

**Anna Jakab Wollner**  
**December 18, 1994**  
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### **Abstract**

Anna Jakab Wollner was born on January 19, 1923, in Nagy-Varad, Transylvania near the Hungarian border and married Imre Wollner on February 8, 1944. Her mother's Hungarian name was Hurchamaya (ph) and her Hebrew name was Fruma Chaya. Her father's Hungarian name was Yaakov Lausch (ph) and his Hebrew name was Yitschak Laib (ph). Her father worked with wood and her mother did not work. Her brother was two and one-half years younger than her and perished during the Holocaust. Her life was normal until the early 40s when the family started selling valuables. She met her future husband at age 15 and they married when she was 21 to protect her from transport. It did not as she, along with her parents, were sent to Auschwitz where her parents perished. After a week, Anna was sent to Riga.

### **Tape 2**

Anna Jakab Wollner was transferred from Auschwitz to Stolp and Stutthof labor camps on her way to Riga. She enjoyed the companionship of her friend Suzy during the various camps until she arrived in the US. In Stutthof, the two friends would sabotage some objects they were moving. In Riga she had to break Jewish tombstones into pebbles to use on the roads. Some of the horrors she experienced included witnessing a woman's hanging, being beaten, learning of prisoner suicides, seeing women die on the march to Germany, and viewing the Russians raping fellow prisoners upon liberation. After the war, she found her husband and they lived in their hometown for two years before immigrating to the U.S. They made their home in Memphis where they raised their three children. They divorced in 1974, and Anna moved to Israel in 1978 but returned for the birth of each of her 13 grandchildren.

### **Tape 1**

00:00 Anna Jakab Wollner was born on January 19, 1923, in Nagyvarad [Oradea], Transylvania near the Hungarian border and married Imre Wollner on February 8, 1944. Her mother's Hungarian name was Hurchamaya (ph) and her Hebrew name was Fruma Chaya. Her father's Hungarian name was Yaakov Lausch (ph) and his Hebrew name was Yitschak Laib (ph). She named her second son after her father's Hebrew name and his Hungarian name after her brother, George, who did not survive the Holocaust. Her brother was alive near the end of the war, but she has no knowledge of his location at death and has never heard anything about him. Her grandfather was a farmer and owned forests. Her

father worked with wood. People ordered square meters of wood for heating in the winter.

- 05:00 Anna's mother did not work. Her brother was two and one-half years younger than her. They did not live in a Jewish area, but a few Jews also lived there. They lived in a small apartment in the center of town, the business area. About 130,000 people lived in her town. Her family was not very religious, but her father's family was more religious than her mother's. She attended Hebrew School from first grade, never public school. The family kept kosher and observed the holidays. She remembers that her father made the blessing Friday night, and she kissed his hand. Anna's class was all girls. She read Hungarian fluently from an early age and spoke Hungarian at home. She was taught to read Hebrew but did not understand it until she came to Israel.
- 10:00 She had many relatives as both parents came from a family of nine children. Eliazar (ph) Jacob is the name of the grandfather who owned the forest. Anna spent summers visiting aunts and uncles and her grandfather in the villages. She has a cousin living in Israel who had been deported to Cyprus. She enjoyed artwork as a child and has created imaginative artwork as an adult although she had no formal art training. She also gardens, embroiders and crochets. She first noticed that conditions had changed when her mother sold her candelabra and other valuables in the early 1940s. Miklós Horthy came on a white horse and claimed Transylvania for Hungary.
- 15:00 In the 1930s, her brother would be beaten on his way to cheder. The girls had escorts to get home for the mid-day meal, and they did not return to school, but the boys returned for a few more hours of schooling. Anna relates how at age 15 in 1938, she was chaperoned by her aunts and mother to a dance where she met her future husband, age 18, when he offered a light to one aunt who was smoking. He sat down at their table and asked her for a dance. Unfortunately, he did not obtain her name and address and searched for her for six months. When he found her, her father threw him out as he felt she was too young for a steady caller. Her beau sent her a large bouquet of flowers for her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and they went out about two or three times a week from then on.
- 20:00 Anna's mother wanted her to marry a millionaire and her beau's mother had similar wishes for him. At the time, he made a good salary as a salesman. They heard from Austrian refugees what was happening in Austria but did not believe it. Her father believed that the Almighty would help them. They gave thought to moving to Romania as her mother's sister lived in Bucharest, but there was an uprising. Her family was aware when the war began in September 1939. Her parents forced her to leave school at age 15 or 16 as they believed her brother needed more education. She hoped to attend university after the troubles were over. Meanwhile she read a lot and worked as an apprentice for several years for a photographer who enlarged photographs and colored them. Her

mother paid her apprenticeship, and later she was paid a small salary. In 1941, when she was 18 and her beau was 21, they became engaged.

- 25:00 In 1941 many refugees came from Hungary and Austria with bad news. Her mother's eldest brother had married a Christian woman from Austria after World War I, and her grandfather sat shiva. He came home and lived one year, and the grandmother forgave him. At 21, Anna's fiancé was placed in forced labor where he used a pick and shovel and they seldom saw each other. His Italian non-Jewish supervisor, Angelo Rabazoni (ph) was friendly to the Jews.
- 30:00 In 1942 there were more refugees from Hungary and Austria and her family still had faith in the Almighty. Life continued the same in 1943 with her fiancé in the labor camp. In 1944 they got married as there was a rumor that family members of those in the labor camp would not be placed in a transport. The fiancé bribed his way home. Anna does not recall the name of the labor camp. They were married on February 8, 1944, under a cold outdoor chupa. She wore a borrowed wedding dress. About 15 or 20 people attended the ceremony followed by a simple meal. Someone gave them wedding cake which they took on their honeymoon. Her husband was born in 1940 so he was 24 and she 21 at the time of their marriage.
- 35:00 They went to the Vihai spa for a one-day honeymoon and he returned to the labor camp and she to her parents. Her family had to move to the ghetto in April along with her father's brother, wife and daughter, Yaakov Susana (ph) who went to school with her. They brought pillows and a change of clothes but no furniture. Each brought some food and got some from the black market. Everyone was helpful so they had food to eat and stayed healthy.
- 40:00 It was hard to find a place to sleep and work. They helped people with sick children and shared their medicine with them. Her father and brother were only permitted to do manual labor for the year before the transport, so they stacked wood. Her brother sneaked into the ghetto to be with the family. They could walk outside their apartment but had to obey the curfew. Since the Hungarians came, they had to wear a star on their left breast.
- 45:00 She took pride in this as she was proud to be Jewish. The next month, May, they were placed in a transport to Auschwitz along with her husband's mother, sister and baby. Except for Anna, all perished. The month of May is special to her as her daughter was born on May 5<sup>th</sup> and the war ended in May. They were allowed to take food and tefillin to the train and pushed in to fill up the cattle car. They were going to their destiny but did not know what was going to happen. During the six or seven day trip, some people died and they opened the door and threw them out. She was with her brother and parents. They had a bucket for sanitary purposes. There was a small square window high up in the car which gave them some light. There was a little room to sleep. Her parents tried to

protect her. She had sufficient food in the cattle car and got water. Some soldiers were kind and gave them food and others were cruel and beat her.

50:00 She was beaten later in the labor camp. She observed a Jewish capo beat a young girl who fainted. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, she saw the sign, "Arbeit macht frei." First the men and women were separated, and she went with her mother. Then she went left to the labor camp and her mother right to the gas chamber. Anna had a hard time believing it was gas. Her body hair and hair on her head was shaved which was demoralizing. It made no difference if a woman shaved her as she did not feel like a human being by then. Anna was hungry and given beets to eat but could not eat them. She was naked and given a striped uniform and kerchief. She was not tattooed. Prisoners who were there earlier ate whatever she would not eat. She was with her first cousin.

55:00 They rested together in the cold barracks. She saw the smoke from the chimneys but could not believe her mother was cremated. Her father was murdered right away but her brother lived awhile. She was given clogs to wear which were wooden on the bottom and like tennis shoes on top with shoelaces. She tried to find newspaper to stuff them to make them warmer. There was a bucket for sanitation. There was a room with a sink with cold water for washing. There was a delousing room where you took off your clothes which were steamed and returned to you.

60:00 They were given warm brown liquid in the morning and a quarter loaf of a bread and a bit of margarine in the evening. Her cousin and the other women were helpful. There were people of different ages including the 40-year-old mother of a school friend. After a week, they were transported by boat to Riga. It was still May, 1944. In Riga, they first broke the rocks from Jewish tombstones and later were assigned inside work

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00:00 Anna Jakab Wollner was transferred from Auschwitz to Stolp and Stutthof labor camps on her way to Riga. She had a friend who had been in the underground in Austria and Hungary who stayed together with Anna through all the camps. Her friend took Anna's maiden name, Suzy Jakab, and they became like sisters. Since Suzy was stronger than Anna, she took the harder labor. In Stutthof they worked in a barn-like building moving materials from one end to the other end of the building using machinery similar to a small train. Suzy taught her how to sabotage the materials.

05:00 They would break the items such as smash light bulbs or puncture plastic bottles filled with chemicals. They could have been hung or shot for their work. Anna was brave as Suzy encouraged her, and she felt the Germans deserved the sabotage for exterminating the Jews. No one found out about their sabotage, and they did not tell anyone. Anna

never discussed the horrors with her children or her grandchildren. She slept in a bunk bed in Stutthof so hates it now when her grandchildren sleep in them. She remained there for about a month or so. The food was satisfactory, and they got used to the cold as they performed physical labor. There were only women in that camp. She saw the other women at meals. At lineups she spoke to the others and they received their rations. Many men committed suicide by throwing themselves against the electrified barbed wire.

10:00 Anna had the will to live so did not think of committing suicide. Occasionally she passed the men's camp and spoke to them. Once a young guy came over and told her that she must have been a beautiful young girl. She did not know if her husband was alive nor did he know her situation until they met in their hometown after the war. She had given her wedding ring to the Jewish photographer who she worked for and saved it for her so she now has it. At the end of '44, the entire camp was moved to Riga. There she broke up Jewish tombstones which gave her an awful feeling as it indicated that Jews were not respected, even in death. The stones were used for gravel for roads. Every morning and evening they lined up and had their names called out. Their ration was about one quarter loaf of bread and margarine and something to drink. She had to walk about 5 or 10 minutes to the lineup.

15:00 The prisoners were woken around 6:30 or 7:30, and it was daylight when they arrived at work. No food was distributed on the lunch break, but they could eat whatever they brought or bought from someone. Sometimes on Fridays, she was able to buy a piece of candle for a piece of bread. She lit the candle on shabbos to remember her mother. The women were in their late teens or early twenties and all supported each other. Sometimes she slept with another girl so they had two blankets to keep warm together. Anna's clothes consisted of striped coarse pants and top, a star and a band with numbers. Her clothes were cleaned and deloused periodically, and she got back her own clothes. The guards had Sunday afternoons off so the prisoners were permitted to walk the grounds. Anna walked near an officer's quarters and heard "Moonlight Sonata" by Beethoven.

20:00 She couldn't believe that she could hear the beautiful music in such an environment. She and Suzy discussed this and other beautiful things they enjoyed such as poetry which was no longer available to them. Anna tells how she was beaten once in the camp and Suzy helped her recover with cream and a hot cloth so she was able to stand up the next morning at the lineup. Anna mentions that she owns a copperplate with a Shoah design. She tells of having to view a hanging of a woman prisoner who had broken the rules. She left Riga by boat and a long march to Germany. Those who fell during the march were either left by the wayside or shot. One of her cousins died on the march which lasted about a week. They ended up in the Saar region [sic] near Danzig.

25:00 Each night they slept in bunkers which the Germans also used for sleeping. The German soldiers requested five women to peel potatoes, and she and Suzy volunteered as thought

they would get more food to eat. After a week they were told to return to their camp. While walking back, Suzy got hit in her thigh by a German bomb. Anna made a tourniquet with some of their clothes and after 24 hours the Russian soldiers came and told them the war was over. A soldier handed her a hand-rolled, hand-cut cigarette and since she had never smoked, she gave it to Suzy who had smoked in the underground. Suzy was in pain and soon an ambulance came and took the five women to the hospital. Anna had to watch three of the girls being raped right in front of her.

- 30:00 She felt that she was not picked as she was so skinny. She heard that in Camp Neustadt or "New City" there were half-dead prisoners wandering around who were transferred by boat which was soon blown up by the Germans. Suzy was placed in a Russian hospital, and a farmer's daughter died in her room. Anna asked to work for the farmer as long as she was given time to visit Suzy. She took her star off so was thought to be a political prisoner and was accepted by the farmer. In turn for such duties as cleaning the toilets and feeding the geese, she was given milk, cheese and sugar for Suzy. At the end of July, Anna was placed in the hospital as she needed extra nourishment.
- 35:00 Despite a high fever, Suzy recovered. The Jewish communities along the way gave them papers to take trains to get home. When they reached Budapest, she found out that Anna's husband was looking for her, but there was no trace of her parents or brother. Anna reunited with her husband in their hometown which she wanted to leave. He insisted they remain as he had started an import-export business with friends. There she gave birth to Peter in '46. Suzy came and stayed in contact with her until they moved to the U.S. Anna's husband did not get along with Suzy who was a Communist so the friends parted. After King Carl of Hungary was exiled and his son, Michael (ph) became King and had to leave, Anna's family decided to leave. They did not want to live under Stalin. They paid a peasant to sneak them across the border to Hungary in his hay wagon.
- 40:00 They gave the baby a tranquilizer but he screamed until they reached Hungary. From there they went to Austria and waited a year in Munich for their quota to come up to enter the U.S. This happened in '49, the year Anna gave birth to her second child. They came by boat, in steerage, to Ellis Island where they were quarantined as Peter had measles. She did not like New York so settled in Memphis, a quiet Southern town with a Jewish population so the children were able to attend a Jewish school and Yeshiva. She did not get advanced education but used the library a lot for reading. She was divorced in 1974, and in 1978 Anna went to live in Israel where she wanted to teach arts and crafts. Her three children were married by then and she had four grandchildren. Anna was close to 60 when she obtained a certificate at the Technion and thought she was too old to teach. Except for a first cousin, she lived alone in Israel until this past Yom Kippur when she came to the U.S. due to poor health. During her years in Israel, she returned for the birth of each of her 13 grandchildren. Now she has three great-grandchildren.

- 45:00 Anna said she is proud to be Jewish even when people in U.S. make unpleasant remarks. She believes that Jews don't cheat as they live according to Halachic law. The Torah mandates to respect and honor elders. When you reach a certain age you need protection from others and the Almighty. It hurts her to talk about her Holocaust experience. She did not know the proper thing to say to a ten year old. Anna was older than other mothers as she was 30 when George was born and 37 when her daughter was born in 1960. If she spoke of her experiences, her children and their friends would feel they were events that they never read in history books. Anna formerly questioned why better people than her perished and she survived. She felt guilty that she lived and her younger brother who she felt was a better person did not.
- 50:00 Anna questions how Hitler and Eva Braun could have committed suicide in his bunker. She knows that conditions in Poland were worse than hers. She questions less now and lived to see the new generations. She came home alone from the war and now has a large family. It took months after liberation to find her husband. She never asked for reparations as does not want money from the Germans as it won't bring her parents back. Soon she will undergo an expensive procedure and does not know if she will survive. Anna questions that perhaps now she should request money for her children. She believes how you live your life is valuable but money is not. She tells her grandchildren to be proud of being Jewish. She is happy that her son teaches Torah to his children and has the ability to prepare his son for Bar Mitzvah. Her son-in-law teaches in a Yeshiva and her daughter is a Rebbetzin in Brooklyn. Only G-d knows the purpose of the Holocaust.
- 57:00 Some rich people were able to buy fake papers and escaped to Switzerland and survived.