United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Anna Jakab Wollner
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PREFACE

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ANNA JAKAB WOLLNER
December 18, 1994

File One

Question: The following is an interview with Anna Jakab Wollner. The interview is being conducted on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on December 18 , 1994 by Gail Schwartz. Please tell us your whole name.

Answer: My whole name is Jakab Wollner. Married to Emi (ph) Wollner, 1944 , February the 8 th.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in Nagy- Varad.

Q: And when were you born?

A: 19 th of January 1923 actually meeting for the __+

Q: Where was the town located, the town that you were born in?

A: It is located in Transylvania, very close to the Hungarian border.

Q: And who made up your family?

A: My parents.

Q: What were their names?

A: My mother-- you want the Hebrew name, the Hungarian name?

Q: Both, if you remember.

A: I do, of course. My mother, Hungarian name, was Harperminan (ph) HerHebrew name was Freeman Higher (ph). My father' s name was Yacho losha (ph) His Hebrew name was Hixsovane (ph) My second son-- my second son is named after my father-- his Hebrew

name is Hixsovane (ph). And my second son' s Hungarian name is after my only brother, George, who did not return.

Q: Let' s talk about your family. Who else was in the family?

A: Besides myself, I had only one brother who did not return. I heard that he was alive almost to the very end of the-- of the war, almost to 19 -- almost to the end of the war. But which camp he died or what he died, I have very confusing or contradicting.

Q: Information.

A: Report, information, However, the fact is that he did not come back because I had returned to the same city looking for maybe some family and there were none.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: Well, actually my grandfather was a farmer, and he has forests. And my father was mainly-- mainly working with wood, which people bought by the square meter for heating in the winter. We had very, very severe winters and they' re covered with snow. So people bought the square meter. They actually ordered certain amount of wood for the duration of the winter, square meter, which was delivered to their house and they were paying __+ or whatever. That was his profession for many, many years until Hitler put a stop to it that no Jewish person can hold a decent job.

Q: Yeah, we' ll get to those years in a moment. Did your mother work?

A: My mother mainly did the house, the shopping, not much.

Q: Was your brother older or younger than you?

A: Younger, two- and- a- half years younger.

Q: Two- and- a- half years younger. and what kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a Jewish section?

A: Not necessarily. We did have Jewish people. But we also had many Christians in that particular city. It was more or less a business section.

Q: How big was the town?

A: The town was over 130 , 000 .

It' s a big city. It' s an important city. It was a cultural center. We had theater concerts, poetry, ballet. You name it.

It was a lovely place to be and we did have a large Jewish community. __+ that was transferred in a ghetto, you know.

Q: Right.

A: I don' t know if you know, but anyway that' s what happened.

Q: We' ll get to that time.

A: Yes.

Q: But let' s concentrate on before

the war first. So you said you lived more in the center of the city in the business section?

A: More or less. I would call it a business section.

Q: Did you live in a house or an apartment?

A: It was actually an apartment. Not a big apartment. It was really just my parents, one brother. And we lived very simply, very happily, but very simply.

Q: Was your family very religious?

A: No, not very. Especially my father was. My father-- my father' s side, the family was more religious than from my mother' s side the way I recall it.

Q: Did you have any religious training as a young child?

A: Oh, yes, I went from the very first, from the first grade on only in Hebrew school. I never been in public school in my life.

Q: And so, your family observed the holidays.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Kashrut?

A: Oh, the Kashrut, yes. For instance, one of my happiest recollections Friday night my father, you know, the blessing and ___+ was lovely.

Q: Yes. It' s a beautiful memory, yes. So you said you never went to public school.

A: No, never.

Q: Did you have any non- Jewish friends as a young girl?

A: Not really.

Q: Most of your friends were Jewish?

A: Mostly were school friends, yes, and of course all of the girls who went to Hebrew school, we weren' t even mixed with boys. It was all girls.

Q: How old were you when you started school?

A: Five- and- a- half, six, something like that. I was already reading very fluently Hungarian. I was a big reader from the very first. And my mother taught me how to read the foreign letters and, of course, I did know all the Hebrew letters. It was lovely, but I did not understand what I' m reading. I learned Hebrew only in Israel. I can speak Hebrew now.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: Hungarian.

Q: You spoke Hungarian.

A: It' s very interesting we spoke Hungarian at home. That' s how my grandmother, I imagine, spoke in her house. And I don' t know, Hungarian was the language we spoke at home.

Q: Did you have a large extended family, aunts, uncles, cousins?

A: Very large extended family because my mother came from seven sisters and two brothers, which is nine children. And my father is born of eight sisters and brothers. My grandfather Eleazer (ph) Eleazer (ph) Jakab__+ and lived in a little village. As a matter of fact, the name is not even on the map as far as I know because it' s only a farm, but it' s a big farm. It was a big farm, and he was a wealthy man once upon a time.

Q: And so you got together with cousins and aunts and uncles?

A: Oh, yes, every summer holiday I spent in villages, visiting my grandfather, my father' s brothers and sisters. As a matter of fact, I have one surviving first cousin who lives in Givatayim in Israel. And she' s younger than I am. And she was in my house when my first-- my oldest son was born. And she decided to join the youth group. And was actually deported to Cypress. And she lives in Givatayim. And we are very, very close.

Q: Were you active in any youth groups?

A: No, I was not.

Q: Did you have any hobbies?

A: Hobbies yes, a lot of hobbies, I paint.I am very-- I have a lot of hobbies. If you look around you can see that there is a multitude of plants growing here. that' s one of my hobbies. If you turn around, you see that painting behind you, have you noticed?

Q: Umhum, beautiful.

A: That' s one of my paintings. There is a cloth behind you. Do you see? I mean the painting behind me, and I have a number of others.

Q: So, did you take art lessons as a child?

A: Not really. I had ideas. I had dreams. And somehow or other I sort of-- I don' t know. I am very imaginative, I think. Maybe I' m bragging. I don' t know.

Q: So, you were painting as a child. When did you start your art?

A: I don' t know if it started with actual paint, but--

Q: You were drawing?

A: Or drawing. But I definitely had some-- if you want to take a look, I have some hanging in the hallway or maybe on the way out, take a look I have made avocado slices, something like imaginative butterfly. Nobody looking at that would ever guess that that' s made out of avocado slices. Have you noticed as you came in?

Q: I will. I will later. I will. Did you--

A: For instance, you see that ceramic bottle, if you take a closer look, there is all sorts of designs interwoven there and yet it has the perfect shape of a bottle.

Q: Did you have any other hobbies besides art besides drawing as a child?

A: I crochet. I embroider. I made some gorgeous color covers for my daughter and daughters- in- law.

Q: Okay. Back to your childhood, so you were not part of any groups, any youth groups?

A: No, no.

Q: Was your father a Zionist? Were your family Zionists?

A: Not so much Zionists, but religious-- you see our city, there' s __+ there. And I was married by the__+ there. And the hazan (ph) was the roof, they call him the roof. One of his choirboys arrived in the United States. And they gave a concert in Memphis, Tennessee where we lived. When we came to the United States--

Q: We' ll talk about the United States a little later on. I still want to talk about your childhood. So you began school and you have these interests. And then when did you first notice that conditions were changing in your town?

A: Well, when I first moved conditions were changing when my mother-- when my mother started to sell candelabras and our valuables.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in already in the early ' 40 s and then__+ came in on his high horse and took over from Romania the Hungarian part of the-- I mean claimed Transylvania for Hungary.

And that' s when he turned over the Jews to the transports.

Q: Okay. What about the 1930 s though? You were ten years old in 1933 . Did you experience any anti- semantic incidents growing up?

A: On the streets, yes.

Q: You did. Can you tell me something about them?

A: Well, for instance, my brother, of course, went to aider (ph) the boy' s Hebrew school and sometimes they were beaten up by__+, the boys maybe. And many a times we had escorts getting the girls home, back home from school. We did go for our midday meal home. The boys went back to school. The girls did not. We had a lot of assignments and things like that, but it was so much easier for the girls than the boys because the boys went back after a couple of hours, you know. They had the lunch break, and then they went back for another three or four hours. And many a times riots broke out because the__+ beating up__+

Q: Did you ever see any of this?

A: I must have. I' m sure.

Q: Umhum. Anything happen to you, yourself?

A: No.

Q: You did not experience that?

A: I have experienced very demoralizing side or experience already in the-- in the-- in one of the camps.

Q: I' m still talking about in the 1930 s.

A: In the ' 30 s, no.

Q: So life went on for you as a young teenager pretty normally?

A: I met my husband in 1938 . I was only 15 years old.

Q: Fifteen years old. How did you meet him?

A: That was interesting. At that particular time, it was allowed with chaperones for a young girl to go out maybe for an evening after shabbat and they were dancing there. There was an orchestra. So my mother and several of my aunts came with me, and Mr. Wollner walked in.

He was 18 years old with three or four girls, cousins or relatives of his own. And then my aunt was smoking so he offered her a light and then sat down at our table and forgot to return to the girls he came with. And we danced several times. And then we parted. And he forgot to ask exact-- my address. And nobody knew me. I was, you know, a young girl.

I think it maybe was the first

time I ever went anywhere. So he was looking for me for almost a half a year until he found me. Nobody knew me. I mean who knew of young__+ nobody. So anyway, he found me and from then on, my father threw him out of the house a million times because he said my daughter is not old enough to have a steady caller. I mean it just doesn' t go that way. So anyway I got my first bouquet, not really bouquet, a big basket of flowers for my 16 th birthday and that was from him. And then from then on, we went steady throwing him in or not, he reappeared at

least two or three times a week. And he took his__+ he said to my father I will be back, please, please let me come, just for a little bit, just to say hello to-- at that time they called me Annica like a community.

Q: Right. So from 1939 on he would come.

A: From ' 38 on. I was only--' 39 , yes.

Q: Right. When you were 16 .

A: 16. That' s when I got my first big basket. And he was even teasing me that he' s sending me a doll because I' m still a child. And I said if it' s a doll, I will throw it out. I don' t have to wait for my father to throw it out. So anyway, we had-- it was a romance. Let me put it that way. Of course, my mother was hoping that__+ since I' m a beautiful girl, I' m going to marry a millionaire. And his mother hoping he' s a very good looking guy and he' s a very capable guy. Has a lot of charisma that he' s going to marry into a very rich family, and of course both parents were disappointed as far as that goes.

Q: Okay. And what was he doing? Was he a student at the time or was he working?

A: Oh, yes, he had a very good job. I think that I mentioned that we lived in a business district. There was a store__+ and he had an excellent job as a salesman. I mean the-- I heard his boss say that Imre Wollner can save the Eiffel Tower. I mean he doesn' t have to be anything exceptional. He can sell. And he got commission and, you know, salary. He made it good.

Q: When you were that age in 1938 ,' 39 , were you aware of what was happening in Germany?

A: We heard, but we didn' t believe.

Q: How did you hear about it, from your parents?

A: People-- there were a lot of refugees from Austria, from Hungary.

Many of them who had a little, you know—

Q: Intelligence.

A: That they went there to__+. They went down south. Transylvania was a dangerous spot.

But my father had such belief that the almighty would help. He__+ My mother had sisters. You heard about ensura (ph) you know, just recently, recently in-- there was the uprising, you know, in Romania. So anyway, my mother had sister in that particular city, and further they are even in Bucharest we had relatives. And my father said the almighty, we don' t have to move. Unfortunately, if we would have moved maybe he would have been alive, at least the close family.

Q: So, you said that your family and you had heard about what was happening but--

A: We heard about it but—

Q: And when war started in

September of 1939 , do you remember that?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What were your thoughts as a young--

A: The refugees brought the news mainly.

Q: Well, you were a young 16 - year- old. Were you frightened?

A: Frightened, no, not at-- at that time, our life was still fairly normal at that time.

Q: Umhum, umhum.

A: I still was going to school.

One thing which I regret, but it couldn' t have been helped, I had one brother and my parents insisted that I step out from high school to make room for my brother because he' s a boy and he

needs the education more so for his profession or his future life that he gets married than I do.

But that didn' t mean that I stopped reading.

Q: So how old were you when you finished school?

A: I was not more than 15 or 16 . I mean I wasn' t finishing it. I just stayed there for his sake and my mother said it doesn' t matter which way, you' re going to get your education anyway. And later on, hopefully going to be able to step up to university after all of these troubles are over. You know we were very optimistic. I think it did think that optimism in order to get through.

Q: So, what did you do with your time once you were not going to school?

A: Not a great deal.

Q: Did you work?

A: Work? Yes. I got a job at the photographer where they made enlargement for presents or pictures, and we had to color it, and making color rendering for those enlarged photos and I was pretty good at it. So I wasn' t -- actually I was apprentice. At first my mother paid. But they were satisfied with my work, so I got a small payment. I earned a little, not a great deal, but it was fun doing it. As a matter of fact, I have to have somewhere over there some pictures, early pictures when I was 15 , 16 and 17 . Now you can see me at the easel with my-- with my enlarged photo.

Q: Wonderful.

A: I will be glad to supply some. I have got an assortment and I will be happy to supply them

Q: Okay, so now it' s 1939 , 1940 and your life went on.

A: Yes, we were already engaged between us to be married when I was 18 and he was 21 .

Q: Okay, that was in 1941 .So 1940 went on for you without any disturbance?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And then comes 1941 and you become engaged. And anything else?

A: In 19 --

Q: Anything that you remember about 1941 ? Was life any different or were conditions any different in your town?

A: The conditions were different because as I said, we had so many--

Q: Refugees.

A: -- refugees who brought bad news from the direction of Hungary as well as Austria.

Q: Did you, yourself, talk to these refugees?

A: Yes, as a matter of fact, my mother' s oldest brother married a—during the__+ War, which was at that time, I don' t know. He was fighting in Austria, my mother' s oldest brother, married an Austrian girl, Christian, of course. And my grandfather__+ after. And after oh, __+ and after the war, my grandfather was not among the living. He came home as a refugee and lived either in grandmother' s house or in our house. And he died within a year in our city. Of course, grandmother forgave him.

Q: So you went on. You were aware of the refugees and life went on in 1941 ?

A: Yes.

Q: And you were engaged, but still your life was pretty normal?

A: In a way, yes.

Q: And any anti- semantic experiences during that year that you recall, any problems?

A: Not directly.

Q: Umhum.

A: Affecting me, not directly affecting me.

Q: But were you a witness to any incidents?

A: Witness to anything? The only thing that I can -- I can think of in terms of my fiancé, sort of, is the war, that at the age of 21 he was indicted in the Army, but he wasn' t Army, he was forced labor, so he got not-- not shooting gun, you know, but he got the pick and shovel. I mean it was forced labor, all right? And the time that we were able to see each other was less frequent, of course.

Q: Uh- huh.

A: And I' m quite sure that he experienced-- maybe he didn' t tell me about it-- some cruelties. I mean after all a Jewish guy over there all of those guys, you know, with the, you know, shooting guns and whatever. I don' t know. He didn' t tell me everything. I' m quite sure.

Q: Okay. And then comes 1942 .

A: That' s still__+ that is still the Hungarian time, yes.

Q: Umhum.

A: That' s where he came in.

Q: And you continued to work?

A: I continued to work. It was sort of a shelter place that the photographer, you know--

Q: Was the employer Jewish?

A: Hmm?

Q: Was your employer Jewish, the photographer?

A: I don' t know if both were. I think he was. She wasn' t. I don' t think she was. But anyway, that was their profession to enlarge-- to enlarge peasants pictures and then have it colored rendering.

Q: Did you at this time have contact with non- Jews or was your world still--

A: I did have contact with non- Jews. There was, I remember, I recall an Italian guy who was really the supervisor of these enlarging photo enlarging coloring. His name was Angelo Ravasini (ph). He was an Italian guy. Definitely non- Jewish. And I don' t think I have any particular relationship with him. He was the supervisor of the workers. And that' s all there is to it. I mean he was really a talented guy. And I mean his final say was if this is acceptable, I mean, it' s correctional.

Q: But your friends were still other Jewish--

A: Oh, yes.

Q: -- people? And you would still observe-- your family was still as religious as ever?

A: Either family we were observing everything.

Q: And that was no problem.

A: Observing everything, no problem, none.

Q: Okay. And then 1942 comes. Any changes there that you can recall?

A: No, ' 42 is still about the same like as ' 44 .

Q: And, again, how aware were you and your family in 1942 , and what was happening in the rest of Europe?

A: As I said, only because of all of the refugees coming from Hungary and from Austria.

Q: And what was your parents' reaction and your reaction when you heard the terrible news?

A: As I said complete faith, 100 percent complete faith.I mean, I don' t know if you are familiar anamamina (ph) I believe.

Q: Umhum. So, you all thought things were just going to get better?

A: Yes, anamina (ph) Q: Right.

A: And unasyama (ph)

Q: Right. __+ about the year 1942 and you said your parents still had a lot of faith that things would be getting better. Is there anything else about 1942 before we move on that you can remember?

A: No.

Q: Now it' s 1943 .

A: It' s more or less the same.

Q: More or less the same. And how often did you see your fiancé? I mean, was he away at labor camp or was he just working during the day?

A: He was in the labor camp. He was. Now, I have to mention why he got married in ' 44 .

Q: Well, anything about 1943 that you want to talk about?

A: No. It' s the same like ' 43 or ' 42 .

Q: Okay.

A: All right? Came ' 44 , all right?

Q: Now, it' s 1944 .

A: There was a rumor that the members of the family who served whether it' s constricted or get in a transport. So he drived his way home.

Q: This is your fiancé?

A: That' s my fiance. Drived his way home.

Q: Do you know which labor camp he was in? Do you know which labor camp he was in?

A: No. He can tell. But I would have to add that, you know, after I ask him. I might be able to give you more information later on. So the rumor was that the family-- family or families of the guy who is serving the—whether constricted or regular Army, will not get in transport so he had the idea, no matter how much it would cost in the family really__+ whatever they were able to-- that his family as well as my family might be exempt from transport so we married on April-- no, February the 8 th, February the 8 th, 1944 .

Q: Tell me a little bit about your wedding ceremony. How many people came?

A: It was under a hooper. It was in February. It was very, very cold. My mother borrowed a wedding dress for just one day, borrowed.

Q: For you to wear.

A: Not a rental or anything like that. And we had-- I was married under the hooper, deep snow.

Q: Was this--

A: Somebody threw something around my shoulder.

Q: Was this an outside wedding?

A: Outside wedding, a hooper, yes. And the__+ married us. Q: How many--

A: How many people? Not more than maybe 15 or 20 . And that was just immediate family.

Q: Was there any kind of celebration after the ceremony?

A: Well, we had simple meal. Someone gave us a beautiful wedding cake, which my mother gave us to take with us. We had one- day honeymoon.

Q: And you were 21 years old?

A: I was 21 , yes.

Q: And your husband--

A: My husband was born in 1920 .

Q: So he was 20 ?

A: Yes, he was three years older than I am. So anyway our wedding was February the 8 th in--

Q: 1944 ?

A: Yes.

Q: So you had your reception after?

A: Yes. And then we went to a place which is called-- it' s like a spa, just for one day.

Q: What' s the name of it?

A: The name of the place is Bihard.

Q: Umhum.

A: I can spell it for you, B- I- H- A- R.

Q: Okay. And then.

A: Bihar. Feuders (ph) spa.

Q: And then you came back.

A: Then we came back. And he went back to his--

Q: Labor camp.

A: Labor camp.

Q: And you lived with your parents?

A: And I lived with my parents for a short while and then in a few months came the transfer- - transport. And the whole thing was just a-- just a pure rumor, all right? His mother and sister

perished and grandchild. I mean the sister had the baby already, and my parents vanished also, never came back.

Q: You were living with your parents?

A: I was living with my parents and my only brother.

Q: When they were taken away?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you there when they were taken away?

A: We went together. We went together to Auschwitz. We went together on the transport to Auschwitz.

Q: Can you tell me--

A: The thing is that I went under-- on the right side, and they went on the left.

Q: Let' s talk a little bit. I know it' s hard.

A: Yes.

Q: Very hard to talk about it. But can you just tell us a little bit about what that experience was like leaving home and going to Auschwitz?

A: Well, first of all, can you imagine-- can you imagine how-- actually there were four families in these transport wagons.

Q: How did you know that you had to go to the – you were in your house?

A: First of all, people were gathered in a ghetto.

Q: Oh, you were in a ghetto by now. When did the ghetto--

A: We were in the ghetto.

Q: When did the ghetto form?

A: The ghetto formed shortly after-- shortly after in either-- it had formed already in April, and the transport stopped in the very beginning of May.

Q: Oh, so you were only in the ghetto for a short time?

A: A short time.

Q: For a short time. And was your house in the ghetto at the time or did you have to move?

A: Oh, no no, it was outside the ghetto.

Q: So you had to move?

A: We had to move, yes.

Q: Uh- huh.

A: And the transports were initiated from that particular place.

Q: Okay. When you moved from your house into the ghetto--

A: Yes.

Q: -- what were your thoughts? Was it a very frightening experience?

A: Well, listen, first of all, we moved in together with my father' s brother and his wife who also had a daughter and we went in the same school. Her name was Jakab Sosani (ph) and my name was Jakab Bona (ph) Jakab Bona-- we sat at the same table in the school from first grade on. I mean it was a first cousin. She did come back, but she did die.

Q: So the move from your house into the ghetto, you don' t remember?

A: We were just able to get out some necessity.

Q: What did you take with you to the ghetto?

A: I don' t know, a few pillows, change of clothes, things like that.

Q: And you left everything else back behind?

A: Furniture and things like that, of course.

Q: Did you take any art supplies with you?

A: No.

Q: You left all of that behind. Okay. And then you were in the ghetto.

A: Yes.

Q: What was the food situation at this point?

A: Well, we all brought something, you know, to eat. And of course there was the bread pocket. There was the bread pocket, yes.

Q: So food was not a problem at that time?

A: In a way, yes; in a way, no. It depends who had a bit of extra money. And, of course, at that particular time everybody was all in together, you know, people helping each other. You know, you have to be in a real big trouble to realize that money don' t matter. You know I learned that lesson very early in my life.

Q: How was your health at the time?

A: Fine. Thank God all of my life I haven' t been sick-- not even with a cold hardly.

Q: Okay, so you' re now in the ghetto. And how long were you there before the transport came?

A: Three or four weeks.

Q: And what did you do during the day in the ghetto?

A: Oh, heavens, I mean, just-- after everybody slept there, to make a little room, to move around, to worship you close so had something to put on or something. Anything, it doesn' t matter how simple, you still have to have the five or six or seven people to eat or ten people even. And we had each other. There were maybe people with six children or maybe somebody had some medication, the other one didn' t. I mean we shared. It was really one of the most

beautiful things of people realize and cooperate when there' s trouble. You know it happens in Israel, too. God forbid we have trouble. The whole__+ is united, otherwise they are hitting each other, you know.

Q: How long was your father able to work?

A: How long? Not the last year of--

Q: ' 43 .

A: Before the transport, there came a law that no Jewish person may be employed, only at manual labor. So my father had to be fired whether he-- I mean--

Q: So he lost his job?

A: Yes.

Q: And did he do manual labor?

A: Oh, yes, and my brother too.

Q: What kind of work did they do?

A: You see like he was working with wood, all right?

Q: Umhum.

A: So people ordered-- in order to get that square made for the boot you had to stack them.

Now, that was manual labor. They had workers for that, but now that my brother and my father even.

Q: So they were doing manual labor and then you went into the ghetto.

A: As a matter of fact, I have to mention at this particular time, my brother, George__+ No.

His name is Obrockgardo (ph) was my father. I have to apologize. My brother was outside at the time that people had to go into the ghetto. And my brother came in voluntarily, so the family won' t be separated.

Q: Umhum.

A: If he would have stayed outside he would have-- I mean it' s no use speculating on things like that, but he was outside, and he came in, he sneaked in, in the ghetto to be together with the family.

Q: When you were in the ghetto those weeks, were you able to walk in the streets?

A: In the ghetto, yes.

Q: So, there was no restriction inside the ghetto?

A: Well, after certain hour there was, yes.

Q: Had a curfew. Did you have to wear a star?

A: Oh, yes, the star on the left breast.

Q: Umhum.

A: Yes.

Q: You got the star when you went into ghetto or had you worn one before that?

A: Oh, much longer.

Q: When did you get the star?

A: The star, when they started to approve the-- the Hungarians came. The star came with the Hungarians.

Q: How did you feel as a young woman having to wear a star? What were your feelings? A: I was not ashamed to be Jewish. I was-- I took pride in it. I' m a Jewish woman. I don' t have to hide it. As a matter of fact, I was proud of it.And I think that it did give me sort of a service that I-- I don' t have to be hiding that I' m Jewish, but what is the-- what is the shame of it? I mean after all, I was proud to be Jewish. I was not-- I was not-- I was not ashamed of it.

As a matter of fact, when I-- when I was liberated later on, I made always a point of it to say that I' m Jewish.

Q: Okay. So now the-- how did you know that you were being transported? How did you get the message?

A: They were talking about it.

Q: Umhum.

A: They were talking about it. From that-- the transport will start from the ghetto.

Q: Umhum.

A: And it did, right at the very beginning of May. And it' s interesting coincidence that the month of May was the month when the war ended and when Hitler ended.

Q: Well, we' re talking a year later, you mean?

A: A year later, exactly. And my daughter was born May the 5 th.

Q: Really. So, the transports where you came, were you in one of the first transports?

A: I don' t know if it was the first or the second. I have no idea. Anyway, they were the scuttle (ph) baggers. There was so many families.

Q: Did you gather in a central place first?

A: They were allowing many food packages or like my father took his starlet bag and he used to fill it or whatever. I mean small little bags.

Q: And you walked to the train station.

A: Walked to the train station and then pushed in the train to full capacity.

Q: What were your thoughts then? What were your feelings then?

A: What was our feelings? That we are going to our destiny. Whatever happened. I don' t know. The first thing you have seen, the first thing you have seen as you have approached, and they had the dividing, you know.

Q: Well, let' s talk about the journey. How long did it take you to get there? How long was your trip?

A: It was, I don' t know exactly, but it was at least five, six or maybe seven days.

Q: Seven days.

A: About a week.

Q: In the cars?

A: Yes. Some people died in the car.

Q: Umhum. And you were with your family in the car.

A: I was with my family. We were together. My brother was there. My parents were there.

Q: Did you ever get out of the car?

A: Not that I know of.

Q: So, you were inside.

A: They brought a bucket for—

Q: Sanitary.

A: How sanitary could that be? You tell me.

Q: And was there any light in the car?

A: You know those little square windows way up high and sometimes people who were, you know, lightweight climbed on somebody' s shoulder to look around.

Q: Umhum.

A: In the area, not that it gave us much__+

Q: How did you sleep? Did you have room to sleep?

A: __+ in the corner. I was young.

Q: Yes. What was the reaction of your parents who were older?

A: Well, they were definitely—my mother was always trying to protect me, and my brother and my father was trying to protect my brother. You know how parents are, they look after their children more than after themselves and that gives them a purpose.

Q: What was the feeling among the other people in the car?

A: Same thing.

Q: People were helping each other?

A: They were definitely helping each other. And as I said there were unfortunately a few instances that people just passed on during the night or for God knows what or maybe despair or maybe God knows what, but nevertheless there were instances that they opened the door to this discard__+ I mean you couldn' t very well travel with a person decomposing body. What they did with it, I don' t know.

Q: What was the treatment of the soldiers to you?

A: The treatment of the soldiers, it depended. There were some kind ones who even handed some food. And there was some real cruel ones who just hit or did some damage. I mean real cruel ones. They were either, both kind.

Q: Umhum, umhum.

A: Yes, they were.

Q: Were you, yourself, hit by any of these soldiers?

A: Not that I recall. I was hit only once that I remember. I was already in the labor camp.

Q: Okay.

A: In one of the-- in one of the labor camps.

Q: Okay.

A: That I have seen a couple. I don' t know if you ever heard what is a couple. A couple is who leads the group of Jewish women or-- a couple saw something on a roll call. Something not exactly soothing her and beat a young woman to pieces, and honestly that girl fainted. And I looked with such hatred to that couple, how can a Jewish woman do this to another Jewish woman that she felt it and came over and beat me the same way. That was the only beating that I recall. That was already in the camp.

Q: So, you' re in the car going to Auschwitz, you said, and it took six or seven days. And what about food? Did you have enough to last you?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they give you water?

A: They did put in a few buckets of water for washing or whatever. So it was more--

Q: And what did you do to pass the time?

A: Well, honey, it didn' t make any difference how you passed the time. I mean you knew you were going towards your destiny and that-- when you arrived over there, you know, that was the doctor who sent people left and right.

Q: Cars come to a stop and the doors opened, we' re now at Auschwitz, and the trains stopped, and the doors opened and what did you first see?

A: __+ that' s the first thing.

Q: Was it day or night? Was it daytime or nighttime?

A: It was daytime. And the guy at the door said for the men either left or right, and for the women left or right.

Q: Umhum.

A: So I went on the left side.

Q: Well, you got out of the car with your family?

A: I got out of the car, but first the women and the men were divided.

Q: And did you say anything to your father and brother?

A: Anything to my father and brother, just God be with you.

Q: Right. Now you' re with your mother?

A: I am with my mother.

Q: And then.

A: And then here again I was a girl, sent to the labor, you know the labor camp, and my mother was sent towards the gas chambers.

Q: Umhum. Umhum. Did you know that at the time what was happening to your mother?

A: I heard, but I didn' t believe.

Q: You didn' t believe it.

A: I refused to believe.

Q: Umhum, umhum.

A: And I was shaved. I mean my hair was-- you know I had long hair. My head was shaved. As a matter of fact, my whole body was shaved.

Q: Was that very demeaning?

A: Demoralizing.

Q: Demoralizing?

A: Yes.

Q: Who did it, did men or women do it to you, shave you? Did men do it or women?

A: I think it was women, but I' m not 100 percent sure. It didn' t make any difference anymore. It didn' t make any difference anymore. It didn' t quite feel like a human being.

Somehow I don' t know. And then we got in a place like a room where they gave us food, but I couldn' t even look at it. It was red. It must have been red meat, and it reminded me of blood. And I couldn' t swallow even though I was very hungry, whatever _+ we were bringing, it was already taken away and they said they would give it back, but we never saw it.

Q: What were you wearing?

A: Nothing, absolutely nothing.

Q: You had no clothes?

A: Finally they handed us the stripes.

Q: Uniform?

A: Uniform with a number on the arm. I never was--

Q: Tattooed.

A: Tattooed, for some reason. I don' t know why. But I was there.

Q: And so this all happened the first day?

A: The first day, the first day. We got that stripe long pants and the stripe upper thing, and something on our head, some kind of a scarf because it was completely shaved, you know, naked.

Q: And did you talk to other young women then?

A: Oh, yes, the same thing that happened to them, it happened to me.

There weren' t exceptions. There were some who were there already a few days and any-- anything that the others couldn' t swallow or eat, they ate it without the least bit of-- they were so hungry, they were ready to eat anything.

Q: At that point did you know anybody or were you--

A: Yes, because we were still together with some of my first cousins.

Q: Oh, so you were still together with your relatives, young women your-

A: Yes.

Q: Young women.

A: And somehow fortunately, I think it was a fortune that we were transferred to Riga, to Riga in Latvia. And that was a work camp.

Q: Well, now let' s just stay on Auschwitz for the time being.

A: All right.

Q: So this is the first day. You' re with your cousins. You had gotten your uniform and then where did you go? Where did they take you, to a barracks?

A: It was in a barracks, yes, and then we just sort of were in groups and tried to catch a little rest or whatever.

Q: Umhum.

A: Not really sleep, and it was cold, gosh.

Q: Did you have a blanket?

A: They did give something, but it wasn' t enough.

Q: Umhum.

A: It was mainly that we were so close together that we kept each other warm.

Q: Right. Right. At that point did you know what had happened to your mother?

A: Well, listen, people were talking at that point. People were talking. I refused to believe that my mother does not exist.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I had seen the chimney and I seen the smoke.

Q: You saw it then?

A: I saw it all.

Q: Did you know what it was?

A: I heard, but I refused to believe it. I said that couldn' t be. They couldn' t do that to my mother.

Q: Right.

A: And they couldn' t do that to my father and brother. Now my brother really did exist for a duration, so I heard, but what happened to him at the

end, we don' t know.

Q: And then-- so you got some rest. What happened after that in Auschwitz?

A: I think we were several days in the barracks or maybe in another

barracks, and we got also these klutzy wooden shoes.

Q: The clogs?

A: Yes, the clogs. It was wood on the bottom, and it was some kind of like a tennis shoe on the top.

Q: Umhum.

A: Anyway, it had shoelace. And we tried to-- if we could get hold of a newspaper to stuff it because they were

all way too big and the newspaper holds a little bit of heat. So we definitely tried to stuff it as much as possible, if we could find a bed of newspaper or any kind of paper stuff.

Q: What was the sanitation facilities like there?

A: Also just buckets and things like that, which is very embarrassing thing, you know, to do your private business in front of other people, yes.

Q: Right. Could you wash yourself?

A: As much as possible, yes.

Q: Where was the water from?

A: There was actually a room with sink, but it was flowing water was cold or very tepid, so you really froze your little tusha (ph) off.

Q: Right.

A: But it was better than nothing. It was still refreshing, yes. And there was a little sink. I remember there was a room where you had to take everything off.

Q: We' re still in Auschwitz?

A: Yes.

Q: You took everything off?

A: You took everything off and then your clothes went through some kind of a steamer or whatever and then you got it back.

Q: Umhum.

A: Which was a good feeling that at least maybe for a few days, you know, with the close-- closeness, you know, they say it' s practically unavoidable not to get lice from one to the other.

Q: Did you do any work in Auschwitz?

A: Only after we got to Riga. Q: Okay, so while you were in Auschwitz, you just sat for-- you sat around and didn' t do anything?

A: Yes.

Q: And what kind of food did they give you?

A: Still there was a bed of --+ in the evening which was supposed to last for-- until next evening. And the little brown-- little brown liquid, which was called coffee in the morning, warm liquid, which was also a blessing. And in the evening, we got our bread ration, was I would say about a quarter of bread and a bed of margarine.

Q: Were people helpful to each other?

A: Which people are you talking about, the Auschwitz people or the cousins?

Q: Well both, the cousins.

A: The cousins, always, yes.

Q: You would help each other?

A: We were together, yes.

Q: What about the other prisoners who were not your cousins?

A: We all helped together. Really we had a wonderful unit.

Q: The women were supportive of each other?

A: Yes, of each other.

Q: Were they generally the same age in their 20 s?

A: Not necessarily.

Q: Or late teens?

A: Not necessarily. For instance, I remember a schoolmate of mine whose mother was really over 40 , but she didn' t look it. She was a lovely petite little, youngish looking woman. It

was her__+ and the funny thing is that the mother came home alive, and the daughter didn' t make it.

Q: So, you felt that the women helped each other and were supportive?

A: Very much so, yes.

Q: So, then you stayed for how many days did you say?

A: I don' t know exactly the number.

Q: A few days.

A: It must have been at least a week in Auschwitz, maybe even longer. And then we were transported in Riga, which was also a work camp.

Q: How did you get there?

A: By boat.

Q: By boat?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you get to the boat?

A: They brought us to a boat and loaded us in the boat and we arrived.

Q: What were you wearing? What did you take with you when you left Auschwitz, just your uniform?

A: Whatever they gave us.

Q: What did they give you?

A: Whatever we had on our back.

Q: Umhum.

A: Nothing particular or extra.

Q: So, you were wearing your prison camp uniform?

A: Right, right.

Q: Do you remember what your number was?

A: No. Isn' t that funny? But I do have some documentation that I was in Stutthof, and that has a number on it, which I don' t remember. I do have it.

Q: Okay. So, you -- what was the boat ride like?

A: Fine. There was nothing to it. I mean it was a little adventure, a little different from the usual daily intake, you know, you' re young. You enjoy every new change.

Q: And then you got to Riga.

A: We got to Riga and we were—

Q: So this is still in May of 1944 ?

A: For instance, for a while, we were breaking.

Q: Rocks?

A: Rocks, and what is the rocks were made of though, they were-- they were made out of the-- you know after 30 days you put-- you put up a--

Q: Kind of cement, cement?

A: What?

Q: Oh, a tombstone?

A: A tombstone. We were breaking tombstones from Jewish cemeteries of rocks for family. And that was the job that I was assigned for a while anyway. Then I was assigned inside, inside the building. There was--

End of File One

Beginning File Two

Question: You were telling us about your experiences you have just come to Riga and you were working in this labor camp. Did the labor camp have a specific name, do you know if it had a particular name?

Answer: I don't I don't remember.

Q: And you were working where you had to break up rocks from tombstones?

A: It was very that was that was

Q: Painful.

A: Did something to my heart.

Q: These were Jewish tombstones?

A: No question about it because of the writings, the Hebrew letters, and that's what we were breaking up. The interesting thing it was, it was very cold.

Q: It was winter, but you were saying that you left in May to go to Auschwitz May of '44.

A: By the time we got to Riga.

Q: So you were in Auschwitz then a longer time?

A: Not necessarily because after Auschwitz we didn't get straight wait just a moment. We didn't get straight to Riga, and we didn't get straight to Riga, we had a

Q: Were you somewhere in between because you said you had stayed a week or so in Auschwitz so that would just be June.

A: Yes, but I must have been somewhere. Let me have, if I it won't help me. After I went to Auschwitz, we were transferred to Stoll and to Stutthof.

Q: And these were labor camps?

A: Labor camps, yes. They were labor camps. Now, here it's a very interesting thing. I got the job. I had a very good friend who actually who was actually in the underground in Germany as

well I mean in Austria as well as in Hungary. And we have decided since somehow or other our first cousins scattered or were assigned different kind of camps. We going to stay like sisters. So she took up my maiden name. Suzy Jakab or Yakab. I had a first cousin, Suzanna, that I was seeing from first grade on together. She was not there anymore. She was assigned to some other job. So anyway she became Suzy Jakab. And was represented a sister of mine and we really stayed together to the very end. Now the interesting thing it was, that for me to work outdoors, shoveling things, it's very difficult, I'm not physically strong. She was very strong physically so she took over the heavy job. And the job she got that was a sort of like a railroad inside the big barn looking thing that they were transporting items from one to the other. She taught me how to use that particular machinery. It was something like a railroad. And you had a little, like a little choo choo train to drive it. I drove it several times against the wall. That they didn't kill me for it I don't know, but anyway I did it. But what did she teach me to do, I never did in my life to sabotage the inside, what is inside. Two of us sometimes went in there breaking things and then receiving the box __+ like it would have arrived, you know, it arrived broken.

Q: How did you break them?

A: What do you mean how did you break them? If you smash a carton which has light bulbs in it, how does it break, okay, or if you puncture plastic bottles with some kind of chemicals, what happens to it, all right? We took really big chances. We could have been hung for it.

Q: Why do you think you were so brave?

A: I don't know, because she encouraged me. And I think that somehow or other I felt that it's coming to them. I mean they did, I mean they kill us without even I mean, we are not human beings with them. They exterminating us. So what, so we do a bit of damage, too. I mean really it was my step sister so called that we cooperated, and somehow we got away with it.

Q: Was this in Stuffhof that you are talking about?

A: It was either Stuffhof or Stoll or maybe both places. And that was before we even ever got on the road to Riga.

Q: Did anybody ever find out that you did this?

A: No, I don't know if anybody found out who did it, but that somebody did it. That's for sure.

Q: But you were never found out?

A: Well, we could have been hung for it easily or shot for it easily without any whatever. But somehow it was a revenge.

Q: Did you tell anybody else you were doing this?

A: No, only between the two of us. It was our secret. I don't know. I mean it's unbelievable. For instance for many, many years, many, many people ask, you know, did you tell your children? I said why should I darken their young ears with horror stories such as this? And I never did. It was very difficult for me to even think about these things, nevertheless to talk to my own kids or to my grandchildren. Sometimes my son asked about interesting stories. I said I might have interesting stories, but it's not for the ears of children. Those are horror stories. Those are ghost stories. And I don't want to frighten them.

Q: What were the living conditions like in Stutthof?

A: Not too bad. Not too bad. We had those bunk beds, which I hate to this day. I wouldn't have a bunk bed in my house or nothing. And all of my grandchildren do have bunk beds. And when I see them, I say, honey, how can you put lovely grandchildren stack over stack. I mean all right, it saves beds, because the bedrooms are not and especially if you have five kids, you do need the space, right? But just recently, my youngest, __+ youngest daughter, who's eight years old fell off the top of the bunk bed splitting her head.

Q: How long were you in Stuthoff?

A: It must have been at least a month or so or perhaps even longer at least.

Q: What about food?

A: Food was fine.

Q: And how did you keep warm?

A: Well

Q: Did they give you more clothes?

A: Not necessarily. You get used to it. It's very I was really working indoors. It makes a big difference. My so called stepsister took the heavy part of the job and when you work with the shovel and filling dirt or whatever, you know, you work physically hard, you do get warm.

Q: Were you just with women?

A: I was just with women, yes. That was definitely a women's camp, yes.

Q: Did you see any of did you have communication with any of the other women that were with you?

A: We came together occasionally.

Q: What

A: Maybe at meal time or maybe there was supposedly but not always worked out, you know, when they had the evening lineup and we got our ration that, that there was a little get together or maybe sharing little experiences or what did you do today or what did you eat today? There were, for instance, maybe suicides, you know the bond fires were electric

Q: Electrified?

A: Electrified. And it happened, especially among the men that they up on purpose hurt themselves on the electrified fire to finish it off. They just couldn't stand it.

Q: Did you ever think about doing that?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: I don't know why not. Must have had the will to live. I must I don't know. I never was that I mean I felt that they could be __+ life, it was given to me. Therefore, I'm not going to take it for granted. I wanted to keep it. Who knows? I mean I always had that feeling that maybe, maybe anything.

Q: Did you have any contact with the men's camp?

A: Occasionally we walk by and they made some comment or we made some comment or we asked what is new or who is doing what or I don't know. We got a little bit of a report just passing by, but they were definitely on the other side. And we were on the other side so there wasn't, you know, just really straight contact. The one interesting thing it was for me that guy was walking by and said, my, you must have been a beautiful child or a beautiful young girl. Well, I was still a young girl, but my head was shaved and I had no idea how I looked like. But anyway that was a compliment.

Q: And did you know where your husband was at that time?

A: No.

Q: You had no idea?

A: No idea. He didn't know I'm alive either. Actually until got back in the same city that I was born, I didn't know if he is alive. He didn't know that I'm alive.

Q: Did you have your wedding ring with you?

A: What?

Q: Did you have your wedding ring with you?

A: Yes, I still have.

Q: You were able to keep it with you?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you keep it in Auschwitz?

A: It was not in Auschwitz. I gave it to the photographer that I worked.

Q: To hold on?

A: He was an honest guy. It wasn't anything valuable. It wasn't a diamond. It was just a fake something. I still have it.

Q: Umhum. This was nonJewish?

A: Um?

Q: NonJewish, the photographer?

A: Who was Jewish.

Q: He was Jewish?

A: I think he was.

Q: Yes. Okay.

A: But she was a nice person. I mean they were good couple.

Q: Umhum. And so you were in Stuffhof and you did this work. You did this sabotage work and then you left there. Did the whole group of women leave together?

A: To Riga, yes.

Q: And that's when you took the boat to Riga?

A: Right.

Q: Okay. And you arrived in Riga in the wintertime, end of '44?

A: End of '44.

Q: Okay. And that's where you said you were working breaking up tombstones?

A: Yes.

Q: What was your feelings?

A: Very bad. It's such it's such an awful feeling that those people, Jewish people even in their grave, even that little respect is taken from them. It's an awful feeling. It's an awful feeling seeing those Hebrew letters scattered and using for gravel for filling in roads or whatever. It's an awful feeling for the person who is doing it and you have to. There is just no two ways about it because those supervisors are standing over you and you have a certain assignment and you have to break up this much during your work day, and that's all there is to it. There is just no argument about it.

Q: What was a typical day like? Can you describe, what time you woke up?

A: Oh, there was always a lineup and they called you by name. And God forbid if somebody did not appear by the name calling, and the same thing in the evening, you had to line up, be called by name, and that's when you got your daily ration, the quarter of the bread and a piece of margarine, and that's it, and maybe something to drink.

Q: Did you have to walk far to where you were?

A: No, not really.

Q: Close by?

A: The barracks were fairly close, I would say five to ten minutes.

Q: And so what time do you know what time you got up approximately?

A: It must have been very

Q: Early.

A: In the winter morning it's not that early, so it must have been between 6:30 to 7:30. By the time we got to work, it was already daylight. So that took a little bit of a time to get there.

Q: And did you have any chance to stop in the middle of the day and rest?

A: We had a lunch break, yes.

Q: What did they give you?

A: They didn't give you anything. You can eat whatever you got in the morning or the evening. That was your daily ration. I mean whatever you brought with you.

Q: Did they give you

A: And if you were able to, you know, buy something on a snitch or somebody had something extra.

Q: How could you buy something? What did you use to buy anything?

A: Let's say, for instance, I used to buy whatever I was able to spare it, a little piece of candle, every __+, a slice of bread, so I can buy two candles for my mom, for my mom.

Q: For your mother?

A: Yes.

Q: You mean this was in memory of your mother or shabbat candle?

A: Shabbat, for shabbat, __+ Friday evening.

Q: Right, you were able to do this?

A: But not every day.

Q: Not always, but this was in Riga?

A: That was something which I done whenever I was able, whenever I felt that I could spare a slice of bread.

Q: Were you able to do that in Auschwitz or Stutthof?

A: Not in Auschwitz, mainly in Riga.

Q: In Riga. That's beautiful.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And so you were in Riga and again with a bunch of youngish women, late teenage women in their 20s?

A: In their early 20s or late

Q: Teens.

A: Teens.

Q: Right. And also were they supportive? Were they of help to each other?

A: Oh, yes, very much so. That's the beauty of the thing, that when you are really in trouble, you are very supportive of each other because only by unity are you able to prop each other up. There is just no two ways about it.

Q: This was wintertime. So did they give you blankets to sleep with in Riga?

A: You know in that

Q: In the bunks?

A: Yes.

Q: They did give you blankets?

A: Yes. Yes. And we slept two to the bunk many a time to keep each other warm.

Q: Warm.

A: And sharing the two blankets, you know, we were able to.

Q: And did you just wear what were you wearing in Riga?

A: What do you mean?

Q: Your uniform from Auschwitz?

A: I don't know if it's the same uniform, but it definitely was the striped.

Q: With the star?

A: Sort of coarse fabric. It's pants and top with the star.

Q: With the star?

A: And the pants with the number.

Q: With the number?

A: Yes.

Q: And you just wore it for months and months?

A: Oh, yes. Well, now it was cleaned. And it was deloused periodically, quite often.

Q: But you got the same one back?

A: Oh, yes, yes, we got the same one back. Yes. It was honestly that was a time when people cooperated fully knowing that we are all in the same danger, and helping each other we strengthen each other and that's all the I mean that's the way I saw it.

Q: You had talked about the one terrible situation where you were beaten in camp by the woman. Was there any other time that you were physically hurt in camp?

A: No, not really, not really. There was an interesting, in my opinion, experience for my part. It was a Sunday afternoon and we were given a little bit of freedom, you know, to walk around.

Q: You didn't have to work on Sunday?

A: We did go for a lineup and things like that, but it wasn't really a workday because the guards and everything, they had their day off for whatever. Anyway I was walking by at one of the guardhouses or one of the officer's houses and I heard some beautiful music. And I sort of crouched down under the window and listened. And it dawned on me that is the moonlight

sonata, Beethoven. And I can't hardly describe the feeling. There are still people who can enjoy music and live a normal life, and I'm still hearing a few snatches of music and enjoy it. Now, that sort of emotionally upset me unbelievable. And I was telling my so called stepsister, Suzy, that, you know, what I heard that afternoon. And then we were discussing all sorts of concerts we've seen and poetry being read, and I mean things which we really enjoyed in life and it just nonexistent anymore. And, you know, thinking back it just it just unbelievable. It is just unbelievable. I'd love to show you, but I don't think we really have the time, I do have some unbelievable copper work with the designs from the shawa (ph) but I don't know if you would have time for that.

Q: When were you ever forced to stand outside in lineups for any long period of time except in the morning and evening?

A: Not alone.

Q: No, but were the women, were you part of a group of women?

A: Well, there was, for instance, somebody was caught doing something against the rules, and there was a hanging.

Q: Is this something you saw?

A: And everybody had to attend.

Q: To watch?

A: Yeah, watch. Now, that was something which I have not seen. I mean my eyes were closed. But nevertheless I knew what's going on.

Q: This was a woman who was hung?

A: It was a woman, yes. There were all sorts of horrible things which happened.

Q: Did you see other people being beaten besides that one time?

A: Umhum.

Q: Besides the one time that you had described about a woman being beaten, did you see other women being beaten at different times?

A: Not I didn't see it. This one I've seen.

Q: Yes.

A: And I was so horrified that she saw me being horrified and gave me the same beating. That was the one.

Q: How long did it take you to recover from that beating?

A: I don't know because Suzy tend that to me with all sorts of creams and whatever, hot cloth and washed it and, you know, to make it feel a little better.

Q: Right.

A: So I'd be able to stand up and line up the next morning.

Q: Right.

A: She tended to me practically all night to make me feel a little better. I was black and blue.

Q: Umhum.

A: So I mean that was an experience also.

Q: So you were in Riga until when?

A: Then they brought us back, they brought us back, I don't know, we made a long, long march towards one of the camps, but I can't quite remember the name.

Q: You left your camp in Riga and went on a march?

A: When we went back to Germany.

Q: To Germany, umhum.

A: Yes, we also came back on a boat from Riga.

Q: And then you had to march?

A: March to a new camp, but I don't remember

Q: What was your march like?

A: Very difficult because many people fell out, and they were either shot or just left by the wayside.

Q: But you were able to continue?

A: Apparently. I had lost one first cousin during that particular march, not her sister was next to her. But she fell out and they didn't let her help her up or anything. There was three sisters, and two of them made it and one didn't.

Q: But you were able to continue?

A: Apparently. I'm here. I don't even know how or why or when.

Q: Do you know approximately how long the march took?

A: It must have been at least a week or more, at least. All I know is that somehow towards the end we wound up in the Saar region dancing, and that's where I was liberated by the Russian soldiers.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about that. Let's talk about liberation unless there's anything else about the march that you remember?

A: No, not really, not really. Only thing I know of that a number of people fell out and never made it.

Q: And what, you would stop at night and sleep on the side of the road?

A: We stopped somewhere, but I don't know where. It must have been a bunker or some kind of a you know, they had bunkers.

Q: Along the roads?

A: Along the roads, you know those zigzag things.

Q: The trenches?

A: Yes, the trenches, that the Germans themselves used. My stepsister, Suzy, Suzy Jakab or Jakabs, Suzy Jakab. She got shrapnel through her eye.

Q: Was this on the march?

A: No, that happened already when we arrived to the Saar region. We were dancing in one of those bunkers, all right? The place where we arrived was heavily bunked by the Germans. And they asked for five volunteer women to peel potatoes. And that was asked by German soldiers. And we decided what did we have to lose, at least we eat for a few days because whatever rations they gave, if you peel potatoes, we get the benefit ourselves. So we went potato peeling, five of us. That was myself and my stepsister and three other women. And after about a week of this treat, because really it was a treat because we ate, the soldiers said now you have to return to your camp. And we thought surely the moment we going to turn our back, they are going to shoot us, but they didn't. They walked thataway and we walked thataway. And after a few minutes we looked back, we didn't see the German soldiers, we saw the bunker flocked down in there. So there was a bombing. The Germans were bombing that Saar region. And my sister or stepsister got a shrapnel through her through her leg.

Q: Eye?

A: I was next to her like even closer than I am to you right now. I didn't have a scratch. But anyway I ripped up something. I don't know whatever she wore or I wore to make a tourniquet, all right? And then after about after about 24 hours the German Russian soldier said that the war is over and handed the first cigarette I'd ever seen in my life. It was a hand rolled, hand rolled and hand cut tobacco. So anyway I never smoked. And I handed it to my stepsister who

was actually in the underground, and she was a smoker already from the age of 16 or whatever, not that it helped her because she wasn't paid. We didn't have anything. So after about a day or so ambulance came and took all five of us to a hospital. But three of the women were pretty good looking, hefty looking were raped in front of my eyes.

Q: The other three women?

A: The other three, not me. I was like a walking skeleton and, of course, my stepsister was injured with the tourniquet and the loss of blood so she was got away.

Q: Who raped the other three women, the Russians?

A: Um?

Q: Who raped the women, the Russian soldiers?

A: The Russian soldiers.

Q: Were you afraid it was going to happen to you?

A: In a way, yes. But then again, I looked at myself, and I said who would want this walking skeleton even to touch. I mean I was just really skin and bones even though I was still young.

Q: Had you been getting your period during the war?

A: No, I didn't for a whole year. I didn't for a whole year. I was convinced that there is something in the food which suppresses all that all that feminine action. I mean it's part of life.

Q: Umhum.

A: But the doctor convinced me that's not the case.

Q: So

A: Actually I became pregnant in August.

Q: We'll talk about that. What was your feeling when the Russian soldier came and told you the war was over? What do you remember what you thought?

A: I was hoping it's true. And then I heard also horrible thing, which I heard. There were very few people sort of half dead, half dead wandering around that camp. It's called Mashata (ph). It just occurred to me. Mashata (ph) _+.

Q: So you didn't quite believe it when you first when the Russian soldiers said the war is over?

A: Not really, however, the Germans did something horrible. There were few sort of half dead wandering around. It looked like that the whole camp was either _+ or diseased or, you know, just ready to be buried. The few alive people who were still alive transported on a boat and the boat was blown up so they all went down. They all went down. That's awful that the Germans did that. Now, that's something which they they didn't gain by killing another 50 people or another 25 people, but they did it.

Q: After liberation, you were with your sister?

A: So actually what you want me to tell you, what do you want me to tell you?

Q: I want you to tell me about the ending of the war and so now you are in Nostach (ph).

A: Nostach (ph).

Q: Nostach (ph) okay, and your sister, Susan, what happened to her?

A: She was in the hospital, and it just so happened that the farmer's daughter died in the same room where my stepsister was, Suzy. Okay? And I went to that farmer. I said I will be glad to work for them if they let me visit my sister at least once a day or at least three times a week so I see how she's getting along. So I was so I was with Polish farmer. They didn't even know I'm Jewish. And I never advertised it because I didn't know. I didn't trust them.

Q: What were you wearing though, didn't you have

A: I still had the so I was a political prisoner.

Q: You took your star off?

A: I took my star off, but I was a political prisoner.

Q: When did you take your star off?

A: Sometime in the hospital most likely.

Q: Okay.

A: All right? The number didn't make any difference because the political prisoners had numbers also. And they were not that well educated. So anyway I went to see my sister, how she's coming along, and she was sometimes on very high fever. And we were very, very concerned, but she had a very strong constitution and she pulled through very good. And anyway I went and I was able to take a little meal again, a little cheese and a little sugar or whatever they gave me. God forbid that I should take it without asking. But I asked if I may take something for my sister. And I was scrubbing the toilet for them and I was tending the whatever __ or feeding these or whatever I was assigned to do. It didn't make any difference to me as long as I was able to provide a little help for my helper. And slowly but surely she got a little better, but I got very bad, and I was admitted to the hospital for a few weeks for better nourishment, and it was middle of or end of July that finally

Q: Who was running the hospital?

A: The it must have been the

Q: The Russians?

A: Russians, yes. It definitely was. The Saar region was definitely occupied by the Russians, yes. And then I was admitted to the hospital for a little better nourishment to build up my strength. And then finally we got our walking papers, and then it took a few kilometers, a very few kilometers either by train or by bus or by whatever to get closer and closer because we

wanted to approach, again, my city, that if there is anything underway somebody will be registered. And the first sign of registration I found in Budapest. That took a good two months.

Q: How did you ride on the train? Did you need tickets or would they just let you ride?

A: No, we had papers. We had papers, you know, so many kilometers. I mean there was always Jewish communities who were helping people to get home and search for their relatives.

Q: Where did your papers come from, the Jewish community or the Russians?

A: Russian Jewish community.

Q: Gave you papers?

A: German, whoever community gave us papers for the rides.

Q: For the rides?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And then you got to Budapest?

A: I got to Budapest and that's where at first, I found that Imre Wollner is looking for Anna Wollner. And, of course, I left my that Imre Wollner is looking for Anna Wollner.

Q: What was your feeling when you heard that he was alive?

A: Well, I was very happy at least that I was married and we were in love and it was a wonderful feeling, that he's looking for me and I'm looking for him. But I found no trace of my parents nor of my brother, and that was a very sad thing. The interesting thing that when we met in my city, the first thing I said let's go home. I have a feeling there is nothing to look for and we can find out later if there is anybody alive.

Q: So you went from Budapest back to your town?

A: Back to my town but we stayed there for

Q: And your husband was in the town at the time when you found

A: No, he came out, I believe, another day or another day later. I don't know. It was something. But anyway we had within a day or so we met.

Q: You were together?

A: The same city where we got married, yes.

Q: And was your stepsister with you?

A: Um?

Q: Was your stepsister with you, Suzy, was she with you, your stepsister, Suzy, was still with you?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: She was still with you?

A: She was still with me and we lost contact only after we got in the United States.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: She was a big Communist. And actually her and my husband didn't get along at all. I mean let's be honest about it. I would like to be honest about it. But I mean really we help each other. We were just really like sisters.

Q: So you saw your husband and you said let's not stay here?

A: Yes.

Q: And so then what happened?

A: We stayed.

Q: You did stay?

A: Yes.

Q: Because he wanted to stay?

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, he established with two of his friends, a business which they called import/export __. And it went well. We did pretty good. And Peter was born. Peter was born. He was one of the first __ in my city. He was born in April.

Q: And you stayed how long?

A: We stayed until King Carl was exiled. I mean he had to leave the country, and then his son, Mikial (ph) became king. And when he had to leave also, I said I'm not going to raise my son under Stalin after Hitler. And that's when we decided that we leave and how did we leave? We paid a peasant to sneak us across the border to Hungary or a hay bagger. And the three of us went to Hungary and then from Hungary to Austria and then from Austria to Munchen. And from Munchen, we requested the refugee porter to the United States, and it took us a year. Arriving in the United States in '49, in '49.

Q: Now, how old was your son when you left your town? How old was the baby when you left?

A: Well, he was born in '46.

Q: And when did you leave?

A: We left in '46. He was two years old. '49.

Q: So you left with a two year old smuggling in a hay wagon. How did you keep him quiet?

A: The doctor gave him tranquilizer, but it didn't work. He was hollering all through the hay ride and fell asleep after we got to the Hungarian side, but nothing happened, thank God. He's here. He's here.

Q: And then you went from Munich to the United States?

A: We requested the quota. You know __+ had a refugee quarter so to be accepted as an intended United States citizen __ and we got it.

Q: And you came to the United States?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you come?

A: Also on a boat, steerage.

Q: Umhum.

A: Yes. Arrived to Ellis island. Peter had the measles so we were quarantined. Then we got to New York finally, and I said this is not the city I want to live in United States. And that's how we got to Memphis, Tennessee. I wanted a leisure southern town, friendly so I heard, and it was lovely. I really liked Memphis, Tennessee. That's where my kids were educated. There was a very lovely Jewish community. There was a Jewish school. It started with kindergarten, and then it became a yeshiva, a high school for the girls. I mean it really turned out lovely.

Q: Did you get anymore education in the United States?

A: More or less I would call it self taught. I mean I practically lived in the libraries.

Q: Umhum.

A: Catching up things. And also I was accepted, which is a very unusual thing in the niklivi (ph) for arts and crafts for __+. I wanted to teach actually in Israel, but at the time that I have finished the nikliv (ph), I would have been a certified teacher, I was close to 60. There is no way in the world that you can get a permanent job or __ at that age. There is no way. So I just gave up. Who needs a piece of paper if I cannot earn anything with it?

Q: So you did go to Israel?

A: Umhum.

Q: When did you go to Israel?

A: '78.

Q: You went to Israel in '78?

A: Right.

Q: You left Tennessee?

A: Umhum.

Q: You left Tennessee?

A: I left Tennessee in '78 to go to Israel. My three children were married already. And I had already four grandchildren. And the rest of my grandchildren were born after I got to Israel.

Q: So you and your husband went to Israel?

A: No, only me. I divorced my husband in '74.

Q: I see.

A: Four years before I went there.

Q: And so you went to Israel in 1978?

A: 1978 and I

Q: Did you have relatives there?

A: I had first cousins.

Q: Okay. And you stayed in Israel for how long?

A: Just I was recently called back by my children that I'm not well.

Q: Oh, I see. So up until recently you have been

A: __ Yom Kippur.

Q: You have been living in Israel?

A: In Israel. Well, I have been coming and going.

Q: I see.

A: Every year there is no grandchild that was born without me. And I have 13. God bless them.

Q: Wonderful. Can we

A: I have three great grandchildren. I think I told you. Can we? Yes.

Q: Can we now talk a little bit about your feelings and reflections about your experience? Has the war, your experience during the war, has it made you more Jewish? What is your feelings about being Jewish considering what you went through?

A: I'm very proud to be Jewish. But then again on the other hand, I'm very proud to be Jewish. And I declare it especially here in the United States when they the people make completely uncalled for remarks, you know, jew you down or, you know, expressions such as that. So usually make the remark, the Jewish people usually are very fair and sincere, and they don't want to cheat people out of anything. As a matter of fact, you can rely on a Jewish person because holically (ph) or according to the law it's a sin to cheat. And anybody who's observant is going to respect that. There's another thing, which is very much observed that is in the ten commandments to respect and honor your elders. That's a very important thing in the Jewish law. That's one of the dos instead of do nots. And I think that the almighty was very kind to us. That was when we reach a certain age that we need protection and we need his protection. I think it's wonderful.

Q: You had said that you really didn't talk to your children or grandchildren very much

A: Right.

Q: about your experiences. Did you ever share your experiences with others?

A: No, hardly. It's difficult. It hurt to talk about it. It hurts to talk about it. Now, what would I say to a ten year old? And then he's going to look at the other young mothers, maybe they are younger than I am. I was 30 years old when George was born. And I was 37 when Teddi was born, when my daughter was born. I was 37. She was born in 1960. That is seven years difference between my children. It wasn't my choosing. It just happened so what can I tell a

child about my experiences? And then he's going to look at his best friend that he comes over to play football with or hockey or just do homework together. And then he's going to say, what, your mom I mean this is something, you know, you read not even in history I don't think. They don't even have these things in history books or do they?

Q: Does the war still affect you? Does your experiences and what you suffered still affect you?

A: For a long time I had been asking why me? Somehow I don't ask it anymore. I don't know why me. I mean really and truly so many so much better people perished. I feel, for instance, that I always envied my brother who's younger than me that he's such he's so much better person as a human being than I am. Why not him and why me? Somehow or other I feel guilty about being alive and him not being alive or, for instance, the event that the war was over, and Hitler does not exist anymore so I heard that they committed suicide in their bunker with Eva Braun Brown, right? I asked dear God why did we deserve this? Why did you do this to us? What have we done? I mean I'm not speaking only about our group? It happened in Poland. It was really something. So I don't know. I mean I am asking a lot of questions, but I am asking less and less as the time goes by. I live to see a whole generation of new grandchildren that my two of my granddaughters are married. One of them already have three children. So I have great grandchildren. So maybe there is a purpose in all of these I mean I have three I have a big family again and I came home alone. Alone with my husband, the two of us. It's not alone anymore. But I didn't even know when I was liberated by the Russians that I do have a husband here that took several months to arrive to the particular to that particular moment.

Q: Do you receive war reparations?

A: No, I never asked.

Q: Why not?

A: Because I don't want their money. Money doesn't it doesn't mean that much to me. There is nothing they could they could pay me a million, but my mother and father will not rise from their grave. My parents will always be there, and my brother is nonexistent. I've never asked for reparation. I don't want their money. It's very funny. I'm going to have fantastic expenses, and I know that I don't even know if I'm going to survive this ordeal or not, but somehow I feel that I did not leave in vain. And the reparation would make much different. Maybe it would make a great deal of difference for the children. Maybe I should because of them. But for me money has no, no value in that particular thing. I have seen people selling houses, homes, fortunes, yachts for a crust of bread, really. I mean when it comes down to value, what is value? Life is valuable. How you live your life is valuable, but not money. The money is not doesn't somehow or other I am completely nonmaterialistic. Maybe, maybe it's foolish. And I should be a little bit have a little bit more foresight, and the children are going to be burdened with my expenses and whatever. But for myself, I don't want their money.

Q: Is there anything you wanted to share about being Jewish with your children or grandchildren or great grandchildren?

A: Yes, to be proud of it. Just to be proud of the fact that they are they have an inheritance, thousands of years old, and be proud of it. It makes me very proud to see my oldest son sit down with the two youngsters, the two ten year olds, Rosalee's son and his son are about the same age. And he's learning with them half an hour every evening, so he's transferring his knowledge, his doctora with the young children and that's beautiful. To me, it gives a wonderful satisfaction. That's value. To me, that's value. It's not the new outfits, and the new bicycles and pizza shops and God knows what, that's beside the point. But the inheritance, our history to be transferred to the children, to teach them how to put the feeling on. To go through bar mitzvah. To be

prepared he prepares them for the bar mitzvah. He doesn't hire another tutor. It's a wonderful thing. To me that means a great deal and so did my younger son, not to mention my daughter. They became so religious. He's teaching in a yeshiva, and she's a __ now. And she's very, very respected in the Jewish community in Brooklyn. And, listen, being in Brooklyn you have to be very religious in order to fit in. And she is fitting in. As a matter of fact, she's a foster mother to a retired __ besides her own five children. I mean I'm very proud of my kids.

Q: Wonderful. Anything you'd like to add before we finish?

A: Well, I don't know. Ask me. Is there anything I need to add?

Q: Just any other thoughts that you have?

A: Um?

Q: Any other thoughts about what you went through in the war?

A: Well, the only thing is that there must be a purpose, only God knows what that I went through, and I'm here. It must be a purpose to it. It couldn't be just a coincidence because I think that in our in the whole world, nothing just happens just by coincidence. Why this happened to us? Why exactly that particular community, it was hit so very hard, only God knows. But I'm sure it's not only question of money. We did have some rich people who were able to buy fake papers or went to Switzerland or whatever. Still somehow even they getting a certain tradition with us with them. Don't you think? And they assured us or the survivor of certain amount of people. It's could be it was their own family. It could be somebody outside the family, but I think that it nevertheless saved a certain amount of people. So it was not in vain.

Q: Well, thank you very much for doing this interview.

A: Well, I don't know if it helped any.

Q: Yes. It certainly has.

A: All right.

Q: Thank you.

End of interview.