

## Life in the Refugee Camps 1948

By Anton Žakelj, translated and edited by John Žakelj

**Thursday, January 1, 1948, in the  
Liechtenstein refugee camp near Judenburg,  
Austria**

Last night I had a dream that we were moving to a new home. I had two full backpacks, two mesh bags full of green apples and various packages. But I didn't have anything for my wife. Our roommates Cene and Franc Kokelj said they had similar dreams.

I often have dreams about returning to our home in Slovenia, but they turn into nightmares. The partisans are chasing me, and I am trying to escape up through the overgrown ravine near our home.

**Saturday, January 3, 1948**

My wife Cilka, Franc Demšar and I took a train this morning to Feldkirchen to visit our friends Tomaž and Dora Pivk. (They were our neighbors in Žiri, but had to leave their homes like we did and are now living with relatives in Feldkirchen.) We arrived at their home at 8 p.m. and stayed up talking till midnight.

**Sunday, January 4, 1948**

Cilka and Dora went to church in Feldkirchen at 8 a.m., Tomaž and I at 10. Dora made us a wonderful dinner including soup, roast veal and potatoes.

Tomaž and Dora are not happy here. They don't know what will happen with them.

**Monday, January 5, 1948**

We got up at 5 a.m. to catch the train from Feldkirchen back to our camp. Dora gave us



*Our friends Tomaž Pivk and Dora Jereb at their wedding in the refugee camp near Judenburg, Austria on November 24, 1945. They eventually settled in California.*

some apples, canned plums and potica to take with us. After a long delay, the train left at 9:30 a.m. and we arrived back in Judenburg at 1 p.m.

### **Tuesday, January 6, 1948**

Today is the holy day of the Three Kings. Back home, this was one of the most important church holy days. Here it's not recognized as a state holiday.

In the evening, I went to the *Festsaal* to watch the operetta, "*Zum weissen Rössl*" ("At the White Pony"). It was poorly performed.

### **Wednesday, January 7, 1948**

Cilka continues to work on leather uppers for local shoemakers. Today I helped fashion and glue some of the pieces.

Our roommates Franc and Pavle had an argument about firewood.

### **Saturday, January 10, 1948**

Pavle is angry with Franc because he gives our firewood away to other people.

### **Sunday, January 11, 1948**

I sent Mr. Dellafiore a price list for our bobbin lace.

Cilka and I went for a walk along the Mura River, and then to a German movie called "Dangerous Summer." It was mediocre.

### **Tuesday, January 13, 1948**

Today I worked all day on the bookkeeping records for our lacemakers.

### **Friday, January 16, 1948**

Frank Mlinar arrived on a visit from St.

Kanzion.

### **Sunday, January 25, 1948**

Cilka and I watched a nearby ski jumping competition this afternoon. The best jump was 69 yards.

### **Sunday, February 1, 1948**

Cilka and I went for a walk along the Mura River today. It was a nice day, but I was in a bad mood. I don't have a job. Our sales of bobbin lace are not going well. I'm bored. We don't know if we can ever go back home, or where we will find a home.

For a while, I was making brushes out of larch branches (to sell to nearby villagers), but that hasn't been going well either. People don't have money to buy things. I've tried to learn to make bobbin lace myself, but I don't see well enough. Why didn't I take the camp administration job that the IRO (International Refugee Organization) offered me last December? Cilka advised against it: "Don't get involved in the administration of the camp - they'll blame you for everything!"

### **Monday, February 2, 1948**

Cilka and I walked to Weisskirchen and sold some bobbin lace for 42 Schillings and 2 loaves of bread. Prices have been falling lately - a pound of butter costs about 50 Schillings, one egg costs 3 Schillings, a loaf of rye bread - 8 Schillings.

### **Wednesday, February 4, 1948**

The residents of the camp are maintaining a round-the-clock prayer vigil in the camp chapel, praying for a resolution of our situation. Cilka took her turn from 9 - 10 p.m., I did 5:30 - 6:30.

I worked for 2 periods of 2 hours each today,

making bobbin lace until my eyes gave out. I did about 600 knots per hour, compared to the 1,000 that a good lacemaker would make. Meanwhile, Cilka sewed leather for a nearby shoemaker.

#### **Friday, February 6, 1948**

I'm feeling sick due to stomach ulcers.

#### **Saturday, February 7, 1948**

This evening, Franc Demšar brought his radio to our room. He's been taking it around to different barracks. He bought it 3 months ago - it's a good radio. People tell me that the radio my brother left with me is now worth about 3,000 Schillings. My radio has a better sound, but Franc's is better at picking up the short waves.

#### **Sunday, February 8, 1948**

This evening, the camp's residents put on a funny play called "15th Street." It was very entertaining!

#### **Monday, February 9, 1948**

Last night, a storm damaged our roofs.

#### **Friday, February 13, 1948**

Jernej Vrhovšek and his wife left for Canada.

#### **Sunday, February 15, 1948**

I went to Mass at 6 a.m., and then tried cooking some goulash in our room. Unfortunately, I burned it badly.

#### **Wednesday, February 18, 1948**

Since Cilka is pregnant, she went to the doctor to ask for a supplemental food ration card. The doctor performed a detailed exam and confirmed that she is 3 months pregnant. But he denied her request, since supplemental rations are not granted until a woman is 4 months pregnant.

I cut firewood to heat our barracks.

#### **Thursday, February 19, 1948**

Cilka's brother-in-law Mire heard that he is on a list of criminals (maybe due to his black marketeering) and he may be sent to Germany.



*The chapel in the refugee camp near Trofaiach. Sometimes we took turns praying so we could maintain a constant prayer vigil, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We prayed for either a safe return to our own homes in Slovenia, or a new home where we could be safe and free. This chapel was made by the refugees. Rev. Malavašič installed the electrical wiring for the lights. Frank Rihtar made the benches.*

It's cold outside - as low as 0°F. Last night, we continued our prayer vigil in the camp chapel.

#### **Friday, February 20, 1948**

I helped Cilka prepare leather pieces for the shoemaker she works with.

Franc Demšar was fixing his radio. It was making terrible whistling noises.

We hear that communists are taking over the government in Czechoslovakia. This means it's more likely the communists will stay in power in Yugoslavia, which means it's less likely we will ever be able to return home.

#### **Monday, March 1, 1948**

I am being tormented by back pain. I tried heating my back with a warm iron but it didn't help much.

#### **Tuesday, March 2, 1948**

Cilka finally received a supplemental food ration card, and I received one as well, for my work with bobbin lace and other things. Finally we are receiving reasonable amounts of butter, meat, bread and polenta. Cilka also gets a pint of milk each day, some chocolate and other things. All this is free, at least for this month. That's wonderful because people are no longer buying much of our bobbin lace or our homemade brushes.

#### **Wednesday, March 3, 1948**

Mire was summoned to a meeting with a British officer, who informed him that he (Mire) may be sent back to Slovenia, and that he should try to emigrate to England before that happens. Four of our other men were told the same thing. They're not sure what to do.

#### **Thursday, March 4, 1948**

This evening, I attended a meeting of the leaders from each barracks. The camp director read a list of 48 refugees, including myself, who have been approved for construction jobs in Canada. The men will have to leave first, and the families will be allowed to join them later. All the married men said they will refuse to leave without their families. After the meeting we prayed in the chapel till midnight.

#### **Friday, March 5, 1948**

A number of us went to the IRO offices, where we were informed that we will lose our rights to food and lodging if we don't sign forms agreeing to have our men move to Canada without their families. We felt we had no choice but to sign.

#### **Sunday, March 7, 1948**

We maintained our prayer vigil in the camp chapel.

This afternoon, Cilka and I went for a walk and picked some dandelion leaves for salad.

#### **Tuesday, March 9, 1948**

I got up at 3:45 a.m. and got ready to take a train to Wolfsberg to sell bobbin lace there. I reached Wolfsberg at 7:30 a.m. and visited a number of stores, but sold very little lace. Even people who had placed orders didn't want to pay for their orders, and I could not get any new orders. I had lunch in a restaurant and tried selling lace to the diners, but couldn't sell anything there either. Hopeless!

At 5:50 p.m. I took the train to Weisskirchen and then walked about 2 miles from there back to our camp.

#### **Wednesday, March 10, 1948**



Cilka and I went to photographer Kuballe to have our picture taken, and then to the city government office to apply for a marriage license. (We heard that some countries, such as the United States, might not accept our church marriage, and that we need to have a civil marriage.) We had to provide them with lots of documents and 42 Schillings.

#### **Thursday, March 11, 1948**

This evening, we had special prayers for our bishop Rožman and for Pope Pius XII.

#### **Friday, March 12, 1948**

Some of our roommates have been playing cards every evening, with frequent loud arguments.

We got our first lettuce; Cilka loves it, I don't.

#### **Saturday, March 13, 1948**

Our roommates Janko and Franc Demšar had an argument about boots under their beds. I was afraid they would start hitting each other, but the others intervened.

#### **Sunday, March 14, 1948**

Cilka and I went to the Leoben hospital to visit our friend Rudolf Primožič, who has been in the hospital for 8 weeks. He still hopes his ulcers will get better without an operation.

#### **Monday, March 15, 1948**

This morning, all the wives were summoned to the camp office to sign forms allowing their husbands to emigrate to Canada without them. Most of them, including Cilka, refused to sign the form. Instead, she and I signed a form saying that we would move if we can go together.

#### **Tuesday, March 16, 1948**

At 5 a.m., all the men in our barracks were taken to the IRO commission in the city of Gradec (Graz), where some of us were again told that we will have to emigrate to Canada without our families. They actually never got to me, maybe because I'm too weak and sickly for heavy construction labor. They examined some of the other men as if they were horses at the county fair: they checked their teeth, feet, everything.

Jernej Zupan and I used the occasion to walk around the city, see the sights and try selling some bobbin lace. We returned to the camp at 8:30 p.m.. Cilka was disappointed that I didn't sell any lace.

#### **Wednesday, March 17, 1948**

Some of our men stayed in Gradec (Graz) overnight and returned today. They said they saw corruption throughout the IRO offices. Bribes often resulted in special treatment.

Some of the men wanted to get approval to emigrate to Canada and were worried they wouldn't get it. Cene Kokelj told them he was 4 years younger than his real age. (Many years later, this lie meant he had to work 4 years longer, till age 69, to retire.)

#### **Saturday, March 20, 1948**

Many of the men in our camp are going to spiritual training every day from 5:30 - 7 p.m.

#### **Sunday, March 21, 1948**

This morning we went to Mass at 6 and again at 8. In the afternoon, Cilka went picking dandelion leaves. In the evening, we went to a play called "The Young Songstress." Two parts were very bad, and three parts good.

We're all in a bad mood because we haven't been able to sell our goods and we're running out of money.

### **Monday, March 22, 1948**

We hear over the radio that the U.S., Britain and France are negotiating about the future of Trieste, which includes many Slovenians. (Trieste was part of Slovenia/Austria before 1918, was captured by Italy in 1918 and by Yugoslavia in 1945, and has been under United Nations control since then.)

### **Tuesday, March 23, 1948**

I completed an inventory of our bobbin lace. We have 432 pieces worth 8,500 Schillings, but we can't find buyers.

### **Wednesday, March 24, 1948**

The camp leadership has arranged for agrarian reform in our camp! We now have 20 square meters in front of our barracks designated for a garden. However, we are also being told that we will soon have to move to the Trofaiach camp about 20 miles away. Why should we plant anything?

### **Thursday, March 25, 1948**

This morning, a Russian emigrant named George Kilin tried to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge nearby, but he survived because he landed on a telephone wire. He said, next time, he will take a closer look before he jumps.

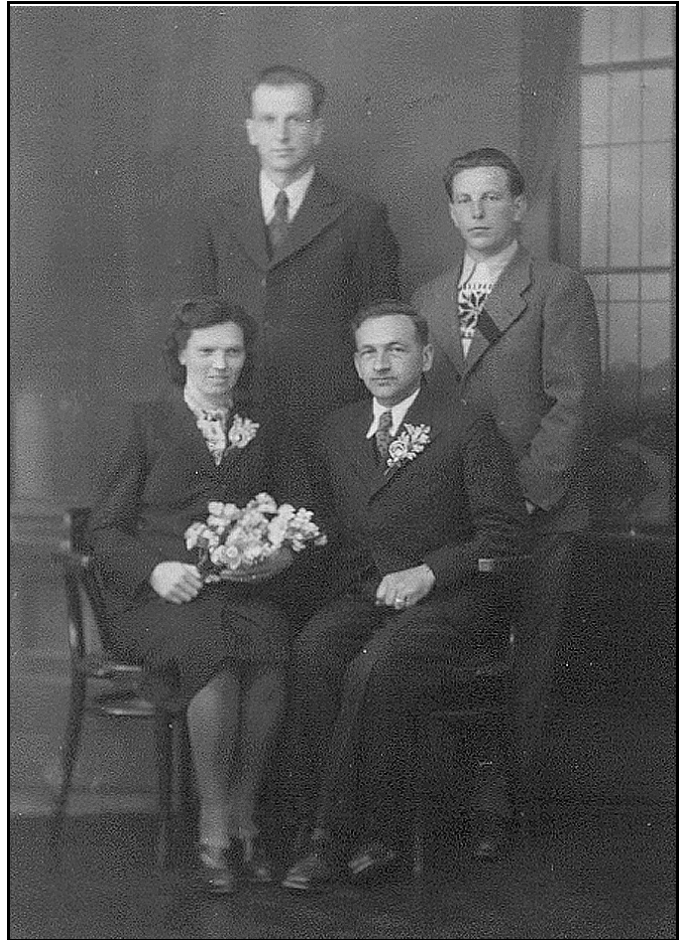
I went to the city offices and learned that Cilka and I have been approved for a civil marriage.

### **Saturday, March 27, 1948**

I bought a tie for 29 Schillings and a liter of wine for 16 Schillings. Then Cilka and I, together with our witnesses Mire Kolenc and Franc Kokelj, went to the city offices for our civil marriage. It's a year and a half since our

church marriage, but we were told that some countries require proof of a civil marriage before we will be allowed to emigrate there.

The wedding began exactly at 9:45 a.m. in a nice hall. There was an organ playing, and then the official (an old man named Gelter) preached to us about marriage. He acted so much like a priest that we all thought he looked very silly



*Anton and Cilka Žakelj were married in a refugee camp chapel on October 22, 1946. This picture is from their second wedding, on March 27, 1948 in the Judenburg city hall. They were told that a civil ceremony was required for immigration to certain countries. Standing behind them are their witnesses, Franc Kokelj and Mire Kolenc. Everyone is trying to look serious. (Photo by Rupert Kuballe.)*

and funny. I needed all my willpower to keep from bursting out laughing. Mire and Franc could see that I was trying to hold it back and they were just waiting to see me start laughing. Cilka thought it was all very funny, too. But we got past that, and as we listened to the old man preach, tears came to our eyes. Mr. Gelter really had some beautiful advice and heartfelt wishes for us.

After the ceremony, we signed the register and received our official papers. I gave Mr. Gelter an envelope with 20 Schillings, and I gave two pieces of lace to the secretary and 10 Schillings to the organist. We all left in a happy mood, visited Kuballe the photographer, and arrived back at our barracks by 11 a.m. Since Cilka and I have now been married twice, our marriage should certainly last (57 years later, I can say that it worked!)

At 1 p.m., we had a wedding feast in our room: soup, roasted potatoes and chicken, beets, wine, potica and cookies. Then Cilka and I went picking dandelion leaves.

I received letters from my father and sister Julka in Slovenia that our brother Janez was called up for military service by the communist government, despite having served in the military during the war. And our brother Stanko (who is a priest) is in a communist prison again, without any specific charges against him.

The camp gave us some extra food so we will be able to cook a proper Easter dinner tomorrow. We are looking forward to it!

In the evening, we celebrated Christ's resurrection with a solemn procession through the camp. I helped carry the baldachin (the canopy over the priest carrying the Eucharist). The camp residents said our ceremony was more beautiful than the one in the city.

#### **Easter Sunday, March 28, 1948**

We went to Mass in the camp chapel at 6 a.m, and then again at 10 a.m. in Murdorf. Then we attended a meeting regarding plans to close the camp and move everyone to a new location. It's not clear why we have to move. We are very worried that conditions in the new location will be worse. Everyone signed a petition asking permission to stay here. But it looks like it won't do any good.

In the evening, Mire, Cene, Franc (Kokelj) and I went to a nearby tavern to celebrate Easter. We drank 2 liters of wine at 38 Schillings each. People are feeling more hopeful these days. We no longer have such terrible shortages of food and clothing, and the political news gives us hope that we will find permanent homes somewhere.

#### **Tuesday, March 30, 1948**

The elected leadership of each of the three refugee camps in our area sent telegrams to the British commandant, the pope, the IRO and others, asking that we be allowed to stay here.

#### **Thursday, April 1, 1948**

Despite our protests, all our things are being moved to the Trofaiach camp about 20 miles away. The IRO is saying we can stay here, but we will be on our own, without food or other support. Reluctantly, we started packing and we prayed. Twelve trucks left in the morning from one of the other camps in the area, and another 17 in the afternoon.

#### **Friday, April 2, 1948**

I mailed a 20 pound package to my family in Slovenia. I know they still have shortages there.

Cilka has been sewing shoes for Russheim, a local shoemaker. He wants us to stay, but he can't pay enough for us to survive here.

First they told us our camp will move next Tuesday, now it's been delayed to Wednesday.

### **Sunday, April 4, 1948**

At 11 a.m., Cilka and I went to say a sad farewell to Russheim, the local shoemaker who has been providing Cilka with some paid work during our time here in Judenburg. He wrote a nice letter of recommendation for Cilka, to help her get work in our new location. Russheim's wife hugged Cilka, cried and could not let her go.

This afternoon, Cilka and I picked dandelion leaves and went for a walk. We found a farmer who was willing to give us 2 pounds of bacon in exchange for a pair of shoes we had made.

In the evening, the children in the camp put on a play called "Mother's Tears." Then we had a beautiful farewell ceremony in the camp chapel. The ceremony gave us comfort and hope that we will survive.

We have lived in barracks #27 in camp Liechtenstein for almost three years. During that time, we have experienced many sad times as well as happy times. Some people think that refugees in camps lose their morals, but we have lived a more "Christian" life here than we did back home. I'm not saying that we haven't had any cases of marital infidelity at all. It's been especially difficult for some of the men who had to leave Slovenia without their wives, and who have not seen them for many years. But, considering the fact that so many of us are healthy young men and women, we have behaved very honorably. We've prayed a lot and we've had a lot of innocent fun. And, despite the crowded conditions, we've gotten along reasonably well.

### **Monday, April 5, 1948**

Now they're telling us we will move tomorrow.

We have no idea what to expect at the new camp, so we are packing everything we have, including our firewood. We took down the boards that walled off a corner of our barracks for me and Cilka. We are also taking apart beds, furniture and electrical wiring that we had set up in our barracks during the past two years. (Later, we learned that we didn't need to pack all those things.)

### **Tuesday, April 6, 1948**

I got up at 4 a.m. and finished last minute preparations for our move. By the afternoon, it started raining and we were still waiting for the trucks. The drivers said they wouldn't do any more trips, so we took everything back into our barracks. We set up the stove again and connected the electrical wires. We didn't put the beds back together, so we slept on the floor.

### **Wednesday, April 7, 1948**

Everyone got up at 4:30 a.m., but the trucks didn't arrive till 7. Some people paid the truck drivers to take them first (thinking that this would allow them to choose the best rooms in the new camp). Mire paid a driver around 10 a.m., and we finally got onto a truck around noon. After an hour's drive across some poor mountain roads we reached our destination - Trofaiach. During the trip, I got so sick that I felt half-dead.

At the new camp, Cilka and I were assigned to a room with two other families, who were already there. They were very unfriendly to us and I had to use some strong words to convince them to let us have a corner that was just big enough for a small bed for the two of us. They each have their own bed, and they are holding a bed open for a friend who may be returning. I was so angry: these are devout, religious people, but they are willing to make us sleep outside just so they can have a room all to themselves. I am trying to understand why they are so unfriendly

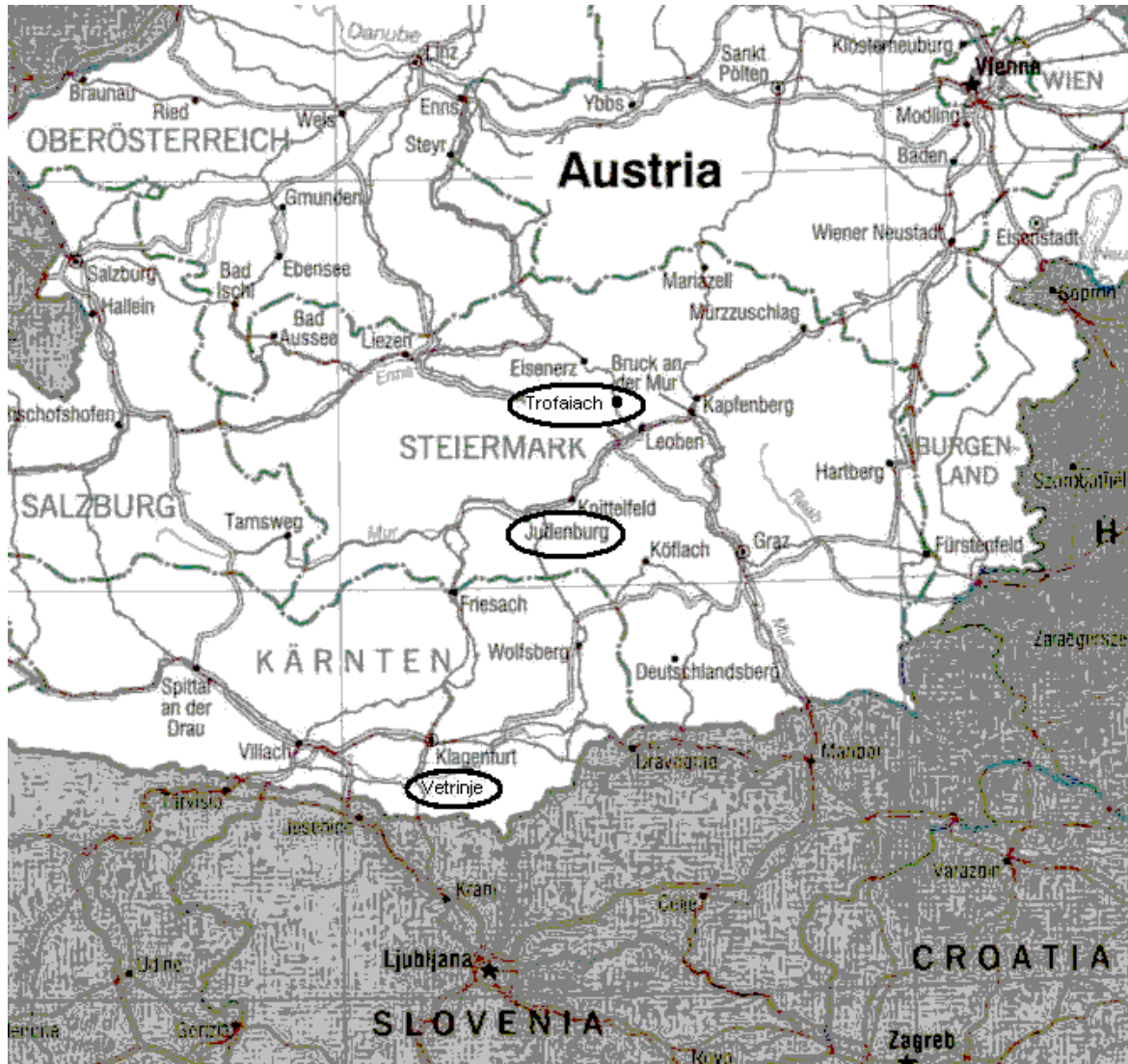
to us. Are they blaming me for not getting them a supplemental ration card in our previous camp? (Later I learned that they had received some inaccurate information about us. We corrected that and then we became good friends.)

Some of our previous roommates have it even worse than we do. The Kokelj brothers and Vinko Kržišnik are assigned to upper bunk beds

with no place to put their things. Mire Kolenc and Janko Demšar are assigned to a barracks with people from Št. Jošt; and Karl Erznožnik and his family are assigned to live with the Jesenko family.

**Thursday, April 8, 1948**

I got up at 7. It was a nice day outside. In the morning, I set up some shelves and exchanged



*This map shows how we were moved from one refugee camp to another, starting with Vetrinje on May 10, 1945, to a camp named Liechtenstein, near the city of Judenburg, on June 29, 1945, and then to Trofaiach on April 7, 1948.*

our small bed for a larger one from Mire. Friends invited us to sleep in their room, but I declined since I heard all the arrangements will change again in a week. I gave Karl some of our boards so he could create some privacy for his family in Jesenko's room. He agreed to take care of Cilka's bicycle, since we do not have space for it in our room.

For breakfast and dinner, they gave us coffee, and for lunch, pea soup and a little bread. You can get milk and white bread if you have a doctor's prescription.

In the afternoon, Mire, Cilka and I went for a long walk. We found a shoemaker named Franz Čopi - a Slovenian! His father came from Slovenia but he doesn't know Slovenian himself. We talked to him in German. He invited Cilka to sew leather for him and said he could use an assistant.

I like the surroundings here better than our previous camp. The spruce woods just behind the camp are especially beautiful. But the farmers seem less friendly.

#### **Friday, April 9, 1948**

At 6:30 a.m., we went to Mass in the camp chapel. The chapel has no windows and the floor is a cold concrete.

At 9 a.m., Cilka, Karl and I walked to town and looked at the market and the stores. The market is a good half hour's walk from the camp. The storekeepers seem friendlier than the ones in Judenburg.

It's cold - we can see new snow up in the mountains.

#### **Sunday, April 11, 1948**

After Mass, I wrote letters to my sister Julka in Slovenia, and to our friends Silva and Tomaž.

In the afternoon we watched a soccer game. It's very cold!

#### **Tuesday, April 13, 1948**

I signed up 8 women to make bobbin lace, but I don't know whether we will have any customers.

I learned that I can get some ration cards for milk in the nearby village of Gai. Milk is good for Cilka's pregnancy, and it helps soothe my ulcers.

#### **Friday, April 16, 1948**

Although I obtained ration cards for milk two days ago, I was not able to find an open store that would take them until today. Finally, I got 2 liters.

We had our first meeting of craftspeople in this camp, but couldn't agree on anything. We agreed to meet again next Monday.

The camp administrator in charge of refugee labor assignments is a British sergeant, a fat man named McKeon. He called a meeting of the refugee men today and assigned 10 of us (including myself) to pound fenceposts along the camp's roads. We didn't work very long.

The men from our village who applied to emigrate to Canada received word from the immigration commission that they were approved, except Franc Demšar and Pavle Kokelj. Both of them appealed and Franc received approval, but Pavle did not. They said Pavle was turned down because he has a wife and child, and because he tried to bribe the commission. He was the one that most wanted to go to Canada and was willing to pay anything.

#### **Saturday, April 17, 1948**

Karl Erznožnik applied to go to Chile. Cilka and I are worried we may be the only ones left. The fat man says most of the refugees will leave in 3 months, and the rest will be moved to Germany.

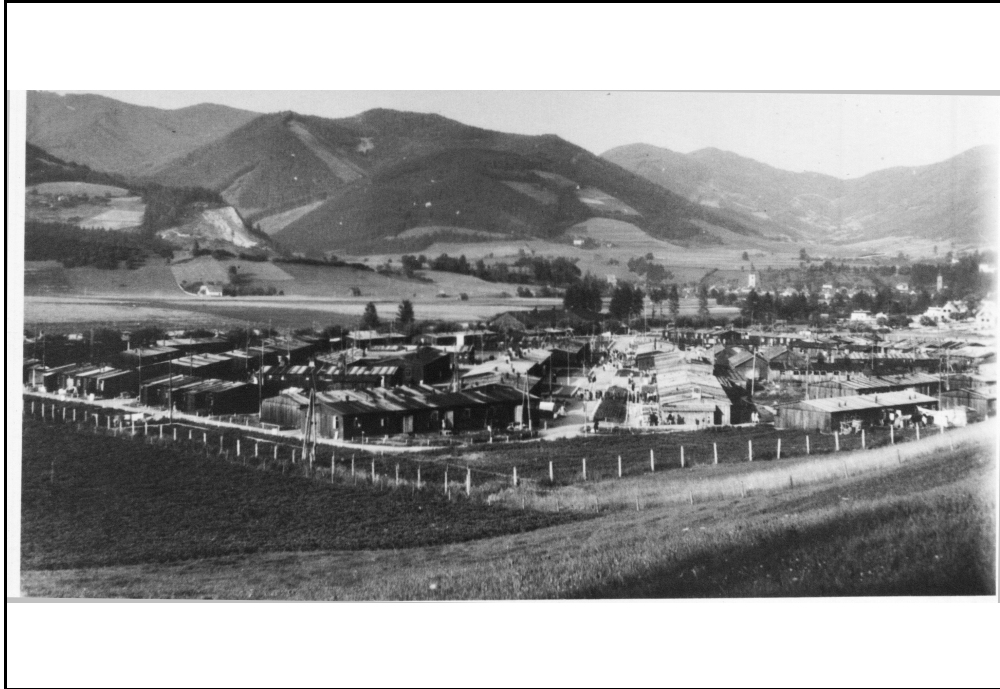
Cilka finished sewing a pair of shoes for the nearby shoemaker Čopi. He said, "This woman sews beautifully! She will be like gold for a master shoemaker!" But he doesn't want my help, since I don't like sewing. He said he would get us some milk, but he hasn't yet.

### **Sunday, April 18, 1948**

Last night, we moved our clocks one hour ahead.

Rev. Malavašič has arranged the camp chapel to be as much as possible like the chapel we had in the previous camp. It looks good, but I can't stand the cold cement floor.

Cilka and I went to shoemaker Čopi again. He was working (on a Sunday!). This time he gave us some milk. He said he will have work for Cilka from time to time, so she can earn a little extra income. Then Cilka and I went for a walk in the woods and picked some dandelion leaves.



*The Trofaiach refugee camp, located near the city of Leoben, about 50 miles southwest of Vienna, Austria, in 1948. Before it became a camp for up to 4,000 refugees, it was used to house military troops. Note the fenceposts, many of which were pounded in by the author.*

### **Monday, April 19, 1948**

All day I pounded fenceposts with Levičar. McKeon said I could continue this type of work for the camp, but the pay would be very low, barely enough to buy a few loaves of bread each month. I said I will see how the crafts work goes. If that doesn't work out, I will try to get a job in the woods with a logging crew.

### **Tuesday, April 20, 1948**

Pavle Kokelj took a train to Gradec (Graz) because someone there promised to help him get to Canada, but it didn't do any good.

Our roommates have become friendlier.

### **Wednesday, April 21, 1948**

This morning, I walked into town to get some milk, and then I worked with the women in the gardens all day.

I received an invitation to apply for Canadian immigration, but I don't think they will accept me once they learn that Cilka is pregnant and I have ulcers and other health problems. I was also invited to a doctor's exam to see if I qualify for a ration of white bread.

Many of our refugees now have jobs with the railroad in the city of Leoben, or in the nearby woods.

#### **Thursday, April 22, 1948**

I've been feeling sick - headaches, no energy, can't sleep. I waited two hours to see a doctor. He said I will need to go to the hospital in Leoben for an X-ray.



*This was the train that took the first group of refugees from our camp to the ship bound for Canada. Looking out from the train window are Vinko Kržišnik and an unidentified man, and holding on outside, Pavle Čebašek. Photo by ?, April 26, 1948.*

#### **Friday, April 23, 1948**

Four other people were taken to Leoben for X-rays. They told me I will need to wait.

Cilka and I met with a Canadian immigration commission. They asked if we know how to work on a farm. "No." Do we speak English? "A little." Sometimes they spoke so quietly I couldn't hear them. Finally, they said, "Maybe in the future we'll need such workers."

We hear rumors that 4,500 Slovenians will be emigrating to Argentina.

#### **Sunday, April 25, 1948**

Today we went to a special Mass for fellow

refugees who will be leaving tomorrow for Canada. Even Mire went to Holy Communion.

Cilka baked cookies all day for the "Canadians." Many of our closest friends will be leaving tomorrow. They are saying goodbye to their women today. Everyone is sad.

I went to the clinic to see Dr. Kozin. I sold him 32 pieces of lace for 1,400 Schillings. Now I can pay my debts and start working again.

#### **Monday, April 26, 1948**

There was a big storm last night. Cilka got up at 4:30 a.m. to make polenta for her brother-in-



law, Mire Kolenc, who was among those leaving for Canada today.

The “Canadians” had to turn in their blankets at 4 a.m. At 6:30 a.m, it was time for them to get on trucks for the ride to the train station in nearby Leoben. Those leaving included Mire Kolenc, Franc and Janko Demšar, Franc and Cene Kokelj, and Vinko Kržišnik. Each one was allowed to take 200 pounds of luggage. Cene even took his bicycle with him. It was very hard for all of them, but especially for Mire, who has a wife and two children back in Žiri. He’s convinced that he will probably never see his family again. Even Franc Kokelj cried. These are our closest friends, all people from our home village, people that we have lived with (usually in the same room!) for the past 3 years. Through all the adversities of these years, we supported each other. We shared our sorrows, hopes and joys (including some weddings), and now we will probably never see each other again.

I knew this would be hard for Mire, so I had bought him a bottle of rum, which I gave to him this morning. He appreciated it.

Soon after they left, I noticed that they had forgotten their food ration cards. I rode my bicycle to the train station and made it there before the train left. At the station, I noticed that it was a special train with the sign “I.R.O. Austria.” The train had 11 cars, including 7 Pullman cars. Each car had about 60 men, all totaled about 400 people. In one of the cars I also saw Jožica Žonta from the Špittal camp. Vinko gave me 20 Schillings and asked me to give them to a priest for some Masses. Some young students from Gradec (Graz) sang, danced and played their instruments. Everyone else was sad and quiet.

We said many more farewells until 9:30, when the train left, on its way to Salzburg and

beyond. They say everyone will board a ship in Bremen in 3 days.

As we were saying our final farewells, we cursed the people who had brought so much suffering to this world.

During the past week, the “Canadians” gave away many of the things they had accumulated which they could not take with them now. Each of them sent packages to their families in Slovenia. After they left, there were still 5 packages for me to take to the post office, including one for Vinko’s mother and one for Mire’s wife and children. They also left a number of things for me and Cilka - polenta,



*Mire Kolenc, 1948. (Photo by Rupert Kuballe.)*

macaroni, potatoes, flour, coffee and old torn shirts. The torn shirts will be very useful as diapers when our baby arrives!

(Editor's note: In order to help our readers understand the Canadian immigration situation at that time, we provide the following quotes from p. 190 of Mark Wyman's book, "DPs, Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951.")

*... the possibility of emigrating to Canada still seemed remote in mid-1946. But changes were occurring in Canadian public opinion, as the long-feared depression turned instead into an economic boom ... Despite French Canada's opposition, Canadian leaders were turning toward the DPs by the fall of 1946 as the best solution for the nation's worsening labor shortages. ... By March 1947 two Canadian resettlement teams were operating in the (refugee) camps. The first DPs sailed for Canada on 4 April 1947, beginning a stream that would reach flood tide at various times over the following five years. Lumbering operations, sugar beet farms, mines, railroads, and other major employers rushed to fill their labor needs with refugees. ...*

*But ...most of the early nations recruiting DPs were taking mainly the young, single and strong. ... Many DPs were rejected as too old or too weak; others were unacceptable because of health problems or dependents or both.*

#### **Tuesday, April 27, 1948**

Karl invited me to come work with the logging crew in the woods. I would like to go, but I get motion sickness riding across the mountain roads.

#### **Wednesday, April 28, 1948**

I worked in the camp all day, pounding fenceposts. The work is tiring, but listening to the other workers gossiping is worse.

I received postcards from Janko, Cene and Vinko, which they sent when the IRO train stopped in Salzburg.

#### **Thursday, April 29, 1948**

I pounded fenceposts again. My arms hurt. Everyone says I should take more breaks, but I can't just stand around.

Our lunch included soup with some meat, and plenty of macaroni with cheese. Very good!

McKeon, (a camp administrator) announced that every nationality will have to do camp work 2 days a week: the Slovenians get Wednesdays and Saturdays from 8 - 11 a.m and 2 - 5 p.m., including all women age 16 - 55, except for women with children under 3.

Each evening, Cilka and I go visit Karl Erznožnik, his wife Mici and baby daughter Jolanda, and the Jesenko family with their 11 children. (This was a different Jesenko family from the one on Cleveland's Westside. Because of the large number of children, this family had many problems getting any country to accept them for immigration. Eventually the family had to be split up, with some of them staying in Austria and some going to other countries, including Australia.)

#### **Saturday, May 1, 1948**

This evening, we attended the first day of May devotions to Mary. The camp chapel was beautifully decorated with 100 lights.

#### **Sunday, May 2, 1948**

Today was Easter for the Greek Catholics. They celebrated the "Alleluia" in the camp chapel from 5 - 7 a.m.

I went for a walk with Cilka, but I was bored most of the day.

### **Monday, May 3, 1948**

Levičar and I worked all day in the camp, including McKeon's garden. McKeon gave us a nice lunch: bread with butter and marmalade, tea with milk, and cigarettes. McKeon was just a farm hand in Scotland, but here he's the "boss." He lives with a Hungarian woman, and they have a child.

Fellow refugee Ivan Oven had to leave the camp by 5 p.m. today because of his sharp words against the British last month. He led our protest against the forced move from Judenburg to Trofaiach. (I don't know where he went.)

Tone Babnik has also been told he has to leave the camp, but he hasn't left yet because he can't find any place else to live.

### **Tuesday, May 4, 1948**

This morning, I felt a sharp pain in my back and I couldn't make it go away. I must have injured something when I was working yesterday.

The man who was distributing mail in the camp lost his job. I hear it was because he was removing too many stamps from the letters. If I felt better, I would try to get that job. It's not a paid job, but you can get a decent income from the tips that people give you.

### **Wednesday, May 5, 1948**

My back is a little better. Cilka is sewing shoe leather for Čopi.

### **Thursday, May 6, 1948**

Today was the holy day of the Ascension of our Lord. I went to Mass at 8 a.m., and then read the "Morning News" most of the day. The "Morning News" is in English and I don't understand it all, but it's good practice for me.

I received a letter from the men who left our camp for Canada. They wrote from Diepholz in Germany. They arrived there after being on the train for 35 hours. They had to wait in Diepholz for a week and were told they would be going to Bremen or Hamburg on May 4 to board the ship for Canada.

### **Friday, May 7, 1948**

My back still hurts, but I did camp work with Levičar again. The others have received extra food rations as heavy laborers and 100 Schillings each, but I haven't received anything. I think McKeon hates me because I refused to give him some lace for his "wife."

### **Saturday, May 8, 1948**

I attended a meeting with Major Leadbetter, the camp director, regarding refugee handicrafts. The major agreed that I could continue selling lace and employing lacemakers as I did in Judenburg. I loaned the major 15 pieces of bobbin lace worth 700 Schillings to display as samples in his office.

Seven lacemakers have agreed to continue working with me. One of them is Mrs. Spreitzer, who didn't know how to make bobbin lace until she attended classes in our previous camp. I will try this for a month, but I don't think we will make much money. Nobody wants to buy lace anymore. I'll have to find a job that pays more.

Karl says I should go work with him in the woods, cutting lumber. I don't think my health is good enough for that.

### **Sunday, May 9, 1948**

Today is the third anniversary of the day we left Slovenia and became refugees. How much longer?

A fellow refugee, Ivan Loeske, age 75, died this morning. The official cause is a heart attack, but people say he was poisoned.

I wrote a letter to my mother in Slovenia for her name day, and a letter to Mire's sponsor in Canada (hopefully, Mire will have arrived there by the time my letter arrives.)

### **Wednesday, May 12, 1948**

Karl and I got a ride this morning to the nearby city of Leoben. Karl bought a radio - it seemed very expensive. It's small, works on all wave lengths and all voltages. He doesn't know much German, so he appreciated my help with the shopping.

We walked around the city. Everywhere we went, I tried selling bobbin lace, but nobody wanted to buy. People don't have money for this kind of luxury!

I took a package to the post office for Cilka's sister Manica in Slovenia. The package included a coat we got from our friend Silva and some money.

I haven't received any mail from Slovenia for over a month.

At 4 p.m., we went to the funeral for Mr. Loeske.

### **Thursday, May 13, 1948**

I drew new designs for bobbin lace. Maybe people would buy something different.

### **Friday, May 14, 1948**

I went back to Leoben to exchange the radio - they gave us the wrong model. Again, I tried selling lace, but nobody wanted to buy.

### **Sunday, May 16, 1948**

Pentecost Sunday. Karl and Mici's seven month- old daughter Jolanda is very sick.

### **Monday, May 17, 1948**

At 4 p.m, I walked to the nearby castle, hoping to do some sightseeing. But there was a sign posted, saying that DPs from the camp are not allowed there.

### **Tuesday, May 18, 1948**

I started doing daily camp work with Levičar, but it's not going well because I feel tired and sick. Mostly we pound fenceposts. Mr. Pahonov said he would get me a job in the woods.

### **Friday, May 21, 1948**

I received extra food rations for my work, and Cilka received extra rations for both her work and for being pregnant. For a week, we got 4 pounds of bread, about half a pound of meat, 2 pounds of polenta, some butter and other food. This will make a big difference.

### **Saturday, May 22, 1948**

We realized that, for the first time in a long time, we have more meat and bread than we can eat. If only we could send some to our families in Slovenia! We haven't received any mail from them for over a month, but we know they're hungry.

Cilka and I divide all our income into 3 parts: 1/3 we send to our families in Slovenia, 1/3 we



*Refugees in the Trofaich camp participate in a solemn procession (probably celebrating the Corpus Christi holyday on May 27, 1948). From left to right: the author, Anton Žakelj, is holding up one corner of the baldachin, Rev. Klemenčič is holding the Eucharist, Milan Čebašek is the tall young man in the middle, Jernej Zupan is holding up the other corner of the baldachin, Rev. Malavašič is to his right, Ferdo Pustl is the altar boy holding the censer with the incense, and the altar boy on the far right is not identified. Photo by Marjan Kocmur.*

use for ourselves, and 1/3 we invest in bobbin lace, which we hope we will be able to sell in our new homeland, wherever that will be.

#### **Monday, May 24, 1948**

Despite Karl's recommendation, I was not accepted for lumber cutting work. They hired a Croatian instead.

#### **Tuesday, May 25, 1948**

Finally, I received our first mail from Slovenia in two months. My sister Mici says they had to pay a large tax for the package I sent them. She asks me to not send any more packages.

#### **Thursday, May 27, 1948**

Today is the holy day of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Almost all the Slovenians in the camp participated in a solemn procession through the camp. The major and others watched. The Slovenian barracks were beautifully decorated for the occasion. I helped carry the baldachin (the canopy over the priest carrying the Eucharist).

#### **Saturday, May 29, 1948**

I received 130 Schillings for my work in the camp this past month - my first paid work in 3

years (other than my income from selling bobbin lace).

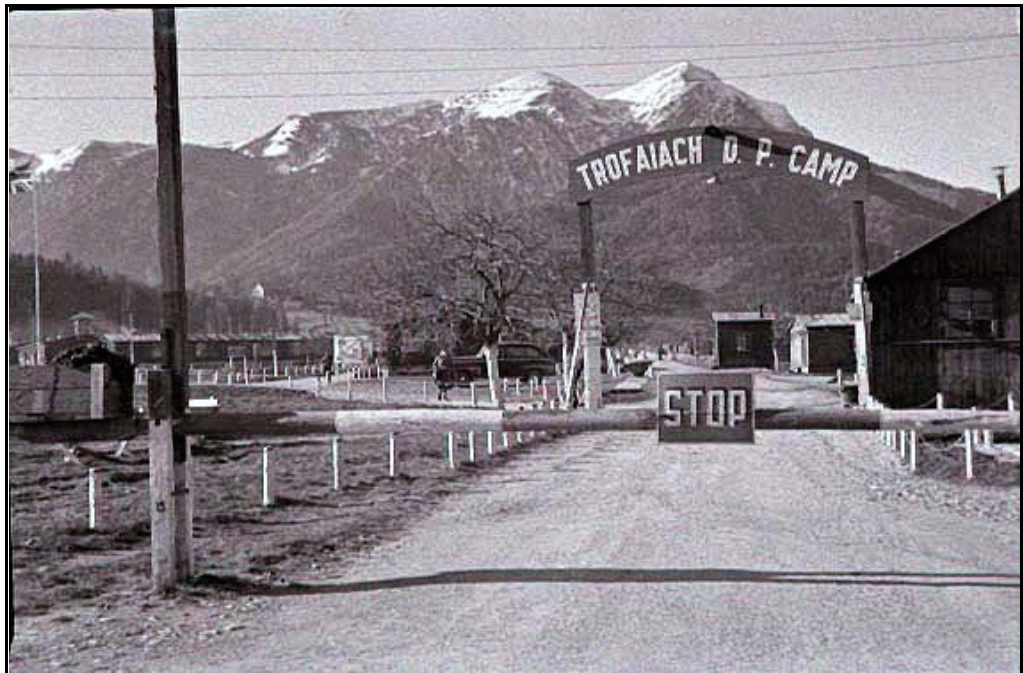
#### **Sunday, May 30, 1948**

I met with my lacemakers from 9 - 10 a.m. They agreed to work for another month. If I can't sell the lace they make, they agreed they would keep what they make, and that would be their pay.

#### **Monday, May 31, 1948**

I received my first letter from Mire and Cene in Canada. They say their trip across the Atlantic took 10 days, of which 8 were so stormy and rough that they almost lost all hope of reaching their destination.

Karl and Mici went to Gradec (Graz) today to apply for immigration to Chile.



*This picture of the entry to the Trofaiach Displaced Persons Camp was taken by UNRRA/IRO administrator Edward Crommelin around 1950. Note the fenceposts which were pounded in by hand in 1948 by Janez Levičar and Anton Žakelj.*

### **Wednesday, June 2, 1948**

Levičar and I have been doing camp work almost every day, pounding fenceposts, tarring roofs, whatever they tell us to do. He's a former judge and he doesn't like this kind of work. I don't like it either. We didn't get much done today.

### **Friday, June 4, 1948**

We had rain and snow today, enough so the surrounding mountains turned white. I stayed in my room and drew designs for bobbin lace.

### **Tuesday, June 8, 1948**

The camp administration is moving people around. Some of them are going into barracks that have been renovated and some into space that has become available due to people leaving. Even though it's an improvement for most people, there are still many complainers who don't want to move. People also have preferences about who they live with, but the camp staff don't care about that.

I talked with the camp staff and they agreed that Cilka and I could have 1/4 of a room in barracks #64. Jože Cerar helped us move our two beds and all our things.

### **Thursday, June 10, 1948**

Levičar and I have been pounding fenceposts next to the guard station at the camp entrance. I worked all day without my shirt and now I'm red as a lobster.

### **Friday, June 11, 1948**

We started digging a foundation for a new dance hall. The ground is sloped, so we have to dig quite a bit to lay out an even base.

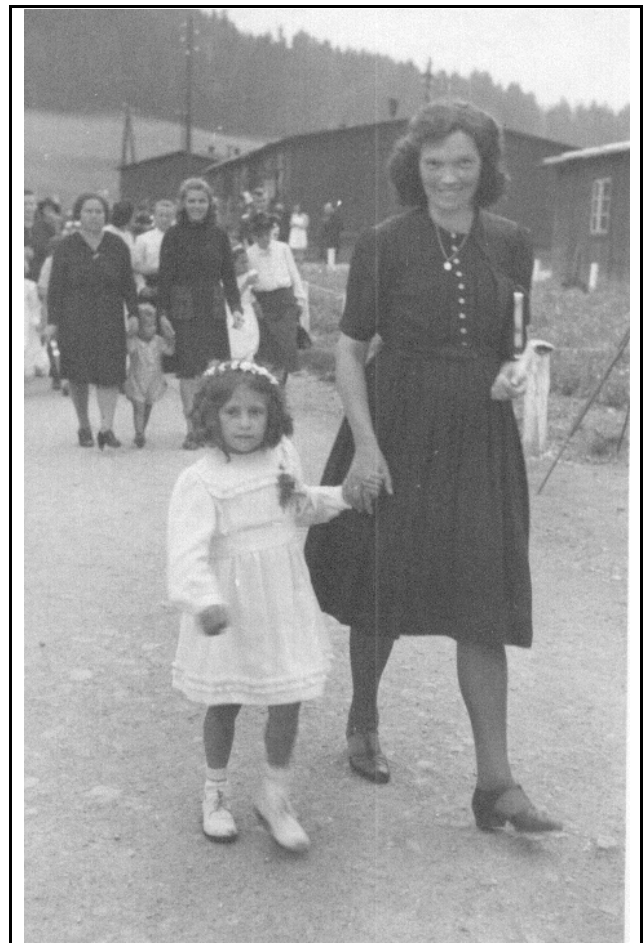
Cilka baked cookies and a potica for my

upcoming birthday and for the upcoming confirmation ceremony for our young people.

### **Saturday, June 12, 1948**

Papal delegate Dr. Jagodic arrived in the camp today to a nice welcome. He will be performing confirmations for our young people tomorrow.

Our friend Marjan Kocmur, the photographer,



*Cilka Žakelj and Irena Primožič in the Trofaiach refugee camp, June 13, 1948. Cilka was the sponsor for Irena's confirmation. During those years, the future was so uncertain that children were confirmed whenever possible, sometimes even before their first Communion. The Primožič family eventually settled in Argentina. Photo by Marjan Kocmur.*





*The Slovenian camp choir at the Trofaiach refugee camp near Leoben, Austria, on the occasion of papal delegate bishop Jagodič's visit on June 13, 1948 (names are listed to the extent that the author still recognized them 50 years later, and with help from Jerry Zupan). Photo by Marjan Kocmur.*

*Front row: Avgust Clemente, no name (a woman who was the secretary for the camp director), Rev. Josip Rot, "Pater Jakob" (the bishop's secretary), camp director Leadbetter (?), papal delegate Bishop Jože Jagodic, Rev. Janez Klemenčič, Rev. Kokelj, Rev. Roman Malavašič, France Zupan (the choir director)*

*Second row: Milena Dobršek, Ema Dobršek, Marija Dobršek, Ivanka Povirk, Vida Povirk, Vera Zorc, Lojzka Zorc, Anica Zorc, Mimi Zalaznik, Julka Zorc, Mrs. Malka Povirk*

*Third row: Franci Skvarča, Rafko Žonta, Albinca Žonta, Marija Gosar, Helena Klemenčič, Hribar, Mrs. Jelka Malavašič, Tončka Povirk, Malka Povirk, Jože Krvina*

*Fourth row: Bore Erman, ?, ?, Pavel Malavašič (with beard), Dr. Alfred Fišinger, Jože Starič, Vincent Povirk, Hribar, Tine Malavašič, ?, ?*

also arrived and stayed in our room overnight. He will be taking pictures of the confirmations and of camp life in general. As we have done before, I agreed to buy his pictures and then re-sell them in the camp. Kocmur said I could keep 10% for myself.

In the evening, a group of refugees sang songs outside the building where Dr. Jagodic is staying.

**Sunday, June 13, 1948**



Today was my 41st birthday. Only Cilka and some of the other women noticed.

We went to Mass at 7 a.m. and again at 9. At the second Mass, Dr. Jagodic confirmed 30 youngsters. Kocmur pushed past 3 other photographers to make sure he got the best pictures.

Cilka was the sponsor for Irena Primožič. She gave her 25 Schillings, a prayer book, a rosary, cookies and some cake. (See also 6/23/46)

After the confirmation, we had a wonderful banquet, including soup with meat in the soup, potatoes, roast chicken and lettuce.

Dr. Jagodic left at 3 p.m., Kocmur at 9.

### **Monday, June 14, 1948**

I went to see the doctor because I was feeling sharp pains in my ribs. Dr. Antonov said I have inflamed muscles. He ordered me to lie face down on a bed. Then they brought in something that looked like a saddle with lots of electric lights. They put that on my back, and then blankets on top of that. Soon I felt like I was being cooked. I sweated and that seemed to help. Dr. Antonov gave me permission to skip camp work for two days.

Dr. Antonov mentioned that he is treating two



*Women at the Trofaiach refugee camp near Leoben, Austria, on the occasion of papal delegate bishop Jagodič's visit on June 13, 1948. Photo by Marjan Kocmur.*

*Front row: Ivanka Povirk (?), Marija Dobršek, "Pater Jakob" (the bishop's secretary), no name (a woman who was the secretary for the camp director), camp director Leadbetter (?), papal delegate Bishop Jože Jagodic, Rev. Janez Klemenčič, Rev. Kokelj, ?, ?*

refugees with penicillin for syphilis. If this were known in the camp, it would be a huge scandal.

I received letters from Cene, Mire and Franc in Canada and replied immediately.

I received approval from the camp administration for us to have an electric "hot plate" in our room.

### **Wednesday, June 16, 1948**

The Chilean consulate accepted 100 Slovenians and about 400 Croatians and Ukrainians for immigration, including our friends Karl Erznožnik and Rudolf Primožič.

Dr. Antonov approved two more days of sick time for me. I am using some of this time to write letters to my father and sister in Slovenia.

### **Friday, June 18, 1948**

After 4 days, I started doing camp work again. I'm still too weak to lift a sledgehammer, so I've been stringing fencing wire and peeling bark off logs so we can use them as fenceposts.

This evening we had a rainstorm with hail and thunder.

### **Monday, June 21, 1948**

I received a 6-pound package of photos from Kocmur, altogether 685 pictures, for which I owe him 3,031 Schillings. They're all very well done. I went around the camp this evening and sold 1,000 Schillings worth.

### **Tuesday, June 22, 1948**

Ristič, a Serb in our camp who is also a photographer, came to look at Kocmur's photos this morning. I wasn't there, so he talked with Cilka. He said he is the only one with

permission to sell photos in our camp. He asked Cilka to give him Kocmur's photos, but Cilka refused.

Ristič returned this evening - with a police officer. The officer wanted me to turn over all the photos and pay a percentage of their value to the camp administration. I refused and we almost got into a fistfight. Instead we went to see McKeon to help us settle the matter. Ristič said he was the only one with permission to sell photos in our camp. Kocmur had permission to take photos for the newspapers, but according to Ristič, not to sell them in the camp.

After some debate, McKeon decided that Kocmur and I were not at fault, the problem was with the camp administrator who allowed Kocmur to take photos. I should tell Kocmur that, in the future, he will have to pay a percentage of all sales to the camp administration. "How much," I asked. "Let's talk about that tomorrow," McKeon replied.

### **Wednesday, June 23, 1948**

McKeon told me to forget about the whole affair with Ristič.

### **Thursday, June 24, 1948**

My co-worker Janez Levičar was appointed to a paid position in the camp administration. Frank Lorber had that job before him, but Lorber quit and went to a job in the woods because he became so frustrated trying to work with the British. I congratulated Levičar with the words "My sincere sympathies! I don't think you will like this work." He disagreed.

Another co-worker, Ivan Fradl, and I met with McKeon, who said our pay for camp work will have to be reduced to 120 Schillings a month. I argued with him, saying this was not enough to stay alive. He said I could quit and he will find 9 other people to take over my job. He called in

9 Ukrainians and offered them the job, but 4 of them said they won't work in the camp. One went so far as to say he would rather find an unpaid job outside the camp. One of them said he would take the job, but only until he leaves for Chile.

Rudolf Primožič had to go to Gradec (Graz) for an operation on one eye. They are concerned that his illness may spread to his healthy eye. This will probably delay his plans to emigrate to Chile.

#### **Friday, June 25, 1948**

Ristič still contends that I am selling illegal photos for Kocmur. I was asked to attend a meeting today with Ristič and camp leadership, including Ožeg and Levičar. We agreed that Kocmur should pay Ristič 10% of the value of 200 photos, or about 90 Schillings. I agreed to write to Kocmur.

In the afternoon, Fradl and I pounded 40 fenceposts.

#### **Saturday, June 26, 1948**

I worked in the basement under the kitchen sorting through 30 - 40,000 pounds of potatoes. Many of them had gone bad and the stench was awful.

#### **Sunday, June 27, 1948**

Today was a nice day. I sold some of Kocmur's photos. Cilka and I went for a walk in the woods.

#### **Monday, June 28, 1948**

Another group of refugees left for Canada this morning, including Karel Albiani, Pušelj and Ožeg.

Since I worked on Saturday, I thought I

wouldn't have to work today. But McKeon got angry and ordered us to work. Fradl and I pounded another 30 fenceposts. After we were done, McKeon congratulated us and said we could take off tomorrow (the holy day of St. Peter).

#### **Tuesday, June 29, 1948**

We went to Mass at 8 a.m. Then we heard an announcement on the loudspeakers calling everyone to their jobs, and saying that anyone who did not report by 9:30 would face a fine of 50 Schillings. Angrily, I put on my work clothes, but when I saw that nobody else was going to work, I decided to stay in my room. I wrote letters to my mother and sister and put together a package for my brother Jože.

Svenšek went around the camp, collecting donations for a farewell gift for the major, our camp director. Most people refused to give anything, some gave 1, 2 or 3 Schillings. I gave 3 Schillings and asked the major to return the lace that I had loaned him for display in his office. I know the British, and I know I'll never get that lace back unless I get it from the major before he leaves.

#### **Wednesday, June 30, 1948**

We buried rotten potatoes near the creek.

Primožič returned from the hospital without his left eye.

I received a letter with 2 Canadian dollars from my brother-in-law Mire, which is a sign that he is doing well in Canada.

#### **Friday, July 2, 1948**

I received a telegram from Kocmur, asking me to meet him at the train station in Leoben tomorrow morning. I asked McKeon for time off from my job and he refused, saying "The

major is not paying you to travel around.”

### **Saturday, July 3, 1948**

I couldn't find anyone to meet Kocmur at the train station.

### **Monday, July 5, 1948**

I painted fenceposts with lime all day, but rain washed it all away.

This evening, we had a farewell ceremony for our departing camp director, Major Leadbetter, and a welcome for the new director, Major Pak. There was a nice dinner and then a dance. Of course, I didn't go to the dance. (I'm not a dancer.)

### **Tuesday, July 6, 1948**

I helped pour concrete all day for the new hall. The work could have been done by 4 men, but 12 of us were assigned to the job. I was bored!

### **Wednesday, July 7, 1948**

It was too rainy to work, so I went to the market. I met a person who is going to Canada. I sold him 3 Canadian dollars for 35 Schillings and 2 pieces of lace for 180 Schillings.

### **Thursday, July 8, 1948**

160 people left for Canada today, most of them Germans who had been moved to Yugoslavia during the war.

### **Friday, July 9, 1948**

Engineer Kirschner promised me a job with the loggers in the woods.

Ristić is still complaining about me selling Kocmur's photos. Levičar ordered me to work it out with Ristić.

### **Saturday, July 10, 1948**

I continued to sell photos, but since Ristić is a Serb, the Serbs and Croats are siding with Ristić and refusing to buy from me.

I wrote letters to Mire, Mlinar, Silva and Kocmur.

### **Sunday, July 11, 1948**

Today it rained in the camp, and snowed up in the mountains. Cilka and I went out in the woods and found 11 mushrooms. For dinner we had polenta and mushrooms.

### **Monday, July 12, 1948**

I asked Kirschner when I could begin the logging job. He replied that McKeon won't allow it. I went to McKeon, who said I can go. I went back to Kirschner, who said he had already hired someone else. I protested, so Kirschner went to McKeon. Kirschner returned, "McKeon says I can't take you because you're a bad worker." I explained to Kirschner that I think McKeon is biased against me, but that didn't do any good.

300 new refugees arrived from Kapfenberg, mostly Ukrainians. Everyone has to make room in their barracks for more people. A married couple moved into our barracks.

### **Tuesday, July 13, 1948**

I refused to go to my camp job today. McKeon asked Fradl why I wasn't at work.

### **Wednesday, July 14, 1948**

This morning I moved some firewood from barracks 60 to 64 and laid down stones for the path to the outhouse. McKeon asked me if I was back to my camp job. "No," I replied.

In the evening, I found 6 mushrooms and some strawberries in the woods. Zupan and Čebašek are advising me to get a job with Hittaler (road and railroad construction), or with the British in Leoben.

#### **Thursday, July 15, 1948**

At 6 a.m. I went to Mass for my brother Vlado's name day. At 7:30 I took the bus to Leoben to look for a job. The British are not hiring, but Hittaler said he would hire me if I could bring a recommendation from the government work office. I went there, but the line was so long I would have missed my bus back. On the way back, I bought some things for my family in Slovenia and a little baby outfit. Cilka's pregnancy is going well and I expect we will soon have a little son or daughter.

Fradl told me McKeon let another worker go because he wasn't willing to work for 120 Schillings a month.

#### **Friday, July 16, 1948**

Silva sent us more than 4 pounds of cherries. Cilka loves fruits and vegetables and was very happy to get the cherries.

I try to please Cilka whenever I can; I often go out to the fields to pick dandelions so she can make salads. As I think about the upcoming dangers of childbirth, I love her more than ever.

Am I pleased that we will have a baby? No! How will I support it? I have nothing to give it. But I will do my best to make sure that Cilka and the baby will at least have food and clothing. If God gives us good health, we will manage. After all, we have been completely dependent on God, and on people's good will, these past 3 years.

#### **Saturday, July 17, 1948**

I received our first letter from Vinko Kržišnik in Canada. He says the journey across the ocean was awful. Now he has a job in a factory in Victoriaville, Quebec. He makes only \$24 a week. He pays \$19 for food and rent, and so has only \$5 left for everything else. Included with the letter was a pair of socks, which I need.

I paid the camp administration a percentage of my lacemakers' earnings. We're not selling much, so there are now only 4 lacemakers still working.

Jožica Zorc went to the hospital because it appeared she was about to have a baby, but it turned out she wasn't quite ready.

#### **Sunday, July 18, 1948**

I wrote back to Vinko in Canada, and to his mother in Slovenia. In the afternoon, Cilka and I walked in the woods and found 2 pounds of mushrooms. Even in the woods, we could clearly hear the usual announcements coming from the camp loudspeakers.

#### **Monday, July 19, 1948**

I received a recommendation from the government work office for a job in construction. This afternoon, I got the job.

I paid Ristič 90 Schillings to settle the affair regarding Kocmur's photos.

#### **Tuesday, July 20, 1948**

I slept poorly and got up at 5:30 for my new job. I walked into town, took the bus to Leoben and walked 30 minutes to a village named Göss. I began working at 7:30. First they had me digging at street level, then I was shoveling dirt up out of a 9 foot deep ditch (for a sewer pipe). I would throw it up to a platform and another worker would throw it the rest of the way up to street level. Hard work! Sunny and hot! I was

so tired I couldn't eat or drink.

At 1:30 I walked the 30 minutes back to Leoben, then took a train to Trofaiach. I returned to the camp at 3:15, exhausted, thirsty and dirty. Since the shower wasn't open, I washed in my room as best I could, ate a little and lay down, worried whether I would be able to get up in the morning.

### **Wednesday, July 21, 1948**

Again I slept poorly, but I got up at 5:30, feeling OK, and went to work. Today they had me working at street level, which was much easier than being 9 feet down in a ditch. I finished the day feeling healthy and had a good dinner of dumplings with chocolate, pea soup and "mehlspeis."

### **Thursday, July 22, 1948**

Despite the heat, work went well.

I received a letter with \$10 from Mire in Canada.

### **Friday, July 23, 1948**

Work was hard today, shoveling dirt again. In the afternoon we had rain and thunder. I was hot and shirtless, and the cool rain felt so wonderful on my bare back!

Our new roommate sometimes sings in his sleep and sometimes screams from the pains in his legs.

Pavle Kokelj finally received the permission he wanted to emigrate to Canada. He will leave on Monday, and expects to get work on a farm.

### **Saturday, July 24, 1948**

This morning I walked to the nearby village of Gai to buy a discount card for the railroad.

Along the way, I picked mushrooms and strawberries.

### **Monday, July 26, 1948**

Today we celebrated Rev. Klemenčič's 40th anniversary of priesthood. People collected money for a gift. We attended a solemn ceremony in the chapel, and then had singing next to his barracks.

### **Tuesday, July 27, 1948**

I am being paid according to how much I dig. I don't dig as much dirt as the other workers, and I'm completely exhausted. Sometimes my pickaxe hits a rock and it feels like 440 volts goes through my body. But I can't give up!

This afternoon, I said good-bye to Pavle Kokelj, who left on a train for Italy, where he will board a ship for Canada.

### **Wednesday, July 28, 1948**

I slept in till 6 a.m. this morning and didn't get to work till 8:30. I moved 1.5 cubic yards of gravel, the same as 3 other workers, but much less than Ciril Rožman, who moved 3.5 yards!

I will receive almost 28 Schillings for 10 hours of hard labor - barely enough for a 2 pound loaf of bread! I'm so tired, I can hardly eat. When I get back to my room, I lie down but can't get my arms comfortable. I keep moving them, but nothing makes them feel better.

This week, many of the single young women in the camp went to Gradec (Graz) to apply for emigration to Canada. All except one were accepted.

### **Thursday, July 29, 1948**

Today I dug out 2 cubic yards and am so tired, I could die.

I received my final pay for the camp work I did earlier this month - 60 Schillings for 11 days.

#### **Saturday, July 31, 1948**

I sorted through old clothes and sacks left by Pavle Kokelj. I sent one package to his wife Ančka in Slovenia, another package to Karl's family, and threw some away in the garbage, including some old cement sacks.

I stopped at Štelzer's, drank 1/8 liter of red wine and brought half a liter back to the room. One liter of wine costs only 9 Schillings. I'm feeling better.

Ema Erman had a baby son today - her first.

#### **Sunday, August 1, 1948**

During Mass this morning, I felt sick, as if I were drunk. I felt pains in my head and my chest.

#### **Monday, August 2, 1948**

Work was easy today, like a miracle. After each day's work, I take a hot shower in the camp. Mr. Sorko makes sure the water is heated and ready for me each day.

#### **Saturday, August 7, 1948**

I mailed 1,000 Schillings to Kocmur from the sale of his photos. I had promised to pay him, regardless of how many photos I sold. I haven't been able to sell all his photos, so in the end, these photos have cost me a lot of trouble, and instead of a profit, I've had a loss.

The price of sugar had dropped to 7 Schillings per pound, but now it's just not available.

The camp gives each person 40 cigarettes a week. Since my wife and I are not smokers, we use these cigarettes to trade for food and other

things that we need. Sometimes I sell them and send the money to friends such as Franc Mlinar who sends us food in the mail.

#### **Sunday, August 8, 1948**

A nice day. I wrote 4 letters to friends and relatives.

They say that a Ukrainian in the camp killed a Ukrainian.

#### **Monday, August 9, 1948**

A family of three moved into our barracks. I moved some potatoes and a bike to make room for them.

#### **Tuesday, August 10, 1948**

I worked in the bottom of a ditch today that was 9 - 12 feet deep. We're laying sewer pipes. Everything is done by hand, with shovels and pickaxes.

Our foreman on this job is a former German soldier who was in an American prison camp in Louisiana. He wishes he had some hope of emigrating to Canada or America, like we do. He says he would go back to America immediately, if only he could.

I saw a doctor about my ulcers and got permission to go to the hospital in Leoben for X-rays.

#### **Wednesday, August 11, 1948**

I got a ride in the medical car to Leoben for my stomach exam. No results yet.

#### **Friday, August 13, 1948**

I went back to work the past 2 days, though I've been feeling sick, and it's been raining.

### **Sunday, August 15, 1948**

This morning we had a solemn High Mass with an orchestra for the holy day of the Assumption.

I packaged 28 pieces of bobbin lace worth 1,041 Schillings for Mrs. Trobec to take to Mire in Canada. She's leaving next Tuesday. We hope Mire will be able to sell the lace in Canada.

Cilka and I went to bed at 9:30 p.m. At 10, she got up, saying "I don't know what's happening. I feel healthy, but I'm losing water." We got dressed and went to the nearby clinic, where we called for a doctor. The doctor called for a nurse and driver to take us to the hospital in Leoben. The camp's driver, Štefan Tovornik, had just returned, very tired from a day-long trip. I asked him if he could take Cilka to the hospital, and he said simply, "If it's necessary, let's go!" (Many years later, I was able to repay the favor by helping him and his family with housing and work when they came to America.) We reached the hospital before midnight, and soon after, Mr. Tovornik brought me back to the camp - without my wife.

### **Monday, August 16, 1948**

I got up at 6 and went to Mass. At 9, I went to the clinic, where I learned that the exam 2 days ago determined I have "ulceres ventriculi" similar to what I had some years ago. They gave me some milk to help soothe the ulcers.

At noon I rode a bike to the Leoben hospital (about 5 miles away). Cilka was still in the operating room. They wouldn't let me in, but I could see that she was smiling. A nurse told me Cilka had given birth to a baby boy at 11:30 a.m. At 1 p.m., they brought Cilka to her room. After she was examined by a doctor, I was finally allowed to visit her, and I stayed till 3. Despite having just given birth to her first baby, and a large one at that, she feels good and looks very happy.

The nurses allowed me to see my new son - he weighs over 8 pounds and is almost 22 inches long. I think he looks bigger than the other babies, and he has an especially large mouth. Will he become an attorney some day?

I am relieved and happy to see both mother and son looking very healthy.

### **Tuesday, August 17, 1948**

Today I worked on sewer construction as usual and visited Cilka from 3:30 to 4 p.m. We wrote letters to our parents.

### **Thursday, August 19, 1948**

I went to the hospital at 7 a.m. and brought Cilka some milk and cookies. Milk is very hard to get and Cilka really needs some now.

I worked on sewer construction in the rain and got soaked through.

Hittaler (the owner of the construction company) laid off 3 Croatians. I can see that anyone who does not work hard enough is soon let go. I'm the weakest man in our crew, but I need to do better than those Croatians.



I wrote to Silva to thank her for the nice little sweater she sent for our new baby.

### **Friday, August 20, 1948**

I received my first pay from the construction job. In 4 weeks, I earned 548 Schillings, but received only 296. They took out 180 for the refugee camp, 50 for health insurance and about 20 for dues to the Social Democratic Workers Organization.

Some of the other men spend their earnings on alcohol or sweets. I don't buy much of that, but I have been going to an inn for lunch each day. I treat myself to plum dumplings and sometimes even a beer.

### **Saturday, August 21, 1948**

This afternoon, I visited Cilka in the hospital, as I have each day this week. I brought her half a liter of milk and some cookies. Both Cilka and the baby are healthy.

### **Sunday, August 22, 1948**

I went to Mass at 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. In the afternoon, I was going to ride my bike to the hospital, but it was broken and I couldn't get it fixed by the time it started raining at 3. I wrote a letter, in English, to Griggs, who had sent us a nice little wool blanket from Tasmania.

### **Tuesday, August 24, 1948**

Today I loaded lumber on one truck and cement on another, and unloaded

sand from 2 others. I learned that I will have 3 days off and then we will begin working in a different location.

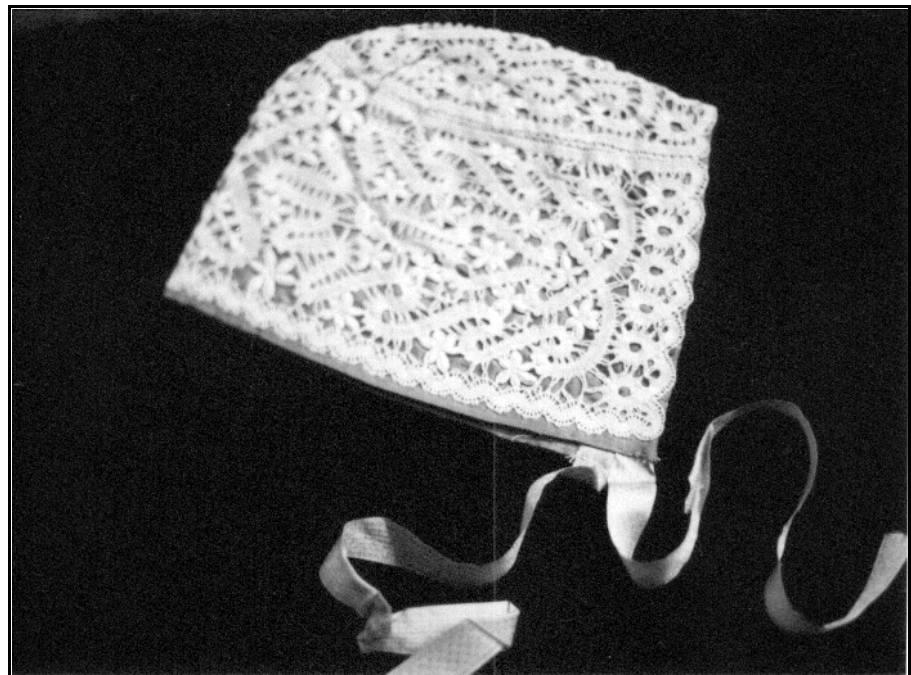
Back in our barracks, Karl helped me rearrange our room for the baby. We set up a new wood-heated cookstove which Fric made for 50 Schillings. For dinner, I cooked myself some polenta at 9 p.m.

### **Wednesday, August 25, 1948**

This morning, I rode in the Red Cross auto to Leoben, where we picked up Cilka and our baby, and then returned to the camp. We've decided to call him Janko (Johnny).

I bought an electric iron for 80 Schillings. Cilka has wanted one for a long time.

I went to a number of government offices to report the birth of my son and arrange for the proper documentation.



*This is the bobbin lace baptismal cap which was made by Cilka for our son John's baptism in 1948.*

**Thursday, August 26, 1948**

Janko woke up at 2:30 a.m. and cried loudly until he was fed.

We received our first extra food ration for our baby. Levičar stopped by to see him.

**Friday, August 27, 1948**

Mrs. Jesenko went to the Leoben hospital yesterday and had an 8 pound baby boy today. Mr. and Mrs. Jesenko already have about 10 daughters, but this is their first boy. Mr. Jesenko was so happy, he put on his Sunday clothes.

**Saturday, August 28, 1948**

Baby Janko's baptism was at 4 p.m. today. Rev. Klemenčič baptized him, naming him after John the Baptist (but we will just call him Janko). Karel Erznožnik and Jelka Malavašič were the godparents. After the baptism, we celebrated with wine and cookies in our room.

**Sunday, August 29, 1948**

We went to see a play put on by Slovenians from Celovec (Klagenfurt). The play is called "The Pastor from the Blooming Vineyard."

**Monday, August 30, 1948**

Most of my coworkers on the construction crew have decided that the conditions at the new work location are impossible. They want us to arrive at 6 a.m. and work till 7 p.m. without lunch. Zupan and a couple others decided they will stay with it, but I won't.

**Tuesday, August 31, 1948**

The camp gave us extra food rations for Cilka and Janko - more than we can eat! Cilka is still

getting credit for working as a lacemaker, though she hasn't done that for 3 months and she hasn't been paying 64 Schillings a month like the other lacemakers.

**Wednesday, September 1, 1948**

Joža Zorc and Zalka Zupan both had baby daughters.

**Thursday, September 2, 1948**

I worked on bobbin lace designs.

I renewed my request for logging work in the woods, but was turned down again.

**Friday, September 3, 1948**

A two-year old boy from the Arlič family died in Leoben - before he was baptized.

**Monday, September 6, 1948**

I decided to go back to construction work after all. Two of us were allowed all day to tear down some steps near an old factory. I could have done the work myself in two hours. I was bored!

**Tuesday, September 7, 1948**

I got up at 5:45, but missed my ride to the construction site. After a combination of walking and riding a train, I arrived there at 8 a.m. I loaded sand into a cement mixer all day. We got an hour for lunch, so I was able to go to a nearby inn, where I bought a good lunch for 5.5 Schillings. A truck brought us back to the camp at 7:30 p.m. I'm very tired.

**Wednesday, September 8, 1948**

Although I slept only four hours last night, I worked a full day in the construction job today.

**Friday, September 10, 1948**

Today I helped Starič bend steel bars for reinforced concrete. His boss is a Slovenian who is not overly demanding. I got back to the camp by 5 p.m.

**Monday, September 13, 1948**

Since we are being paid “by the piece,” we worked extra hard and fast. Starič, two other men and myself unloaded 70,000 pounds of cement in 3 hours. We were told that we would each be paid 12 hours for 4 hours of work. But at the end of the day, I got into an argument with the foreman about the exact amount of credit I should get. He finally agreed to put me down for the number of hours I felt I deserved, but he said we would not be paid this way any longer. I returned to the camp very tired and vowed to never work at a “piece rate” again.

**Wednesday, September 15, 1948**

For the past 2 days, the foreman has had me working with the bricklayers. I’m trying to not work quite so hard.

**Saturday, September 18, 1948**

I reported to the work office that there is only one woman - Spreitzer - still making lace for me. We are not selling enough to keep the others working.

**Monday, September 20, 1948**

I received letters from Canada - Franc Kokelj sent me one dollar, Pavle sent five dollars. I also received a letter from my brother Ciril and his wife Ivica in Slovenia, with the first picture of their baby daughter Marjetica.

**Thursday, September 23, 1948**

Last night I dreamed about our home in

Slovenia. It was covered with deep snow and there was a river running down the street next to our house. Was this a sign of bad news to come from home?

In fact, I received a letter from my sister Mici today saying that our mother is very sick and may soon die. I wish I could see her before she dies, but if I try to go back home, I would probably be arrested and put in prison before I ever got to see her.

We took our baby Janko out into the sun for the first time today.

**Saturday, September 25, 1948**

Cilka went back to work for Čopi today, sewing shoeleather. I worked on construction all week, working on steel-reinforced concrete. Today I stayed in our room with Janko. He slept in the morning, but cried in the afternoon.

**Monday, September 27, 1948**

Jernej Zupan and I went to the construction site alone today. We unloaded two railcars of sand in 5 hours instead of the expected 10, and then worked another 4 hours. I’m exhausted, my clothes are torn, and I’m hungry.

**Wednesday, September 29, 1948**

Today we started work on a construction site in Trofaiach, which is much better than our other sites because we don’t have to travel so far. We dug a ditch next to the school for a telephone cable. (We have no machines, so everything is done with shovel and pickaxe.) Afterwards, we argued with our foreman, Feldman, about our pay. We couldn’t reach agreement.

**Thursday, September 30, 1948**

We finally reached agreement with Feldman about our pay on the current construction job: 3

Schillings per meter of ditch dug. Not good!  
By 1:30 I had dug 10 meters.

At 3 p.m., about 100 Slovenians from our camp left for Argentina - our first group to go there. Included were Zajc and his wife, Lazar (one of my coworkers on the construction job) with his wife and child, Jože Babnik with his wife and two children, Slavko Babnik with his wife and two children, Glac with his wife and two children, Urbančič with his wife and two children, Franc Jelovčan, Smole with his wife and 5 children, Paula Žagar with two children, Nežka Borovšak with her son, Kien with his wife and daughter, Ovčjak with his wife and two sons, Klemenčič with 6 children and two aunts, Rev. Klemenčič, Stanjko with his wife and 3 or 4 daughters, Stajdohar with his wife and 6 children, Mehle with his wife and 5 children, Krvina with his wife and two children, Kobaljš with his wife and 5 children, Vilko Čeč, August Clemente, and two families that I don't know. (I didn't write this in my diary, but I think this group must have also included Fr. Mirnik, Jože Klemenčič, the Švajger family, Zinka, Miss Verčič and some people from Kapfenberg.)

Immediately after the group left for Argentina, the camp administration ordered everyone rearranged in the camp. Karel helped me move our things from barracks #64 to #59, which is where the Lazar family had been. We worked past midnight to get everything rearranged. We lived in barracks #60 for 2 months and in #64 for almost 4 months. How long will we stay in #59?

### **Saturday, October 2, 1948**

A package arrived for Lazar from Boris Paulin in New York. Before Lazar left for Argentina, he told me this package might come, and that I should keep it. The package includes a 3 pound can of lard which is worth 60 Schillings. Franc



*These refugees are repairing a railroad somewhere in Europe. Note the lack of machinery - the heavy labor was all done by hand. After World War II, there were 1.8 million displaced persons ("DPs") in Europe. Many of them were business managers, skilled craftspeople, academics and other trained professionals, but they took on whatever work was available and endured very difficult working conditions to support their families.*

Zupan and I determined the entire package was worth 177 Schillings. I decided I would send to Lazar in Argentina an equivalent value of bobbin lace, which he will probably be able to sell there.

Levičar announced that he will marry Ana Kunovar.

I put together a package for my brother Jože in Slovenia - some old clothes we had received from New York and other things that Jože had asked me to get for him. Then I set up electrical wiring to our corner of the barracks that we just moved into.

I received a letter from my sister Julka in Slovenia, saying that our mother's health has improved.

### **Sunday, October 3, 1948**

At 10 a.m., we had elections for a new leader to represent the Slovenians in the camp, since our former leader, Kobaljč, left for Argentina. Out of 40 votes, I received 16, Gutovnik 10, Maček and Fišinger 6 each, and Dr. Erman, Sonkel, Fr. Zupan and Roman 1 each. I refused to accept the position, so we agreed Gutovnik would represent us, with me, Maček and Fišinger as his advisors.

I wrote letters to Anica and Marica in the Spittal camp, to Cene in Canada and to my mother back home. I am very relieved that her health is better.

At 5 p.m., we had our first meeting with Gutovnik, Maček and Fišinger. Gutovnik was an officer in the Yugoslav army, then he fought with the partisans (the communists), and in the end, against the partisans. From 6 - 10 p.m., I went around barracks 59, 60 and 61 and noted the names of 82 Slovenians.

### **Monday, October 4, 1948**

I dug 11 meters of ditch today. Very hard labor!

Another group is getting ready to leave for Argentina. That's where I would most like to go, but they won't accept our family because Janko is still less than 6 months old. I think my skills and honest hard work would be appreciated in South America. My skills might

not be appreciated in Canada, which is more advanced in both culture and technology. And I have no hopes for America, since I have no relatives or acquaintances there to help me. Besides, I hear that the fight for survival in America is simply not human.

### **Wednesday, October 6, 1948**

Čebašek, two other workers and I continued to dig ditches and lay telephone cable. We hit many rocks and tree roots, which slowed us down. We each earned 28 Schillings today (about enough for a 2 pound loaf of bread.)

There was an announcement from the I.R.O. (the International Refugee Organization which runs the camp) that anyone who has been accepted for Argentina but refuses to go, will be expelled from the camp. This includes people who have an "affidavit" for possible future emigration to America!

### **Thursday, October 7, 1948**

Our construction foreman ordered us to dig a ditch under a rocky road, and said we would now be paid 2 and a half Schillings per meter, instead of the previously agreed 3 Schillings. Because of that, and since it was raining, I refused and turned in my tools. I was followed by Franc Zupan, Jernej Zupan, and Vatovec. Some of the others quit a couple hours later, but some kept working till 3 p.m.

### **Friday, October 8, 1948**

I bought a sawblade which I will use to make a woodcutting saw. (Fifty years later, I still occasionally use that saw.)

### **Monday, October 11, 1948**

At 7 a.m. today, I tried going back to my construction job, but the foreman refused to accept me back. He said, "You walked off the job last Thursday morning, while some of the other workers kept working all day." "But I have health problems. At least give me permission to see a doctor!" He told me to come back at 10 about that. He allowed Zupan and Vatovec to return to work, but with a warning.

I returned to the foreman at 10 for permission to see a doctor, but he didn't have any papers for me. I went ahead to Dr. S. without any papers, but he wouldn't help me. Then I found Dr. Bayer, who agreed to see me right away. Dr. Bayer noted a large swelling in my groin area which he diagnosed as a hernia, probably an injury from the shoveling on the construction job. He said I need to be admitted to a hospital and have an operation as soon as possible. He asked me if it hurt. I replied, "No, not too bad." I went back to the foreman and finally received the proper papers. I agreed to the operation, partly because I know I will have trouble being accepted for emigration if I have any health problems.

My coworkers kept working on the job all day. Thank God I didn't have to stay with them!

### **Tuesday, October 12, 1948**

At 6:30 I went to Mass, and at 10 to the Leoben hospital. In the hospital, I met Franc Korenčan, an old acquaintance from Horjul, not far from my home village of Žiri. He's in the hospital because of problems with the veins in his legs. Out of 8 patients in the hospital, 6 are Austrians,



*In this picture taken in 2002, the author (age 95 at that time) demonstrates the saw which he made himself and used to cut wood in the refugee camp 50 years earlier.*

one Slovenian and one Polish. One of the nurses is Slovenian. The staff are friendly. The doctor examined me in the afternoon and said the operation would be in 2 - 3 days.

### **Thursday, October 14, 1948**

The food in the hospital has been good, and there has been plenty of it.

This afternoon, Milka Čebašek came to see her mother, who just gave birth to a baby daughter. She brought me letters from Cilka, who has

been taking care of our baby back in the camp (about 5 miles away), and from my brother Jože in Slovenia. Jože says our brother Stanko (a priest) has been sentenced to 4 years in a Yugoslav prison. Nobody knows why. The citizens of Yugoslavia are expected to trust that their communist government knows what is best for the people.

The nurse gave me something to clear out my intestines.

#### **Friday, October 15, 1948**

My stomach was in revolt all night. No breakfast this morning. At 8:15 they took me to the operating room. Dr. Schmid and someone else did the hernia operation. They administered local anesthesia and I was able to watch the whole operation in a mirror on the ceiling. The doctor asked me if I was hot. I said, "No, I'm fine, but what about you?" I could see that he was sweating profusely.

After the operation, I wanted to get up from the operating table and walk to my room, but they wouldn't let me. I didn't feel any pain until later in the evening.

#### **Monday, October 18, 1948**

Except for constipation, I've been feeling alright. I've had some visitors from the camp each day. Today, Cilka came and stayed for two hours. She and Janko are doing well.

One of the other patients in the hospital is a former Nazi who is not really sick. I heard him begging the hospital director to let him stay longer because nobody will give him a job and he has no place to live.

The constipation has finally cleared up and I am beginning to eat regular food.

#### **Thursday, October 21, 1948**

I received a nice letter from Cilka. I wrote one back right away, but couldn't find anyone to take it to her.

Nurse Anita removed 7 silver clamps from my healed surgical wound.

This evening, the hospital administrator and 3 doctors came to my room and asked if anyone had any complaints. One of my roommates said, "Do something about that lady down the hall who keeps screaming so loudly that I can't fall asleep." They said she had an operation for a goiter and the surgeon mistakenly damaged a nerve. Tears came to the administrator's eyes and he suddenly ended the visit.

I slept poorly. They gave me some ricin oil, which helped.

#### **Friday, October 22, 1948**

We're not hearing the screaming lady any longer. We don't know what happened to her.

Cilka visited me in the hospital today for 2 hours, to celebrate the second anniversary of our wedding.

#### **Saturday, October 23, 1948**

Dr. Fišinger and Melik the Turk visited from our camp. They asked if I wanted anything, and I said I would really like some grapes.

#### **Sunday, October 24, 1948**

Last night, I dreamed about dirty snow and fishes. That's a bad sign!

Melik brought me some grapes! Sorko also visited, bringing me potica and other good things. In the evening, I got up and walked, with difficulty, for the first time in 7 days.

#### **Monday, October 25, 1948**

Cilka brought me some grapes, coffee and cookies, but I couldn't eat the cookies. I'm having problems with hemorrhoids and worried that I'll need an operation for that.

Nurse Kerubina asked me when I want to go back to the camp. I replied, "The day after tomorrow, if I can get a ride."

#### **Tuesday, October 26, 1948**

I felt better today. Sorko visited and brought another letter from Cilka. He said he would arrange for a car to take me back to the camp tomorrow.

#### **Wednesday, October 27, 1948**

At 11:45 a.m., I got a ride back "home." Fifteen days in the hospital is too long!

Our baby Janko grew while I was gone - he's rounder, smiling from the heart, and sleeping well.

#### **Friday, October 29, 1948**

I've been lying in bed, writing letters and listening to the radio. I like to listen to radio Alpenland, which plays mostly local music, including brass bands. I fixed the electrical connections to get the radio to work right.

#### **Monday, November 1, 1948**

The radio isn't working again. I'm bored. I wrote 5 letters today.

#### **Wednesday, November 3, 1948**

Last night, I had nightmares all night where I saw dirty, muddy floodwaters behind our home in Žiri.

We hear that, in a surprise result, Harry Truman was elected president in America. People had

expected Thomas Dewey to be elected. We don't know if this means any change in American immigration policy.

#### **Monday, November 8, 1948**

This morning I took the train to Leoben with Jernej Zupan. We went to the "Gewerkschaft" (the labor union office) to inquire about sick pay, health insurance, etc. but couldn't find any information. Then I went to the "Gebietskrankenkasse," where they reviewed my hospital papers. The doctor had recommended 8 weeks of rest, but this office is only approving 10 days of sick pay. I'm upset that the Austrians want us foreigners do all the hard, dirty work, pay dues and health premiums, but then not let us get benefits like the other workers.

The I.R.O is again trying to force our friends Karl Erznožnik, his wife and daughter to emigrate to Argentina, but the doctors say their year-old daughter, Jolanda, has "endocarditis" and is too sick to travel.

#### **Tuesday, November 9, 1948**

At 10 a.m., our second group of refugees left for Argentina, among them: Lojze Pirc and his family of 4, Tine Malavašič with his wife and niece, Marija Lazar, Pavle Malavašič and his family of 3, Vatovec and his family of 4, Ogrinc (family of 3), Starc (family of 3), Pečar (family of 2), Ivan Maček, Ivan Oblak, Jože Završnik, Anton Čeferin, Jože Tominc (family of 3), Javornik (family of 2), Pepca Meglen, Peter Vašl (family of 3), Štefan Kavčič, and 3 members of the Kien family.

Some of the above people had also left earlier, but were stopped in Celovec (Klagenfurt) or other cities and sent back to the camp for various reasons.

#### **Thursday, November 11, 1948**



I wrote 4 letters today. Cilka cut firewood for our stove.

#### **Saturday, November 13, 1948**

After some help from my foreman, I received some additional pay for the work I did before I went into the hospital.

#### **Sunday, November 14, 1948**

Miha Sršen asked me if I could take over the sales for the shoe uppers which he's been making. He also asked Cilka if she could help him sew the leather. Cilka is also still doing some sewing for the local shoemaker, Čopi.

#### **Monday, November 15, 1948**

I went up on our barracks roof to fix a rain leak.

#### **Tuesday, November 16, 1948**

Our 3-month old baby Janko weighs 13 pounds.

Zupan brought me about 300 Schillings in sick pay.

The radio reports that Argentina is not taking any more immigrants. There were hundreds of people waiting for the Argentine consul in our camp today. Was it all in vain? He approved a number of people for immigration, saying that the change in policy will not apply to us.

#### **Wednesday, November 17, 1948**

A group left for Brazil today, but no Slovenians among them.

#### **Friday, November 19, 1948**

I went back to Leoben this morning for a follow-up medical exam. Dr. Ottenthaler ordered another week of rest. Dr. Mühlbacher wrote me a prescription for my first glasses.

While I was on the construction job, I had to pay dues to the Social Democratic Workers Organization, so today I asked them if they could help while I am on sick leave. They said I don't qualify for their help because I am a foreigner.

#### **Tuesday, November 23, 1948**

Another group of refugees left for Canada today, including Mimi Albiani, Ferdo and Terezija Pušelj with their son, Marija Zorc and many others who had just arrived in our camp during the past few days.

I made wooden handles for my new woodcutting saw.

#### **Wednesday, November 24, 1948**

This afternoon, I started working with shoemaker Rudl Drmota, my first shoemaking work in 16 years. Rudl is helping me, because I've forgotten much of what I knew about shoemaking. (When I was young, I learned how to make shoes from my father, who had a shoemaking shop in our home.)

#### **Friday, November 26, 1948**

In two days I made two pairs of shoes and earned 70 Schillings - as much as I earned in an entire week of hard construction labor!

#### **Saturday, November 27, 1948**

This morning, the doctor gave me a recommendation for another week of rest. In the afternoon, I cut firewood.

We received 200 pounds of coal to help heat our barracks.

#### **Sunday, November 28, 1948**

Our baby Janko is beginning to notice things

around him. I think he is getting some teeth.

**Monday, November 29, 1948**

This morning, I went to Leoben and got my first glasses. The lenses cost 46 Schillings and the frame 45. I hope I can get some help from the health insurance.

While in Leoben, I sold two pairs of shoe uppers for Sršen.

Another group left for Argentina, including Ivan Oven and Anton Vodnik with their families.

**Thursday, December 2, 1948**

I cut firewood today. We have 2 cubic yards of wood and over 400 pounds of coal to keep us warm this winter.

**Saturday, December 4, 1948**

I received 308 Schillings from the construction company for sick pay. What a nice surprise!

I went to Kohlenegger's and bought shoemaking tools for 100 Schillings. I hope I can earn more money making shoes than I did in construction.

**Sunday, December 5, 1948**

St. Nicholas brought presents to children in the camp hall and, if people preferred, he came directly to their barracks.

**Monday, December 6, 1948**

I received 490 Schillings from the health insurance treasury. Another nice surprise!

**Tuesday, December 7, 1948**

I took the train to Bruck to shop for leather which I could use to make shoes. But the price of shoeleather has jumped up recently, and the

pieces they had didn't look good.

**Thursday, December 9, 1948**

I mailed a package of new and used clothes, and bicycle parts to my brother Jože in Slovenia. The shortages in Slovenia are still worse than what we have here in the refugee camp.

**Monday, December 13, 1948**

Cilka has been using the sewing machine at Čopi's to sew shoes for Rudl Drmota and now also for Hofninger. She received 50 Schillings for sewing the leather for 5 pairs of shoes.

**Friday, December 17, 1948**

This evening, we began special devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary. A statue of Mary will be moved from one barracks to another, staying a day at each one for the next 9 days.

**Thursday, December 23, 1948**

The camp provided us some special gifts for Christmas. Each person received two packages of cigarettes (which Cilka and I will trade for other valuables), 2 pounds of apples, some candy, a chocolate, 2 pounds of oranges and some cooking oil.

**Friday, December 24, 1948**

Baby Janko received his own Christmas package - candy, figs, cookies and oranges.

The spruce trees on the nearby hills are covered with snow and frost.

In the evening, all the families participated in a traditional Christmas eve procession. We prayed the rosary as we went around all the barracks. We carried the statue of Mary to the camp chapel and set up a Christmas tree. Then we returned to our room and listened to

Christmas music on the radio.

At midnight, we went to Mass in the camp chapel. The chapel was beautifully decorated, but the singing was weak. There's not many of us left in the camp. We miss the many friends who have dispersed all over the world.

### **Saturday, December 25, 1948**

We had a wonderful Christmas dinner - soup, potatoes, red beets, a piece of pork, rolls, potica and cider!

### **Sunday, December 26, 1948**

We went to Mass at 8 a.m. As he often does, Rev. Malavašič warned us to not be consumed by efforts to make money, but at the same time, he begged for contributions for the camp chapel.

In the evening, we had another nice dinner. Then we celebrated the grand opening of the new dance hall and movie theater, which had been built by refugees in our camp. It's a beautiful hall, but why was it built? Soon the camp will be empty.

### **Monday, December 27, 1948**

I wrote letters to Vinko (in Canada), Tomaž (in Austria), Helen (in Argentina) and Štefan (in Argentina). I received a letter from my brother Vlado in Slovenia, announcing the birth of his first daughter.

### **Friday, December 31, 1948**

As a businessman, I'm used to doing inventory at the end of each year.

During this past year, our camp had 24 births (9 boys and 15 girls), two deaths and 4 weddings.

Three and a half years ago, there were 50 of us from our home village of Žiri in Austrian

refugee camps. Now we're down to 6.

Of those 50, 9 were Home Guardsmen who were forcibly returned to Yugoslavia, where they suffered a martyr's death. (In addition to those, there were many others from our home village who stayed home after the war and were killed by the communists). Another 10 went to the Spittal camp, and from there, most of those 10 went back home voluntarily. The larger camps had communist agents who convinced them to come back to the "workers' paradise". The camp administration (run by the United Nations) supported these efforts to convince people to go back home. They ran announcements on camp loudspeakers which were critical of refugee leaders such as Bishop Rožman. But most of the people who returned voluntarily were men who had wives or children back home, and who were willing to risk prison and discrimination to be back with their families.

Many of the rest of our villagers went to Canada and Argentina. They were people such as my brother-in-law Mire, who joined the partisans earlier in the war, but went over to the Home Guard when he saw what the partisans really stood for. Even though Mire had a wife and children in Slovenia, he could not return because he would be treated as a military deserter.

As for myself, my wife Cilka, and our new baby Janko, our future is not much clearer now than it has been for the past 3 years. We pray that 1949 will bring what we have been seeking for so long - a home where we can work and live in freedom.