

May 24, 2004

Life in the Refugee Camps 1949

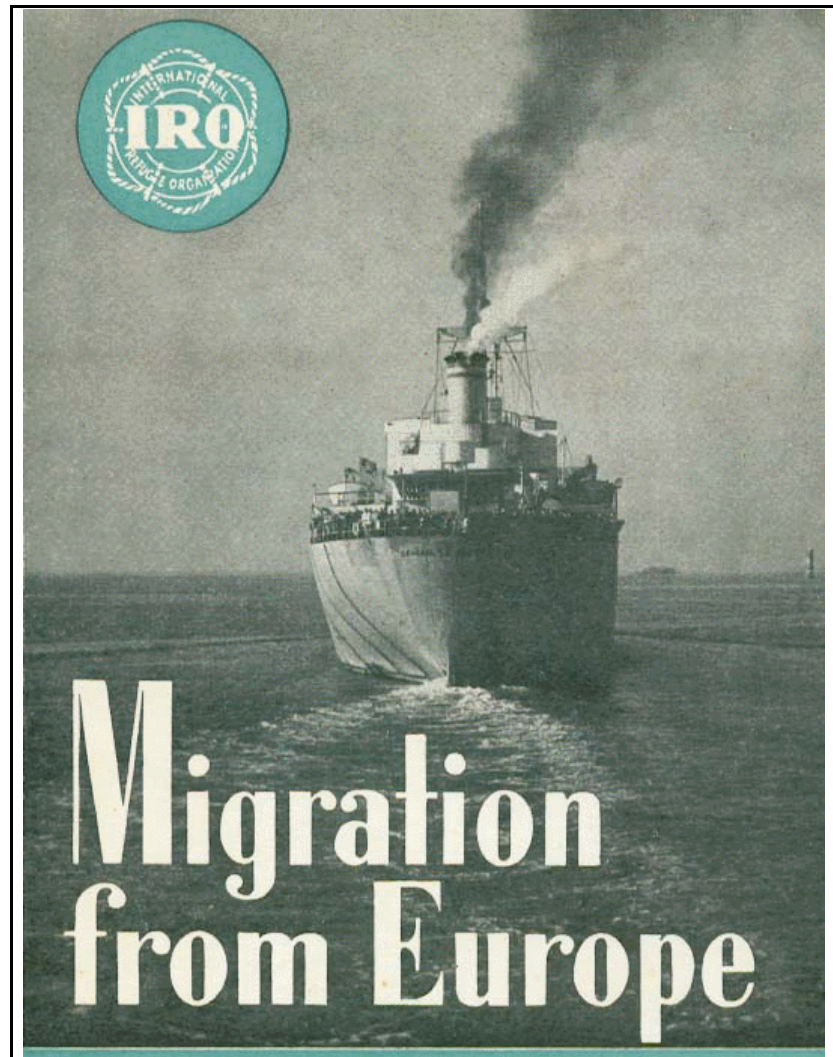
By Anton Žakelj, translated and edited by John Žakelj

Introduction

(Translator's comments:) As we began 1949, we were in the Trofaiach Displaced Persons (D.P.) Camp, located near the city of Leoben, Austria, about 50 miles southwest of Vienna. The camp was under the auspices of the International Refugee Organization (IRO). At this point, it may be useful for the reader to know more about the IRO and the situation in Europe at that time. The following interesting article is from Miff Crommelin in Vancouver, British Columbia. Miff's father, Edward Crommelin, worked for the IRO and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) from 1945 to 1952. This article is from the *Stars and Stripes News* sometime in 1950:

More than 750,000 people today are becoming established in new homes in 80 countries throughout the world, thanks to history's most outstanding example of international peace-time cooperation - the United Nations' specialized agency, the International Refugee Organization.

demonstrated the ability of many nations to band together against a mutual enemy, the IRO has best illustrated their capacity to cooperate smoothly in peacetime, without the stimulus of a



Although World War II

The cover page from a 1950's booklet describing the work of the International Refugee Organization. Courtesy of Miff Crommelin.

common threat to their individual security.

The work of the IRO in the three years since it was started has produced hundreds of administrative, operational, social, financial, political and diplomatic problems. All have been settled by negotiation, conference and compromise within the organization to the satisfaction of all nations involved, and to the permanent benefit of more than 1,000,000 persons uprooted and displaced by the last war and the political upheaval that followed it.

From our standpoint as refugees, things didn't work quite as smoothly as the description in the *Stars and Stripes* article. Nevertheless, throughout 1948 and 1949, we were finally beginning to see resolution of the uncertain and dangerous situation that so many of us had been in since the Communists took over our homeland in 1945.

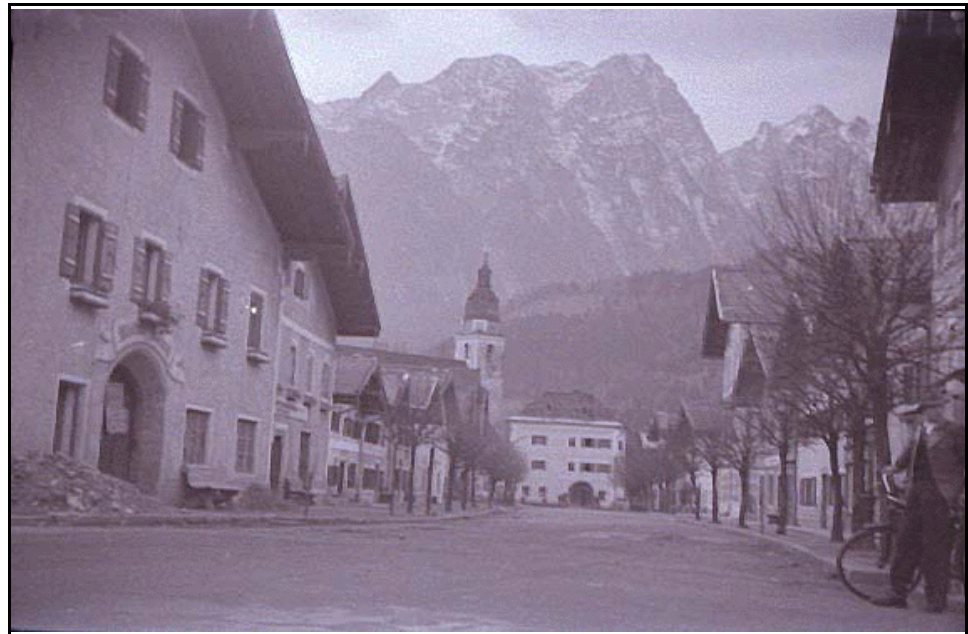
Saturday, January 1, 1949, in the Trofaiach D.P. (Displaced Persons) Camp near Leoben, Austria

The Trofaiach D.P. Camp is located about a half hour's walk from the market ("trg") in Trofaiach. During World War I, this was the site of a gunpowder factory for the Austrian Army. When Austria (and Germany) lost that war, the machinery for manufacturing the gunpowder was apportioned among the new countries that were formed after the war. All the buildings were

destroyed and only the foundations remained. During World War II, the Germans built barracks on this site for their *Ostarbeiter*, workers whom they had forcibly relocated from Eastern Europe (mostly Ukrainians). On this site, the Germans also built a crematorium to burn the bodies of workers who died.

(In 1986, my son and I visited Trofaiach. At first, we had a hard time finding the site of the D.P. Camp because nobody could remember it. Finally, when we asked about the old gunpowder factory, people remembered the location. When we arrived there, we found that a youth camp had been built on the site of the former D.P. Camp.)

Today, January 1, 1949, we're taking turns praying in the chapel to make sure we always have someone praying 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Last night, I didn't sleep well because I was worried I would miss my turn at 3:30 a.m. I finally fell asleep and then woke a few minutes late. I prayed in the chapel from 3:35 to 4:30



A scene from an Austrian village, probably Trofaiach. Photo by IRO administrator E.C. Crommelin, 1950.

a.m., 30 minutes longer than planned to make up for being late. We are praying for a new home where we will be safe and free.

About 5 inches of snow fell last night. At 8 a.m., I went to Mass. At 2 p.m., we had a special New Year's dinner: soup, potatoes, pork, cider and a little red wine. I bought a bottle of red wine yesterday for 21 Schillings.

Baby Janko is 4 and a half months old and weighs 16 pounds. Our friends' daughter Jolanda is 15 months old and weighs only 17 pounds due to her health problems.

Sunday, January 2, 1949

At 11 a.m., the Slovenians in the camp were supposed to elect new representatives to participate in the camp administration, but nobody came. I was asked to replace Gutovnik, who will be leaving for Argentina, but I refused, and nobody else wants to run. Camp administration is thankless work, always full of controversy. And, with so many people leaving regularly for other countries, it's hard to maintain any continuity.

Monday, January 3, 1949

About 300 refugees left for Argentina this morning, including about 70 Slovenians; among them were Rot, Mejač, Svenšek, Kovač, Gutovnik, Primožič, Košir, Močnik, Cukjati, Meden, Zlatar, Fradl, Fišer, and Est with their families and some students from Gradec (Graz). Not one of them is glad to be going to Argentina. They wish they could go back home to Slovenia - but not to slavery, suffering and death.

I canceled my subscription to the "Morning News." Reading the "Morning News" has helped me learn to be a fluent reader of English and even a decent writer.

Tuesday, January 4, 1949

After 15 months, the doctor is no longer prescribing milk for my ulcers, which means that I must be healthy now.

I sent a 20 pound package to my brother Jože in Slovenia, where basic necessities are still very hard to get. I received letters from my sister Mici and my father. Cilka got a letter from her friend Ivanka Žakomeli.

I bought a new suit from Spreitzer for 470 Schillings.

Wednesday, January 5, 1949

I began studying Spanish, in case we will go to Argentina.

This evening, the men were working, so only the women participated in the traditional procession and blessing of homes on the evening before the holy day of the Three Kings.

Thursday, January 6, 1949

We went to Mass at 7 a.m. Rev. Malavašič says the holy day of the Blessed Three Kings is one of the most important holy days, but it's not recognized here in Austria. We didn't have any special food today - for lunch we had sauerkraut and a piece of bread, for supper we had peas.

Friday, January 7, 1949

I received a 30 pound package of food from Mlinar, worth 220 Schillings. My friend Karl had said he would pay for the food from Mlinar, but now he can't afford it.

Saturday, January 8, 1949

I have started doing camp work again. Today I shoveled coal - very tiring work.

Sunday, January 9, 1949

I wrote a letter to Dr. Krek, asking his help in finding Karl's uncle in America.

Monday, January 10, 1949

Last night, at 12:30 a.m., they took Angela Filipič to the Leoben hospital to give birth. She had been complaining of pain for some time, and she has been long overdue.

In the evening, I attended Spanish class. It went well!

Tuesday, January 11, 1949

Angela Filipič died in the Leoben hospital last night at 11 during childbirth, but her baby, a boy, survived. Her husband Marjan was here in the camp, waiting anxiously for news about the birth, but the hospital didn't send word until 1 p.m. today. A nurse arrived with the news 10 minutes after Marjan had left to go to the hospital. So he got the news when he arrived there. He returned to the camp at 5 p.m., in complete despair.

This tragedy has shaken me deeply. What if this had happened to Cilka? I would feel responsible for her death for the rest of my life.

Wednesday, January 12, 1949

Marjan stayed in our room till 11:30 last night. After that, I couldn't sleep all night.

At 8 a.m., Marjan and I took the bus to Leoben. In the hospital, we saw his dead wife - on the dissection table. We picked up her things and then went to the government offices to arrange



Three months after his wife Angela died during childbirth, our friend Marjan Filipič plays with his infant son Andrej. Note the handmade baby carriage, which was probably made out of aluminum from damaged warplanes. Photo by Radulović, in the Trofaiach D.P. camp, April 17, 1949.

for the transport and burial of her body, but we weren't able to accomplish anything because the necessary papers weren't signed yet. We returned to the camp at 10 a.m., and took the train back to Leoben at 2 p.m., but still could not make any arrangements. The doctor who had examined Angela's body had left without signing the papers. When we returned to the camp, we saw Mr. Šepin (Angela's uncle), who had just arrived from Celovec (Klagenfurt) with

his two daughters.

This evening, Štrukelj began a collection to pay for the transport and burial.

Thursday, January 13, 1949

Marjan and the Šepin family went back to Leoben to arrange for transportation of Angela's body back to Trofaiach. After paying a driver 200 Schillings, they returned with her body before noon. Štrukelj and I went around the camp all day, asking for contributions. We collected 498 Schillings. I cried frequently; no other tragedy has shaken me as much as this one.

This afternoon, I went to the Health Commission for a required exam. Dr. Meršol is one of the three IRO doctors. They decided I am not healthy enough for hard physical labor, but good enough for skilled labor and for emigration.

In the evening, there was an announcement over the camp's loudspeaker that the funeral would be at 3:30 tomorrow.

Friday, January 14, 1949

Marjan Filipič and Tončka Šepin brought his baby boy from Leoben around noon today. He was immediately baptized and christened Andrej. During the afternoon, he slept in our room, and people came to look at him.

At 3:30 p.m., Angela's body was buried in the Trofaiach cemetery next to the chapel, in the presence of a large number of Slovenians and others. Marjan's farewell to his wife was deeply moving.

At 8:30 p.m., the Šepin family returned to Celovec with Marjan and his 4-day old baby Andrej. Marjan will return here next Monday.

Saturday, January 15, 1949

This morning, I cut firewood with Karl. In the afternoon, I looked for others to help with the camp work.

Sunday, January 16, 1949

A heavy snowstorm blew all night. I got up twice to close doors and windows which the wind had blown open. Our entryway is full of snow.

The Spreitzer family left for Holland today. Mr. Spreitzer is originally from there. He had married a Slovenian woman; they were living and working in Slovenia when the war ended, and wound up as refugees with the rest of us. As Mrs. Spreitzer was leaving, she gave us some kitchen supplies and thanked us for teaching her how to make bobbin lace.

Monday, January 17, 1949

Marjan returned from Celovec.

Today is my father's 70th birthday. I wish I could be with him at home in Slovenia.

Friday, January 21, 1949

Gross tried to fix my radio, but couldn't because our electricity kept going out. The transformer for the camp overloads and shuts down frequently.

Saturday, January 22, 1949

Another snowstorm last night and all day today. Marjan returned to Celovec to see his baby and his wife's relatives.

Sunday, January 23, 1949

Engineer Karlin and Mr. Lorber, who work in the camp administration, offered me the job of

to Argentina. She says they are doing well, but are having problems because they don't know Spanish. She also writes that they have had some success in selling bobbin lace for borders on curtains and tablecloths, but they can't find any buyers for larger, more expensive pieces. (We had been hoping that, wherever we go, we could get some income by making and selling bobbin lace.)

Sunday, January 30, 1949

Nice day. Cilka and I went for a walk in the woods on the nearby hillside.

Monday, January 31, 1949

We received our second vaccinations against typhus. Another snowstorm outside.

I asked engineer Karlin about the job I was promised. He said the major (the camp commander) hired a Russian, but Karlin is not happy with him. He will arrange for me to get the job, but it won't begin February 1 as we had expected.

February 1949

Tuesday, February 1, 1949

This evening, we met with Frank Lorber, who explained the possibilities of emigration to Canada, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. He recommends emigrating anywhere, the sooner the better.

Wednesday, February 2, 1949

We went to Mass this morning in celebration of Candlemas, the feast day of St. Blase.

This evening I went to English class from 7 - 8, and Spanish class from 8 - 9.

Thursday, February 3, 1949

I took my turn praying in the chapel from 11 p.m. to midnight. The chapel was very cold. Outside it's - 4°F.

Saturday, February 5, 1949

We each received a loaf of white bread, for the first time in a long time. For lunch, we usually get cabbage, peas, polenta or barley porridge with beans.

Sunday, February 6, 1949

I wrote to the national bank for permission to send my brother's accordion back to him in Slovenia. I also took care of business correspondence for a number of friends and relatives. I have become like a "clearinghouse."

Tuesday, February 8, 1949

Jernej Zupan thinks I should write to Dr. Krek and ask him to help us emigrate to the United States.

Thursday, February 10, 1949

I received my first ration card for milk in 40 days. The doctor prescribed milk for my ulcers again, but the card lay in the clinic for the past 10 days.

Friday, February 11, 1949

We received 200 pounds of coal for our barracks.

The national bank denied my request for permission to send my brother's accordion back to him in Slovenia.

Saturday, February 12, 1949

After three weeks of repair, I finally received

my radio back, but it still doesn't work right.

Monday, February 14, 1949

We received a letter from our brother-in-law Mire in Canada. He says he was sick and had to spend all his savings. Now he's working in a factory. He has not been able to sell a single piece of the bobbin lace we had sent him. We had hoped this might be a source of income for us.

I was the only one at Spanish class this evening. Since Argentina is not accepting applications, nobody wants to learn Spanish.

Cilka was informed she will not be receiving extra food rations any longer, since our baby Janko is now 6 months old.

The following families received approval to emigrate to Canada: Hribar, Zorc, Levičar and Žonta.

Tuesday, February 15, 1949

There were 12 people at English class this evening. I was still the only one at Spanish. Our teachers are very demanding.

Wednesday, February 16, 1949

For the first time, our baby Janko said, "Ata, teta."

We received two packages from our friend Paulin in New York. The packages included food, which we are very happy to use here, especially lard; and old clothes, which I send on to our relatives in Slovenia, and which they are very happy to receive. The packages also included 3 Reader's Digests, which I enjoy reading and which helps me practice my English.

Friday, February 18, 1949

We received a letter from our friend Vinko in Canada. He sent one dollar for our baby Janko and one dollar for our friends' little girl Jolanda.

237 people left the camp for Brazil today. There were no acquaintances in this group.

Saturday, February 19, 1949

I bought an American dollar for 36 Schillings. Later, I sold the same dollar for 40 Schillings.

Monday, February 21, 1949

We received firewood for the month of March. I gave some of our coal to Miller in exchange for more firewood.

Thursday, February 24, 1949

33 people left for Canada today, including Mimi Albiani and her children.

The New Zealand immigration commission visited our camp.

Friday, February 25, 1949

The group that was planning to emigrate to Canada (Levičar, Zorc and Žonta) has been told they cannot leave because Levičar can't get approval from the Field Secret Service. They were supposed to go meet with the Canadian immigration commission in Gradec today, but received word to not come.

American agents have been in the camp for the past 2 days interviewing the Gosar and Zupan families.

A number of camp jobs have opened up due to people leaving. Franc Zupan is the new quartermaster and Adolf Kokelj is working on finances in the camp administration. I haven't asked again about a job for myself.

Sunday, February 27, 1949

I wrote letters to friends and relatives all day.

For Sunday lunch, we had cabbage and potatoes in the camp dining room, followed by soup with meat and dumplings in our room. The camp food doesn't even provide enough energy for a person to die, so we have to supplement it with our own cooking. Despite the shortages, people in the camp are healthier than rich people outside the camp.

Monday, February 28, 1949

More than 200 people left the camp for Australia.

March 1949

Tuesday, March 1, 1949

Fat Tuesday. We celebrated in our room with a meaty soup, cookies, rolls and a bottle of wine. Despite all this, I was in a bad mood. I'm worried - where will we go? What will become of us?

At English class in the evening, there were only 6 of us; and at Spanish class, three.

Thursday, March 3, 1949

I meant to visit the camp's work office, but instead I mistakenly stepped into the office of the Yugoslav repatriation commission. I saw the Yugoslav representative, but didn't talk with him. Other refugees have been stopping in to argue with him about relatives back in Slovenia who were murdered by the government.

Friday, March 4, 1949

I took a 15 pound package to the post office for my brother Jože in Slovenia. The package

included a pair of boots, a thermos bottle and an electric cooker.

Tuesday, March 8, 1949

More than 30 people left for Canada, among them the Hribar family, heading for Alberta.

Wednesday, March 9, 1949

I received letters from my father in Slovenia and from Mrs. Edwards in Tasmania, Australia. Last year, she somehow heard about our needs in the refugee camp and so she sent us some food. I wrote back, thanking her. She replied by sending a nice wool blanket for our baby, and we have exchanged a couple letters since then.

Sunday, March 13, 1949

I wrote back to my father in Slovenia, and to Rudl Primožič (who left our camp for Argentina two months ago).

Monday, March 14, 1949

I received letters from my mother and from my sister-in-law in Slovenia.

At the camp store, I exchanged 80 points for clothes, mostly for our baby Janko.

Miss Lili asked Cilka to teach her how to make bobbin lace. Miss Lili is a secretary in the camp offices. She is a refugee herself, a "Volksdeutscher" (a Native German who had moved to Slovenia during the war).

A new doctor examined Janko in the camp clinic. He recommended giving him Vigatol and lots of fresh air to prevent rickets. Janko weighs 19 pounds.

This afternoon, I was at the IRO offices with Seliškar, translating for his application to emigrate to America.

Our Spanish teacher is so demanding that I cannot keep up.

Sunday, March 20, 1949

I wrote letters to my mother, my sister, and to a friend who had emigrated to Canada.

Wednesday, March 23, 1949

At 7 a.m., I took the train to Leoben to buy things that my brother Jože needs in Slovenia.

Thursday, March 24, 1949

This morning I split firewood. Cilka now thinks I should take a job in the camp offices so I wouldn't do so much physical labor. Earlier she had been opposed because she was worried I would be blamed whenever things went wrong.

Friday, March 25, 1949

I received another food package from my friend Paulin in New York, worth about 100 Schillings. These packages really help.

Sunday, March 27, 1949

I wrote a reply to Mrs. Edwards in Australia. I sent her 33 stamps and a lace collar. The postage was 11 Schillings!

Monday, March 28, 1949



A scene from the Trofaiach D.P. Camp, just to the left of the main entrance. Our barracks was a little further to the left. Note the snow covered mountains in the background, and the British flag flying in the camp. Our camp was in the part of Austria that was occupied by the British after the war. Photo by IRO administrator E.C. Crommelin, 1950.

I drew patterns for slippers for Cilka and Janko.

Tuesday, March 29, 1949

We used a Linguaphone (a machine like a record player) for the first time in our Spanish and English classes this evening. I can't keep up with the teacher!

Thursday, March 31, 1949

I made slippers for Cilka and Janko.

April 1949

Friday, April 1, 1949

Sun and snow today. This morning I went shopping for our families in Slovenia. This

afternoon, I put together a package for Cilka's family.

Saturday, April 2, 1949

This evening, we began spiritual exercises; we prayed till 11:30 p.m.

Sunday, April 3, 1949

We picked some dandelion leaves near the camp clinic.

Monday, April 4, 1949

For the first time in this camp, I was attacked by bedbugs. As a result, I slept poorly last night.

We have a new English teacher who seems better than the one we had.

Tuesday, April 5, 1949

I have bedbug bites all over me. Lice stay away from me, but bedbugs seem to really like me. This afternoon, I sprinkled DDT powder.

Thursday, April 7, 1949

It's a year since we arrived in this camp.

Reberšak promised me I could become a camp policeman whenever one of them leaves for America.

Saturday, April 9, 1949

J. Zupan says I should take over his mail carrier job when he leaves for America. The job has no official pay, but he's making 300 Schillings a month from tips.

Tuesday, April 12, 1949

I sent our friend Silva 80 cigarettes to thank her for the food she's been sending us. The camp

continues to provide us with cigarette rations, which I don't need.

I sent Mihelič the remaining Kocmur photos from last summer. Last June, Kocmur sent me 685 copies of photos he had taken in the camp. We had hoped I could sell them to the other refugees at a profit, but I have not been able to sell them all, and have actually lost money. The ones that are left are mostly of Croats. The Croats in the camp preferred to buy from a Croatian photographer.

Thursday, April 14, 1949

Our friend Silva sent us ration cards which will allow us to buy some meat.

Our baby Janko is beginning to walk if we hold his hand. He made one first step by himself and stopped when he realized there was nobody holding on to him.

Friday, April 15, 1949

This Sunday will be Easter. Cilka baked a potica for the Jesenko family, two for us and three for the Erznožnik family.

We received Easter cards from my sister Julka, Cilka's sister Julka, and letters from my mother and from Cilka's brother Rupert and sister Manica.

Saturday, April 16, 1949

At 4 p.m., we went to the camp chapel for the traditional Easter blessing of food. Then we had a wonderful dinner: potica, klobase, horseradish and tea.

At 6:30 p.m., we had a solemn procession through the camp. I helped carry the baldachin which covered the priest carrying the Eucharist. The Croats sang poorly, our Slovenian singers sounded much better.



Refugees in the Trofaiach camp participate in a solemn procession (probably the Saturday before Easter , April 16, 1949). From left to right: Tone Babnik, Rev. Malavašič, Miha Sršen is holding up the left front corner of the baldachin, the author, Anton Žakelj, is holding up the back corner of the baldachin, Jože Starič is in the middle, then holding the other corner, unknown. Photo by Radulović.

Easter Sunday, April 17, 1949

At 9 a.m., we attended Easter Mass. The camp chapel was packed, and the singing was glorious.

At noon, the camp provided soup with macaroni, potatoes and pork. Even though we were grateful to get some meat in our soup, it was a disappointing meal for Easter. Back in our room, Cilka prepared some potatoes and chicken. I bought a bottle of wine and we had a more appropriate Easter celebration.

We had our first picture taken with our baby Janko, who is now 8 months old.

Tuesday, April 19, 1949

We received two dollars from our friend Pavle Kokelj in Canada. That means he is doing well.

Thursday, April 21, 1949

This morning, we listened to the major speaking about emigration. He recommended Australia, Brazil, Canada, Venezuela and the United States. This was my first time in our beautiful new movie theater.

This evening, the staff reviewed each person's plans for emigration. They are threatening to evict us from the camp if we refuse to make

plans for emigration, or if we are too picky about where we want to go.

In the camp store, I exchanged some of our points for a coat, shirt, underwear, soap and shampoo.

Saturday, April 23, 1949

I spent my last Schilling to buy some meat.

Sunday, April 24, 1949

A beautiful day. We took our boy for a walk in the nearby woods; we saw a deer and a rabbit.

Monday, April 25, 1949

216 people left our camp for Australia.

Tuesday, April 26, 1949

I wrote letters to friends. Sold 100 cigarettes for 20 Schillings. Those cigarette rations really help us get by.

Wednesday, April 27, 1949

430 "campers" left for Australia.

I am attending two Spanish classes in case we have to go to a Spanish-speaking country.

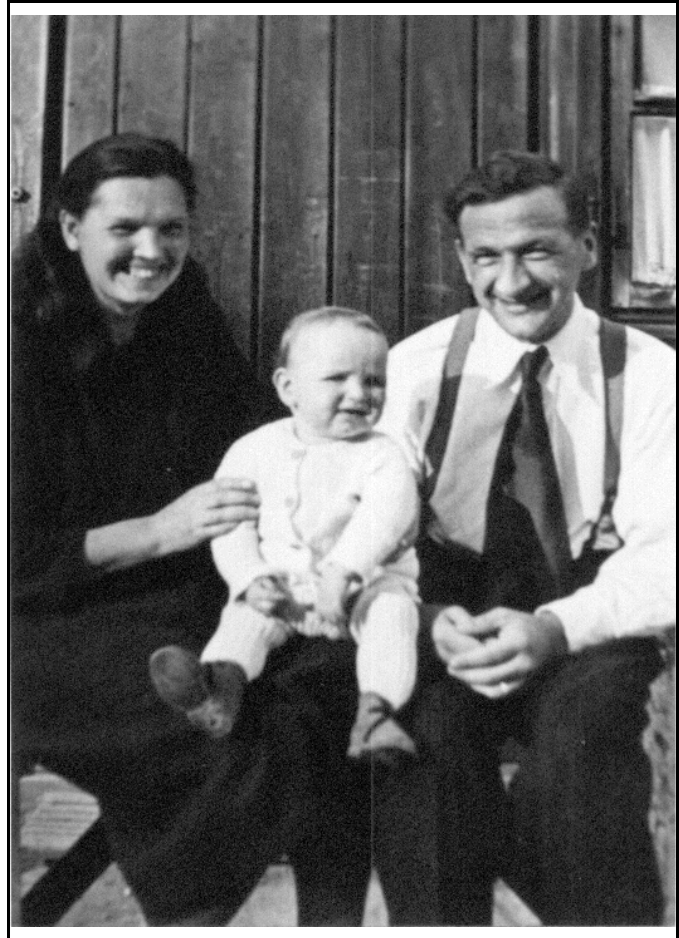
Thursday, April 28, 1949

For the second time this week, I was awakened by swelling in my eyelids. I don't feel good.

Dr. Klaus gave me 30 Schillings each for my two dollars.

May 1949

Sunday, May 1, 1949



Cilka, Janko and Anton Žakelj, in the Trofaiach D.P. camp, on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1949. Note Janko's slippers which were handmade by the author. Photo by Radulović.

I gave Jerič a pack of Lucky Strikes to fix my radio.

Monday, May 2, 1949

The IRO offices will move to Kapfenberg, but we will stay here.

Wednesday, May 4, 1949

This evening, we attended another meeting in the camp hall regarding emigration. For most people, the IRO officials are recommending emigration to Australia. For us, they recommend getting an "affidavit" from our brother-in-law Mire in Canada, or from someone we know in Argentina. Right now, due to my illness, they can't force me to move.

Mr. Povirk asked the Australian representative if they have cows and churches in Australia.

Friday, May 6, 1949

Mr. Jesenko was called to meet with the IRO staff. They demanded that he decide between Australia and Brazil. He said he would rather go to Argentina.

Saturday, May 7, 1949

This afternoon, we planted lettuce (for the first time) and red beets.

Sunday, May 8, 1949

The first group left for New Zealand today - 50 people, among them 3 Slovenians and a number of Ukrainians (including Strihačenko and engineer Pahonov). The train went off the tracks in the Trofaiach station soon after everyone got on board. They had to move

everybody into trucks and transport them to Leoben, where they boarded another train.

Tuesday, May 10, 1949

We took our son Janko to the clinic for an exam. He weighs 21 pounds. The doctor recommended lots of fresh air and Vigantol D (Vitamin D). I am taking Janko for walks in the nearby woods almost every day. The other day, we saw a beautiful little fawn with spots.

I talked with the farmer who usually sells us milk. He agreed to lower his price from 2.50 to 2 Schillings per liter. This will save me 6 Schillings a month.

Wednesday, May 11, 1949

Snow and rain today. I was called to meet with the IRO staff to discuss emigration to Argentina.

Thursday, May 12, 1949

Again I was called to meet with the IRO staff. I

My wife Cilka's IRO refugee identification card, issued May 9, 1949.

gave them the address of my friend Čeferin, who emigrated there last November. They said they will write to him.

Saturday, May 14, 1949

My friend Karl bought his wife Mici a watch for 467 Schillings.

Monday, May 16, 1949

Jernej Zupan is sick with the mumps, so he asked me if I could go get the mail for him and distribute it to everyone in the camp. I ran around doing that from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

In the evening, I read my English essay "My Home Village" to the class. The teacher corrected only a couple words.

In the evening, Erznožnik, Jesenko and I applied to emigrate to South Carolina to work on the tobacco plantations.

Tuesday, May 17, 1949

I distributed the mail from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. I ride around on a bike, but it causes my heart to pound.

Wednesday, May 18, 1949

Each day, I'm getting the mail distributed 15 minutes quicker.

Saturday, May 21, 1949

Today, we had rain so I had to walk instead of bike when I went into town to get the mail.

Monday, May 23, 1949

Tone Seliškar, the Gosar family, and the Zupan family went to the American consulate in Gradec (Graz) and were accepted for immigration to the United States. Okorn and

some others were not accepted.

I agreed to take over Zupan's job as mail carrier after he leaves for America.

[Editor's note] To help you understand the situation, the following are excerpts from Mark Wyman's book, "DPs, Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951."

There was initially little hope that America would take in many DPs. President Truman's early moves brought in 40,000 DPs in less than three years, as regular immigrants, but it is noteworthy that Truman did not propose to go beyond existing immigration laws in 1945 and 1946.

Wheels were starting to turn, however, slowly and painfully. More and more Americans began to realize that Europe's refugee problems could not end without massive immigration into the United States. The other possible solutions—large-scale repatriation or assimilation into overcrowded Germany—were finally seen to be impossible. A Citizens Committee on Displaced Persons (CCDP) was created in the fall of 1946. ... The CCDP launched a nationwide campaign to convince the public that DPs would not take jobs or homes from Americans, that they were neither collaborators nor Communists, and that only a small proportion were Jews, contrary to widespread belief.

The fight in Congress was bitter, and opponents delayed the DP bill's passage until the spring of 1948 using "all the parliamentary tactics of stall, evasion, confusion and deception," according to one scholar. At the same time that President Truman signed the compromise measure on 25 June 1948, he attacked it for combining the worst features of the Senate and House bills resulting in "a pattern of discrimination and intolerance wholly inconsistent with the American sense of justice."

Truman said he was signing it, despite its negative features, to allow resettlement to proceed for the 200,000 DPs authorized to enter over the next two years ...

...An elaborate system of recruitment was worked out quickly, known in the U.S. Displaced Persons Commission as "the pipeline." It carried DP applicants through twenty-two steps, ranging from medical and skills checks to an FBI investigation and a search among records of the Nazis' Berlin Document Center. ... The crucial feature of the American program was the "assurance," a promise from an American sponsor that a specific DP would be provided housing for his family and employment. (This was a moral, not a legal, obligation.) Assurances were mainly collected by voluntary agencies, then approved by the DP Commission in Washington ...

Time spent in the "pipeline" ran from three months to more than twelve months, depending on the nature of medical problems (such as old TB scars) or collaboration charges. ...

The chance to move thousands of refugees to America shifted voluntary agencies' operations into high gear ... The organizations pleaded, scrounged and advertised to locate sponsors in the United States. Churches were especially active ... Catholics had a DP resettlement committee in each diocese, usually working with ethnic organizations. ...

Friday, May 27, 1949

This evening, Zupan and I collected 160 Schillings in tips for distributing mail in the Slovenian section of the camp and in the transit section (for people passing through).

Saturday, May 28, 1949

I collected only 10 Schillings for delivering mail to the Croatian barracks.

The Chilean commission accepted only 38 people out of 360 applicants (for emigration to Chile).

Sunday, May 29, 1949

I sold newspapers in the camp, including "Sunday," "God's Love," "The Carinthian Chronicle," and "Steierblatt." People tell me I might be able to make 70 Schillings a month selling newspapers.



Our son Janko is learning to walk, in the Trofaiach D.P. camp, probably on July 10, 1949. Photo by Radulović.

This morning, we attended the blessing of the new scout flag.

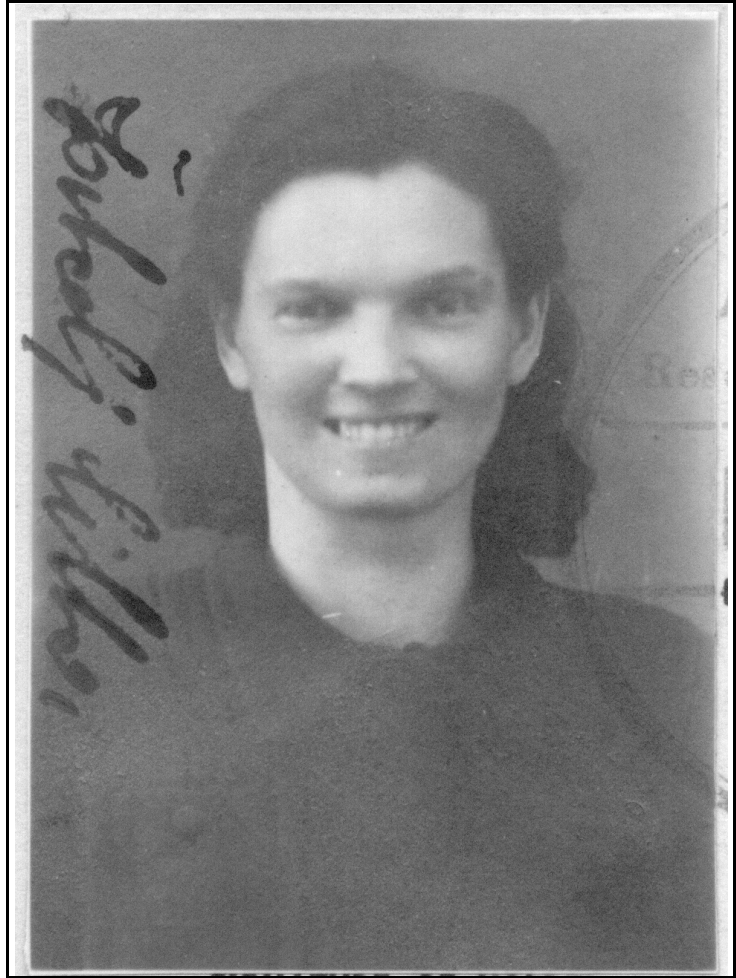
This afternoon, we went for a walk in the woods. Our son Janko really likes these walks and pays attention to every detail; he notices birds or squirrels quicker than I do.

Monday, May 30, 1949

At 9 a.m., our first large group left for America, including Tone Seliškar, the Jernej Zupan family (5 people), the Gosar family (3 people), Korenčan and others, altogether 26 people. I gave Zupan 80 Schillings, some bobbin lace and some postal coupons to write to us when they get to America.

They say that none of the camp staff (including many of our fellow refugees) will be paid for the month of May, or in the future. People are very upset and refusing to work.

The camp food is the worst in 3 years: nothing but coffee in the morning, bean soup or polenta for lunch, and coffee or inedible soup for dinner. Is this how they will force us to leave?



Cilka Žakelj, refugee camp ID picture, June 13, 1949. Photo by Radulović.

June 1949

Wednesday, June 1, 1949

New people are working in the camp kitchen to replace the people who refused to work due to lack of pay, but the food is still just as watery. At least they're finally giving me some white bread again, after not getting any for some weeks.

I've caught a bad cold, probably from riding the bike when I get the mail. I get hot and sweaty,

and then I get the chills.

The Brazilian commission accepted only 35 families.

Friday, June 3, 1949

My friend Čeferin writes from Argentina that he has arranged an apartment for us. We can move in around July 1.

32 people received an invitation to come to the American consulate in Gradec (Graz).

I went to a store in Trofaiach and bought some food which we will cook in our room, including 40 pounds of potatoes, 5 eggs, some oil and some grits. I also received a supplemental ration from the camp warehouse: some bread, polenta and a little meat.

Saturday, June 4, 1949

Most of the camp staff are still striking, but I'm distributing mail as usual.

Monday, June 6, 1949

Franc Zupan received a letter from Dr. Basaj which says that John and Mary Brezic have agreed to be our sponsors in America! They are an older couple who want us to help them on their farm in Wisconsin, and maybe someday take over their farm.

So now we have a choice: we can go to either America or Argentina. Everyone is congratulating us about our prospects for America, but I'm still wondering if Argentina might be a better choice. Maybe it will be easier to sell our bobbin lace in Argentina. What if I could get easier work in Argentina? I've always been interested in farming, but I hear that farming in America is much more advanced than it is here. What if it will be too complicated for me? And I think I'm probably too slow and too honest for America. But Cilka is worried that the heat in Argentina will be too hard for her lungs (some years ago, she had a tuberculosis-like infection).

Tuesday, June 7, 1949

Levičar is teasing me about becoming an American farmer. People think we will soon become owners of a farm. I know it won't be like that.

Wednesday, June 8, 1949

Of the 30 of us who applied to go to America, all have been accepted.

Thursday, June 9, 1949

This morning, I took the train to Leoben and went shopping for sandals and a raincoat which



When John and Mary Brezic agreed to provide us with work and a place to live, they had never met us and hardly knew anything about us. Without them we could not have come to America. This picture is from their wedding in 1912 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. John came to America from Slovenia in 1907, Mary in 1910. They bought a forested farm near Willard in 1914.

I could use when I ride my bike to get the mail.
Nobody had what I needed.

A large group left for Brazil today.

Friday, June 10, 1949

Some of the refugees in the camp were raising pigs for food. The pigs were all slaughtered today, I think because of hoof and mouth disease.

Saturday, June 11, 1949

I was a witness today for the civil marriage of Štefan Zorc and Joža Zaleznik. I distributed the mail as usual, but became very tired.

Sunday, June 12, 1949

I went around to some of the barracks and collected 40 Schillings in tips for distributing mail.

Monday, June 13, 1949

I'm 42 years old today. We went to Mass at 6:30. Cilka made me a cake for my birthday and gave me a kiss (we don't do that very often).

There was new snow up on the mountains.

Radulović (a Croatian and fellow refugee) took our pictures for new ID cards.

Tuesday, June 14, 1949

The photos didn't turn out, so we needed to retake them.

This evening, people were singing outside our barracks.

Wednesday, June 15, 1949

At 10 a.m., 58 people left in trucks for Leoben, and from there on trains to a ship for America. Among them were Jože Starič, Franc Zupan, Franc Škulj, the Okorn family, and Povirk.

The Australian commission will stay here for a week. In two days, they have already accepted many applications.

This afternoon, I brought some saplings which we will use tomorrow as decorations for the procession.

Thursday, June 16, 1949



*Anton Žakelj, refugee camp ID picture, June 13, 1949.
Photo by Radulović.*

At 9 a.m., we went to Mass and then we all participated in the traditional procession for the holy day of Corpus Christi. Despite the bad weather and shortage of singers, it was beautiful. Even the Hungarians participated - under the leadership of Rev. Atila.

Saturday, June 18, 1949

I bought new sandals for 57 Schillings and a bottle of wine for 20 Schillings. On the way to town, my bicycle broke down, so I had to walk.

Monday, June 20, 1949

I brought a backpack full of packages from the post office and distributed them in the camp, but nobody gave me any tips today.

Thursday, June 23, 1949

This evening, many people made bonfires up on the hills, as we usually did at home on this date, the last day of spring. (Bonfires on this day are a tradition with many people, but for Slovenians, they are referred to as "Kres" and they commemorate a time hundreds of years ago when Slovenians used large bonfires on hilltops to warn neighboring villages about the arrival of attacking Turks.)

Friday, June 24, 1949

Our friend Karl Erznožnik received a letter and documents to fill out from the National Catholic Welfare Conference (N.C.W.C) for emigration to America. He feels very fortunate.

Dr. Maksimoff examined us to see if we are healthy enough for emigration. He recommended an operation for my varicose veins. He said my eyesight is

good. I did not try to cover up my problems with ulcers. They took blood samples and injected some vaccine. They also did X-rays and wanted some urine samples, but neither Cilka nor I could produce any.

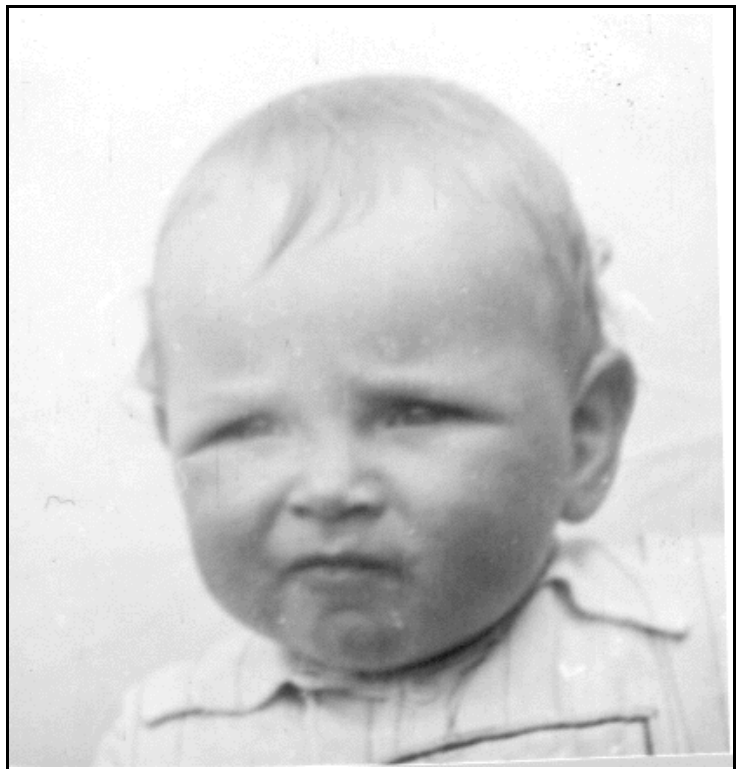
Saturday, June 25, 1949

Cilka still does some leather-sewing for Čopi, a nearby shoemaker. He sold me new soles so I could fix my own shoes, and charged me only 7 Schillings (in the store, I would have paid 22).

Sunday, June 26, 1949

I went walking in the woods this afternoon with Cilka and Janko. Janko ate wild strawberries with great pleasure.

Monday, June 27, 1949



Refugee camp ID picture for our 10-month old son Janko, June 13, 1949. Photo by Radulović.

We received a telegram from our friend Silva, that she will come visit us next Wednesday.

Rev. Roman (Malavašič) made us extra copies of our birth and wedding certificates. We have been waiting for emigration papers from the N.C.W.C. for 3 weeks now. Other people who do not have a sponsor like we do have already received their papers.

Wednesday, June 29, 1949

I got the mail distribution done by 11:15, and then newspapers by noon. In the afternoon, I took the train to Leoben to meet our friend Silva. She brought two suitcases full of wonderful things for us: potica, lard, cherries, pants for me, an outfit for Janko, and a dress for Cilka.

For the entire month, I received 355 Schillings in tips for delivering mail. Although the job has no official pay, the tips add up to more than I could make if I had one of the camp jobs. Mrs. Cerar gave me more than anyone else, in the hope that I would deliver her mail first.

Cilka and I continue to use our income as before: 1/3 for immediate expenses, 1/3 for our families in Slovenia, and 1/3 for savings. We use much of our savings to buy lace that people make in the camp, because we think we will be able to sell the lace wherever we go.

July 1949

Monday, July 4, 1949

At 1 p.m., we said farewell to the first refugees from our camp to leave for Chile. There were 216 people in the group, including Anton Tisel with his wife Martina and Jerič with his family.

Tuesday, July 5, 1949

Hundreds of new people arrived in our camp, all bound for Australia.

Wednesday, July 6, 1949

A large group - 542 people - left our camp today for Australia. There were many Slovenians among them, including Lakajnar, Soko and others.

Friday, July 8, 1949

This evening we went to a meeting in the Slovenian reading room. Rev. Malavašič had bad news for us. Very few of us will be allowed to go to America. Argentina will again begin accepting applications, but we don't know when.

We received a large gift of food and clothes from American Catholics. Rev. Malavašič and I were chosen to do the distribution.

Our friend Karl and his family went to Kapfenberg today to continue the application process for America.

Saturday, July 9, 1949

I distributed letters till 1 p.m., then newspapers till 3 p.m., and then the American food and clothing till 6 p.m. Here's how we decided to divide everything among 180 Slovenians: each child under 14 months received one set of baby clothes and one diaper; each child under 6 received one box of biscuits and two boxes of dry milk; older children received a pound of beans and a box of peas; adults received a box of biscuits, 2 boxes of soup and 2 boxes of dry milk. Everyone was happy except one person who was angry with me because he didn't get what he expected. I distributed everything according to Rev. Malavašič's list. I considered refusing to accept the baby clothes for our Janko, but then there would have been a fight about who would get that. When you're

distributing something like this, you can never please everyone, and they blame you for everything.

Sunday, July 10, 1949

Our friends Hans and Mila Huber arrived by motorcycle today for a visit. They live in Deutsch Feistritz, a village about 20 miles southeast of here. They said they could get us jobs and an apartment in Deutsch Feistritz. They don't think we should leave Europe. (We first met Hans many years ago when he came to Žiri as an Austrian border guard. While stationed in Žiri, he fell in love with Mila, who lived near Žiri. They married and returned to his home in Austria.) I turned down their invitation to stay in Austria because I do not think I could get decent work in Austria. I think the prospects for decent jobs are much better in

America or Argentina.

Radulović took pictures of us this afternoon, including Silva (who is still here visiting), and Hans and Mila.

Marjan Filipič was teasing Cilka and Silva, but Cilka got angry with him. Now all three of them are upset.

Monday, July 11, 1949

Silva went back to her home today, after visiting us for 14 days. I accompanied her to the train station in Trofaiach and gave her 10 Schillings and 20 packs of cigarettes for the trip.

Friday, July 15, 1949

We received a package from Silva - 10 pounds



Our friends visited us in the Trofaiach camp. From the left: Cilka, Janko and Anton Žakelj, Silva Hoja, Hans and Mila Huber, Jolanda, Karl and Mici Erznožnik. July 10, 1949. Photo by Radulović

of cherries. Cilka loves them.

Janko was vaccinated against whooping cough.

Rev. Roman (Malavašič) helped me fill out some papers -for emigration to America. Now people are saying that Argentina will not accept any families with children - only single adults up to age 37 and married couples up to age 40.

Saturday, July 16, 1949

I paid Radulović 55 Schillings for 9 photos of us with Silva, and 16 of us with Silva, Mila and Hans. I sent 3 photos to Mila and 6 to Silva.

Sunday, July 17, 1949

I signed up for a pilgrimage to the shrine at Maria Zell for next Sunday.

Wednesday, July 20, 1949

It's cool. The bedbugs were biting me all night.

Saturday, July 23, 1949

Cilka has been working in Čopi's shoemaking shop the last few days. I was in the camp workshop repairing her shoes.

Sunday, July 24, 1949

At 7 a.m., about 90 of us, including Slovenians, Croatians, and Volksdeutcher, left on trucks for a pilgrimage to Maria Zell, about 50 miles away. (But Cilka and Janko stayed at the camp.) At 9 a.m., we stopped at the See-Pass, at an altitude of 4,000 feet. At 11 a.m., we reached our destination, after traveling through the mountains, across many very steep and winding roads.

Maria Zell is a modern, tourist village. But our primary destination was a 700 year-old church located on the hillside above the town. The

inside of the church was stunningly beautiful. Rev. Malavašič said Mass at noon, accompanied by Slovenian singing.

After Mass, we had lunch at the "Golden Ox." The lunch cost 10 Schillings, and we didn't have to use any ration cards! At 2 p.m., we toured a mechanical Nativity scene which they told us is the largest in the world. At 3 p.m., we went to Slovenian litanies to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Four men led the singing from the altar, with the entire church responding to each refrain. It was deeply moving for all of us.

At 5 p.m. we left for the return journey to the camp. The weather was beautiful all day. I rode in the open truck behind the cab. Despite my warm clothes, I felt very cold.

I missed my wife and little boy during the entire trip. I wanted to buy them some souvenirs, but everything seemed terribly expensive.

At 7:30, we arrived back in the camp. The Hungarians in the camp were waiting for us and they greeted us with singing.

Monday, July 25, 1949

As I went to the post office to pick up the mail, I felt a growing pain in my back, but I continued with my usual mail delivery.

Tuesday, July 26, 1949

This morning I couldn't get up; my back was stiff and painful. Cilka went to get the mail for me and brought it back to our room. I sorted it out on the bed and then Cilka took it out to each of the Slovenian barracks. I distributed the rest to the other barracks in the afternoon. When I got back to our room, I warmed my back with an electric heater which I had bought from Štefan Zorc for 20 Schillings.

Wednesday, July 27, 1949

My back still felt stiff, but I distributed the mail in the Croatian and Ukrainian sections of the camp. In the afternoon, I went to the clinic, where they gave me some anti-neuralgic tablets and 30 minutes of heat treatments. Back in my room, I warmed my back some more with my electric heater.

Thursday, July 28, 1949

Cilka helped me distribute the mail in the Croatian and Ukrainian sections of the camp.

The IRO in Kapfenberg sent us an invitation to apply for emigration to America. This afternoon, I worked on the forms, but couldn't finish. Here's an example of some of the questions and my replies (this is all translated from German):

*Question #40: Why did you leave your homeland, and why have you not returned?
Answer: Refugee from communism.*

#41: Don't you want to return to your homeland and why not? Answer: No. Life in communist countries is uncertain and the people are mean.

*#42. Provide a short history of your life.
Answer: For my first 25 years, I lived with my father, including 10 years as a shoemaker's apprentice. In 1929 and 1931 I served as a draftee in the Yugoslav army. During the Great Depression in 1932, I attended business school in Ljubljana. After I graduated from business school, I was employed as an accountant at the shoemakers' cooperative in Žiri. I continued there until 1943, when the partisans made further work impossible. From the fall of 1943 to the spring of 1945, I was the accountant for a shoe factory which was established in Kranj by a group of shoemakers who had moved there from Žiri. After the war, I fled from my homeland because, as a democratic man, I felt that life under communist rule would be impossible.*

At 4 p.m., I was called on to help Karl and his family complete similar forms.

Since I am one of the few people in the camp who has documents showing my family history going back for a number of generations, I am often called upon to be a witness for people who have no identity papers. Without proof of identity, they cannot emigrate anywhere.

Friday, July 29, 1949

At 9 a.m., we said farewell to the third group to leave for America. This group had 64 people, including Štefan Zorc, his wife Joža and their 11-month old daughter Marija.

It was hot today, with a thunderstorm in the afternoon.

Saturday, July 30, 1949

Cool. My back is feeling a little better. I haven't gone to English class all week.

Sunday, July 31, 1949

Warm again. I worked on the emigration forms again. I wasn't sure what to put down for race. I put down "white."

August 1949

Monday, August 1, 1949

At 6:30 a.m., Cilka, Janko and I, and the Jesenko family boarded a train for Kapfenberg, to the American offices of the IRO. We finished our business at the IRO between 8:45 and 9:30 a.m., and then made arrangements for pictures and our return to the camp. On the way back through Leoben, I picked up 2 copies of Janko's birth certificate. By 12:30, we were back in the camp. Janko was calm through the entire trip. He enjoyed looking at the horses, cars, motorcycles and other things as we passed

by. In Kapfenberg, we had to do some walking. Although my back still hurts, I still walked faster than Cilka, and much faster than Mrs. Jesenko (who is 4 months pregnant). Janko sometimes walked on his own, but mostly we had to carry him.

Tuesday, August 2, 1949

I went to the clinic again for my back. They had me lie down in the special electric heater. I fell asleep and woke up 30 minutes later, wet from sweat.

Thursday, August 4, 1949

I received a letter from my brother Jože in Slovenia, Yugoslavia. He says our brother Ciril and his wife Ivica have been in prison for 14 days. Which prison and why? Their infant daughter Marjetica has been moved to relatives in Žiri.

(We learned later that the police took them from their home without notice, leaving Marjetica home alone. Friends came by and cared for their daughter until relatives arrived. As was typical in communist Yugoslavia at that time, the charges were vague, something like not cooperating with the government.)

The letter also says that our sister Julka lost her job in the factory because she used up all her vacation taking time off for church holy days. As punishment, they may give her a job somewhere where she won't even get Sundays off.

Monday, August 8, 1949

My back is back to normal, so I no longer need help distributing the mail. Cilka did a good job helping me the past 14 days.

Tuesday, August 9, 1949

Today our English class was in the woods near

the camp.

Saturday, August 13, 1949

There was new snow in the higher elevations in the nearby mountains. Cool.

Monday, August 15, 1949

At 7 p.m., Slovenians from the camp sang in Trofaiach, and then again at 9 p.m. in the camp chapel, under the direction of Bore Erman. Very nice.

Wednesday, August 17, 1949

I bought a large German-English dictionary for 40 Schillings.

Thursday, August 18, 1949

I used up all my points in the camp store and bought a second suit.

Friday, August 19, 1949

Malka Povirk left for America.

Saturday, August 20, 1949

Karl received an invitation to visit the American consulate in Kapfenberg on Aug. 25; they say that he and his family will leave for America a week after that.

Monday, August 22, 1949

Cilka and Karl went to Leoben to buy eyeglasses. They will ask the IRO to reimburse them. They also bought a bicycle part and a thermos bottle to mail to my brother Jože in Slovenia.

Thursday, August 25, 1949

Karl and his family went to Kapfenberg and

back today. They received approval to emigrate to America in one week.

Friday, August 26, 1949

Karl and I began building shipping crates for the trip to America. We obtained some boards and metal strips to hold them together. The boards are from barracks in the camp that are being torn down as more and more refugees leave for other countries.

Monday, August 29, 1949

I wrote a number of letters to friends and relatives, and received our first letter from our sponsors in Willard, Wisconsin. He is 65 years old and his wife is 58. They have 100 acres of farmland and 24 cows. They've been waiting for us for a long time. Why haven't we received approval to emigrate yet?

Wednesday, August 31, 1949

This month, I collected 520 Schillings in tips for distributing mail in the camp, plus I made 50 Schillings selling newspapers.

September 1949

Thursday, September 1, 1949

At the post office, I met Mr. Veigl, with whom we did business before the war. He was a salesman for an Austrian company

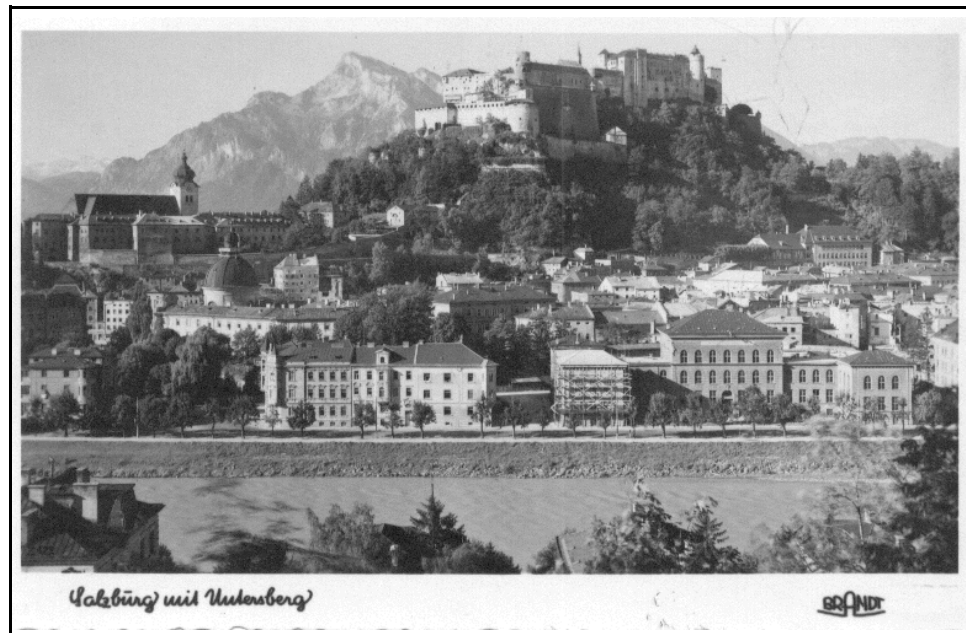
that sold special sewing machines for shoes. Just before the war began, he was at our shoemakers' cooperative trying to convince me that Germany had no intention of occupying Yugoslavia.

Hans and Mila Huber arrived by motorcycle this afternoon and visited with us for two hours.

From 7 - 9 p.m., I went to English and Spanish classes. An Englishman from the Linguaphone company was also there.

Friday, September 2, 1949

At 9 a.m., about 50 people left for America, among them our good friends Karel and Mici Erznožnik with their 2-year old daughter Jolanda. Mici was crying because Jolanda had become sick from a vaccine. Karel had been excited about leaving for America, but today he was more subdued.



This is a postcard of Salzburg which we received from our friends Karl and Mici Erznožnik on Sept. 7, 1949. Salzburg was the headquarters for the IRO in Austria and a processing point for refugees heading to America. On the back of the card, they told us to bring extra food when it comes time for us to go.



Refugees boarding a ship in Bremerhaven. Photo from "Stars and Stripes," around 1950, courtesy of Miff Crommelin.

After they left, everyone competed to carry off what was left in Karl and Mici's room. Karl had quite a supply of firewood.

The Austrian police now have a permanent station in our camp.

Saturday, September 3, 1949

This afternoon I repaired shoes. In the evening, I went around collecting contributions for my letter carrier duties. I collected 150 Schillings.

Sunday, September 4, 1949

I wrote a letter to our sponsor, Čeferin, in Argentina. We still don't know if we will go to Argentina or America.

Monday, September 5, 1949

Our English class is done because the teacher no longer has time to teach us.

Tuesday, September 6, 1949

I sent a 20 pound package to Cilka's mother in Slovenia. Hot today.

The Sršen family received word yesterday that they have a sponsor in America. The Lunder family received a similar notice today.

I bought 2 pounds of margarine for 8 Schillings and 1 pound of pork for 24 Schillings. For many years in the refugee camps, we had to eat potatoes with little or no butter or margarine. Now we finally have enough, partly because our friend Silva sent some extra ration cards.

Arl and Kamenšek moved into Karl's room.

Friday, September 9, 1949

A large number of new refugees arrived in the camp, on their way to Australia.

Saturday, September 10, 1949

435 people left for Australia, among them only one family that we know - Šepetovec.

Sunday, September 11, 1949

I wrote my first English letter to our acquaintance Paulin in New York.

Tuesday, September 13, 1949

More new refugees arrived, this time on their way to Canada.

This afternoon, I cut and shaped the leather uppers for new shoes for our 1-year old son Janko.

Wednesday, September 14, 1949

56 people left for Canada. All afternoon I helped Mojse and his two sons complete their emigration forms. He paid me 7 Schillings.

Thursday, September 15, 1949

Our friend Karl Erznožnik writes from Bremen. They will soon board a ship bound for America from nearby Bremerhaven.

Friday, September 16, 1949

A large group left the camp for America today. There were no Slovenian acquaintances among them but I knew a Ukrainian, Fesenko, and his wife.

Saturday, September 17, 1949

This afternoon, I continued making new shoes for our son. Today I sewed some of the leather together by hand.

We had expected a visit from the American consul today, but he never came.

Sunday, September 18, 1949

About 100 Croatians from our camp made a pilgrimage to Maria Zell today. They are working on a monument to commemorate our rescue from communism.

Monday, September 19, 1949

We went to see a movie in Trofaiach, *Das Lied von Bernadette* (*The Song of Bernadette*). I was very satisfied - it was beautiful.

The camp staff tell me I will no longer receive a ration of white bread, but I will still get some macaroni and milk.

Tuesday, September 20, 1949

I worked on the shipping crates for our trip to America or Argentina.

Wednesday, September 21, 1949

Our friend Marjan Filipič drew a nice sign and nailed it to our door. It says *Mail*. (I'm still delivering mail throughout the camp every day. I usually go into town to pick it up before 8 a.m., and I get it all delivered by 10:30 a.m.)

In the evening I helped Miha Sršen complete forms for the National Catholic Welfare Conference. He paid me 10 Schillings for one hour of work.

Thursday, September 22, 1949

Both our son Janko and I have a cold.

Friday, September 23, 1949

This afternoon I was summoned to Father Atila's room. Someone stole his radio when he was out this morning. Since I delivered the mail this morning, they think I may have seen the thief, or perhaps stolen it myself. I had to show them exactly how I slid the mail under the door.

Saturday, September 24, 1949

Still no invitation to visit with the American consul about our emigration plans. What is the problem? Our sponsors in America have been waiting for us for a long time already.

Sunday, September 25, 1949

This afternoon, 4 families left for Chile.

I took Janko walking in the woods, as I do almost every day. But today he was sick and didn't feel like walking.

We heard on the radio that Russia successfully exploded an atom bomb.

I sold the remains of Cilka's bicycle for 15 Schillings.

Monday, September 26, 1949

Before he left for America, my friend Karl had applied to the health insurance fund for reimbursement for the glasses he had bought. I went to Leoben today to see if that had been arranged yet. It had not.

I bought a bicycle inner tube for 12 Schillings, some paper and some shoemaking supplies.

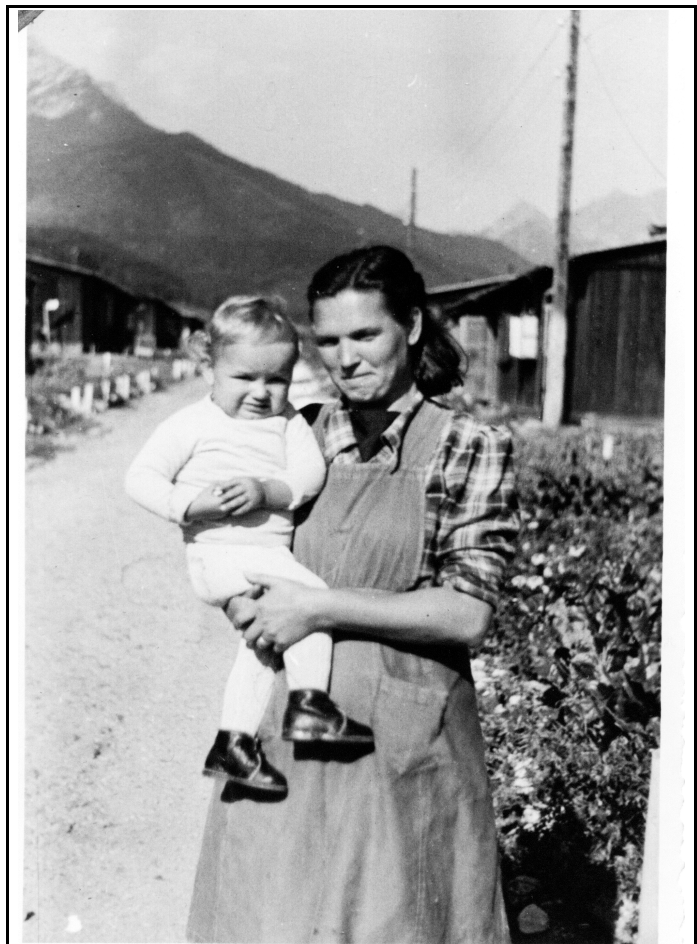
Tuesday, September 27, 1949

From 5 p.m. to 2 a.m., I filled out immigration forms for the Sršen family. I

completed 10 forms in 9 hours. Fischinger completes 4 forms in 6 hours.

[Editor's note] The following excerpt from Mark Wyman's book, "DPs, Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951" provides an interesting description of the paperwork that was involved in applying for emigration to America:

DPs soon found the American requirements and paperwork to be a frightening quagmire, and many still recall their frustration. Some could find a grim humor



Cilka is holding our 13-month old son Janko, in the Trofaiach D.P. camp, September 25, 1949. Note Janko's shoes which were handmade by the author. Photo by Radulović.

in the situation: One DP was asked whether he would be willing to join the U.S. Army. He said he would. Then the Immigration officer asked, "If, while in the Army, you had a chance to capture Stalin, what would be the worst punishment you could give him?" The DP shot back: 'I'd bring him here to (the DP camp) and make him go through processing for emigration to the States!'"

There was truth behind this humor. A resettlement officer once laid out the documents in a single case file for entry to the United States: they stretched seventeen yards.

Wednesday, September 28, 1949

122 people left for Australia.

Others are receiving their American visas, but nothing for us. I wonder if we're in trouble because I tried to hide my ulcers. I like my mail carrier job here in the camp, but now that we've decided to leave, I don't want to wait any longer.

Friday, September 30, 1949

This month I earned 482 Schillings delivering mail, and when you add in what I earned selling newspapers, it comes to 630 Schillings. Last year, I never earned that much when I was toiling with a pickaxe on sewer construction. This year I spend less time working and I don't work as hard.

October 1949

Sunday, October 2, 1949

Although it was raining, I went to the post office, picked up the mail and delivered it in two

hours.

Tuesday, October 4, 1949

I put together a package for my sister Mici and brother Jože in Slovenia - things that I bought here, but are hard to get there, such as writing paper, soap, macaroni, matches, film and clothes.

I filled out immigration forms for the Cerar family from 8 to 11 p.m.

Thursday, October 6, 1949

I received our third letter from our sponsor Brezic in America. We should have left some time ago, but there's still no visa from the consul. It looks like we will have to wait another 2 - 3 weeks. I'm worried that I may be developing gout, and that will affect our ability to leave.

I wrote back to Brezic, and to our friend Karl.

Sunday, October 9, 1949

Today was Election Day in Austria. There is a lot of interest in the outcome. I brought 57 newspapers to the camp and sold them all.

I took Cilka and our 14-month old son Janko to the children's theater. I think he prefers the merry-go-round.

Monday, October 10, 1949

In yesterday's elections, the People's Party won fewer seats than before (77 vs 85), while the Nazis won more (16 vs. 0). The People's Party will have to work with the Nazis to be able to govern, unless the Nazis are disqualified. This is a disaster for the People's Party.

Wednesday, October 12, 1949

Cilka sewed leather for the shoemaker Čopi today. I stayed in our room and took care of our son.

Friday, October 14, 1949

58 people left our camp for America, but no Slovenians among them.

Cilka worked with the shoemaker till 6 p.m. I was angry that she came back so late, and she was offended that I was angry.

Saturday, October 15, 1949

This afternoon, I repaired Cilka's shoes.

White bread is available for sale without ration cards! Meat is available for 6 Schillings per pound with a ration card, and 10 Schillings per pound without a ration card. The price of shoes has gone up from about 90 Schillings per pair to 150.

Tuesday, October 18, 1949

We forgot to include Miha Sršen's parents in his emigration application. They're worried they will have to wait and go later.

Wednesday, October 19, 1949

I pulled up the red beets we had planted near our barracks. They're nice and fat.

The IRO says their work is being extended 6 - 9 months longer than expected.

Our son Janko is constantly sick.

Friday, October 21, 1949

Yugoslavia was accepted into the United Nations. We don't feel that a country that has taken away our homes and killed our friends and relatives belongs in any

international body.

Sunday, October 23, 1949

Cilka, Janko and I took a long walk today. Janko saw a stream for the first time; he just gazed at in wonder.

Monday, October 24, 1949

It's 3 years since Cilka and I got married, and 6 years since the partisans (communists) came to our home village.

To celebrate our wedding anniversary, I bought



Our son Janko is smiling. Photo by Radulović, in the Trofaiach D.P. camp, October 30, 1949.

some meat and a bottle of Vermouth. Cilka baked a potica.

Tuesday, October 25, 1949

Our friend Janez Levičar says we will all be able to return to our homes next spring. I think it will be at least 3 years.

Wednesday, October 26, 1949

168 people left the camp for Australia, including Arl.

Friday, October 28, 1949

A large group left the camp for America, including Tončka Kunovar, Franc Bizjak, Andrej Mojzej, and two Ukrainians for whom I had helped fill out emigration forms two weeks ago.

We have new snow; the mountains are all white.

Sunday, October 30, 1949

Cilka, Janko and I walked to the Turmhause. Radulović took 3 pictures of us.

November 1949

Tuesday, November 1, 1949

For All Saints Day today, we had a special Mass at 8 a.m. with 8 altar boys, and then another service in the evening with 10 altarboys. Unfortunately, all our good singers are gone, and today's singing was not very good.

In the afternoon, we went to the cemetery with our friend Marjan

Filipič, whose wife died during childbirth earlier this year. Today Marjan placed some beautiful decorations on his wife's grave. Our son Janko observed everything very carefully.

Wednesday, November 2, 1949

At 7:20 a.m., Cilka, Janko and I took a train to Kapfenberg for new pre-emigration medical examinations, because the exams we had 4 months ago are no longer valid. After examining us, Dr. Korošec said we are healthy enough to go to America, and we will receive an invitation from the consul next week. The probable reason for the past 4 months' delay was Cilka's tuberculosis-like infection 11 years ago. But the doctor can see that is no longer a problem. We will probably leave for America at



Nine months after his wife Angela died during childbirth, our friend Marjan Filipič holds his infant son Andrej. Our son Janko is in front of Andrej. Photo by Radulović, in the Trofaiach D.P. camp, October 30, 1949.

the end of this month! I had begun to doubt that we would ever go to America, but now I am feeling hopeful again.

We returned to the camp at 2:30. Bore Erman had already taken care of the mail for me.

Sunday, November 6, 1949

It's 4 days since we saw the doctor and still no invitation from the consul. They tell me to wait another week.

This morning it was raining, so I walked to town to pick up the mail instead of riding bike like I usually do. I don't think I will do that on a Sunday again!

Tuesday, November 8, 1949

One of our fellow refugees, a Hungarian engineer named Josef von Handl, is accused of spying for the communists.

My upper false teeth broke into two parts - after 8 and a half years of wear.

Wednesday, November 9, 1949

I went to the dentist in Trofaiach in the morning and again in the evening, but he was too busy to see me.

Thursday, November 10, 1949

The dentist repaired my broken false teeth and added two new teeth for 50 Schillings.

This afternoon we finally received an invitation to see the American consul on November 16! I am worried that I will become sick before then and they won't accept me.

Friday, November 11, 1949

I collected donations for my mail distribution in

the Ukrainian part of the camp, but didn't receive much.

In the afternoon, I repaired shoes with Zupančič. He fixed my boots. He charged me 97 Schillings, but I gave him 130.

Monday, November 14, 1949

Bore Erman will take over my mail carrier duties when I leave. He accompanied me to the post office today and started learning more about the job.

Wednesday, November 16, 1949

At 7:20 a.m., a group of us from the camp took the train to Kapfenberg. First we saw the doctor (again!), then they took our fingerprints, and then we finally met with the American consul. I had to swear that everything I had written on our forms was the truth. Then he shook my hand and wished me luck. Finally, we have approval - we will be going to America!

Although I never really wanted to go to America, now I feel fortunate that we will go. The others are very envious, especially because our sponsors sound so perfect.

We had to wait an extra hour at the consul's office because there was some concern regarding Rihtar's grandmother. They told her she might be able to go to America by airplane instead of by ship, and that someone else might be able to go with her.

Thursday, November 17, 1949

I wrote letters all morning, making arrangements for our departure.

Monday, November 21, 1949

I went to the train station in Leoben to meet our friend Silva, who brought lots of good food,

clothes for Janko, and 10 dollars for my bicycle and radio. I bought 5 American dollars from a friend for 28 Schillings each.

Tuesday, November 22, 1949

Today is Cilka's 35th name day. We celebrated at noon with soup, roast chicken, potatoes, lettuce, wine, potica and cookies. The rest of the day we made preparations for our trip to America. They tell us we will leave on November 25.

Wednesday, November 23, 1949

I packed up the radio for Silva and made arrangements for that and my bicycle to be shipped to her home in Austria. Silva helped me sort through the letters I had received in the camps during the past 4 years.

Thursday, November 24, 1949

I bought some new shoes for Janko for 58 Schillings. The ones I made for him are too small, so I gave those to the Jesenko family.

Even though I haven't packed anything for our trip yet, I'm feeling happy.

This morning we each got another vaccination. I went to the camp store and exchanged most of our remaining points for clothes. Then I went to the camp offices and said farewell to the workers there, including Hilda Jung and Frank Lorber.

Hilda Jung is a pleasant young lady who has been working in the camp offices. She's the daughter of a tailor who was also a former member of the German SS troops. She has a beautiful figure and a pretty face with black, velvet eyes. When I deliver mail, she's always hoping I'll bring a letter from her boyfriend. When I bring one, I like to tease her and tell her I don't have anything for her. When I finally

give her the letter, she's never angry.

I also said farewell to Frank Lorber, who has been working in the camp office. (He was the director for a while.) In Slovenia, he was the manager of a stocking factory. The first time I met him was when he came out to tell the women who were working in the garden that it was time to come in for lunch. He stayed out and continued their work. (Some years later, he moved to Cleveland and I helped him get work at Risher's. He was a very hard worker. Even though he was highly educated, he was willing to take on any kind of work.)

In the evening from 9 - 11, we said more farewells to our friends in the camp, including Levičar, Dr. Erman, Rebernak, Rev. Kokelj, Šankal and others. The Cerar, Sršen and Rihtar families (who will all be going to America with us) sang songs. Some of us drank wine. We ate bread, klobase, cookies and candy. I tried some coffee liqueur.

From 11 p.m. to 1 a.m., I continued to make preparations for our trip. I couldn't sleep because Janko was crying due to pains from his vaccination.

Friday, November 25, 1949

Today is the day we leave the camp for our trip to America. I woke up at 5 a.m. and went to Mass at 5:30. Then I returned seven I.R.O. blankets to the camp store, keeping five for our trip. At breakfast, they gave us some rye bread, butter and coffee, and three one-day food ration packets for each of us to take on the trip.

By 8 a.m., I finished packing all of our shipping crates and suitcases. I had made two wooden shipping crates, each one about 2 feet high and 2 x 3 feet wide. In them I packed the most valuable things we had accumulated over the past 4 years, such as my bobbin lace designs, a large quantity of lace we had made and saved

for sale in America, the pots, pans and containers we had made of out of downed warplanes, and various tools, including the woodcutting saw which I had made in the camp. I used large screws to seal the crates.

I sold our kitchen stove, shelves, table, chairs, potatoes and beets to other refugees in the camp. Sršen had a particularly nice woodstove and various shoemaking machines which he decided to take along, hoping that he could use them to make a living in America.

Babnik has a job lined up in New York at a wage of one dollar per hour, which seems unbelievably high to us. He cut up his steel bed frame so he could pack it and bring it to America, just in case we get stuck somewhere without a bed to sleep in.

At 8 a.m., they loaded our heavier items onto trucks and at 8:30 they began loading the lighter items and the people. Some people cried, but I didn't let myself think about that.

At the last moment, Zupančič brought me the new shoes which he had been making for me. I gave him 200 Schillings for them, but unfortunately, they don't fit

well.

The IRO trucks took us to the nearby train station in Trofaiach. I was assigned to be in charge of the group and provided with the official papers which I am to turn over to the Americans in Salzburg. By 10 a.m. we transferred everything to the regular train that runs to Leoben. Altogether, there are 88 of us, including a few more refugees and an IRO officer (Englishman) who joined us in Leoben. In Leoben, they disconnected our railcar from the Trofaiach train and connected it to the faster train that will take us to Salzburg.

It was a mostly cloudy day, with a little sun and no rain. Our group includes the following families: Sršen, Rihtar, Cerar, Semanjuk, Raits,



The Austrian headquarters for the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was headquartered in the building on the right side of this photo, Residentzplatz I, Salzburg. On the left side is the Dom Cathedral. Photo by IRO administrator E.C. Crommelin, 1947, courtesy of Miff Crommelin.

Djačenko, and Babnik. As we passed through Schladming, I thought about how my brother had to work there in the German *Arbeitsdienst* at the beginning of the war. That work assignment then led to him being drafted into the German army and a long, difficult time in Russia. If he had not cooperated, they would have forced our parents to lose their home.

Along the way to Salzburg, the train stopped in each town. At each stop, there were vendors selling tobacco, candy and snacks. Our locomotive was powered by coal with heavy black smoke pouring from the stack. We could see that they were converting some of the tracks and trains to electric power.

We reached Salzburg at 7 p.m. We were transferred onto trucks along with our lighter baggage and transported to the Lechner barracks, about 10 minutes away. Mr. Raits and I went to the registration barracks, where we found an IRO worker named Pibernik, who happened to be from Ljubljana. In German, he asked me where I was from. I told him "Slovenia, Yugoslavia." Then he replied, in Slovenian, "Where?" I said "Žiri," and he said "Ah, a shoemaker!" He gave us our room assignments and told us what to do. Mr. Raits and I went back to the group, explained the instructions, and we all went to the assigned barracks and picked out beds. At 8 p.m. we returned to registration and received ration cards for milk and food, and two blankets per person. Since I had brought five for myself, Cilka and Janko, we now have 11 blankets. We won't be cold!

All the men had to go back to the train station to load our heavier baggage onto trucks. Although I had injured my hand, I helped as much as I could.

At 9:30 everyone went to bed.

Saturday, November 26, 1949

Our 15-month old son Janko woke up first around 7 a.m., and then everyone else. The IRO staff gave us coffee, and then some food for the next three days: white and rye bread, butter and milk. I think we have more food than we will need.

Most groups leaving for America have been going through Bremen (in northern Germany) and boarding ships at Bremerhaven, but the IRO staff are telling us that the transition barracks at Bremen are full and we will probably go through Naples and onto a ship from there.

We waited all morning for the American consul, but he didn't arrive. So I decided to take Janko for a short walk in Salzburg. He was awed by all the large vehicles. I tried to buy some postcards, but the stores were all closed.

At noon, they fed us lunch, including soup, potatoes and meat with gravy. It was good and there was enough of it. Nobody is hungry here.

Finally in the afternoon, the American consul arrived and we were called back to registration. The consul saw people individually and got up to number 390 by 5 p.m. Since my family is numbers 421 - 423, we were asked to return tomorrow morning at 8.

For dinner, they gave coffee to the adults and hot chocolate to the children. Afterwards, I wrote postcards to our friends Milica and Levičar, back at the camp, to let them know we had arrived safely in Salzburg. People went to bed at 9.

Our son Janko doesn't sleep in the evening and often gets up at 6 a.m. Even though he wakes the others up in the morning, everyone likes him because he is the smallest and not afraid of anything.

Sunday, November 27, 1949

Cilka got up at 5:30 a.m. and went out to look for a church, but couldn't find one. At 7 a.m., I went out with her and we found a chapel where they were just saying Mass. There were a large number of nuns in the chapel.

From 9 - 10 a.m. we met with the consular official. He asked me why I had been in the Yugoslav army (I was drafted), when I was born, and whether I can read. This was all in German, and I had to read a German paragraph. Then we went to see a doctor. Janko cried when he saw the doctor's white coat (I think it reminded him of the many vaccination shots he's received during the past months.) The doctor weighed Janko (26 pounds), checked his eyes, throat and genitals. Everything was in order!

For lunch, we had soup, potatoes, and meat with gravy just like yesterday. In the afternoon, we went for a longer walk in the city, along one side of the river to the sixth bridge and then back along the other side of the river. We saw many beautiful store windows, some new buildings and many ruined buildings - remnants of the bombing during the war. We also saw beautiful bridges, colonnades, pigeons and hundreds of gulls. The gulls would catch pieces of bread that were thrown in the air 6 feet above us.

Monday, November 28, 1949

I woke up at 7:30. We are not allowed to do any cleaning; we've been told that is for the workers. However, later this morning, Sršen and I helped unload coal and firewood for our barracks.

In the afternoon, I took two letters and five postcards to the post office. I wrote to Karl in America, Mire in Canada, to Cilka's mother and others. We returned 6 blankets to the IRO and helped load our baggage back onto trucks. At 7 p.m. we were all waiting outside, ready to leave. We were divided into three groups of 24, and continued to wait until 9:30.

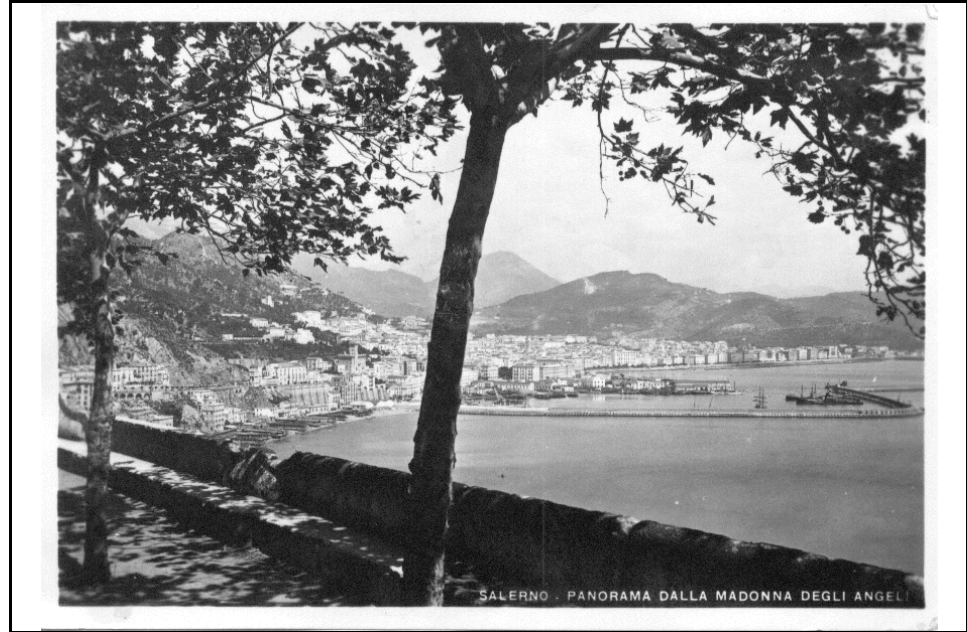
Some of our friends from Trofaiach, including Raits, Zemljanj, Miščenko, Dr. Gole and Pečavar are staying here to wait for an airplane or train to take them to a ship which will go across Panama and then to California.

Finally at 10 p.m., we were taken to the train

Resettlement Form VI	WAR RELIEF SERVICES	Identification Card
National Catholic Welfare Conference		
RESETTLEMENT DIVISION		
149 Madison Avenue — New York 16, N. Y.		
U. S. Code No. <u>LC/276</u>	European Code No. <u>A-K 1653</u>	
Name(s) <u>Z A K E L J , Anton</u>		
<u>-"-</u>	<u>Cecilija (wife)</u>	
<u>-"-</u>	<u>Ivan (son)</u>	
Sponsor <u>John BREZIC</u>		
Address <u>Rt. 3 Greenwood, Wisconsin</u>		
This card must be carried by displaced person until arrival at final destination in the U. S.		

Our identification card for the long voyage from Austria to Wisconsin.

station, where we boarded a special IRO refugee train. We are sharing a compartment with the Sršen family. Miha Sršen arranged a bed made out of suitcases for our wives Kati and Cilka, their daughter Katka and our son Janko. Miha and I lay down on the luggage racks. That meant Janko couldn't see me and so he started crying. I became angry at the entire world. Why do we force innocent children to wander homeless like this?



Postcard from Salerno, Italy, 1950.

It's drizzling outside as we continue to wait for the train to leave.

Tuesday, November 29, 1949

Around midnight last night we fell asleep. At 2 a.m., our special IRO train finally left Salzburg. At 7:30 a.m., we passed through Innsbruck. For breakfast we ate the bread and canned American meat they gave us in Salzburg. At 9:15 we reached the snow-covered Brenner Pass. (The Brenner Pass is on the Austria-Italy border, at an elevation of 4,500 feet, with nearby mountains reaching 10 to 12,000 feet.)

At the Italian border, customs officers asked us about cigarettes and radios. They checked luggage in other compartments, but not ours. I talked with a revenue officer and exchanged my 12 remaining Schillings for Lire.

At 1 p.m., we got off the train and got a quick lunch - bread and soup with cabbage. At 2

p.m., the train continued further through the gorgeous South Tyrolean countryside. The weather was beautiful. Earlier, when we were coming down from the Brenner Pass, we could look back and see our train twisted behind us like a snake. Now we entered flat terrain, all covered with fruit trees for miles!

At 4 p.m. we reached Balzano with its countless vineyards. We could see that the city had been heavily bombed during the war. From Bolzano to Trento I marveled at the orchards of fruit trees, all neatly cared for.

Wednesday, November 30, 1949

At midnight last night we traveled through the city of Verona. I woke often through the night, but still managed to get some good sleep.

At 9 a.m., we stopped at a large station far outside Rome. The weather continued to be beautiful. On the other side of a fence I saw



This map shows our journey by train from Salzburg, Austria to Naples, Italy, and then by ship from Naples through the Mediterranean Sea past Gibraltar out to the Atlantic, and on to America.

orange trees with blossoms and ripe oranges.
How I wished I could have one!

I'm feeling good, but open sores have appeared on my face, just like when we were camped outdoors over four years ago in Vetrinje. I think they were caused by the dirty water in Salzburg. We only had one washbasin with a small amount of water, and we used the same water for our son's bath and my shaving. Now I'm washing my face with brandy and I can no longer shave. I look and smell like a gypsy.

Around Rome we saw lots of new construction. After we left Rome we saw vineyards and orange trees with white blossoms and red fruits, and then olives in the flatter areas and on the terraces.

At 11:30 a.m., Cilka was the first one to see the Mediterranean. At 1:30, we reached Naples, where we got off the train for a couple hours.

At 5 p.m., we reached the Pontecagnano station near Salerno. There were already 5 trucks waiting for us. After a five-minute ride we arrived in camp San Antonio, where we will stay until we can board a ship for America. We went through registration, where the men were separated from the women and children. Cilka and Janko went to barracks #33, I went to #15, where I fell asleep at 9:30.

December 1949

Thursday, December 1, 1949

After a good sleep, I woke at 7 a.m. After I shaved, I washed with brandy, which I think is helping me get rid of the sores on my face. For breakfast they gave the adults white bread and coffee, and for the children, biscuits and milk.

For lunch the adults had soup, macaroni and potatoes, and the children got rice and potatoes. It was good and there was enough of it.

I sold 40 cigarettes at 8 Lire each, which I then used to buy 3 postcards, a pound of almonds and half a pound of grapes. Everything costs about 20 times as much as it did in Austria.

Friday, December 2, 1949

Again I woke at 7 a.m. - after a long cold night. I took some bread and milk to Janko and got some coffee for myself.

In the morning, we took a walk around the camp. At 2 p.m., we were visited by an American Slovenian from the National Catholic Welfare Conference, who gave us some buttons with their organization's symbol on them. I got some firewood for the women's barracks. Then I took a bath. In the evening we went to the chapel.

Saturday, December 3, 1949

I got up at 6 a.m., and went to Mass in the chapel at 6:30. Janko got another vaccine shot. The sky turned cloudy, but warm.

This morning a group boarded a ship for Australia. People are saying that, next Monday, we will either go straight to a ship, or to camp Bagnoli near Naples.

For lunch today, we had soup and macaroni. For supper, soup again, potatoes and cauliflower.

Sunday, December 4, 1949

At 8 a.m., we went to Mass. There was Slovenian singing, but I had to go outside with Janko because he couldn't sit still.

At 10:30, we went to another medical examination. Cilka said I've been spoiling Janko. If he's not with me, he cries and does not like being with her.

Tomorrow morning we leave for camp Bagnoli near Naples.

Monday, December 5, 1949

I slept poorly last night and got up at 4:15 a.m. We don't have clean water for washing. We got everything packed and got ourselves onto trucks at 6:45 a.m. At the train station, we got a nice compartment with the Sršen family in a new Italian train. At 9:50 the train left for Naples.

Along the way, we saw the effects of recent flooding: beautiful orchards and vineyards were destroyed. The tracks were damaged in some locations so the train had to move slowly. We reached Naples at 11:30. We could see people rebuilding factories that had been destroyed in the war.

At 1 p.m., we reached camp Bagnoli: huge buildings, former military barracks, located on the bluff overlooking the harbor.

At 3 p.m., another medical exam. The doctor immediately ordered me to the clinic because of the open sores on my cheeks. He said I won't be able to leave if I don't get better in three days. At the clinic they bandaged my face and my leg, which I had injured while loading our shipping crates. The clinic visit delayed me long enough to miss supper. Those damn crates!

Again, the women and children were separated

from the men. Sršen and I slept on some mattresses in a hallway in Block L, while our women and children were in Block D.

Tuesday, December 6, 1949

I didn't feel good today. I think it might be the canned beef liver I ate yesterday. I went back to the clinic this morning for additional treatment of the sores on my face and the injury on my leg. I'm worried that I won't heal enough to be allowed to leave.

In the afternoon, Sršen, Babnik and I went to the canteen and drank half a liter of wine (70 Lira).

Wednesday, December 7, 1949

I slept better last night and I feel better. At 7:15 a.m., we went to Mass in a church nearby which has a Slovenian priest. For breakfast, they gave us milk and bread.

At 8 a.m., I tried going to the library to read newspapers, but it was closed. I can't find any newspapers anywhere.

The clinic gave me some new cream for my sores.

Cilka and I took Janko to a playground, but he was restless. We could have gone on a tour of Pompeii or Capri, but it costs 1,000 Lira.

They tell us that our ship may be leaving on December 11. If everything goes well, we may be in Wisconsin for Christmas.

Thursday, December 8, 1949

Today is the holy day of the Immaculate Conception. I went to Mass at 7 a.m., and Cilka went to a solemn Mass with singing in Slovenian and Latin at 9. After that, we were together all day. We tried cooking some tea, without success. Finally, I went out and bought

a quarter liter of wine.

Around noon, they posted a list of people who will leave for America on the "U.S.S. Greeley" on December 11. There are 1,280 people on the list, and we are numbers 617-619!

In the evening, we went to Slovenian litanies at the nearby church, but the priest was not a very good singer.

Friday, December 9, 1949

At breakfast this morning, the staff told us that the men will need to do some work in the camp today. I helped from 8 - 11 a.m. and 1 - 5 p.m.

Saturday, December 10, 1949

I slept poorly. I went to Mass at 7, and then to the clinic at 8:30 a.m. At 2 p.m., the doctor finally determined that I was healthy enough to go to America!

Janko got an ID necklace in case he gets lost during the trip.

The ocean looked stormy all day. Wind and rain. Will the ship leave in this type of weather?

For lunch, I opened a can of meat that I had been saving for three years. I didn't feel good after I ate it.

I wrote letters to our sponsors in Wisconsin, to our friend Paulin in New York, and postcards to my father in Slovenia and our friend Marjan Filipič, who is still in the Trofaiach camp. The postage cost me 250 Lira.

In the evening, there was an announcement that 70 people were removed from the passenger list. That caused a great deal of worry, but it appears there are no Slovenians among those who were removed.

Sunday, December 11, 1949

Most people got up at 3 or 4 a.m. to prepare for departure. I was the last up at 4:30. At 6 a.m., we had breakfast. Then we returned the blankets they gave us when we arrived here, and everyone gathered in the theater. They divided us into groups of 100 and then into groups of 40 to board trucks.

At 11 a.m., we boarded a large ship, the "United States Transport Ship General Greeley." At 1 p.m. we had our first meal on the ship: soup, meat, peas, potatoes, pudding, bread and tea. The portions were small, but good.

At 1:30, the ship left Naples. It had been raining all morning, but by the time we left, the weather cleared.

Sleeping quarters on the ship are separate for men vs women and children. It was hard to find the cabin that Cilka and Janko were assigned to. I helped them and we finally found cabin #33, which they have to share with 2 - 3 Jewish/Polish women. The cabin looks nice, but the Polish women do not seem friendly.

When I brought Cilka's suitcase to her cabin, Janko was crying "Papa, papa!" so we all went up to the upper deck.

The sea has been calm, but by evening we were all feeling a little seasick.

I am assigned to dormitory F5 which includes 111 beds in the lowest level of the ship. We share one bathroom with deck E, and it's always occupied. So I use the bathroom near Cilka's cabin instead.

The ship has 6 passenger decks, with Deck A being the upper deck, and Deck F being the lowest passenger deck. Below Deck F is another level for storage.

Monday, December 12, 1949

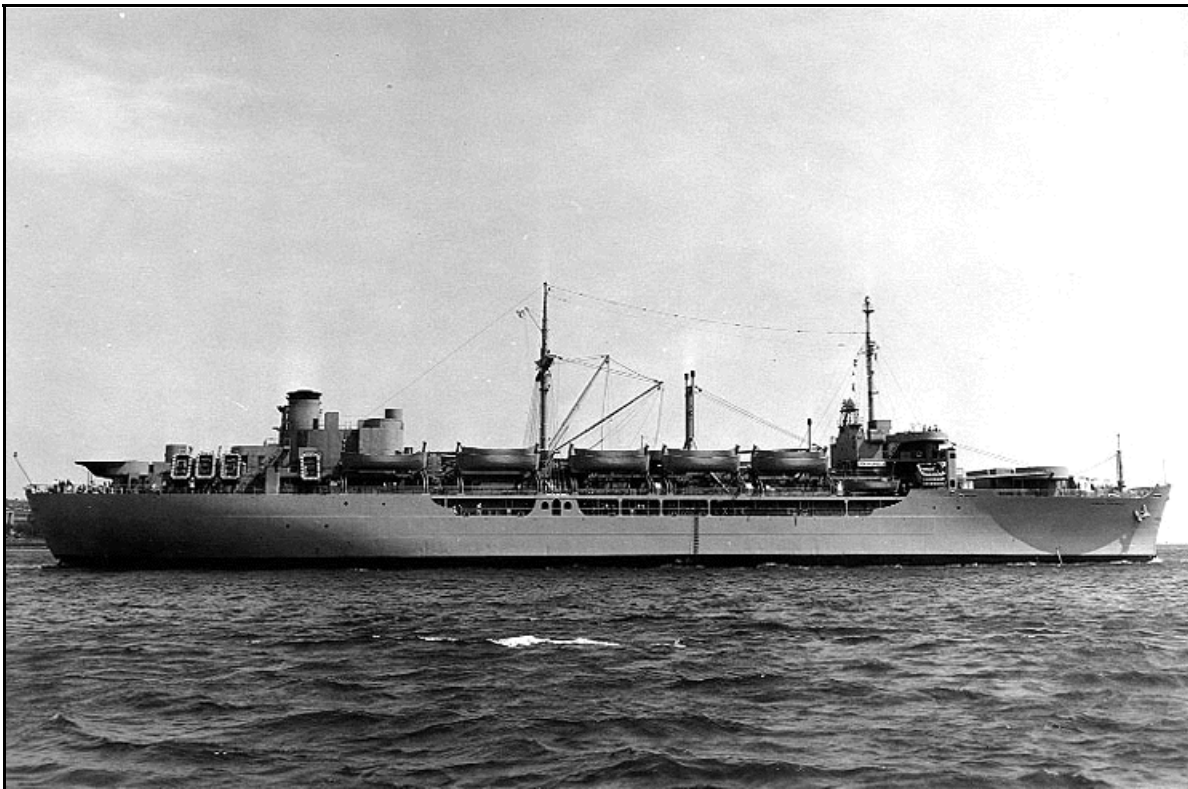
I slept well. At 6 a.m. we went to Mass in the ship's meeting hall on Deck B. Many people missed it because the clocks were changed as we traveled into a new time zone.

At 7 a.m. I went to breakfast. I ate only the hard-boiled egg and put the apple and orange in my pocket for later.

After breakfast, I went to the upper deck where I found Cilka and Janko and many others. There was a strong wind and high waves. I felt cold, even in my winter coat. Many people were leaning over the railing, throwing up, and there were many others who were not able to get to the railing quickly enough.

At 10 a.m., I helped Cilka and Janko back to their cabin. Janko cried for a while, then fell asleep. I went to the ship's clinic to have them look at my injured thumb. I had torn the nail a couple days ago, but I didn't want to tell anyone, for fear that I wouldn't be allowed to leave. I talked with an American doctor in English. He cleaned my injury, and put on some ointment and a bandage.

Cilka had been very worried that, with my stomach and ulcer problems, I would not do well on an ocean voyage. But yesterday, she started feeling seasick before I did. This morning, she didn't want to eat. While I was in the breakfast line, I thought about eating her portions, but by the time I got to the food, I



United States Army Transport Ship General A.W. Greely. This picture is courtesy of Rudy Flis, who traveled to Europe on this ship in 1953 as an Army private. He remembers being seasick for three days and homesick for the entire cruise. He describes the ship as "a rusting bucket of bolts which somehow defied sinking." The ship was placed out of service in 1955.

wasn't feeling very well either. My brother-in-law Mire had written us, telling us that we will be less likely to become seasick if we eat a lot. But I'm finding that the more I push myself to eat, the worse I feel.

At noon, I went to lunch, but I was throwing up and feeling too seasick to eat anything at all. I decided to just not eat and stay quietly in bed. I tried taking a pill for seasickness, but I threw that up too.

This morning, we passed an island. I'm not sure if it was Sardinia, Corsica or Baleari. They tell us we traveled 384 miles today. At 9 p.m. we went to bed. The sea is steadily becoming more agitated.

Tuesday, December 13, 1949

I slept poorly. The ship was heaving all night. At 4 a.m., I jumped up, thinking that the ship had hit a mine. I could hear terrible noises from the kitchen - porcelain dishes were crashing to the floor. (This was repeated many times during the rest of the trip.)

I got up at 7 a.m., but soon returned to bed. The sea was so wild that announcements were being made on the loudspeakers, telling everyone to stay in their cabins. If you went out, there was a great danger of being hit by falling objects. But it didn't seem much safer to stay in bed, either. In the dining room, any tables and chairs that were not fastened down were destroyed. In the clinic, large bottles of medicine broke. In the kitchen, hundreds of dishes broke into pieces.

During the storm, I didn't go to Cilka and Janko at all. I felt that I couldn't help them, and I hoped that it would soon be over.

At noon, the sky cleared and the sea became calm. I felt better and went to lunch. I had soup, pork, potatoes, bread, blackberries and tea. Then I found Cilka and Janko - with the Sršen

women and children, in their cabin. Cilka said she went to Sršen's because one of her cabinmates was expecting Cilka to be her maid and do whatever she demanded. Cilka said she just couldn't stand it any longer.

The afternoon was nice. We saw many ships, and as we passed Spain, we saw snow-covered mountains.

Today, we traveled 412 miles. The entire trip is 4,392 miles, so we have 3,980 miles to go.

Wednesday, December 14, 1949

I slept better, but dreamed a lot. I woke at 6 a.m. The clocks were moved back another hour as we traveled through another time zone. They say we passed Gibraltar at 2 a.m., which means we are now in the open Atlantic. We may reach New York on December 23.

At 10 a.m., I went back to the ship's clinic. The ship's doctor changed the bandages on my injured thumb, and referred me to an older doctor, a fellow passenger, for the eczema on my cheeks. The older doctor drew some blood from my finger and injected it into my thigh. The younger, ship's doctor was puzzled by this. (I learned later that this practice was considered to be a remedy for disinfection a long time ago, before penicillin was available.)

This morning, the ocean became rough again. My seasickness returned and I was not able to eat lunch or supper. I was just thirsty.

During the past 24 hours we've completed 372 miles.

Thursday, December 15, 1949

Again I had many dreams. After breakfast I was assigned to work in the lowest section of the ship. They say that any man who does not work at least three days during this trip will not be allowed on land. I went to the lowest section of the ship but it was so stuffy that I couldn't breathe. They sent me to the labor office, where I waited in vain for two hours.

In the afternoon, I helped take care of Janko, who is sick with diarrhea. I've been eating so little that I feel very weak. Today I skipped lunch and dinner. At breakfast the past couple days, I've saved the hard-boiled egg they gave me, thinking I would eat it later. A day later, it was still in my pocket, going bad, so I threw it overboard.

Cilka and Janko have been spending their days in Sršen's cabin, but sleeping in the cabin assigned to them with the Polish Jewish women. I had angry words with the woman in Cilka's cabin who was treating Cilka like a servant and not allowing her to open the window for fresh air. Now the window is usually open.



This is a typical picture of women and children crowded into a compartment of a ship bringing refugees to America around 1949. Photo from United States Merchant Marine website (www.usmm.org/dp.html).

There a large number of Poles on the ship, and the announcements over the loudspeakers are usually in Polish, beginning with "Uvaga, uvaga!"

We've completed one-third of the trip. Will we make it alive to New York?

This evening I was terribly thirsty. After I ate a slice of apple I felt much better.

Friday, December 16, 1949

I got up at 6 a.m. At 8 a.m. I went to Mass, where I saw a large group of Franciscan priests and brothers.

I worked all day with a Jewish man in the ship's cold storage area. He was very angry that the other people from his group weren't working. I saw lots of good food in cold storage - poultry,

pork and other food, but all I wanted was an apple. I found a crate of green New Zealand apples and I stole one. It was very good.

I asked a huge black cook if I could have something to drink. He gave me a can of grapefruit juice, which I had never tasted before. I brought it back to Cilka and we all thought it tasted so bitter that we couldn't drink it. (We forgot that we had some sugar along. With that sugar, we could have turned that juice into an excellent drink.)

Around noon today, we traveled past the Azores Islands. The air was clear, so we had a good view of the islands with their airport and radio station.

Janko has been eating very little. Whatever he does eat comes out quickly, either as vomit or diarrhea. I'm catching a cold.

Today we completed 402 miles.

Saturday, December 17, 1949

This morning I worked in the "crew bedrooms" with a Slovenian. They fed us good coffee, an orange, lemon and bread. In the afternoon, I swept hallways. My "boss" documented my work. I still need confirmation from the labor office that I have completed my work requirements.

In the evening, Slovenians performed a little concert on the upper deck in honor of a leader of a religious order.

The ship provided us with coupons we can use to buy things. I used some to buy two pairs of socks, shaving blades and some other things.

Today we completed 398 miles; we still have 2,054 miles to New York.

Sunday, December 18, 1949

I went to Mass at 6 a.m., Cilka at 8. Janko is usually too restless to be with us at Mass, so one of us takes care of him while the other goes to Mass.

This morning we had to take all children under three years old to the doctor. Janko is still sick.

We've been on the ship for a week and we're still alive. Today the ocean was rough again, so I didn't eat breakfast or lunch. After supper I went straight to bed. I woke up after a while, thinking about how we will probably not make it to Wisconsin by Christmas.

Monday, December 19, 1949

This morning I went to see the doctor again regarding my injured thumb. This afternoon I worked in the ship's butchershop, where I helped sort poultry and pork. We threw all the chicken necks and wings into cans to be thrown overboard; likewise with the smaller pieces of fat from the pork. If only we could have had these pieces of meat when we were in the camp!

Today, we noticed that Janko (now 16 months old) is teething. The doctor said that may be why he's been so sick. Janko was feeling better today, though he's lost a lot of weight. Cilka has a bad cough, but she refuses to see a doctor.

Whenever Janko starts feeling better, we have to keep a close eye on him, because he likes to wander off and talk with everyone he meets. The people all like him.

Tuesday, December 20, 1949

Today I worked in the butchershop more than 6 hours. I could have had any meat I wanted, but all I took were some scraps of cooked gristle, and I think that made me feel sick later. They didn't give us anything to drink. I saw a crate of Coca-Cola, but I didn't know what that was. I noticed that a foreman often checked to make

sure all the bottles were still there.

When I was cleaning the foreman's bedroom, I noticed that the storm last week had tossed a bottle of ink around the room. There was ink all over the walls.

Today we completed 402 miles, for a total of 3,520 since we left Italy. Subtract that from 4,278 and we have 758 miles to go. They say we will reach New York around noon on December 22.

Wednesday, December 21, 1949

I got up at 6:30 and went to the doctor. Then I took care of Janko while Cilka cleaned her cabin. After that I cleaned the toilet for my dormitory. It was terribly soiled and plugged.

This afternoon the weather was beautiful, so we went up on Deck A, the upper deck. I weighed myself and noticed that I had lost 15 pounds during this voyage (going from 147 pounds to 132.)

In the evening, the staff distributed our visas and other documents.

Thursday, December 22, 1949

Everyone knew that today would be the day we would reach New York. Many people got up at 3 or 4 a.m., but I waited till 5 a.m. I put on my best clothes for the first time since we left Europe.

I went to Mass, then breakfast, and then 15 minutes more work in the butchershop, in my nice suit.

At 8 a.m., I looked through the fog and saw the outlines of dry land: it was the New Jersey shoreline. There were many boats and ships, and hundreds of gulls. I was amazed by the unbroken line of autos traveling along the shore.

They were all rushing to the south. Was it a huge funeral or something like that? I also noticed some half-sunken ships and military bunkers on shore. Did they have a war here?

We watched as the crew threw packages of food overboard from our ship. During the past couple days, the weather was nicer and we were feeling better, but hungry and thirsty. We would have been so happy to get some milk and bread, but they wouldn't give us any.

At 9 a.m., we entered the New York harbor area. Finally at 10 we caught sight of the Statue of Liberty and the Manhattan skyscrapers.

At 10 o'clock a boat came to the ship with a customs officer and a number of medical officials. There was no need for X-rays, they could see right through our stomachs.

In the afternoon, we stepped on dry land. We didn't stop at Ellis Island - it was just going through decommissioning. They arranged us in alphabetical order and brought each person's baggage, including the shipping crates that I had made in the camp.

I was worried I would have to pay customs duties for the lacework we had brought with us. I talked to a priest about this, and he assured me that everything would go smoothly. When the customs officer came to us, the priest sent a pretty young woman to distract him. The customs inspection went well.

There were some Jews who had larger crates filled with valuable paintings by well-known artists. They had to open everything up for the customs officers.

We were greeted by women in grey uniforms - I think they were the Daughters of the Revolution. They served us coffee and donuts. I wished they had not taken the holes out of the donuts! If I hadn't been so embarrassed, I would have gone

back in line many times (maybe I did). Later, we saw a man selling food in many languages - an apple, a piece of bread and I think small cups of coffee - for a dollar. I bought food for all three of us and spent as much as I had earned in three days of hard labor in Austria. At these prices, the few dollars that we received from the National Catholic Welfare Conference for the trip will be gone too soon.

It was already night when they put us on busses and drove us through Manhattan to the train station. I looked out from the bus and tried so hard to see the tops of the skyscrapers that I developed quite an ache in my neck. I wondered how the driver could distinguish the stoplights from all the other lights - everything was covered with red, green and blue lights. (We were not used to Christmas lights.)

We had to wait about an hour at the train station. I used this time to look for a loaf of bread for about ten children - ours, Sršen's and Rihtar's. The grownups were hungry, too. But there were no loaves of bread to be found anywhere - just sandwiches, so thin you could see through them and expensive as saffron.

A gentleman walked around us a number of times and looked us over. Finally he came to me and gave me a couple dollars, and suggested I buy some candy for the children. I was grateful, but I would have been much happier with a loaf of bread.

Around 11 p.m. we boarded the train. It was a New York Central train, with large, shiny, new aluminum cars. On the inside end of each car was a large mirror made of ground glass; stenciled on the mirror was a map of the railroad's routes all across America. To us, this train represented the greatness and comfort of America, just as Europe was represented by the old, small wooden cars that brought us from



Cilka, Janko and Anton Žakelj, in the Trofaiach D.P. camp, October 30, 1949. Photo by Radulović.

Salzburg to southern Italy.

In spite of our hunger, we soon fell asleep and did not see the first part of our new homeland.

Author's closing comments:

Although we never wanted to leave our home in Slovenia and come to America, we are thankful to God that we did. After we came, we were able to send help to our families in Slovenia for many years. They were forced to live in a communist "paradise" where many things were lacking, and they appreciated all the help we sent. But sadly, we could not send them the one thing they longed for more than anything else - freedom.



Refugees on a ship approaching New York get their first glimpse of America. Photo from United States Merchant Marine website (www.usmm.org/dp.html).