow morning they wanted to capture these Jews. This young boy went to Giudici, who said "OK, tell your grandmother that I don't know any Jews, I don't know them, I don't know where they are. In any case, thanks for the message".⁸

The boy left and came straight to Botto Basso to tell us what was happening and that we needed to escape. We didn't know where to go, but we knew we could not get far, it was March, Liliano was around three months old. There was a pass that went from Botto Basso to another small suburb called Piazzolo. To get to Piazzolo, there was in fact another [easier] road that passed Ardesio, but we took this other pass, moving between the stones

⁸ This information was given to Alice Redlich much later by Giudici himself.

that keep falling down the side of the mountain. It was a very bad road, but we managed to reach Piazzolo, someone met us there, and we started looking for somewhere to stay.

The people in Piazzolo were very kind, and later on we became good friends with them, but at that time, they were very surprised, and did not know what to do. There was a young girl maybe 13 or 14 years old who said "there is space at my house, would you like to go there? Come to my house". And someone said "but where is your mother? Will she agree to this?" "No, my mother is not there, she is in Clusone". "In which case", replied the other lady, "how can you take people back to your house without your mother's permission?" And the young girl replied "if my mother comes home, and hears that I refused to help someone who needed it, she will not be pleased. She may even smack me for it...". She was called Eliana, and her mother (who died only recently) was called Clorinda Fornoni. They had been working in France, and had only recently returned to Ardesio. In fact, when she came home, Clorinda welcomed us, and for some days, we stayed at her house. Later we went to another house, again in Piazzolo. We stayed at Piazzolo maybe two months, perhaps until June. One evening, a young man came to see us, the son of the cobbler Giudici, and he said that he had been sent by his father to tell us that there was a Fascist big-wig in the town, from the militia: he had gone to Giudici, and said "Listen, we know there those Jews are, and tomorrow morning, we are going to go and get them. But notwithstanding my [political] point of view, nor my Fascist ideals etc, going on the hunt for women and children disgusts me. So you go and warn them of that is about to happen". Giudici replied "But you're crazy, what Jews are you talking about? I don't know any, I don't know anything". And the Fascist replied "OK, you do well to reply like this, but I know that you are in contact with these Jews, so I will repeat my advice to you".

And Giudici continued as before: "You are mad, I don't know anything, OK?" As soon as the Fascist had gone, Giudici sent his son to warn us to leave. We really did not know where to go, since there was nowhere suitable further up the mountain. There were two stables towards the top, where farmers would take their animals during winter, in an area that was part of Ardesio. It had three or four houses, it was called Ave, and before you reached it, there were these two stables hidden between the mountain and the fields. So we went up to one of the stables. When I had left Gromo while I was pregnant, I had been able to walk freely, I could run even, and the other time when I had escaped from Botto Basso to go to Piazzolo I walked well, but this time, going from Piazzolo to Masù, I could barely put one foot in front of the other. It was called Masone, and they had to push me along, since I could not walk. One woman carried Lilliana, another helped your grandmother to walk, another carried the cot, and then me and your father would walk behind. We slept on the hay in that stable, in the section used for the cows. Obviously there was no toilet, there was a cistern for water, which would be boiled and filtered, but it was disgusting nonetheless. One time, I woke and said to my mother "I don't know whether to laugh or cry", as there was a patch of mushrooms where I had put my head. But in any case, there we were...

How long were you there?

We stayed there from May until October. The weather was not bad, but in July, I think, there was a round-up by the Germans. We had been warned that the Germans were moving up from Clusone and Ardesio, and that they had burnt down Valzurio: so we were scared that they would pass by the stables and see us there. Aside from us, there were two men who looked after the animals, and one of them came to us, and took me and your father right into the middle of the dry forest, there was a large hole between some of the rocks, and they helped us to hide in there. They covered the hole with leafy branches and other things, and told us to stay there all day. You looked just the same as the other children in the area: you had shorts on, you spoke Bergamasco [dialect] well, and you had your hair cropped like the other children. Lilliana was still small and they had placed her in the cot. A woman gave grandmother an old apron and put a handkerchief on her head, and told her not to say anything if the Germans came past, since she spoke Italian badly. And that is how we stayed all day. Finally, in the evening, we got word that the Germans had left the area.⁹

They had killed some people in Ardesio. It was very sad, very nasty. They had not managed to round-up the partisans [that they had been looking for], instead they had killed civilians, ordinary people. One boy that they killed, for example, had been up in the mountain looking after some deer, and he had returned [to the town]: when he saw all the people in the town, he had panicked and tried to run. He was maybe 13 or 14 years old, they opened fire and killed him. There was another boy who came from the mountains, another one who had nothing to do with the army or the partisans, he was a cousin of Vittorino Zucchelli. He came out of his house, I am not clear on the details, but he had passed [the Germans], they had grabbed him and thrown him into a canal; when he tried to climb out, putting his hands on the canal-bank, they had beat his hands with their boots until he fell back into the water. Then they opened fire and killed him too.

⁹ In fact, the Germans and the Fascists never made it that high up. They did pass from Ave, but from Masone, they were seen using a mountain pass a little way below.

Anyway, we stayed there until the weather turned, round about October. There were already several partisan units up in Ave, and in the surrounding area, also above Gromo. We were also scared of being mistaken for partisans, we were scared of the round-ups, we had felt safer in the houses in Piazzolo than up there in those stables. A dear friend of ours was captured, a young man from Pavia, he used the partisan code-name Peter, and one day he had to leave. He came to say goodbye, as he had to take messages to another partisan unit, and father had wished him a safe trip, and warned him "Be careful, be careful", and he had laughed "Of course, don't worry about me". We saw him again fifteen days later, in a coffin, and in a photograph. They had forced him to drink so much water that he had expanded, then they had killed him and there he was in a coffin. Someone had placed some rosary beads on his body, and had taken the photo that we saw: it was a very bad shock for us, he was twenty, twenty-one years old, full of principles, a good person, and he had met such a terrible end.¹⁰

Where was he a partisan?

At Ave.

But which group was in Ave?

There was a partisan group, led by a certain Lanfranchi, although I do not know if that was his real name or a partisan code-name. He was from Bergamo and he led the unit, he was from the valleys, and he had another codename in those days. Anyway, at that time, towards the end of October, Liliana became ill, she coughed constantly, and you could see that she was not well. Her first birthday was due on January 2. so we called the doctor in Ardesio, doctor Moioli, who knew our situation, and he came up to us: he looked the little one over, and said that it was nothing serious. He gave us a prescription, and had some medicines brought up to us, but the little one continued to get worse: within two or three days, I realised that she could no longer urinate and she had completely lost her voice: I was very concerned, and I sent someone to Ardesio to ask doctor Moioli to come up again. The person I had sent came back, saying that the doctor was not there, because he had gone over to the other side of the mountain, and that he would be back by evening. During the day, I kept sending someone down the mountain to Ardesio, two or three times, and I always got the same answer: the doctor had not returned yet. I could see the little one worsening again, so I finally I decided that I could not wait any longer, and I went down. You came with me, and we took the risk of going down, I went to the doctor's house, and his wife apologised, and said "look, my husband has still not returned, but I understand what you are saying, please do not worry. If you like, you can wait here".

I didn't want to bother her, so I went to the church to hide myself there, with you, we stayed there 30 minutes, maybe an hour, and then we went back to the doctor's. He had just arrived, he was eating, it was obvious that he was very hungry: I explained the situation, and he said "I am very tired, I have been out all day, and this evening I cannot make it up the mountain, but my first house call tomorrow morning will be to you". I did not want to insist, and we left, we came back to Piazzolo, we were both crying, and I did not want to say it, but I thought it "who knows if we will find the little one still alive?". Your father and my mother were there when we arrived, and they were distraught, the child's condition had visibly worsened.

We were all very upset that the doctor had not come. While I was explaining the discussion with the doctor to your father and my mother, we heard the dog bark. It was the doctor, he had come up after all: clearly, my description of Liliana's symptoms had concerned him, and with real self-sacrifice he had come up the mountain, despite his exhaustion. His diagnosis was [that the little one had] diphtheria.

He sent your father down straight away to Ardesio to get the serum, and then he said "but you cannot keep the child here, you have to take her to the hospital in Bergamo". I didn't know what to do, and said to him "but that is impossible". In the end, he said that that was the only way to save Liliano, so we decided to go. There was a woman who offered to go for us, but I declined her offer. I said "I want to go because if they start to ask questions etc, perhaps you will not know how to answer". And I wanted to go. So the next morning, we got the first train to Bergamo, I think we got on at Ponte Selva.

You and Liliana were alone?

No. there was a lady who accompanied us. I was afraid because the train had left from Clusone and so there was the chance that there would be someone on board who would recognise me, but in the event, no-one saw me. On arrival at Bergamo, we went to the hospital, and at the reception, someone asked to see my documents, and I said, "I don't have any documents, I have come from Rome, I was evacuated from Rome to

¹⁰ Clarification provided by Bepi Lanfranchi in his letter of 17 June 1987: "The person known as Peter died at Cornalba on 24 November 1944, and was called Callisto Sguazzi".

Milan. In Milan I was injured, and my child here is dying. Isn't that enough?". So they let me through, I handed the little one over, and while they were taking her to the infectious diseases ward, I spoke to a nurse, and I overheard one of the nuns who was saying to the lady who had accompanied us "but what did you bring her here for? To die? Because she is dying".

Then the nun asked the woman where we had come from, since she had to warn the council of the infection. So I said to the nun "no, you cannot warn the council." I explained the situation to her, and she wrote me out a small note, telling me to buy such-and-such medicines from the chemist, and how to use them. She explained it to the woman who was with us, she went home again via train.

Did you tell the truth to that nun?

Yes, we told her everything, and she said "right now, I cannot do anything, I will keep the child here, but I am not in charge here. It all depends on the head physician".

Sorry, you were telling me about the woman who then went home?

Yes, she went back up, she bought the things we needed, they told her what to do, and your grandmother then started treating Liliana. Then the nun said "look, I have to say something to the head physician, you will need to speak to him", he was doctor someone, I have forgotten his name now. So I got to give me his address, it was November 1st, a holiday; I went to the doctor's house, I remember the address even now, it was in via Torquato Tasso, where it meets via Pradello.¹¹ I told the truth to the doctor, and he started shouting and screaming. "How could dr Moioli do such a thing? He is the doctor in Ardesio: did he know the circumstances?" "Yes", I said, "of course". "So how could you take the child to hospital?" I replied "but he said that it was the only way to save her life, that is why we came here". He was not convinced of my story, so he asked me "do you know that house in Ardesio, that red house?" There were people in the red house, father had gone there to hide, the people there would listen to Radio London, so I said "yes, I know it. Mr such-and-such lives there". In effect he was scared as well. Then he said "look, I don't know anything, let's just leave it like this. Let the nun do what is needed".

That night, I slept in the town as well, it was already afternoon, and your father had once known the people who ran the Carminati bar, on the corner of via Pignolo and via San Giovanni, he had met them in Colarete. They had become friends, so he said to me "go and see if they can help you". I went to see them, and they said "yes, we have a room and you can sleep here, but listen, the barracks is nearby, there are always Germans and it's dangerous: but for one night, let's hope nothing happens". I spent the night there in great anxiety, and my stomach hurt. The next morning, I thanked them, and I went back to the hospital. I could not remember exactly where the infectious diseases ward was, so I asked a nurse: but he obviously was busy, because he said "sorry, I don't have time to explain". A German soldier passed by at that moment, so the nurse called his over, and said "you explain it to the lady". The German looked at me and asked "you, what are you looking for?" I was struck with terror, but I managed to explain in good Italian (I spoke it well by now) which ward I needed. And he said "why, why do you need that ward?"

I said "I have my daughter there". He replied, "ah, Italians, they are good doctors, good doctors, get better soon, get better soon". I thanked him and went to the ward, I went straight to Liliana's room, and I found the little bed where she had been put down empty. I was terrified, I thought the little one had died during the night. Then the nun arrived, and she smiled and said "don't worry, come with me". She showed me a room where Liliana had been put down by herself, a room with two beds. She said "we decided to put her here". I thanked her, and she explained that Liliana's condition had improved, and that I should not worry. She was very kind, and she asked me what I intended to do next, whether I would return to Ardesio or stay there. I told that I could not stay, as I had nowhere to sleep, so she pointed out that there was another bed in the room and that I could sleep there. And I thanked her for her kindness, and then I told her the truth - I only had a small amount of money, I thought I would be able to pay the third-class [hospital rate] for the child, but I could not afford a private room for both me and Liliana. She said "oh, don't worry about that. More importantly, what shall we do about food? So you have your ration book? No, I said, but I would sort myself out. She replied "no; even if we are always being checked by the Germans, we can always find some milk or soup, if that would be OK for you?" I thanked her, and I stayed there 13 days, and for 13 days, she looked after me, and gave me food. All the nuns did the same, and after 13 days, Liliana was free to go: I only paid a very small sum, and then we went home.

While I was there, one of the nuns said to me "Look, you are cooped up inside here day and night. Why don't you go get some fresh air? The little one is out of danger, you could go for a walk." So I went, and without

¹¹ This doctor was called either Panseri or Pansera.

knowing the way, I found myself in via XX Settembre. At the time, there was the big delicatessen, Ghisalberti, and I stopped to look in its windows. It was Saturday, and all the large dishes were out on display, raw fish etc. All of a sudden, a German officer stopped close to me, and he asked me in excellent Italian "madam, excuse me, could you do me a favour? I live here, I have a flat with a kitchen and a lady who prepares my meals, could you please tell me how to cook these fish?". I was very agitated, scared, and I knew nothing about preparing that type of fish. But I managed to say "Yes, of course, this fish is excellent", and I gave him a recipe for boiled fish, and then I invented another for cooking it in broth. He thanked me, wished me good day, and I quickly made my way back to the hospital, thinking "thank goodness it ended like that".

While we were going back to Ardesio, I was scared again in case someone going to Clusone should see us, but I was lucky again, no-one recognised me. That was January 1945, and it was clear that the Americans were advancing: they seemed stalled lower down in the Padana plains [the main plain in the Po Valley, stretching from the Alps to Emilia Romagna - English translator's note], but we hoped that they would be able to advance.

One day, maybe in February or March, I came down, I dared to come down to Ardesio, I don't remember why now, and on the way back, I met one of the farmers who lived in Ave, he was called Mosè, and he was with the partisans, that is he was helping them, he was already getting on, and he was helping the partisans. He was with a young man, maybe 28 or 30 years old, who walked with a bad limp, and Mosè said "Look, I found this one, he says he wants to join the partisans, but I don't know if I can trust him. Talk to him, he speaks German." So I said to him in German "What are you after?". And he was pleased and asked "are you German?". "no", I said, I am married to an Italian, but I grew up in Austria, I have come down here, and I speak a little German. So, what do you want?".



A fake identity card carried by Leiser Schwamenthal, made out to a certain Leone Perani, that he used in the last period of the war.

He told me that he was from Alsace and was a soldier. He had been injured, I don't know where, and he still have to serve in the army, and he was tired of it.

He continued: "I want to join the partisans, they told me that there are partisans round here". And I replied "I don't know anything about partisans. How come you have made your way here?" And he told me that he had escaped with another soldier, I don't remember where from, I think it may have been Verona.

Someone had given him civilian clothes, and sent him towards this place. He and his comrade had put on the clothes, and stashed their uniforms in their baggage, but at the station at Bergamo, they had been stopped by someone or other, and he had managed to escape. He didn't know what had happened to his colleague, he himself had gone to Clusone, and had them managed to make his way to Ardesio.

So Mosè asked me "do you think I can trust him?" I said, "I don't know. He has told me such-and-such". So Mosè said "look, I will take him to a certain place. Tell him not to be scared, we will help him". I explained this to the German, we left and on the road to Piazzolo we stopped so he could drink from a fountain. There was a small farmhouse, and the farmer came out, and asked if he was thirsty. With some embarrassment, he replied that he was hungry. So we all went in and the farmer's wife gave him some milk, polenta and cheese. He set about the food, and then he asked me "but that lady, does she know who I am?". "What do you mean?" I said. He repeated "does she know who I am?" "Yes", I said, "I know". "And still she gives me something to eat?" "Yes", I said, "because Italians are good people." in the end, someone took him up to Ave, and there someone else accompanied him into Switzerland and there he was imprisoned. We stayed at Piazzolo until two or three days before Liberation, and in fact, it seemed more dangerous there than in the town. In fact, two or three days after we came down, the war ended.

How did you hear about that?

Well, everyone knew, people were going about shouting "the war is over!". You can see it - by now, people were listening openly to the Allied radio broadcasts. There were officers, I don't know if they were British or American, who suddenly appeared out of nowhere, and so we knew that it was over. There is one other thing to add: in the last days of the war, a group of Russians arrived in Ardesio, they were on horse-back, and they were

asking if someone could take them over the mountains into Switzerland. Someone suggested that they speak to your father, and he spoke to them, he managed to make himself understood, and acted as interpreter for them. And the Italians said "yes, we will take them, we will help them across the border". And your father said "be careful, because they have said such-and-such. Don't trust them too much". And in fact, as they approached the border, the Russians killed the people accompanying them and then escaped across into Switzerland.

They killed the partisans?

Yes, they killed the partisans, I don't know how many there were of them...

When you left Austria, didn't you, or father or grandmother, ever think of going to Israel?

Israel was Palestine: it was not yet Israel, it was Palestine and under the British who did not let anyone in. That is a completely separate story, which I will tell you when you have time, a story of secret journeys. Many people travelled secretly, they were trying to sneak into Israel. There were boats that left from Yugoslavia, Greece or Albania, people would pay a fortune, and they used boats that were well insured, even if they were already quite delapidated. Or they would let people off near the coast, or they would just throw them into the sea and tell them to swim the final part of the journey to Israel.

There was a group of people with us at Ferramonti, who had been put on a boat I don't know where, maybe Yugoslavia, they were picked up by the Italians and taken to Benghazi; at first they were prisoners there, and then they were sent to Ferramonti, and they stayed there afterwards.

End