

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

Oral History Interviews of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center

**Interview with Amalie Salsitz
April 24, 1987
RG-50.002*0089**

PREFACE

On April 24, 1987 and October 27, 1987, Amalie Salsitz was interviewed on videotape by Ruth Harris and Bernard Weinstein on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

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Summary of the
Interview with Amalie Salsitz
April 24, 1987

Amalie Salsitz was born in Munich, Germany in 1922. When Hitler came to power, she moved to Galicia, Poland with her parents and two sisters because her father thought it would be safer for them there. They lived in a German colony in Stanislawow, Poland (Ivano Frankovo, Ukraine). Amalie attended a Hebrew Gynamsium and lived a life fairly isolated from non-Jews. She was also isolated from economic hardship while growing up. Amalie remembers living peacefully until the Germans occupied Stanislawow.

The town was under Russian control from September 1939 until June 1941. During this time, Amalie worked as a physics and math teacher and as a secretary-bookkeeper. She remembers being indoctrinated into Marxism. The Hungarians invaded Stanislawow on June 22, 1941 and took over control from the Russians. In October 1941, Amalie's mother and sister, Celia, were taken away by Germans. After a mass killing in October 1941, a ghetto and a Judenrat were established in Stanislawow. One day, Amalie's father did not return from work. She later found out that he was taken to Belzec, a concentration camp in Poland. Three weeks after her father's disappearance, Amalie left the ghetto with a Karaite man she had met named Mundek. Amalie was able to get false papers so that she could get a job and she moved to Lemberg, Poland (Lviv, Ukraine). When she was discovered as a Jew in Lemberg, she moved to Kraków, Poland, arriving on Christmas Eve 1942. In Kraków, Amalie developed an inflammation and her father's former boss, Kasimir Jerzenicki, helped her to get into a hospital that Jews couldn't get into. In the hospital, Amalie met a Polish chambermaid with whom she went on to work in a German club for executives doing domestic work. One of the executives eventually helped Amalie to get an office job. From this job, she moved on to work for a German company, named Wilhelm Langert, which was connected with the Plaszów labor camp in Poland. Amalie had a false identification. Her assumed name was Felicia

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

2

Milaszewksa. She then got another job as a personal secretary and the company left her in a position of authority when they evacuated their site near Plaszów.

During this time, Amalie met her future husband, Norman Salsitz. Amalie and Norman arrived in the United States in 1947.

Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Amalie Salsitz
April 24, 1987

01:00:00

Amalie was born in Munich, Germany in 1922. She was the second of three daughters. Amalie's father thought that it was safer to emigrate once Hitler came to power. They moved to Galicia, Poland. Amalie lived in Stanislawow, Poland (Ivano Frankovo, Ukraine). Amalie's mother's family emigrated to Palestine in 1934. Amalie was educated in Stanislawow. This city was under Russian occupation. Stanislawow became metropolitan after World War I. When Amalie lived there, it had a population of 100,000 of whom 40,000 were Jewish. Amalie and her family lived in a German colony in Stanislawow.

01:04:00

The Jewish population in Stanislawow covered the whole economic spectrum. Amalie's father sent his children to a Hebrew Gymnasium. They tended to be isolated from non-Jews. Amalie was very preoccupied with her studies. There were ultra-Orthodox Jews in Stanislawow and there was also a reform movement.

01:07:00

There were three Gymnasiums in Stanislawow. Life in the town was sheltered. Amalie's father was somewhat authoritarian. He raised his daughters with "military" discipline. He taught them to excel. Amalie's mother was easy-going, while her father was somewhat stern.

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

2

01:10:00

Amalie was somewhat sheltered from economic hardship. Her father was self-educated. He taught himself French and English. He also had beautiful penmanship. Amalie's father came from an Orthodox family. His mother was well-versed in Talmud. Amalie's father felt that, since he had no sons, he wanted his daughters to study Talmud and Jewish teachings.

01:13:00

Amalie, because she was the middle child, tried to excel. Amalie's older sister was jealous of her. Her older sister fell in love with a young Jew from Palestine. Amalie felt that she was trying to get away from the family pressure.

01:16:00

Amalie's father cared very much for his family. When he realized that he would not have a son, he took in a young male relative to live with them. The family meals included discussions. Amalie's father had a great influence.

01:19:00

Amalie's father wanted the family to go abroad, either to Palestine or Australia. Amalie learned English, and she hoped to go to the United States. There was much poverty, but Amalie's family didn't experience the depression too badly. People eked out a living. Jews were taxed by the government and the Kehilla. The Kehilla was supportive.

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

3

01:22:00

Amalie remembers summer and winter vacations. Her family belonged to numerous political organizations. Her parents were very active. Students were not permitted to be involved in politics, however. The police used to watch them vigilantly. Her family lived quite peacefully. But, they sensed the danger once the Germans occupied their town and Poles began to incite violence. When young Poles snatched Amalie's purse, no one lifted a finger to help.

01:25:00

Stanislawow was under Russian control from September 1939 until June 1941. During that time, students could not say nor do anything against the government. Poles came to take their apartment, the Secret Police were sent. When the police came, the leader became infatuated with Amalie's sister, Celia. Celia was physically attractive.

01:28:00

Amalie's father had to do physical labor at first. He eventually got a job in a chemical factory. Amalie got a job teaching physics and math. This was a temporary job. After her teaching job, she became a secretary-bookkeeper. There was almost no money to support the family. They had to be indoctrinated into Marxism. The United States was held up by Russian leaders as the enemy.

01:31:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

4

When the Germans invaded, the Russians told the Jews to evacuate with them. The Jews, however, didn't believe that anything would happen to them. A fellow student offered to have Amalie and her sister Celia go with him to Russia. Amalie's father wouldn't allow it.

01:34:00

The Hungarians, allies of the Germans, invaded Stanislawow after June 22, 1941. No harm was done to Amalie's family in this invasion. The Count, who was the leader of the Hungarian group, offered to marry Amalie on the condition that she convert to Catholicism. Amalie's father declined the offer. Her father did not want her life put at risk when she got to Hungary. The Count advised them that the Germans were determined to kill all Jews.

01:37:00

Jews were used to do menial work. Often, Jewish men were beaten and killed. Jewish women had to go to work with brushes and pails. Whoever didn't go to work had to forfeit a ration card.

01:40:00

There were rumors about the Jews going to a ghetto. Amalie was assigned to work for a Gestapo man, cleaning his apartment. Celia had a sandwich and threw it down for some starving Jews. As a result, Celia was taken. Amalie went to plead for her. Amalie had disguised herself as a Gentile.

01:43:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

5

By pleading for her sister, Amalie revealed herself as a Jew. Celia wasn't released. Amalie's mother's hair turned white virtually overnight. Her mother drew closer to Amalie. On October 12, 1941, the sixth day of Sukkot, known as Hoshanah Rabbah, when 12,000 Jews of Stanislawow were murdered, there was a commotion and they thought they might be sent to Hungary.

01:46:00

That night, October 12, 1941, Amalie's mother awoke her with a kiss. Amalie was surprised. Her mother said, crying, that she didn't know if they'd ever see each other again. Amalie always believed that the men would be taken away, so they tried to hide their father. A neighbor told Amalie's mother to come and hide with her and her family. Amalie's mother refused the offer.

01:49:00

The neighbor's son tried to persuade Amalie's mother to hide with them. The Germans suddenly broke in and started taking people. Some neighbors suddenly appeared, telling them that people were being shot in ditches. Amalie's mother and sister were taken; Amalie and her father were left. Of the people taken, most died on this day. Those who didn't die were let go in what turned out to be a mad stampede.

01:52:00

They learned that Ukrainians were doing the killing. Those left alive were transported to the Stanislawow ghetto. A neighbor took Amalie and her father into her home. The woman's daughter was taken away. There were six people living in one room.

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

6

01:55:00

Amalie and her father thought that the ghetto would be safer. They thought that after a mass killing, they would simply have to work to live. Amalie was allowed to remain home. At this point, the ghetto was still open so one could barter. One needed permission to go from one part of the ghetto to another.

01:58:00

A Judenrat was formed, as well as Jewish police. Some of the Jewish police were decent. But, ultimately, they had to round up people for shootings. There was no camp in the area, so people were, simply, shot in ditches. The Germans claimed that they saved the able-bodied but killed the others.

02:01:00

The intelligentsia were killed. Those who survived had meager rations. People who were once well-off and respected sat on gutters and begged for bread. Once the ghetto was sealed off, one could no longer barter for food.

02:04:00

One had to bribe to get food. Amalie's father worked with carpenters on a railroad. Food that was found in Jews' possession was given to Ukrainians and the Jews were shot. Amalie thought, again,

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

7

of escaping to Russia. Jews were being transported east, this time for gassing. They thought they'd be able to escape during transport.

02:07:00

Amalie's cousin got a job in a slipper factory. Her family thought they'd hide there. Amalie and her father could have been hidden, but for some reason, she refused. Amalie's aunt and others went, but were taken. Not staying with her aunt saved Amalie's life and, temporarily, her father's life.

02:10:00

When there was no more bartering in the Stanislawow ghetto, people simply starved. Amalie had to clean toilets. She was approached by people who wanted to save her, but refused to take her father.

02:13:00

Amalie met a man called "Abrahamovitch," a.k.a. "Mundek." Mundek was a Karaite and since German officials decided the Karaites weren't Jews, but were Turks, he could come and go as he pleased. Mundek tried to get Amalie to join his community. Amalie declined. One day, in August 1942, a Jew spat on a Ukrainian guard. Germans demanded the offender. When the Judenrat refused, every tenth man, including the leader of the Judenrat, was hanged. One of those hanged escaped when his rope broke. He survived.

02:16:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

8

One day, Amalie's father went to work. Amalie had a high fever. There was an Aktion that day. Amalie thought that her father was safe, but he didn't return. A neighbor told her that he'd been taken to Belzec, a concentration camp in Poland. Mundeck kept trying to persuade Amalie, but she refused.

02:19:00

Amalie's father had told her to wait three weeks. Now there were only 2,000 people in the ghetto. Amalie did not know what to do. She had little education. She didn't look Slavic. Amalie didn't hear from her father. She was warned by Mundeck that the ghetto had been "cleansed." Mundeck told Amalie to take off the arm-band and board a train bound for Halitz (Galich, Ukraine), where he lived.

02:22:00

Amalie boarded the train. The compartments were being checked. She had no papers, but somehow they passed over her. Mundeck, who accompanied her, may have bribed them. Amalie never found out. Mundeck took her to her mother's house, but Amalie realized she was endangering them. They sent her to a peasant's house, but Amalie didn't feel that she could trust anyone. Amalie didn't want to be closed in.

02:25:00

Amalie was able to get out of the Stanislawow ghetto with 10 others who looked Aryan. All the others were subsequently caught and shot. Amalie managed to get false papers that said she had a

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

9

job in a Polish company. Amalie was able to obtain a room, through Mundek, in Lemberg, Poland (Lviv, Ukraine). The apartment belonged to Mundek's cousin, who was "king of the black market." Mundek, Amalie believed, was a righteous man. Mundek told her not to be afraid.

02:28:00

Mundek never wanted a reward, but later in life she helped him financially until his death. Before Amalie left Mundek, he told her that her father had tried to make an escape from the train taking him to Belzec. He had opened the floorboards with his bare hands. A 16-year-old girl went with him.

02:31:00

Her father stayed in the house of a Polish peasant woman who lived near Halitz after his escape. Then he tried to contact Amalie. Her father went back to his town on the train. A Ukrainian architect recognized her father, betrayed him to the Nazis, and he was shot. When Mundek told Amalie this, she couldn't cry. She couldn't go back to Mundek's cousin's house.

02:34:00

An officer's wife who had a hostel took Amalie in. The Ukrainian police came looking for two women trading on the black market. A Ukrainian policeman was suspicious that Amalie was Jewish. Desperate, she admitted that this was so, but that she had nowhere to go. Roughly, he took her to the railroad station, cursing and reviling her. He threatened to kill her if he saw her again.

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

10

02:37:00

The railroad station swarmed with police. Amalie returned to the hostel, but the Polish woman asked her to leave. Amalie decided to go to Kraków, Poland. She had to change trains. At the station, the police were swarming again. Amalie found out that they were looking for Jews trying to get to Hungary. She survived another night.

02:40:00

Amalie stayed that night with a girl who worked in the railroad station. A man followed her in the railroad station. Amalie was nervous. Desperately, she confronted the man. Nervously, the man helped her get on the train to Kraków. On the train, she was again accosted by a policeman who thought that she was Jewish.

02:43:00

In the Kraków station, police were again swarming about. The police were not looking for Jews, but for Poles without working papers. Poles in this situation were taken to slave labor camps. A policeman, again, accused Amalie of being Jewish. Amalie was arrested and interrogated by a Gestapo man. Amalie resigned herself to being killed.

02:46:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

11

A Pole told her that the Gestapo was letting her go. Amalie didn't believe the Pole, but they released her. Amalie came to Kraków on Christmas Eve, 1942. A woman offered Amalie a bed to share. The woman had a fair complexion and red hair with black roots.

02:49:00

They recognized each other. The woman was Jewish and from Lublin, Poland. The woman was a seamstress. She had survived a mass killing in Lublin. She cautioned Amalie to silence. The woman was looking for a job. She shared her ration card with Amalie. Amalie knew her father's boss, Kasimir Jerzenicki, was in Kraków. Jerzenicki and his family had run away when the Russians had taken over Stanislawow. Jerzenicki's wife didn't recognize Amalie when she came to them.

02:52:00

The wife told Amalie that if her husband didn't recognize her as Jewish, they'd help her. Jerzenicki didn't recognize her as Jewish. Amalie stayed with them for a week. They advised her how to get a job in a German household. Such a job was safe because Polish police didn't search there. Amalie got a job in a German household. The employers liked her. Amalie developed an inflammation. The German employer got her into a hospital that Jews couldn't get into. Near her lay a Polish chambermaid.

02:55:00

This girl, the chambermaid, worked for a German club for executives. Amalie's condition required surgery. Amalie was visited by a priest and had to cross herself. A nurse that Amalie believed to be

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

12

Jewish helped Amalie. The chambermaid arranged for Amalie and herself to get jobs in a casino where they might get access to cigarettes and other valuables that they could sell on the black market.

CONTINUED OCTOBER 27, 1987

02:58:00

In the club, Amalie and the chambermaid had to do physical domestic work, which Amalie found difficult. This showed, and it aroused German and Polish suspicion that she was Jewish and well-to-do. One day, a German executive insisted that Amalie see him. She was reluctant to do so. Actually, he wanted to help her get an office job, knowing that she was in danger. Amalie knew someone who built bridges and tracks for the railroad. He said he'd try to get her a job.

03:01:00

Other Jewish women were working there, posing as Catholics. One woman told Amalie that it was dangerous for the Jews to be concentrated in one place. This one, Katia, became her intimate. Katia and Amalie comforted one another. Amalie needed to obtain a false birth certificate.

03:04:00

Amalie made an application to Polish police for the certificate. There were inconsistencies. The police came to the club to interrogate Amalie. She hoped an older person would interrogate her.

Amalie had very bright eyes, which made her look happy, so it was believed that she couldn't be Jewish. Amalie got new papers which enabled her to get a ration card and working papers.

03:07:00

Amalie had to keep a low profile. She had a chance to get another job. However, Poles were not allowed to get other jobs if they worked for Germans already. Through a contrived "accident," Amalie managed to get fired and she got an office job with a German company, Wilhelm Langert. This company was connected with the Plaszów labor camp in Poland. In Plaszów, there were Jewish slave laborers. Amalie was now a secretary. Her German was good for someone who was Polish. She was paid partly in cash and partly in cigarettes and vodka which she sold on the black market.

03:10:00

Amalie wanted to keep a low profile, but she wanted to bring provisions to the Plaszów prisoners. Amalie convinced her boss to help her; he thought she was after Jewish valuables. One day, the Gestapo man, Müller, appeared. Müller was sadistic and intimidating. He had his dogs with him. The dogs were trained to tear Jews to bits.

03:13:00

Amalie's adopted name was Felicia Milaszewska. This was also the name of a noble family. Amalie's boss kept company with a woman of that same surname. This woman decided to take Amalie under her wing because she believed her to be from a sideline of the family.

03:16:00

Once, near the end of 1944, a trainload of Slovakian Jews came through Kraków. They were bound for Plaszów, then Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland. Amalie wanted to bring them water, but the guards warned her not to and they spilled the water on the ground. A Polish mining engineer was suspicious that she was Jewish. There was a Jewish girl masking herself as a Catholic who was shot when she mispronounced a word and gave herself away.

03:19:00

Amalie described many "close calls." Often, she had to bluff her way out of situations. Once, Amalie didn't use the greeting of "Heil Hitler" and she had to admit that she was a Pole. Amalie learned not to show fear when insinuating questions were asked of her.

03:22:00

After a few months, the company had to retreat because the Allies were advancing. Amalie was able to get another job in a company where she was a personal secretary. She was going to be betrayed as a Jew, but the company protected her. Just before the end of November 1944, this company, which built bunkers, left her in a position of authority when they evacuated.

03:25:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0089

15

One day, she was ordered by the German military commandant of Kraków to detonate the barricade. Amalie got in touch with the Polish underground who wanted the general plan for the destruction of Kraków. This was how she met her husband (see testimony of Norman Salsitz). He thought she was a German.

03:28:00

Once, Amalie had been invited to a reception for Hans Frank, Governor-General of Poland, who was impressed with her attractiveness. Amalie became extensively daring, sometimes even courting exposure. Amalie always wanted to impress people; she thinks this is because she was the middle child. Amalie always looked controlled and happy.

03:31:00

Amalie wanted to survive the Communism that would inevitably take over and destroy the history of the Jews. Amalie was also motivated by the desire to see the remnant of her family in Palestine.

03:34:00

Only when she met her husband and linked her future to his did Amalie begin to feel secure. Not to have to show an identification card, to move freely through the streets was more important than anything else.

03:37:00

Amalie and her husband, Norman, arrived in the United States in 1947. The feeling that she could grow according to her ability was quite heady.

THE REMAINDER OF THE INTERVIEW TAPES CONSISTS OF INTERVIEWS WITH TWO POLISH WOMEN: KAZIA JEZIENICKA, WHO KNEW AMALIE'S FATHER AND WHO SHELTERED HER IN 1942 AND STASHKA HODOR, WHO SHELTERED NORMAN SALSITZ IN 1942. BOTH WERE INVITED BY THE SALSITZS TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES DURING THE PERIOD WHEN AMALIE'S SECOND TAPE WAS MADE.