

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Ruth Krautwirth Meyerowitz
February 20, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Ruth Krautwirth Meyerowitz, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on February 20, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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RUTH KRAUTWIRTH MEYEROWITZ

February 20, 1990

01:00:01

Q: Would you tell me your full name?

A: I am Ruth Krautwirth Meyerowitz.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1929 – June 23, 1929. My father was born in Slovakia – what became Slovakian during the Second World War; and he came to Germany when he was about two years old. And he was, I'm sorry to say, in the Austrian Army during World War I. And my parents were married in 1927. My father had just started a business, and he was in leather good business. Frankfurt is – the Jews in Frankfurt – many Jews in Frankfurt, were in the leather good business actually, across the river in Offenbach. And then during the war, he had to leave the business in Offenbach and move, to move the business into Frankfurt. Was behind in the, in the commercial district, behind the main railroad station. And I have a younger brother, four years younger. He is now – he now lives in New Jersey, too. And I live in New Jersey, of course. And in 1933 – I have memories from the events, the chaotic events that went on in Germany in 19– from 1933, probably 1932 on. But, of course, the – I understand, going back into history, that there was a lot of continuous up– unrest in Germany, from the end of the war actually and through the Depression and all this. But actually on account of the inflation. But I'm, of course, was too young to know of anything. I have memories from when I was about two, three years old. The first thing that I remember, was that there was sort of unrest and fear in the air. And one day, my parents went out and left me with help. And I was worried because everything seemed so insecure all at once. So and we lived in an apartment about on the third floor which is probably is.... And I went out on the balcony and looked for my parents. And of course, when you're that age I don't think you have any depth perception. And there was a banner slung between the two apartment buildings and to me it seemed like it was a barrier that no one would be able to cross anymore, and I was very fearful that my parents would not be able to come back to me. It was a banner; it was political banner that was put up by the Nazi party. I don't know what, I don't remember what it said. But that was my very first memory of Nazi, the rise of the Nazis. My uncle, my father's youngest brother, was a budding reporter as they would say in today's jargon, and he worked for a German newspaper. Apparently had written something or maybe, I don't know, maybe his political views were not anything the Nazis liked. Anyway, he was hunted, hunted down. He was taken to a – he was, at first he was working on the newspaper. And one day my father – and I was three years old – my father told, told me that, "If some men come and asked you where Uncle Julius is, you should tell them that you had just seen him this morning or the night before or some such." Because he wanted to sort of cool his trail. If he had left by then, he was fleeing from the Nazis and made his way to Czechoslovakia, and sure enough some men came, and I was really itching to tell them

that my uncle wasn't here, but thank God they never asked me. They just spoke to my father. They wanted to know where my uncle was, and he ended up in Czechoslovakia, and they never caught him until much later. He was working in western part of Czechoslovakia in Pilsen and when the Nazis came in, of course he tried to make his way east, away from them, and he went by motorcycle and had an accident, had a broken leg and brought him to the hospital. And of course by then the occupying Nazi, Nazi forces – the German army, knew who he was and they took him out of the hospital and took him to jail and he was shot there. So they did eventually catch up with him.

01:02:23

So these were my very earliest memories of living in a police state in Nazi Germany. When, of course in the very beginning they – the Nazis did not allow any money to be paid out or whatever foreign money or any monies were in Jewish bank accounts was stopped. Of course they had to open the accounts again especially since my brother was getting money from out of the country foreign exchange with better interest. Which they were anxious to get in because they needed it, so it seemed that for a very short time life might be fairly normal in a large city. It wasn't in the small cities. There was a lot of beating and harassment of Jews of all kinds, but in a city like Frankfurt, it didn't quite begin. I didn't feel it until much later, but gradually they encroached on our liberties. I was walking with my family on the side of a park once, and a young boy on a bicycle knocked me over and went over my knee. He didn't break anything, but my parents were even afraid to go to the police and report it, report it to anyone because it would only have meant problems for us. So since I wasn't seriously hurt they took me home and nursed my knee and that was it.

01:06:19

When, sometime ago, my family – my sons, my husband and I – went back to Frankfurt on a sort of very bittersweet tour, we – I wanted to show them the Jewish places and the rich Jewish history, if anything could be found – the places that I remembered and the places that made sense within Jewish history to them. And we were walking from the last apartment where we had lived, on the way to where my school was. This school, incidentally, was a rather well-known school. The educational process is still being studied today. They were very progressive. It's Philantropin – I don't know if you've heard of it but it was a really well known school. And anyway, there was a few blocks walk to the school from my first house, and we passed a house that has been left standing, and it brought back a terrible memory of something that had happened. There was a little girl in my brother's class. She was four years younger, I mean he's four years younger than I, so she was, must have been the same age as my brother. And she was, I don't know, maybe at the time eight or seven or something like that. Her father had done something that the Nazis didn't like, and so rather than punish him outright, they took this little girl and had her sterilized, and then returned to the father. And that is, I mean, a much more terrible thing. Now that I have grandchildren and I see my sons having their daughters almost that age, this is a most terrible thing that you can do to a parent. It's worse than taking and chopping a parent's hand off or something like that. And

we passed this house and I told them the story and it was absolutely – they were absolutely stunned. I mean they had heard and read every-everything about the Holocaust and about the persecutions and all, but standing in front of the house where this actually went – where this girl actually had lived, it was really quite mind-boggling. And of course eventually, everyone was killed anyway, but this was one of the terrible things that went on as the war progressed and as the war against the Jews progressed. Actually the war against Jews didn't really start in Europe in 1939. It started in Germany. It became a hot war in 1933, but I think German history is, is full of war against Jews, cold and hot and in between.

01:09:00

Q: Let's get back to you. How, what were you doing this years?

A: I was going to school. Many of the teachers left. Many of them committed suicide. They were disillusioned with what was, and they were afraid of the future and when I've gone back to the cemetery and I've seen some of their graves and they are all, they all fall in this in a certain time period. It must have been at one point the realization that everybody would be killed and people preferred to die in their own beds and by their own choice. And so I do go the cemeteries and I recognize some of the names and I put a stone and I remember what has happened. But, I did go to school and many of my friends left. And then more and more restrictions were placed on Jewish teaching. We were allowed – I mean – I guess they couldn't control that we were learning Hebrew and the Bible and Jewish history and.... But we were not allowed to play Jewish music by Jewish composers and it was very funny. My – when the school stopped, my brother and I took violin lessons. Pretty bad, we were pretty bad. But anyway when – after we were not allowed to go to school anymore, my mother wanted us – to keep us busy I guess, to keep practicing. And we were playing together the Barcarole from *Tales of Hoffman* and for some reason some Nazis, Gestapo men, came up to see us for I don't know what. And they heard us scratch away on the violin and they asked us what we were playing, and we were afraid to say that this was by a Jewish composer. Of course, Offenbach¹ was not allowed to be played. Neither was Mendelssohn² and all the other Jewish composers or even if they were remotely related to Jewish composers. Because I guess they figured I couldn't – we couldn't do much harm with our playing so they didn't say anything. But that was one of the many harassments that went on.

01:11:10

Our school was finally combined with the – another school, we – one of the two Jewish schools in Frankfurt that had existed from – for at least 100 years. I mean students had left, and there were very few left behind, and then of course some were sent out on transports into – we didn't know, but it was ostensibly, of course, for repatriation into the east or for settlement in the east. And of course that was not true, but we were told that that's what it

¹ Jacques (nee Jacob) Offenbach

² Felix Mendelssohn

was. They – when my good friend Irma was taken away – and many, many of our – of my friends and then the school building was closed and we had classes for a very short time in the an old orphanage building, the Jewish orphanage building. And then of course, school was stopped completely. And because my father was a Slovak citizen, and because he had – his business was taken over by a German Nazi. He was a dentist, and he we think that he was an executioner because whenever the grapevine said that there had been some kind of shooting of German dissidents, he was away from the business. And he walked around, with a gun, he had a gun in my father's desk and whenever he called my father in for consultation, he would open the drawer and they, the conversation would go on over a gun sitting in the middle of my father's desk. And so he wanted to keep my father because this man knew absolutely nothing about running the business, so he wanted to keep my father on. My father had the choice of staying behind when we were supposed to be sent to the east. And he could have stayed behind and just had his family go but he didn't want to do this. He thought he could protect us if he would come with us, and ironically, very sadly, he is the one who did not survive the war. My brother and my mother and I managed to scratch out of it and survive. So, because of that, we were among the last few full Jews – I mean there were a lot of mixed marriages, and there were a lot of off-spring you know who were half Jewish. Those were – some of them were let sent to Theresienstadt after we left – but we were among the full Jews the last few to be sent to Auschwitz.

01:13:47

Now the reason we were not put into – and we were told we were not put into a car with the gas going – was that we were such a small transport and it didn't pay for them to use up a whole lot of gas. So, they figured they'd send us into Auschwitz and we would be somehow dead within a short time anyway, so they just shipped us over. And on the way to Auschwitz, we were joined by a lot of Polish prisoners. But they were forced laborers, women, who were taken into Germany when the Germans occupied Poland. They were probably – maybe they said they didn't like the food or they objected to something, and they were then taken to a concentration camp. So as we were going along, and we were only riding during the day because at night the planes, the Allied planes flew overhead and they didn't, and of course the planes had no way of knowing who was in there. If they thought that we carried ammunition they would bomb us. So they made us stay at night in different places, in prisons and whatever along the way. And we did the few hundred miles to Auschwitz in, I think, something like seven days and no nights. But wherever we went, we picked up several prisoners and they – non-Jewish prisoners – and they went to camp with us. But we were the last Jews, were about 37 of us. And as far as I know, only my mother and my brother and I, and one other young boy survived. And I think that was a pretty high percentage because if we had been gassed of course no one would have been alive from the transport.

01:15:30

And at the – when you arrived in Auschwitz – with all the pictures that you see of the SS men with the dogs and a beautiful bright day in April.... We were taken away on the 19th of

April which was Hitler's birthday – or the 20th, or something. It was the 20th wasn't it? This was supposed to be a birthday present to the Führer,³ that Germany would be Judenrein,⁴ and that was why they shipped, gathered us on the 19th of April. And it took us about a week to get there, and it was a beautiful, bright, lovely day. It seems almost impossible that something this horrible could go on in the world on a beautiful day like that. We saw my father, from far away, and that was the last I ever saw of him. And we went into Auschwitz. Our clothes were taken away. Our hair was shaved off. My brother stayed with us for a very short time – was allowed to be in camp with us. And then they decided that it wasn't moral for a young boy to live with all these women who would sometimes would be in the nude. But of course it was very moral for them to have us to get undressed and to parade in front of an SS officer or a few SS officers anytime they wished and anytime a whimsy struck them you know. But this was immoral and my brother was taken to the men's camp, and he managed to live through it somehow and of course he survived.

01:17:70

Q: You told me a story about your mother at the Selektion.⁵ Would you tell us about that?

A: When she saved – when she pulled me away. I – when I came to Auschwitz, a few months later, I think, almost everybody became very sick. My mother had malaria too, but she never had typhus. I was the one who came down with typhus, and I have very little memory of what went on. But my mother dressed me every morning, took me out to this Zählappell⁶ – which is the equivalent of roll call – and dragged me to work so that I wouldn't be beaten or sent into the hospital – the barracks which was, which was really a death barracks. So my mother dragged me around, but of course I looked terrible. And there was the Selektion for the gas chambers one time, and we were standing outside and this SS man told me to go in one direction and my mother into another because I looked so sick. And of course I was just wasting the food – this 200 calories worth of food that they gave us everyday. So my mother pleaded with him and said that, well, I'm her child and she, can't she come with, can't I come with her? And he said, “No, but if you're so concerned about your daughter, go with her.” And she was just about to do this, and, and one of the women, who was working in the barracks – I think she swept floors and whatever and maybe cleaned the chimney, the stoves and whatever other menial work, but she had some kind of protected position, whatever that was worth – she sort of grabbed me under one arm and my mother grabbed my other arm, and we managed to walk away. We were not even stopped, and it was some kind of miracle that the SS man didn't notice that or, or pretended not to notice us. And just, and we just kept going and my life was saved that day. It was really the most amazing thing. I can't figure out.

³ Leader (German)

⁴ Jew Pure (German); Nazi term used to describe areas that had been completely purged of their Jewish population.

⁵ Selection (German); term used for process of selecting prisoners for immediate liquidation or continued forced labor.

⁶ roll call count (German)

Of course, I was sick and I don't know exactly what went on – the excitement of the moment.
But my life was saved that day

01:19:15

Q: Tell me more about what you remember about Auschwitz, please?

A: Well, of course the first day we arrived my hair was shaved and we were standing completely in the nude and I was frightened. I was thirteen years old. I called my mother, and she answered me and I turned around to look for her, but I didn't recognize her because, of course, she had no hair. Was impossible to recognize her totally without clothes and without hair. And then, we were tattooed and of course was nothing like the, the disinfectant or anything put on the ta– on the needles. Everybody's tattoo became slightly infected but it – that stopped. And we were brought into barracks, at first into the “A” camp and then later on into the “B” camp. One of our first chores was – they had – the roads in Auschwitz were terrible. They were muddy and then the mud dried. It was full of ruts, so they had this big steamroller. But it wasn't propelled by steam, it was pushed by prisoners. It was tremendous and they filled it up with sand. You had to fill it with sand, so it would be heavy, and then someone had to go out and push it to even the road. So, one of our first jobs was to fill this steamroller and then later on – or whatever it was, it was a tremendous roller – and then later on to push it across the ruts to try and even out the road. I don't think it was very successful. And one of our next jobs was to even out the road, to dig out wherever the road was higher and to fill in where the road was lower. It really didn't make any sense because we dug parts of the road out, filled in another hole. And it seemed like this kind of work was designed to take our energy away and to make us weak. And I think that was the purpose, to demoralize us and to sap our strength. Then we were in a camp – in the barracks and we had this horrible food. Where we had – they once – I don't know, a few times a week, maybe two or three times a week – we had a slice of salami which was about an inch thick and sometimes it was liverwurst. And something that came out of rusty barrels – it was called “tea” – and sometimes they had soup. They made soup out of bean – no some kind of turnips, that weren't even peeled and potato peels and the sand wasn't washed off. And they just threw everything together, and even at times they emptied out bags that the people had brought food when they were taken on a transport, and were – and it was – sometimes these bags of food managed to get into the camp. But it wasn't assorted, they just emptied everything into this pot of soup that they were cooking. We found combs and compacts and things like that sometimes in the soup, because they never bothered to assort it. And that was the food that we had. And it must have been just a few hundred calories a day because everybody was getting sick. One of the signs of malnutrition and vitamin deficiency is sores, and people had terrible sores which festered on their legs. It was just awful. And that was one of the things that you could be taken to the crematorium for. As soon as someone had a sore like that, or the scratches from scabies that was a reason to be taken to the crematorium.

01:22:53

Now I was very fortunate. I also had scabies at one time but somehow it didn't get into my face. It stayed on my body, and there was a Selektion and they didn't, that day, make us take off our clothes. So they didn't that I had scabies and that also saved my life. Now scabies can be cured with a few pennies worth of sulfur cream. But of course no one had it and they were not interested in saving anyone of course. They were interested in having people get sick and having people die or be in such condition that they would take them to the crematorium. The crematorium was just a few minutes away. We could see the chimneys from wherever we were, and of course we could smell the gas when it was left, let out from the gas chambers. And then we could smell the burning of the bodies, the human flesh burning. Then they cleared the grates and we could hear the grates being cleaned and it's similar to what your own oven would be like when you move the grates around except in a much – it was much noisier that we could hear all the way in the barracks. And to this day when I clean my own oven, I am reminded of that noise of the cleaning of the grates in the crematorium.

01:12:03

Well, we lived through the – these times. I made friends with a girl from Salonika and her sister. Her name was Nini Ben Mayo(ph). She was about 18 at the time and her sister was a year or two younger. I had not even realized that the Nazis were trying to eliminate even the Jews of as far south as Greece and I understand. I saw – I met people in Jerusalem in 1981 who were from Rhodes and they had done the same thing to the Jews from Rhodes, and I really wasn't aware that they were doing. Well, anyway, the Greek girls were taken from their homes. Most of them were from Salonika. They were taken from their homes and brought to Auschwitz and of course their parents either had been killed or they were left behind and were taken out another time. So I made friends with Nini Ben Mayo. She was studying to be an opera singer, and to us at the time, when she sang, it was like the most beautiful thing you could ever hear. Maybe she had a beautiful voice. To me it now sounds like she really, you know, she was like an angel singing. And of course there were Jews from all over Europe and every language was spoken in the camp except English.

01:25:37

And they didn't get as far to, to the English Jews yet. So all the – they under– they realized that everybody in order to communicate – and luckily they didn't stop that – would speak in the language that she would know. Nini and I could communicate in English because I had studied English and so did she, and that was the only way – the only language that the two of us had in common. Of course this was forbidden. So because it was forbidden – I mean, you were 13 years old, you – in spite of it everything – you tried, you think you're very brave. And so we were speaking in English and, and she told then the story that she was taken and that she trying to be an opera singer. And she – whenever there was a chance, Nini would sing for the prisoners. And of course we had so few mental escapes, you know. We had so few anything that was nice that was happening, that you were really, we begged her all the time whenever she was being halfway in the mood to sing for us. Well, her sister died in the summer and after that all the spirit went out of her. She just lost all hope and of course she

didn't sing anymore. But shortly before that somehow this SS man, Taube⁷ – did you ever hear his name, Drechsler⁸ and Taube? The woman's name was Drechsler and his name was Taube. They were not officers. They were – but they were the ones who kept order by beating in the camps. Well, he had heard that Nini had a wonderful voice, and he proposed that she live in his house, yes, and sing for him. And Nini knew what it meant. But you have to realize for the time that she would have been alive and of course you were hoping everyday that maybe through some miracle there would be some kind of release. But for the time that she might have stalled and would have been alive, she might have lived in clean sheets and would have had a bath and would have had some fairly decent food. And so the sacrifice that she made was tremendous. She refused him. And among the next Selektions to the gas chamber, her number was prominently mentioned and there was no way that anyone could have erased the number. I mean he made sure that she was on that next transport to the gas chamber. And of course she was killed that way.

01:28:16

But I have been telling my sons about this and all their lives they've heard about Nini and how the heroic stand that this girl took and her bravery of course. And when I was in Jerusalem in 1980, '81, for the gathering, I was looking for people from Salonika because I really had a very great rapport with most of them, I mean with all of them. They were really very nice. They were – you know, young girls who spoke several languages – they were very happy as far as it could go. They were, were very talented. They danced and they sang. There was still a woman; her name was Stella, who did a lot of dancing and she entertained us. And I was told that she lived in Paris after the war, that she and her daughter had some kind of nightclub act. But I understand something sophisticated and everybody asked, "Well, if you're so interested, how come you didn't find out about her?" And I really never found out what became of Stella, but she did entertain us with some very beautiful dancing. But, so I went around looking for people who came from Salonika and I didn't meet anyone that I knew. But on the last night when President – Prime Minister Begin was speaking at the Wall – I heard someone, a man in back of me say that he was from Salonika. And of course my ears stood up and I turned around and asked him some – if he knew any of my friends and I, in passing, mentioned that my friend had been Nini Ben Mayo(ph). No, it's not good. But anyway, he said there was still a Mr. Ben Mayo(ph) in Salonika. He's the head of the Jewish community and I should get in touch with him. Well, of course, as soon as I came home I tried to figure out a way of getting in touch with him and the only thing I knew how to go about getting a foreign address was get in touch with the Federation. And within a half hour I had the address of the Jewish community in Athens who then forwarded the letter to Mr. Ben Mayo and Mr. Ben Mayo is a cousin of Nini's. When they were in New York we had a very nice visit. We met at the Jewish Theological Seminary because this is half-way between where he was staying and my – where my house was and a lot of reminiscences and of course we sort of corresponded for a while. It was very interesting to be able to reminisce

⁷ Adolf Taube

⁸ Margot Drechsler

about all the thing with Nini. One of the things that Nini sang and I guess it must have been part of her training was Avé Maria. And of course I was – we always begged her to sing Avé Maria and to this day I am sometimes invited to Catholic weddings and I listen to Avé Maria and of course I start crying. And everybody goes on look at this Jewish woman – how touched by Avé Maria, but they do not know the memories I have of Avé Maria and Nini. And that was one of real unforgettable friendships that I did form in Auschwitz.

01:31:43

And my mother and I were together for the whole time. At first we worked in a factory where they – it was called “Weberei,”⁹ “the weaving place.” Radar was coming into prominence at that time, the British airforce used it against the Nazi airforce. The Nazis tried to stop – they tried to interfere and cause static so they made us weave. We were told that what it was – I am not a hundred percent sure. They made us weave plastic – braid plastic strips and they were going to drop this, hoping that that would interfere with the radar transmission. They were dropping this from planes and we were forced to keep plaiting these things in the Weberei. This was one of the jobs in the Weberei and we worked there for a while. And somehow, through knowing someone, my mother and I were assigned to work in Kanada,¹⁰ where all the belongings that came into the camp that the prisoners took with them and – of course, everything was taken away from them. All this was brought in and assorted and then packed and sent into Germany. And even the word Kanada – spelled with “K” the German way, “KANADA” – it was a metaphor for all that is plentiful and available and just there because Canada, I guess to them, meant a lot of riches. And so that's what it was nicknamed. My mother and I worked there, and we assorted mainly blankets and comforters that people had taken with them, hoping that they would be able to use them. Of course most of them didn't even live to see what was happening with it, but even in the camp they all had these raggedy old rags and for blankets. They were full of lice and every so often they were cleaned and the straw mattresses. But when the things that were in Kanada were assorted and just sent to Germany, and one time was a tremendously high pile of comforters, and we had a few minutes during lunch break, and I had found a book *Nathan the wise*. Actually the play of *Nathan the Wise*. During lunchtime, I crawled up on top of the mattress hoping that no one would see me, and I was reading it. But of course when you come in came in from an angle at the, at the barracks, you could see me up on top there. And an SS woman came in and called me down and took the book and threw it away and really boxed my ears until I was dizzy for reading that. So even this small attempt at culture of course was stopped of course. I don't know if you realize that *Nathan the Wise* was written by a German¹¹ in praise of a Jew. But of course I don't know this, and probably she wasn't even aware of it. It's just that she didn't want anything like this to be available as activity.

⁹ Weaving mill (German)

¹⁰ Kanada (German); term for the warehouse of looted goods at Auschwitz; also used to refer to prisoners who were assigned to work in the warehouse facilities.

¹¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

01:34:59

While I'm – the belt? Right, the belt. While I – while we were in – working in Kanada we were not allowed to wear what was really – would be considered civilian clothes. While, the people in camp, in the camps, were not given these stripped clothes, not all of them, they were wearing stripped clothes. They were given the old rag clothes that were taken off the bodies, and given to them and they lasted until they really fell off and they were full of mud and filth and lice. And then every so often they, they would – the lice – the clothes were taken away and they were put in the gas chamber to kill the lice, and then of course all the nits were dead but they were all sitting in the seams and were still there. And those were the clothes that the prisoners wore but because we were in Kanada, and we were not supposed to wear home anything that was still wearable that they could ship to the Reich they – we were supposed to wear these long prison uniforms. And I was very – I was getting thin. I had been sick and the dresses were very long. The mud in Auschwitz was just – it was clay and it stuck to the dresses, to the hem of the dresses, and when it dried it was very heavy and very difficult to remove. And it dragged us down. Of course, we didn't have much strength to drag ourselves around let alone a muddy dress, so most prisoners found some pieces of string, tied it together and pulled up their dresses and we were allowed to do this. I found a belt. The Greek girls who came to Auschwitz had brought in a lot of knitted dresses with beautiful rose designs knitted into the hem and into the top and when I saw the belt it had, it was blue felt. It had yellow and red felt flowers sewn on. I thought that it was a Greek handiwork, and of course being Greek you know, having been so fond of the Greek girls, I was felt very sentimental about the belt. But later on when I showed it to someone, it turned out that the belt was not Greek. But whatever it was, I had the belt. And I used it to pull my dress up. Of course we weren't allowed to wear anything that would be an adornment, so because I bloused the belt over the – bloused my dress over the belt, I was able to wear the belt and no one saw it. And my mother kept saying, "Oh Ruth, you know, look at how thin you're getting, my poor child. Look, this starvation is terrible for you." And so I kept telling her, "But no, the belt isn't getting, isn't – I'm not getting thinner. The belt is getting longer. The belt is stretching." That's how I tried to appease her. And there was a button at one time on that belt and the button came off and then I ended up just using a safety pin that I found, a rusty old safety pin. And the belt went with me even later on when we worked in – were in a labor camp. We were taken to a forced labor camp, and I did have another different kind of skirt and I was able to use the belt just as an adornment, but no one paid any attention. This was towards the end of the war, and no one paid any attention to that anymore. And so I had the belt with me all the time. And of course once I was in freedom, I wouldn't part with it. And I was very happy that the Holocaust Museum could make use of it now because I felt that if anyone would go through my belongings and see this raggedy, dirty old faded belt they would say, "What is this woman saving this for?" And this way there is a whole story attached to it and I'm very happy that I can relate this story of the belt.

01:38:50

Q: You were telling me earlier about your mother helping a woman who was in trouble. Can

you tell us that story?

A: Yes, my, my mother – when we were in Auschwitz. For a short time there was a – two sisters were brought in and I think they were from the area of Katowice and their names were Tesha and Nusha Unger(ph). That was their maiden name. One of the ladies, as I understand the story – but I'm not sure about, of course, a hundred percent sure. Nothing is a hundred percent sure of what happened. One of the ladies supposedly had given poison to her children. There was not enough for her. And I'm not sure now, if this is the story that I really – it was told to me in this kind of secret, or if this was really true. She wanted to commit suicide at the first chance. She was very despondent and one time my mother saw her running out into, into – towards the moat that was out by the fence. And of course there were the soldiers on top shooting, and as soon as you crossed this little ditch you would be shot but they – when they saw some one running towards the place, they started shooting immediately too. So my mother ran after her and I mean among all the bullets and amidst all the bullets she was able to pull the woman back. She came to visit us after the war. She and her sister came to visit us after the war. Somehow I've lost touch with them. I'm not sure if the story was that I was told was in the sequence and I hope it doesn't bring out a whole lot of pain to her. We never mentioned it to her. But this is what I think my moth– this is what my mother told me had happened. And my mother had saved her life. And of course there were many things that we witnessed that I'm not sure if anyone else has talked about it. At one time there was a young man working in a camp, supervised by a group of Nazi officers. And inadvertently – they were shoveling the mud there – he started whistling the Internationale,¹² which is the Communist – yes, the Communist song and the anthem. And as of course, the Nazis were very much opposed to Communism – that's how they came to power – this was of course the ultimate in anything they would hate. And immediately on the spot he shot this young man. My mother was telling me this. She was really upset her and aggravated over this when she told me, was very agitated, that she had seen this happen. So those were the things that I remember from Auschwitz.

01:41:59

Of course there are many, many more tales and one time I was working somewhere and my brother was still with us at the time, and my mother and my brother were being taken to a Selektion, and my brother was a child. Of course he was four years younger than me, about nine years old. He was taken – the Nazi officer told them to go to, to the side. That meant where they were being – that this group is being sent to the concentration camp, to the – I'm sorry – to the gas chambers. And my mother and my brother suddenly were taken by a German soldier, pulled away and hidden behind a pile of coal in a different barracks. And when my mother asked him why he had done this, he said while he was in Poland, there he had witnessed a shooting of – actually mass shooting of people from a certain city – village. They were taken to a, they were taken to a pit and everyone was shot and then thrown into the pit. And sometimes they weren't even shot, they were still alive when they were shot into

¹² International (German): Communist anthem.

the pit. And one of the Nazi officers had said to this woman who was walking up towards the pit with two children, one in each hand, that she can live if she picks one of the children to be sent into the – to be shot and fall into the pit. And then she and the other child could live. And the woman of course saw no hope so she firmly grabbed both children and jumped into the pit. And this German soldier was so touched by what she had done that he swore to himself at the time that if he ever could save a mother and a child, he would make it his mission to do so. And he did that by saving my mother and my brother and hiding them for the day behind a pile of coal. I never knew who the man was, and my mother didn't know him either. It was just a very strange and human gesture in a sea, or in a surrounding, of inhumanity. And it was a very touching thing that something like that could happen, even there. And of course it was very, very unusual.

01:44:35

When we first came to Auschwitz, my mother needed – had some medication at home. And there was a German doctor, Doctor Wolpe(ph) and an SS man standing there, and I went up to him and very naively telling him that my mother needed this medication. And he just laughed at me and walked away and it was – he was – there was this irony in his laughter. Of course why was I bothering him with nonsense medication for my mother when she wouldn't be alive probably within a few weeks. So there was very little that was human – humane in the in anything that happened to us. Of course I still picture the Dr. Mengele¹³ – the so-called Dr. Mengele – who stood at the Selektion and humming Mozart. Sometimes when I – and I am very fond of Mozart – but sometimes when I happen to sing Mozart I catch myself. I think. “Look, you're doing the same thing that Mengele did.” But no, he was doing the same thing I am doing. He was using some kind of humanity that he had learned and he was.... When I introduced this once to some people where I speak on the Holocaust, and she was shocked that he was able to sing Mozart. And she said she wondering how much of Mengele is in every one, in every person. I don't believe that that is necessarily so. I don't know. I don't want to philosophize. I don't know if – how these people were bred or conditioned to do this sort of thing. But how can one – especially some one who might have known the history of – that the biography of Mozart was such an equal and you know and such a person who would really wanted to see it equality for all people – abuse the music. Or maybe he wasn't even thinking or there was this veneer of culture that happened and – to them and yet was not used properly. It's – sometimes I think back and I wonder, “Did this really happen to us? Could really some one have done what really happened to other human beings?” They tell the story that Himmler¹⁴ once came to the camp, long before I got there, and when he saw what went on, he went from somewhere and he vomited. But from – maybe from the odor, or from whatever went on. But that did not stop him. And of course the killing went on and he was of course was the most notorious of all the killers. I'm going through – with now more than 40 years – I'm going through this in my mind over and over and I'm trying to figure out why – how inhumanity.... And yet, inhumanity like this does go

¹³ Josef Mengele

¹⁴ Heinrich Himmler

on. It started with 6,000,000. It made it possible for the world to accept large number of killings. Large numbers are being killed today. And when large number of people are being killed, we talk about it. We cry about it. We forget about it. And I'm trying to do my thing to try to keep in mind how easy it is to fall into a police state, to become a police state and to fall into this pattern of uncontrolled hatred and destruction.

01:48:27

Q: Is there anything you want to add about Auschwitz. Any other story you want to add or tell us?

A: Well, I've told you many stories. What is it in particular that you had in mind?

Q: You talked about eating a piece of salami?

A: Oh yes, oh sure. The salami they gave us something like this – probably about an inch or a little bit less than an inch slice, slab of salami or liverwurst once, or twice, or three times a week in addition to the little pieces of bread that we got daily and the tea that came out, out of the rusty barrels and this “wonderful” turnip soup. And we, one time – the salami had a terrible odor. They said it was made of horsemeat. It had some kind of a flavor of urine. And one time in the evening I was just given a piece of this salami and I looked out at the window and I saw the crematorium going at full force and, or course, was at night, you could see the fire. During the daytime you could only see the smoke coming out but at night you could see the flames. Well, you know, some flames, but the sky was fairly red. And I was thinking of the people that were destroyed there and I was thinking, “Oh my God, I hope the salami doesn't contain human flesh.” And I threw up from it and after that – this was towards the end that I was in Auschwitz – and after that I was never able to even catch a piece of the salami and whenever it was given to me, I traded it. Now some people would – who didn't have the same experiences, I did of course – didn't know and were anxious to trade it for this little piece of bread that I could get. But I could never eat a piece of salami like that again and that was one of the more – well I think there were a lot of things that went on and if I go through it in my mind, more and more will come out. Of course because I did have typhus, I did forget a lot of the incidents. And maybe in my own mind I try to push them aside. I was never able to watch many of the programs. Even when the Eichmann¹⁵ trial – other people were able to watch on television and I just couldn't face up to it. I it's only recently I have written on the Holocaust and have spoken about it at colleges on it, that I am able to do this. I still cannot get any kind, watch any kind of movie on the Holocaust. I sometimes think, “Oh I'm brave. I'm going to do this now.” And two minutes into the program, and it goes off. And I don't even go to any war pictures of any kind of war. I think maybe one of the reasons I am so anxious to talk about it is that I think that this kind of cruelty can be prevented and can be stopped before it gets out of hand ever. Maybe that's my small contribution I can make to this.

¹⁵ Adolf Eichmann

01:51:25

Q: Can you tell us about the shoes you wore?

A: Oh gosh, the shoes. Everyone was given shoes in regulation, these clogs. They were just, you know, wooden soles and little canvas strips to hold, to put the feet in. The earth in Auschwitz was very muddy. It had been I understand no man's land between the wars and there were fish hatcheries and it was very wet and humid. And we were given those shoes and then when it rained the shoes were stuck in the mud and we had to force our feet to get out. Of course we had no strength to pull ourselves out, and those shoes were in there and you know when you are walking in it, if the shoes were stuck and you tried to pick them up and you weren't fast enough, you got a beating. The SS made us walk to the back with this and when the weather was dry the – it wasn't the – it was very difficult to walk in those ruts too, because the earth had dried so uneven. So these shoes were really the least desirable of what you can get and when we were able to find an old pair of shoes we tried to exchange and to adapt it as best we could to our own use. So I think it must have been in Kanada that I found a pair of shoes and it was something that was fashionable at the turn of the century. It had long points and they were boots that you buckled up and they were very elegant. The elegant ladies wore it at the turn of the century. And but they were much too small for me and this was one of the things that would not be sent to Germany because no one would be able to wear those shoes and they had been out of style. But they were also very, very uncomfortable and they were very small. They were much too small for me. And so I wore them with my foot in the leather side, the heel of my foot coming out on the leather side, rather than fitting over the heel, so that the heel stuck out on the side and I was walking on the, the leather. This was of course preferable to the clogs, those, those wooden clogs but not much preferable. It killed my feet and one of the first things that I did after the war – I mean when we were walking, we were walking from Malchow for eight days, and finally somewhere in German farmhouse I found a pair of shoes – and this was the first thing that I threw away. Of course I'm sorry now that I didn't save the shoes, but I hated them so much. I mean they really did terrible things to my feet, but they would have been a very poignant memento for the Museum. But unfortunately I don't have them. But they were terrible boots.

01:54:18

Q: Under what circumstances did you finally leave Auschwitz?

A: Well, we were told, and it turned out to be true, that the German war machines were suffering because there wasn't enough labor and they needed some laborers. And one time we were told that within a day or so we would be leaving Auschwitz and to prepare whatever. The things we had were nothing – maybe a kerchief where we could carry our bread in. And on November 1, 1944, we were loaded on to a train, the same train that brought people into the camp, and on one side was the crematorium and on the other side was so-called freedom, the western part of Germany. And we were sitting on this train for a

while and we didn't know which way it was going. We were hoping that it was true that we were really being taken to Germany to for labor, but it could have been just the other way. We could have gone up to the crematorium after we'd been going. Well, finally the train moved out and we were indeed taken to Germany and we stayed in Ravensbrück. We were taken to Ravensbrück because all this is in northern Germany, very close to the North Sea. We were taken there and we were kept in a very large tent, something like a circus tent, for several days without food and water. It was the, without the water, I mean we were sort of used to starvation, but without water which is something awful. It rained and we had these spoons, and we were trying to put our spoon outside the tent to try and collect a few drops of water. But of course we didn't have the patience to wait for the spoon to fill up, so as soon as we had a few drops of water, we would anxiously drink it. But a few days later we were taken to an actually barracks in Malchow and then – I'm sorry, in Ravensbrück – and then taken again, shipped by train to this small town called Malchow. It was in northern Germany, somewhere near the North Sea, somewhere near the Oder – the Elbe? Where the German soldiers finally surrendered and where the four armies of the Allies eventually met. But–

[TECHNICAL CONVERSATION]

TAPE #2

[TECHNICAL CONVERSATION]

02:00:12

Q: Let's go back to Auschwitz for a moment. You were telling me the story what happened at Christmastime. Would you tell the story?

A: Yes, this is Christmas Day, 1943. In Germany – Germany celebrates two days of Christmas. This is the last day of Christmas and so it had to be December 25th in 1943. It's very much in my memory, one of the few things that I really remember very, very clearly. In the summer before, a woman had, a Jewish woman had been brought into Auschwitz. She had been a young married woman, and what wasn't obvious at the time was that she was pregnant. And when she – as she went along of course, she was losing weight because she was getting emaciated. And these prison clothes, these ill-fitting clothes whatever it was, was hiding her condition. And when we went out to roll call, we were five deep. So the prisoners sort of always put her in between where it couldn't be noticed. I mean, it was like an unwritten order that we had among ourselves that we just obeyed. At the same time there were also non-Jewish laborers, and some of them were in our barracks. There was one particular woman I remember, Pani Wandzia(ph), a very tall aristocratic woman. And we – I was told that she came from some very aristocratic family. She was allowed – the Polish prisoners somehow I think were allowed to have two times a year packages mailed from home. She had one at Christmas time. And then there were these three Polish slave labor women who worked outside the camp, but stayed in the barracks. And I don't think they got any Christmas – there was no one to send them any packages too. And so they worked outside the camp somewhere and they were treated almost as badly as Jewish prisoners. The only exception was – got the same food, got the same everything, except non-Jewish prisoners were never taken to Selektion. If they died, they died, but nothing was done really to help them, nothing was done by the German authorities. But that was the only difference. Of course it made a large difference but they were treated the same. And so they worked somewhere. Now came Christmas time. Somehow they managed to pluck from somewhere this tiny little branch of a pine tree, probably about this tall, and they made a base out of chewed bread and stuck this Christmas tree in. And it so happened that this woman who was pregnant, went into labor that night, and had a little boy. Now the next morning there was no roll call and that that was the only free time that I remember while I was in Auschwitz, when there was no Zählappell in the morning or in the evening, one, one day. And I think it was only because the SS were out late reveling at night and they didn't expect to get up very early, so they figured well they weren't going to do it that one day. And the next morning my mother and I walked outside and the camp was in some strange quiet. There was an awe about it. It seemed almost like pink cotton was enveloping the whole camp – strange light. And between a little Jewish boy being born the night before, and being Christmas time and this strange light in the – around us, these Polish women kept saying that a miracle has happened. And this must be the miracle when we would be freed. And this would be the day. And when you're so desperate

– even though I am Jewish and didn't think that could happen to me, I wasn't brought up to believe in it – we somehow decided to believe, “Well, maybe you hang on to this. Maybe there is some truth to the story.” And this went on almost all day. Now – and everyone was beginning to be a little bit, to talk, to begin to talk about it. I mean we really didn't believe it. We were too realistic and too many things had happened. Somehow we felt that maybe something could happen. Well, by five o'clock of course the spell was broken. Was around five o'clock, towards evening, when this spell was broken. We heard the familiar sound of four, three or four army trucks. People were on the trucks – open trucks, with prisoners being taken to the gas chamber. And it was preceded by an German, the command car that the couple of German officers rode in, and in back of it was the car with the Red Cross on it that, whoever would observe it would think there's some kind of Red Cross, some kind of charitable or humane–humanitarian project going on. But of course that was the truck that held the gas. And they, we of course recognized the noise of the approaching trucks. At that point when the they drove between the men's camp and the women's camp which was separated by high wires, electrically-charged wires, and they had to go around the bend and get to the crematorium, to the chimneys which we saw, and we didn't see the actual compound from the camp but we saw the chimneys. Of course they were very tall. So they approached the crematorium and as they – the prisoners in the first truck came within the sight of the chimneys – they started singing the Hatikvah.¹⁶ And then the second truck started in and then the third and fourth – if there was four. I am not a hundred percent sure how many. And of course they were driven into the compound of the crematorium and as they were driven in, the first voice stopped. The first truck stopped and then the second and then the third, and we had the, the familiar noises of the steam going and the smell and the noises of the gra–grates of the of the ovens, and the next morning, this roll call again. And of course no miracle had happened.

02:07:12

But as we were standing roll call, there was – the body of the baby washed out into the into the ditches that I don't know where it went because actually the Germans probably would have seen that there was a baby, would have seen the body. I don't know where it ended, but maybe they didn't even pay attention or maybe it went somewhere underground, and that was the end of the miracle. And it took another two years or so before we were really liberated, and a year and a half before we were liberated. As a matter of fact bodies of babies – speaking of that, when we were in working in Kanada, there was a baby found, smothered in the blankets. It seems that either in the rush the baby was taken away from the mother and pushed in with the blankets, or maybe the mother tried to save the baby by putting it in with the belongings that she had, hoping that someone would pick up the baby, somewhat like Moses or so. But of course nothing happened. And the baby was found dead rolled in some of these blankets and things. So lives of children were very cheap and very expendable. It was, it's a terrible thing. I think over 1,000,000 or so of the 6,000,000 that died were children. You don't know all the potential that was killed at the time with such.... And that

¹⁶ Hope (Hebrew); Jewish national anthem.

was one of the things – another one of the things that went on in Auschwitz. And you know, when you speak about Auschwitz, everyone has the same story of lice and rats and filthy clothes and beatings. My mother – there was a time when a woman, Mala,¹⁷ the –you might have heard this famous – she was a page or like an errand run–runner, between the Germans – between the Nazis and different groups of Nazis, and sometimes to the prisoners. She had some friends and they managed to get Nazi clothes and they escaped from the camp. And a few days later she was caught and brought back to camp, and she was hung. They had a moat like, I don't know. A few days after afterwards, they had to drag her and one of the things that everyone was saying was so amazing. According to the Geneva Conference, you are supposed to – that was the story I was told – according to the Geneva Agreement, you're supposed to cure prisoners – a prisoner before you execute him. And this is – and we were amazed that, of course, what did they pay attention to about Geneva conventions? They dragged this poor woman with broken legs to the to the gallows and hanged her there. And around the same time they had, they wanted to check up and make sure that we had all the – that anyone was there, that no one escaped. So they had extra roll call, this extra Zählappell every hour, every hour of the day. And of course when you were standing at Zählappell – it had to be like this – and you weren't allowed to move at all. This SS woman Drechsler came to take the Zählappell, and my mother stood perfectly still but she followed her with her eyes. She saw the eyes moving, so she pulled my mother out of the ranks and slapped her and my mother fell to the floor. Luckily she didn't shoot her right then and there. But my mother had an ear ailment, she damaged her ear. Until my mother died four years ago, this never cleared up completely and it was from that time. But Mala's story has been written up. I know that. It is written in – I just recently read it again in a book *Anus Mundi*, by a Polish man.¹⁸ He wrote about this extensively. And this was one of the other things that went on in Auschwitz. Every day was the same and for everyone, but not – and yet everyone has an individual story of his individual tragedy, their individual story of hopeless and whatever happened to them, so yes, it was all the same. We were all the same. We didn't even have a name. We had a number. We had our hair shaved, which was lucky because lice were by the billions. But we also had individual things that we can remember and talk about.

02:11:59

Q: Is there anything that you want to add about Auschwitz?

A: Well, there's probably so much and I don't know. When this happened with – in the Christmas.... After Christmas, my mother dreamt – now I don't know how much of her conscious went into this dream – that my father told her that now is the time to say Kaddish.¹⁹ And we have kept that day well as a memorial to my father, because it's the only day that we can really – that's tangible. It is as valid as any other day, so we are using that day as memorial to my father – my brother and I. Well, we were taken from Malchow – from

¹⁷ Mala Zimetbaum

¹⁸ Wieslaw Kielar

¹⁹ Holy One (Aramaic); Jewish prayer said to honor the dead, especially close family members.

Ravensbrück to Malchow. Malchow was – had been, originally, a labor camp equipped to have about 1,000 people. But by the time we came in there were several thousand in the camp. But it was amazing to us. There were actual table and chairs, benches. There was a real water fountain. And there were bunk beds, which was two to a bed instead of six, with actual blankets. And there were cupboards to put your clothes in, little somethings. And of course we didn't have anything to put in, but we – they were there and they were signs of civilization, something that... It's amazing that how much, we had lived among civilized things with the equipment of civilization. I was – nice furniture and everything, and yet when we saw these crude closets we were amazed that this was civilization. And that there was something other than Auschwitz out there. And so we lived with in the in the camp with this and we were taken to a labor camp, to a labor to a factory to work. This was a labor camp, this became a – but it became a concentration camp really because the SS officers went. Some of them came from Auschwitz with us and some were picked up in different places and they were there. We were taken in the morning and marched for about several miles to something that looked like woods. They were woods, and where the trees were sparse they planted artificial trees, and there were nets with leaves overhead to camouflage the, the things that were going on there. Then there was a sand hill with some trees coming out of it, and on the side was a door. Once you walked into this door it was like a very modern looking laboratory or some very clean factory. It was actually an ammunition factory, very well camouflaged from attack from over-fly – overhead planes. And we were – actually the whole camp was honey-combed underneath with all these different factories. One group I know was making hand grenades. Our group was making bullets.

02:14:59

And for being such a very modern factory and very cleverly designed factory, there was really the equip– the way we made the bullets was very primitive. There was a board with little holes in it that I think there were 24 or whatever the number, tiny little small holes, and there was a – we – there was a half a capsule of a bullet put in – that we put it in–into each one of the holes. Then we filled a certain amount of gunpowder into it, and then the other half of this board closed over it. Something like a waffle iron, on that idea, or a hamburger press. And the other half of the capsule of the bullet was pushed down and that made a bullet that would be used I guess in a regular gun. At both ends of the table – these were long tables we were sitting at and must have been about 20 or 30 prisoners on each table – and on each end was a SS woman making sure that we did the right thing. Well, it was very difficult but I tried to not line up the top with the bottom part of this board as much as I could without being detected because I really didn't want to be hit or killed or whatever. But I tried to sort of squeeze it in a crooked way so that it would close but not quite. And I was hoping that these bullets would misfire and I was hoping that in this way it would be my part of the war effort against the Nazis. Well, we worked in this camp, and after the first of the year Auschwitz was – I think in the beginning of January, Auschwitz was emptied and they brought a lot of prisoners from Auschwitz to Malchow, I guess, and different places. Most of the prisoners who came to Auschwitz, who came from Auschwitz were the Gypsies. Of course you know, the Gypsies had been in a camp in Auschwitz and they were killed by

families, just the way the Jews were killed. Because, in this hierarchy of “superman” that the Germans established, the Gypsies were just about one rank higher than the Jews and, of course, they had to be eliminated because they were a “lower people.” And so we saw the Gypsies in the camp and they were first brought in the end of – the middle of 1944, something like that. They might have been there before but I became aware of them at that time. And then they were brought to Malchow and they were very nice. They were happy-go-lucky people. They sang. And maybe because they knew that the end of the Nazi era was coming – we weren't aware of it as much but they had been walking from Auschwitz to Malchow which is I don't know how many miles, hundreds of miles – and they had seen what was going on. They had taken meat of the dead horses and they brought it to camp and they barbecued it and they shared it with who ever came along. It was exceedingly nice. And I mean they – I really have very, very good memories of the Gypsy people. The only thing that they did is that they were looking for wood to barbecue the meat. They took apart the toilets, the doors, and there was no place where to go any more, so we had to squat just over a hole rather than over this little bit of wooden frame that was made for toilet. But the Gypsies were very nice when they were brought in the camp. And you know, I do speak about I do speak on the Holocaust very often, schools, churches, colleges, and I do want to mention the Gypsies because until recently no one set up a memorial. No one did anything for them and the poor Gypsies are – I mean so many died unnamed that something – someone should remember that there were these people at one time and they were a kind and gentle people. Throughout the history of Europe they were really denounced and, and feared and everything and they were very, very nice and gentle and very helpful. But the – and they were in a camp with us.

02:19:15

We were in a camp then when more and more people came in and eventually they could not take us to the factories anymore, and we stayed in the camp. The roads became clogged with eastern Europeans trying to get back to their homes, and Russian – I'm sorry – German soldiers trying to run away from the Russian armies going, west and refugees – German refugees who lived in Poland and were afraid of what would then happen to them were trying to make it to Germany. And most of the roads were clogged with this and you couldn't get – you couldn't go to work anymore. And of course everything was breaking down and we – nothing was happening any more. So – but what happened when in the last few days before the war ended was they also didn't give us any food any more and there were food riots because we were actually starving. The warehouses were full of – well, they were not full, but there was bread in the warehouses and the prisoners were – didn't get anything so we rioted to get in. And my one – think a day or two, we were liberated – we were made to walk out of the camp, march out of the camp on May 1, 1945. A day or two before there were these food riots and some–sometimes the Nazis from outside the camp – this German officer would see the riots so they would shoot at the prisoners, sometimes. And once in a while someone was hurt from the shootings. Sometimes they shot in the air. But they couldn't stop us. I mean we knew that things were already happening and we really lost more and more of our fear you know, to some degree anyway. And so we went – we were rioting

and my mother was in the barracks and I was out and she was told that someone had been shot and of course she immediately imagined that it was me, but it wasn't. We stormed the food barracks and that afternoon – that must have been the day before we were leaving – the food that the Nazis were eating – these Nazi officers in their mess hall – was left on the table, untouched like some of the fairy tales. You know, the stuff is sitting there and the people are gone. And we were starved, but we ignored it and we were looking for the chamber where they would keep all the food. So, we came to the storage place, and there was something that looked like noodles to me. Now, you have to realize I haven't had – I didn't have anything decent to eat you know in these years and noodles, my God. I took the noodles hoping that we would be able to at some point cook them and eat them, but I didn't know how, what to do, how to carry these. Well, we already had been given regulation underwear, gray flannel. It was tied with a string and that was it, but among the things that I wasn't supposed to wear was somewhere that I had found a pair of pink silk underwear. So I had that underneath the gray flannel. So I took off the gray flannels, pulled out the string, tied it on the bottom and made a bag and put these noodles in.

02:22:29

We then were told to line up to leave the camp. At that point the Swedish Red Cross had sent packages for the prisoners. And the first few prisoners, each one got a package, and then it was two to a package and because they were running out of packages. Then it was five to a package. And then by the time it came to us it was five to a package, which was a lucky thing because these packages contained cocoa and sardines and butter and our stomachs were not used to this. My mother became deadly ill from just eating something oily. I think sardines. You know, we fell over it and actually she ended up in a hospital – in a British army hospital, for a few days because she was so sick. The right thing to – would have been probably to have some cereal a few times a day cooked in water and gradually bring our stomachs back to normal. But that of course didn't happen. So we were given these packages and gradually everyone along the way had diarrhea and we were marched out of the camp and the SS went with us. A few disappeared as we were marched along. At one time we were taken over a make-shift bridge. The bridge had been destroyed but we had to get over a small part of the river, and they took, there was a tavern on the hill below – above the bridge, and the bridge was below and the river was all the way down. So they took tables and tied the legs together and made a bridge, and we could only go over like two or three people at a time. Was a beautiful sunset I remember and we were walking over this. And then we got to another part and I'm carrying this bag of noodles, what I thought was noodles, with me right along. And then on the way wherever we went, we managed to find – it was I guess harvest time or whatever, we found potatoes in the ground, and we managed to make a bonfire and bake the potatoes. They were most of the time just charred on the top and the inside was raw. They tasted horrible but we managed to at least eat that. And I carried this bag with noodles with me, waiting for an opportunity to cook it. Gradually the SS did disappear and sometimes they put on clothes to make them look like they were part of us. We knew who they were, and of course they did have a tattoo under their arm to identify them as SS people. But of course we didn't see that and they thought well maybe no one would know about it

and they would get away, you know, by just mixing with the population and pretending that they had – were nice people.

02:25:11

So at one time we were brought into what had been a sugar factory, was completely empty. I guess there was no more sugar available. And an SS woman saw me pass by and she called me into a small office and she was cleaning her guns there. And she said to me, "I guess you'll be free soon." And I was afraid to say, "Oh, how wonderful! Of course. I'm glad my time is finally coming." So, I was saying, "Oh well, maybe it won't be so fast yet." I was trying to tell her something, and I think it might have saved my life, knowing full well that, of course, liberation was just a few days away. But I was afraid to antagonize her yet, and that was actually my last encounter with them. They really sort of disappeared and when they finally – when we finally did see them again, they were checked for this tattoo under their arm pits, by – I think the British part of the army that we saw. Well, anyway coming back to my noodles and these horrible potatoes that we were broiling – baking on the way. Finally, my mother found a rusty can of some sort and we went up – we were right along the ocean, the North Sea, and my mother went and got some water. And she went to see that we finally would cook these potatoes, these noodles, I'm sorry. Well the thing grew and grew and grew, and what I had dragged from Malchow were dehydrated potatoes when all we had was potatoes and I had dragged this out. It was one of my real disappointments of – you know, of having this. But it was part of the life that went on in that was part of, of Auschwitz – a part of my experiences. When of course when my mother and I walked on, we were near the Elbe and we – the first thing we know, we saw was this tank with different insignias on it. It was an American army tank saluting us and we went one way and they went the other way. And then it – within a few hours, occupation forces changed, because all the different forces were meeting at in that spot – so at one time the French and British and Russians. And we ended up in a British, in a British zone in – at the time in a zone – I don't know what it finally became. And we were there in a like a tent city which was during the summer, which was alright. We were in one section of the camp and on the other side there was another tent camp where there were Italian soldiers. It seems that when Mussolini was hanged he was – the soldiers in the Italian army had a choice of either joining the German army or becoming prisoners of war. These soldiers that were on the other side of the camp had been the prisoners of war, and they were now being repatriated to Italy. The only thing was I mean the transportation was destroyed and communications were hardly working. So the they were sitting in this camp waiting for things to normalize so they were in one camp and we were in this camp. Then when it was – when summer was coming to an end, the British army had to see – you know, they couldn't keep us out in the winter. And they made some kind of travel arrangements for us in trucks and on cart, rail, whatever was available to get back to Frankfurt. They asked us where we wanted to go.

02:29:01

Now we had agreed with my father and everyone – you know, my brother and my mother –

that whoever would live would try to make his way back to Frankfurt and so we could be united as a family and then see where we would go from there. So we arrived in Frankfurt, sometime in the Fall. We came back, and the city was practically destroyed. Almost everything was gone. Even my mother who had no great love for anything German that had happened, after what had happened to us, really was like shocked when she saw this, saw this horrible destruction. And we stayed overnight in this hotel near the near the railroad station where all kinds of people met. And everybody exchanged experiences and there was no place else to go. At one point in that evening an American soldier came in and he had looked at the lists that the UNRRA²⁰ and the HIAS²¹ had printed of survivors and – as much information as they could, the origin and birthplace of the people. So, he had seen that we were from Frankfurt and he was looking for a family in Frankfurt. He had left before the war and been in the American Army and was now looking for relatives, hoping that someone could tell them what had happened to him – to them. And in the conversation – we didn't know anything about his relatives – but in the conversation, he mentioned that while he was doing the same thing in – while he was in Italy he had read about a young boy who was also from Frankfurt. So he went to ask him about his relatives. And the young boy fit the description of my brother. So we said, "How do I write to him? How do I – can I get in touch with him?" So he, he gave us an Army post number, and we wrote to them. And somehow, the letter did get to my brother and he was in Baury(ph) at the time. He had been liberated near the Austrian border. He had remained in Auschwitz until the end. And in January of 1945, they emptied Auschwitz. They were burning all the bodies and all the evidence that was around, as much as they could, of course. By then they were scared stiff for their own lives. They thought that everything that happened, that they had done to other people, would happen to them. And they should have been scared. My brother was telling me that he looked out at the crematorium, and he knew that they were packing up people to go, to go on this big march. And they were.... He was looking out, and an SS man approached him and said, "Hah! You can go there, too." Or, "You're going to be sent there, too." And my brother said, "You know, I don't care anymore what happens to me. So much has happened to me. I don't care what you do to me." He said, "Because you said that, go out and join the march." So he went. And he walked until he was, somewhere, liberated near Austria. And he was taken – he met up with the British contingent of – actually, the Israeli contingent of the British Army. They had an army, and they were anxious to get my brother into Israel and Palestine at the time. Because he was a minor, and he was only one of – you know, minors were – the British allowed in. And they felt, well, in a few more years he'll be old enough to go into the Israeli Army. And they knew there would be, there would be a war, and there would – he would be needed. And this indeed what happened. But we wrote to him, and he was already embarking to – by the time the mail got to him, he was already going to Israel. And eventually – he had been hurt in Auschwitz. He didn't tell us that he had a problem with his arm. And they did surgery on his arm. And because he could not lift his arm for any – he had a very serious infection, he couldn't lift his arm past just his shoulder height – the Israeli army then discharged him. And so he was able to leave Israel very young, and he came to the

²⁰ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

²¹ United Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society.

United States. But we're always up and back with Israel. And that was – we stayed around in Frankfurt, hoping – even though we knew better – that my father somehow could have made his way back. I wrote to Czechoslovakia, to his birthplace, thinking that maybe somehow he would have ended up there. Maybe he was sick. Maybe he was somewhere in a hospital. But, of course, all this hope disappeared soon and on the last day that our visa to come to the United States was still good, was when we finally embarked and, and gave up all hope that my father was alive. But I still didn't give up hope. Even when I came here I kept thinking, "Oh well, maybe somewhere, somehow I will hear that he is someplace else." But of course, no.

02:34:14

Q: Tell us about your early years?

A: This was in Frankfurt. When I sometimes think that the war against the Jews didn't just start in 1933. It started much earlier – ended up in 1933. One of my first memories was probably before the Hitler election in 1932 or so. We – I lived, we lived in an apartment, the second floor – third floor, and the, there was a, a propaganda banner for the Socialist – National Socialist, Nazis – strung between – across the streets down between the two apartment houses. And there was a lot of agitation in the air. I mean a lot of agra– they were really trying to get to the Jewish people, and to, to convince the non-Jews that they should vote for the Nazis because Jews were their enemy – and also against Communists, against anything that they wanted to be against. And so this banner was across – was strung across and I looked down. My parents had gone out, left me in the house and I had – I saw the banner and I looked down. And but you know when you're three years old you don't have depth perception, and I don't think – and to me it seemed like it was a barrier and my parents would never come back. And from that time on I did – I think I've told you this – and from that time on I knew that, you know, everything was topsy-turvy. We – this – I think I have very many bad memories of people being killed, of relatives being taken away. My Aunt Selma volunteered. Her, her fiancé was – my Aunt Selma could have stayed behind. Her fiancé was taken to the – to be selected to go to Poland, ostensibly, "resettlement in the east" as it was called. And she just volunteered to go with him, and we never heard of or saw her again. And that was, that was life in Germany and Europe.

02:36:28

Q: After the war, you are in Frankfurt. How did you get from Frankfurt to United States?

A: Oh, very simple. I mean there were organizations that helped. The HIAS, the UNRRA had their own groups. And we were told that we – was some form of Jewish organization. Of course there was a very large displaced persons camp in Zeilsheim which was out on the outskirts of Höchst, which is on the outskirts of Frankfurt. And you – you know, you listened to everything through the grapevine and we were told we should sign up – go to the American Embassy or Consulate and get our papers. And we did that. And then, of course,

we waited, because of my – because we thought of my father and we waited until the last day to get to, to embark. But that is what we did. And of course in the United States, we were met by ladies from the HIAS and the UNRRA. And HIAS were actually in the – and we were put for a few nights into a hotel on off-Broadway. I think it was on 103rd Street and off-Broadway, or something like that. And then my mother took a job in Clifton, New Jersey and we stayed there.

02:37:50

Q: How – you were telling me earlier, the way people reacted to you in the United States. Can you talk about that?

A: Yes. I am not happy to talk about it. It seems that we were not treated as having had the experiences that we did. We were not treated as equal human beings, somehow. We were told to take work as laborers, as domestics and this sort of thing. And even though now my husband had been an American soldier – and to him I was someone who had survived a camp and had been brave enough and human enough to survive and be treated as a human being – his mother didn't go along with this. To her everything that was European – and she was born in Eastern Europe – everything that was European was lowly and despised – despised—despicable, and shouldn't be.... She wanted to stay away from this and she didn't want to have anything to do with it and so this was wasn't good enough for her son. And I did have a lot of problems with her, and I found, in general, that a lot of people had this sort of reaction. I was active in the Memorial Committee –the Holocaust Memorial which is usually sometimes in April – and the people – the men who had worked on this before I became active in it, told me that they had a lot of resistance to making a memorial service and to even speaking about this. And they had difficulty getting a stage to do the memorial service and it has only become fashionable to – I don't know, in the last 20 or so years – to speak about it, and to not consider it a badge of shame which – of course, which it wasn't. But I think we as survivors – as prisoners of the Nazis were told that we were “Untermenschen,”²² sub-sub-humans. That we were not up to par. And I think it was so drilled into us that we kept actually believing that it still was true. And what we really should have had, was a lot of counseling. But, of course, organizations were more – they found the immediate need for clothing us, and feeding us, and finding shelter that that was really secondary.

02:40:33

It would have been just as important as any of the other things, because a lot of people floundered, have terrible traumatic lives since then because of that. And this is one of the – I think – things that have been learned that now most people do get counseling after hostage situations or after prison situations. And immediately they do get counseling and it's very,

²² Sub-humans (German); term used to refer to people deemed inferior according to Nazi racial theory.

very important. It's one of the things that can't be stressed enough. So life was very, very difficult for people arriving from home, without a family, with their whole background destroyed, without any means of support. And those who did not want to be a burden to – and consider whatever the HIAS is doing – I mean, I considered it as charity; and I wanted to get away from it as quick as possible. But to the people who did that, they really had to struggle from the bottom up.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: Well I was moping around and my mother was working and I did a lot of reading and all I wanted to do was read and I was very anxious to improve my English. I did a lot of reading, and my mother didn't like the idea of my being home by myself all the time. So she told some young woman that she knew that she should take me out with her when–whenever. And there was a dance in the Y, and she – we went up there. She somehow disappeared. I was left up there. And my husband asked me to dance, but I didn't really – I wasn't really thinking of dating and I really didn't want to go out. So, “Well, I'll just dance for the evening, and then I went home.” And he wanted to walk with me, and I didn't let him. And then there was the city hall – this was in Paterson and the city hall was in the middle of the street. And I was walking along one street; he was walking along another street, trying to catch up with me. And he met me at the bus stop. And after that, he started dating me. That's what happened.

Q: Is there anything you would like to add?

A: Well, I'm sure there are a lot of things. And it's like taking an exam – when you, you know, later on you walk out of there. That's what always happened to me. I did work my way through college, and I did work my way through grad school. And I have a degree in a Bachelor's Degree in History, and a Master's Degree in Literature. And I know when I walked out of and into the parking lot, I remembered all the correct answers. So – and I'm sure that I'll say – as soon as I walk away from here, I'll think, “Oh, I should have mentioned this. And I should have mentioned that.” So maybe I'll have a chance to talk to you again, and you can put it on tape. And if there's anything you want to ask me, of course, I'll be glad to tell you.

Q: Thank you for coming.

A: Good.

Q: Thank you.

A: Glad I can do something that will keep this in front of the public, so that eventually people will know that it really happened. Perhaps it can be a warning to the people, to the world. We're trying in our little way, I think all of us, all the survivors, are trying in a little way to say, “This is what happened. Beware, don't fall into this sort of inhumanity.”

02:43:56

[Conclusion of Interview]