

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lotte Hirsch
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PREFACE

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LOTTE HIRSCH

May 5, 1995

Question: Could you be so kind to tell us your name?

Answer: My name is Lotte Hirsch, Hersh(ph) in English, H-I-R-S-C-H.

Q: I would like also to know when and where you were born.

A: I was born May 1918 before world, the end of World War I. And I was born in Czernowitz, Chernowoods(ph), Chernofsa(ph).

Q: In Bukovina?

A: Bukovina, the, at that time still province of the Austria-Hungarian empire.

Q: Can you tell us in a few words about your background, your, your family life, your school years in, in Czernowitz?

A: Yes. My father was a, a lawyer but worked for the government for the, the Department of Finance in Czernowitz and in 1914, he was transferred to Vienna by the Ministry of Finance and lived there for four years with my mother and my 16 years old sister, so born 1912. She went to school, we always spoke German at home. And my parents were example of Austrian, very loyal Austrian citizens.

Q: So how was your life, what do you remember about your school years? Where, where did you go to school, why type of school was this?

A: I went to Romanian school the first, I did not go to kindergarten, the Romanian grade school. I went to a public Romania, there were private schools, but I went to a public Romanian schools, had colleagues, Gentile and few Jewish. It was a Gentile school and felt comfortable. And I have only one, especially which is in my mind, one memory of anti-Semitic and hostile remark of someone and I was I think seven or eight years old. And that was in the house of my, a friend of mine whose father was a priest. It was a Greek, a Greek Orthodox religion was prevailing and he was a Greek Orthodox priest. And it was Paysa(ph) time and he asked me, he knew that I was Jewish and asked me very intensively about our habits and whether we ate mussels and did I know that there might be blood in it, etc. And that shocked me then, in much I did not cry or what, and that was my first

experience with remark like that. Otherwise we had Christian neighbors and so on, we, we're just in peace of, with them. It was grade, I mean grade school and then high school we went to a private school and that was mostly, many Jewish colleagues, also some Christians. I, that was first to eighth of lycee and then, should I go on with my studies, or?

Q: Yeah, if you could be so kind as to continue about, about, how whether [talkover] years before the war and if you encountered any other cases of anti-Semitism directed or your family encountered cases of anti-Semitism and then we'll go on with the war years.

A: It was encountered directly and indirectly. Directly, it was just very much in my mind, was already, I was a student at the University of Czernowitz, where I, I had one year of law and, and at the same time literary humanities and I continued this _____. And at that time, there was the Kova Kooza(ph) time in Romania, 1938, and I watched, I was supposed to go out at night and I see coming toward me some, I mean at some distance, some colleagues of mine from the law school with clubs in their hands and looking for Jews and beating them up. And they ran back home but I then had the report from many people who experienced it and that was very strong shock because I did not, these were my boyfriends, my colleagues, my friends, among them.

Q: So, so these people were followers of Kova Kooza(ph)? [talkover] But followers of Kova Kooza(ph)?

A: No, they were followers, they were not, yes.

Q: Okay. Can you, can you describe, at length, please take your time, what happened to you and your family once the Soviets took for one year, Bukovina in 1940. What did you witness in terms of what happened to the Jewish population of Bukovina between July 1940 and June 1941?

A: May I go back to the, my student years because that is something very important about it?

Q: Sure, please, please.

A: I told you about direct experiences and I will tell you two indirect experiences of which, affected my, my career, my life. In 1936 when I finished high school with my baccalaureate, the dream of my life when I was a little girl, you would have asked me what I am going to become, I would tell you a pediatrician. I had this great election for medicine. And in 1936, there was numerous

noolus(ph) which means that I could not get into any medical school. I, resignation, I continued my humanity studies until 1940 when the Russians come in. The other indirect, so that affected me personally very much, the other indirect experience in the family was my sister who had her PhD at that time, still pretty rare, in humanities, in French. And she was very well qualified for being a university professor. She could teach only at the high school level and not in the public school. So that affected both of us. I would, now I can come back to the place which you asked me.

Q: Sure, so, so again, if you could tell us, what did you witness before, between July 1940 and June 1941 during the one year of occupation of Bukovina and of Czernowitz of course by the Soviets.

A: By the Soviets? I had to interrupt my studies. I worked, I did not continue my studies. I was supposed to have my _____ at that time. And I worked in factory in the, some secretarial work, I had picked up some Russian and that was enough for my job. And I, I mean this is the experience of the Russian Occupation. From my very personal, I told you that I had this 16 years older sister and she, she's much more, I was closer, closer to her than to my mother or my father. And she was not married at that time and we spend a lot of time together. And the, the discrepancy between her and me, she was crying for, for the collapse of the old world, of the belle epoch(ph), which she experienced and was very sad and, and worried. I was, and me being very young, there was a lot of curiosity what are the Russians, what is going to happen now? And I had a, quite a good year, from the, let us say from the emotional and, point of view, however, our standard of life went way down because my father is a lawyer, did not earn one penny, only what my, the very poor salary which I earned and my sister also teaching in some school. And so from that point of view but, and how did I experience that? I knew some, I picked up some Russian that I knew also from before something and I felt quite comfortable not, not enthusiastic but not really very bad, not threatened yet.

Q: Did you, did you witness for deportations done by the . . .

A: The Russians.

Q: By the Russians.

A: Yes, the first were the Russians who did it. I witnessed it only from my home and from hearsay. But there were very close friends of my father's who were deported and never came back. And there were others, and there were relatives who were deported and never came back. There was, and some cousins and the very old parents of them volunteered to go with them and that is _____ Siberia.

Q: Do you remember which, when this was roughly, the months when this happened?

A: The month when, when the deportations [talkover] .. .

Q: Was fall or was winter?

A: Before 1941, it, that was, they, at the end of, in the spring, summer '41.

Q: Okay. Unless you want to say something more about this year, 1940, 1941, the, the year of Soviet Occupation, we can go farther and start to talk about what happened to you and your family once the Germans and Romanians entered Czernowitz and what exactly, what happened to you during the first and your family during the first days of the war. So we are on 22nd . . .

A: Yes.

Q: Of June, 1941.

A: Yes. I could elaborate on '40, '41, but it is not, I don't think it if very relevant, only for the fact, the only fact which is relevant is that I met my husband at that time. Although we were, he's also from Czernowitz and we lived quite in the neighborhood but we never met each other because we somehow belonged to different circles. And, and so I met him in this factory where I, where I worked as a secretary and we went out a whole year already. No, only the last few month of this year. No, as a matter of fact, some eight or nine month and during the Russian Occupation. And, that is the only thing which I think is important for you.

Q: Okay. Very good so we are on 22nd of June, 1941.

A: '42.

Q: '41.

A: '41. Yes. When the war broke out.

Q: Yeah.

A: This is the following. In, okay, a neighbor rang the bell and told us that the, the airport was bombarded. And I was, the war broke out and my, I had a _____ director there at the factory, I was in the factory. And this, my director said, “Nobody goes home. You stay here, overnight.” And my husband, went somehow to him, and talked to him and he let me go home. And we, Czernowitz was, when the, when the Russians left, this town was without water, without light and now let me, I don’t want to mix something up.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes. And I, I told you that I already was with my, so to say engaged . . .

Q: Yah.

A: We, what date in, that when, this, my husband did not work yet, a little later but he will tell you about that but we were in our house until October 11th, 1941.

Q: But let’s, let’s back off a little bit. Let, let’s describe, if you could describe to us what did you witness when the Romanian troops and the German troops entered Czernowitz and what happened until October, I mean what happened during the summer, and during the early fall?

A: That was not yet the wearing of the star, there was not yet, there was not yet restrictions that you have, cannot go out at, at certain hours. That, that came later.

Q: So, so, so the life wasn’t a [talkover] the first few months was a normal life.

A: Not, not normal because everything was destroyed. The city was [talkover]

Q: But for Jews there were no discrimination during [talkover]

A: For, for Jews, we already, until, that was October 11th, we were already taken to the ghetto.

Q: Okay.

A: Then already, yet I don’t, I don’t remember very exactly when they imposed this not going out in the street and not going [talkover].

Q: How ‘bout, how ‘bout, let me, let me back off again and ask you, did you witness during the first days of the war, or more exactly when the Romanian and German troops entered Czernowitz, did you see, did you witness any executions, any deportations during those days?

A: I did not witness executions but I heard of them immediately. There were a lot of people taken to so-called house of _____, and they were, and they were friends, two friends of mine there, of ours there. And they were in, and they were, I think I made a mistake, and they were threatened, all the time threatened by people who watched over them. And finally, many of them were taken out and executed, among them our chief rabbi, Mark(ph), and but, but nobody was, and all the others were just threatened and let go home again. When I think back now, I remember that there was sooner than that imposed, the star and the curfew because I, I was not married yet but we were always together, my husband and I and he spent a lot of time at my house and I remember that there was already wearing the star and I remember the first day, that I do indeed wear the star which was very strong emotional [talkover] experience.

Q: Can you describe please, where and how they moved you and your family to the ghetto?

A: Yes. On, we did not know anything about an establishment of the ghetto be, before the very early morning of the, of the 11th of October.

Q: October 1941.

A: October 1941. Again, very early in the morning. We were at the same neighbor, rang the bell and told us there are some signs, big signs put up in the street that you should not, but the signs were not a direct, it was indirect authority. It said something which you could not understand very well. It was written that you cannot, you shouldn't have contact with Jews, you should not buy anything from them, you should not sell them anything, etc., etc. And it was not clear. By the way, interesting is that the, my, Carl, my betrothed at that time went to work. He worked at the railway station. And he went to work and I was alone with my parents, with my sister and they told us _____ this, this ghetto and we have to be there as soon as possible. And you already, we, we looked out of the window and right on the second or the third floor and we saw people with bundles already leaving the house. What did they, what did the Czernowitz people do, they, I mean, the Romanians. They enclosed a certain part of, of the city and all the Jews who had somebody there walked in and we moved to another, our house was evacuated, our apartment. And we had to move to some, some relatives. Interesting is, that when we, there were some neighbors in the house and

they said, “You know, well look at that, they’re taking us to a ghetto and they’re, they will deport us.” And my father, who I told you was a lawyer, he said, “But this is against European, the _____ . The European right of, European law.” And the, so my neighbor thought _____, didn’t know that you are, that you’re, don’t, I’m not an alcoholic, I would think that you had something to drink because you see the people, the people go for the ghetto. We of course prepared and then my husband came and, and all the family together, the whole family, I don’t enumerate all the family. And we lived in house of a cousin who lived in a street which belonged to the ghetto. Our street did not fall into the ghetto. And we were immensely crowded there but we were still together. The family was together. And in, on this, yes, then we stayed there until let us say the, 16th, in this particular house.

Q: 16th of October.

A: Of October, or maybe it was the 15th. They evacuated street by street and they came, the people on, on these peasant carts to the railway station and putting _____ and taking them away. Very interesting event, also, I would like to mention that my, my Carl and I, we had everything packed on this cart already, already, yes. In the, I go back. In the, the early morn, morning, I don’t know, six or seven o’clock, some soldiers came and knocked at the _____ said to us, “We, it’s, it’s your turn. You better pack.” And we packed the things of the whole family on this cart and it was loaded to the top and everybody was looking for only Carl and me because we were the youngest of the family. And we were, they were standing there, some of them, very old and broken, and, and Carl and I were walking the street, back and forth. And a friend of ours came and said, “Carl, you know they’re, they are making lists of specialists, of people who have a certain profession. And these people won’t go.” And Carl went to the, yes, and when we walked, some officers came, Romanian officers came and he accosted, he went to one and told him, “I am an engineer and I hear about lists.” And he said to him, “Stay _____.” Not one word, and, and left, this officer. Very kindly he said it and but only one word. And when we arrived, and then came our turn, there were cart by cart standing there in line and when our, it came our, our cart came on the turn of us, at this court, on one side it went to the railway station, on the other side it

went back to the city. Carl took some bill out of his pocket and gave it to the soldier who was watching there and he took us to the other direction. And then we went to another relative who lived there but not in the ghetto. And of course, they, then we stayed there.

Q: So there were some Jews left out of the ghetto.

A: There were some Jews left out.

Q: Yah.

A: They, there, they were, I mean, yes, no, there were some Jews who did not live in the ghetto.

Q: I see. [talkover]

A: Who did not, part of us [talkover]

Q: So the soldiers took you, took you back to the ghetto, practically.

A: Not to the ghetto, it was not, it was outside the ghetto.

Q: Oh, I see, I see.

A: No, no, it was in the ghetto. But the, it was still in the ghetto but it was not to the, he took us back to the ghetto but not in the railway station.

Q: I understand.

A: Yeah.

Q: I understand.

A: And we went to live, stayed there for a few, how is it in, about Parryom Poppovitch(ph) probably, who was the mayor of our city. He came to bring the news to the house of this relative of mine that some Jews are going to stay and we knew . . .

Q: And did you see him?

A: No, I did not see him. He came, we heard about it, he came to the Jewish hospital.

Q: I see.

A: And, and talked to people. And so we, we stayed in, in this house and after one day, another house of my uncle opened up, I mean, we moved there because there was more room but we were sixty people in this house. And another about our, that is where I married, in the ghetto, again, we were very young and daring and so we, yes?

Q: How, how, how long the deportation lasted? What, what did you see in terms of deportation?

A: Two, two days, 14 days in the ghetto. What I saw of the deportations was, I only knew of them. And I, everybody was very busy with himself. So I would like to tell you only that we were many in the ghetto and that we came one day out of the ghetto. We, we went, we went to some rabbi and this was Friday and he said he cannot marry us so we said we want to, civil marriage because we knew would either stay together or leave together. And we, Carl and I went to this major who was the, the leader of the ghetto, the . . .

Q: Commander.

A: Commander of the ghetto and he, he told us, "You know, I let you out. And ask for, you have to ask for permission to, 14 days it has to be." And he took us to the general . . .

Q: The mayor _____.

A: The mayor, yes, and, and he told us, under escort, we went. And also to, to the, the _____ . . .

Q: Okay, I understand, it's a office.

A: We married, to the office, yes . . .

Q: Where people were getting married.

A: And, and that was, they gave us a little ceremony there and they're very friendly because it was Poppovitch(ph), the, who was the of course in the . . .

Q: The mayor.

A: The mayor. And that is how we, and about deportations? After then we came back home.

Q: Yah.

A: After 14 days he let us go back. Well . . .

Q: Did, did the ghetto remain sealed?

A: No.

Q: Or, or was, was . . .

A: They opened these, they were, they put some boards. That is was not a very heavy, not a, not a wall or what.

Q: Okay.

A: They took it apart and let you go home.

Q: So after, after let's say the fall of 1941, they allow you to go home? Or you stayed . . .

A: After eight, 14, yes [talkover] . . .

Q: The winter of '41, winter of, beginning of 1942, you were still in the ghetto or they allow you to . . .

A: No, I was only from, from 11th of October to let us say, to, the end of October.

Q: I understand.

A: I was there.

Q: I understand.

A: 25th or what.

Q: What, what else did you witness during the beginning of, end of 1941, beginning of 1942 in terms of Jewish life in, in, in Czernowitz?

A: The Jews were, everybody was packed. The ones who were not deported, yes? And I don't go into, into, into numbers now, but there was a heavy deportation during that time. What was our life? Our life was, we had one eye on the people who were out in Transnistria and were deported and we wanted to help and tried all kind of generous(ph). It was one part of us. At the same time, what we are, as far as we are concerned, we had to these curfews and we had, and we had to wear the, the star and we led a relatively normal life. But we had no, no income and so we lived from what we sold piece by piece, rugs, furniture, jewelry but, we, I think it was a good school for many, _____ the value of material possessions and _____ thinking about, about what important things and about life first of all. And of course family, family and friendship was very important. And the Jewish life went on. We were among us, through the curfew, we could not very well visit and we visited, we stayed overnight. And, and otherwise, people continued to eat and to write and there was established some possibilities to teach the children, mainly the parents but also some schools were, Jewish schools.

Q: Tell me please, did you witness a second wave of deportations from . . .

A: Yes.

Q: 1942 and what did you witness [talkover], what did you see? So please take your time on describing complex?

A: Okay. All of a sudden, so quite _____ of the Poppovitch(ph)

[End of Side 1 of Tape 1]

Q: Would you be so kind to tell us if you witnessed the deportations from the summer of 1942 and what exactly you witnessed? Please take your time and describe to us, at length, what you saw.

A: The deportations of 1942, I witnessed direct, direct _____ or more than that from the window in, where I stayed at that time. Where we lived at that time. It was a house in a corner and, and this particular corner they assembled, the Romanian police assembled Jews, Jewish people whom they collected from several houses. One night, they, the rang bell at our, the bell rang, the bell rang at our house, at our apartment, in the middle of the night. It was two o'clock and my husband went to the door and asked, "Who is there?" And they said, and they said, "We are looking for Kahanni(ph)," which was a neighbor and which was hidden so she, they did not get her. But you can imagine our state of mind until we heard that they're looking for Kahanni(ph) and not for us. So, but we, that was it. Another time, we looked, we heard some commotion at the window and we looked down. We were always watching from this window and watching what is going on at that corner. And there was several families but my eyes was on one of them because these were some people we knew. And there was a very Orthodox Jew with his long gray beard and this is family and, in a very dignified way, he conversed and communicated with his family and he probably wanted still something from the house and talk to them. And, and I think these people let him still go back to the, it was very close to where he lived, that is how we knew them. And I just witnessed the, how to say, _____ your faith as such without complaining or without whining unlike a neighbor of ours who lived upstairs and who was a very, let us say, simple and simplistic. And this man, we heard him walking back and forth and crying, crying, shouting, in Yiddish, "_____, what do they do to us and what, what will happen to us?" And he called, he did not stop, all night long we heard him like that and this is a quite a contrasting one, still to tell you that

reminded me of something but I forgot right now. Yes. I know what it reminded me of. It is nothing to do with the Romanians and nothing, but it is to do with the emotions of people, when in, in time of crisis. I told you that I spend the night at the factory where I worked in Russia in Czernowitz and I had . . .

Q: This was when, when [talkover]

A: When the war broke out.

Q: Yah, yah.

A: And I, the war broke out, night and I was in the factory with my colleagues and there was one of maybe one of my bosses and he came next to me and held my hand and said, “Shtoybooyitznomee(ph) what is, what, what, because it is, what is going to happen to us?” And I could not understand. He was a young man with a big family in Russia, and this uncertainty, he addressed me, but it was just the outcried, outcry, the moment of crisis which remains the same. It, it was just a human outcry. So, this is what happened with this too, that is how I watched. And it was watching and at the same time, watching out for yourself and always being prepared. And we had this _____, I remember this knapsack. It was in the corner in the room, it stayed with us, it slept with us, with the [talkover] . . .

Q: For the chance that they would deport you.

A: We were always ready, ever, every since the Romanian Occupation.

Q: Tell me, which is according to you the moment when things started to improve and you felt that things are not as harsh as they were until this moment?

A: Yah.

Q: When do you think that things starting, started to improve for the Jews in Czernowitz?

A: With the new, there was a new, new . . .

Q: Government.

A: _____, yes. [talkover] But what is name now?

Q: You are talking about the mayor or you are talking about the governor of Bukovina? [talkover]

A: Governor.

Q: So it was Carloteskoo(ph) [talkover]

A: No, no Carloteskoo(ph) was terrible. [talkover]

Q: After him I think it was a general, General Dragoyina(ph).

A: Dragolina(ph).

Q: Yah.

A: With Dragolina(ph), the change came. I, as a symbol I will tell you, there was sugar, of course. There was, there was already some absolutely _____ also in the attitude. There was like, from, from when you are in this jacket, what do you call it [talkover]. It was a little bit loosened, loosened, not free but loosened. [talkover]

Q: But still you had to wear the yellow star?

A: I, we still had to wear the star. We still had curfew but it were, the attitude was . . .

Q: Was milder.

A: Was milder. What, something which might interest you is that I knew from, I don't, don't know how my sister found it out that, the _____, the Pope, the [talkover] because I remember if she did some translation for them was very secret business but there was some intervention. And I think was either it a miracle that we did not, it, it was pure luck and coincidence that we were not deported, very, I would like to tell you that I, this, oh you know it very well. That from these people, nobody came back from the second deportation.

Q: Nobody came.

A: Nobody came, they were _____ [talkover]. Over the book and there is this book, you probably know, _____ . . .

Q: Yah.

A: Which I know.

Q: Tell me something. Once war ended, did you witness the return of deportees from, from Transnistria?

A: Definitely so.

Q: Yah?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you describe this?

A: Yes. I can describe cousin of Carl's who came back and who we sort of came to the bridge and picked her up. Completely destroyed her since [talkover]

Q: Where was she deported to?

A: She, that was Transnistria. [talkover]

Q: You don't, you don't know where in Transnistria?

A: In, in, no, the main city . . .

Q: Mogilev.

A: In Mogilev, yes. In Mogilev. She, they went five people. She, her husband, her child and the parents and she came back all alone. All of them, were, died. I would like to tell you also that most of them died in the first winter, some on the way, they were, on, on the way when they were chased away and, and fell down and it was snow, it was ice and they died. And most of them of starvation and cold in winter when we, our help couldn't reach them in the first winter, whatever we wanted to do. So they, they, most of them died at that time. And of coming back, I would like to tell you about this cousin of ours who was completely destroyed and that. that, so many more who, who never . . .

Q: Returned.

A: Never returned. And that made us, it was part of our suffering too because we could see that we send some money which we hardly had and it never got there.

Q: Can you, can you describe for us briefly, what happened to you when liberation came? How liberation affected you. What happened to you and your family when you were liberated?

A: When the Russians came in for the second time, again, in June 1944. There happened something very interesting again. The Germans, on their way out, made such raids, broke into houses and all of, yes, first of all they broke into the house where my sister lived. And they took her husband away into some, and she knew where and she went to this house and, and there were some SS and the result, she, she came to ask for her husband and they made her come in and she came

with them. And we were locked up in the house. My family and my mother and father and the war(ph) and the neighbors and some, the neighbor from across the street signaled to me that my sister was taken away. I did not know that. So Carl and I went to save, to, to rescue her. And then she came out with two SS and, and they were, it, they saw that she was very sick and they took her home and sort of well, human in a way, behaving humanly to her. But what happened to, at the same time, they, some soldiers, German soldiers broke into our house and, that was after my sister was home already. Broke into our house where we lived and we were locked up but they somehow managed to, to come in and they were asking for _____, for watches but they were all asking for, for life(ph)and they, especially they were after, after Carl. Took this revolver, just like that. And they didn't know, _____, you did not protest, just and there was a little boy in the neighborhood who was there and he was terribly frightened. But they left and we heard that the next day, they were shot, that they weren't even, there was this bridge over the Broot(ph) and they were not, no more able to cross it and caught.

Q: Can you tell me when you left Romania and how long it took you to reach America? How did you reach America? United States?

A: We left Romania in May 1961. We left Bucharest legally and oh yeah, okay, let me tell you just about that. And we went to, we had a permit to go to, that was also some miracle to go to, to Vienna. I had a cousin there and she sent me just a limited stay there, only for two weeks but and, you made that. And you wanted to know about how we left?

Q: Yah, I wanted, I wanted to know more exactly.

A: When. That was a time and that was a time when we were, that was again a strike, a strike, big strike of luck, of luck because there were, everybody liked, everybody wanted to leave and could not leave and, and we just got these permit but after three and a half years. We applied and then it took, Carl was on his job, and I was working in the embassy of the German Democratic Republic. Resigned, because I knew that that doesn't go together, this was something, romantic. I resigned and, and applied. We stood in line at the police and applied for departure. We did not apply, okay, people mostly they applied to go to Israel at that time. But very few, some got it, some didn't get it.

And I remember that you got a certain, a certain notice that you can leave and the woman who delivered the mail, the mail _____, she said, she came and gave that envelope to me and said, "I don't know, you never, I didn't know you were Jewish because you never asked me whether I had the good, good news for you, you know." So then we, we left and that was a very emotional moment because I, we have, we just did not know what is going to happen to us.

Q: Yah. So you waited for three years [talkover]

A: We were three and a half years [talkover]. Then we applied, then we were, we could immediately go okay, to Israel but we did not go to Israel. We applied to, we went to the, _____agency . . .

Q: Hyuss(ph).

A: Hyuss(ph) to ask for they even paid for us to go to America and we got the visa very, after one year, we got the regular visas because we were on the Russian quote, quota, being born in Czernowitz.

Q: So, when, when did you enter United States?

A: And we entered the United States in July, 1962.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

Conclusion of interview.