

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014
RG-50.106.0216

PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

AGNES HOFFMAN

January 10, 2014

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Hoffman conducted by Gail Schwartz on January 10, 2014 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This is track number one. Please tell me your full name.

Agnes Hoffman: My name is Agnes Hoffman.

Q: And what name did you have at birth? What was your maiden name?

A: Agnes **Weisbrun**.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in Budapest, Hungary and I lived in a city called **Miskole**.

Q: When were you born?

A: January 21, 1931.

Q: Let's now talk a little bit about your family. Your parents' names.

A: My mother's name is, was Anna Weisbrun and her maiden name was Weinstock.

Q: And where was she from originally?

A: And she was from a small village, **Ricse**. And my father's name was Bela Weisbrun and he was born in Miskole, Hungary.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman January 10, 2014

4

Q: How far back can you go with your family? Your grandparents. Do you have any information about your grandparents?

A: My grandfather had a store selling the finest of delicate meats and it was famous all over Europe. People were ordering food from him from everywhere in Europe. Delicacy and meats and fas—

Q: How far back did his family go that you know – how many generations back?

A: Well I only –

Q: Do you have any more information about that?

A: My grandfather was a very educated man, highly respected and my father had a brother and his name was **Jula**. I will spell it later. And he had gone to at that time it was Palestine. He moved to Palestine. Also my father's sister. Her name was Elsa. They lived there until my, Elsa died, young. And then my uncle moved to Australia. And he had lived in Australia til the end. And my grandmother was a fantastic lady. Her name was Ida or in Hungarian **Eda** and she was, they were religious people. But my grandmother appeared in theater, was very, very well known. And my whole family were practically writers. My father was a writer. He wrote movie manuscripts. He was in the movie business. He had, he traveled to Budapest back and forth. He arranged and he picked the movies that the theaters would play and he had also writ – he had written novels. And towards the end he wrote a book that he told in the book that the war would be over in six months. Well it was close to it, but he never made it. And he hid that book, he said. When the war is over, I am going to get this published. So he put the book on the shelf in a certain place. But I will tell you when he traveled to Budapest, when the Germans came in, and we had to wear the yellow star, the Jews could not travel public transportation, could not go to any public places. But my father had to travel. On the train. So he was wait – and he took off his star in order to be able to go. For his work. And he was waiting for the train and a Hungarian

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

5

man went to the SS and said there is a Jew. So the soldier, he went over to my father. And he said what's your religion? And he said Jewish. So they had to take him away right away. They put him I assume to a camp in Hungary until –

Q: We'll get to that a little later. I want to talk more about your childhood.

A: Yes, yes. Oh I want to tell you about just so the Jews had to go to a ghetto, but in the first one was to move into a, an area of 33 streets.

Q: I know. We'll get to that in a few minutes. I want to get your childhood before the war first.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Any information about your mother's side of the family. You told me about your father's side.

A: Yes. I loved going to the small town or village, Ricse. Every summer us children, I have three little sisters and every summer we went to Ricse. We could not wait to go there. It was so much fun.

Q: What were their names? Your sisters' names?

A: My sister was Susan, or **Zuzanna**. And Elsa, Elsa and Eva. And I was the oldest one, 13. Zuzan, Susan, she was 11. Elsa was six. And Eva was two. And Eva won a beauty contest, number one in Hungary. And –

Q: And maternal grandparents. What about your mother's parents?

A: Yes. Weinstock, Samuel. Samuel and he was a fantastic wonderful man and a loving and caring and he had in the little village, he had the movie theater and he had, they called it a hotel. But it was a small one so all the traveling salesmen and people, they stayed over there. But it was

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

6

not a huge hotel. And he also had a pub. The pub in the town where all the gendarmes came there and had their beer and wine and at that time they would give us a little wine also, because in Hungary you could have, children could have a little wine.

Q: Was your family very religious?

A: They were religious.

Q: They were observant. You observed the holidays.

A: Oh yes.

Q: I'm talking about before the war now.

A: Yes, definitely. Yes.

Q: Did you have many cousins around, extended family nearby?

A: Yes. In Ricse I had aunts and uncles. I had two single aunts and then they had, at that time, and then and they spoiled us so. When we arrived at the station, half the town's children were waiting for us. And then when we got to the house, outside, before we went inside, my aunt came out with a big tray of fabulous homemade cakes. And this was a vision that we never forgot.

Q: What kind of school did you go to, elementary school?

A: You don't want me to tell more about the, Ricse.

Q: Was there something you want to say? If you want to say it, fine.

A: Yes, yes. So I had a lot more relatives there. Really a whole lot of the people were relatives

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

7

of ours. And so it was a very happy surroundings. And we had a famous uncle, great, great uncle. I want to tell you about him. His name was Adolf **Zukor**. Have you heard of him?

Q: Yes.

A: He was a great uncle and that's, he was 16 years old and he lived in Ricse. And his parents got killed in an accident. And my great, my great grandfather had, was raising him. And one day he said uncle, I want to go to America. And my great grandfather was a well to do man. They had a very great business there going with the – and he said ok. I'll take you to the ship. So he traveled and he put him on the ship and he gave him \$40 to go to America. And the reason I'm telling you this is because he would come back to visit them often and when he came he would go to the temple and he would give thousands of dollars to the people in the temple. And he had sent, when all the aunts like my mother and her sisters and her brother, when they all got married, he gave a lot of money for each of them as a gift. And my mother got the most. And it was really the Jewish people that lived there were really all my relatives.

Q: When you were growing up, did you live in a Jewish neighborhood?

A: No, it was a mixed. Yes.

Q: Did you have friends who were not Jewish, when you were young? I'm talking about before the war now. Did you have friends who were Christian?

A: I think the ones that were in school and you know we had lived our lives to, within the Jewish community and schools were mixed and I had friends there, yes.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism when you were young before the war?

A: No, never, never.

Q: Nothing from the teachers?

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

8

A: Nothing.

Q: Or other non-Jewish friends?

A: No.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: We spoke Hungarian, but my grandmother had a sister who was deaf and she had gone to deaf school in Vienna and when she came back she spoke German and you know how they spoke, not sounded clearly but we all learned German and we learned German in school. So we spoke German to her all the time. And in school we learned. So we knew German, perfect German.

Q: When you were growing up, what were your other interests? Do you like to read or did you do any sports? What were your hobbies or any additional interests?

A: I'll tell you. It was not like America where you had any interests like that. I used to go to the movie theater that my father was associated with. And it was free for us and we could take our friends and they were free to go in. And I was very popular.

Q: I'm sure you were.

A: But I do want to tell you one incident after the Germans came in about the movie theater.

Q: We will get to that. I just want to stay on before that. Did you have any favorite holidays that you liked to celebrate with your family?

A: I had all of them. All of them with my family.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

9

Q: Did you like to do any sports? Were you very athletic?

A: No. In Europe in those days they did not have that kind of life.

Q: How would you describe yourself as a child? Were you very independent, do things on your own or you were –

A: Well I'll tell you one thing. I was very into everything that was going on. My father depended on me to take care of a lot of business. I knew how to, as young as I was, ten, 11, he would send me to the movie theater, to the boss who would give the money to give to my father. He would, anything I had to take care of, I could take care of it. And so he really trusted me with a lot of things that I could handle.

Q: You would describe yourself as an independent youngster?

A: Yeah.

Q: Were your parents strong Zionists at all?

A: Zionists? No, just regular Jewish.

Q: So were you a member of any youth groups or anything like that. I know you were young. But were you in any kind of a youth group?

A: No.

Q: No. Ok.

A: It was very private life. All the Jews.

Q: But you said you did have non-Jewish friends.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

10

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: And did you go to their houses and play at their houses?

A: Maybe occasionally but we were family oriented.

Q: When did you first start hearing about a man named Hitler? Do you remember?

A: No, but I'll tell you. We had some relatives in Austria. And they came in, the Germans came into Austria before Hungary and our relatives there, an uncle died but some, another uncle wanted to take his place and what they did was they asked – well my grandfather had passed away. They had asked my grandmother to give them my grandfather's papers so they could get out of Austria. So that's how it all started. And we heard all the terrible things about Austria and other countries. And we did not believe it. But it was true. So, but we never thought the extent of it. And so we hadn't really heard about Hitler's things what he did.

Q: Did you ever hear him give a speech on the radio?

A: No.

Q: You never heard him.

A: No.

Q: You continued. Well then the war started.

A: It has been, had started yeah.

Q: And then the invasion of Poland and the war starting in September 39. Do you have any memories of that?

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

11

A: No.

Q: You were very young. You were only eight. Was it the kind of thing that at a young age, that your parents talked things over with you. Do you remember, you being the oldest child in the family, about what was happening in Europe? Did they discuss that with you?

A: Well I did hear about, because of the relatives in Austria, we heard about that.

Q: The war has started in other countries and you continue to go to school. When did life start to then change for you?

A: Well

Q: Do you remember the first change that you experienced?

A: We knew that the Germans were coming into Hungary but that was the final blow. And so like they, that's when they started.

Q: Ok, but up to that time, was your life affected in any way? Up to the time that the Germans came into Hungary was your life changed in any way.

A: Well they started, had to stand in line for some bread. Everything was getting weaker and lower and not the normal kind of living.

Q: I'm talking about before the Germans came in.

A: Yes, yes it started that way.

Q: Life was changing.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

12

A: Yes.

Q: And then the next change, the next thing that you remember?

A: Oh and when they came in, they were taking over businesses. They were taking over any buildings or people that people owned, like the movie theater. The big movie theater that my father was closest to, the owner had built a second floor. He had an extra apartment for himself there also. A huge lounge where the people when they came to the movie theater and had to wait, they went up there and sat and relaxed. And now I'm going to tell you the story.

So I would go and take my friends to the movies and they had – oh and the German soldiers took over the second floor. They took over the owner's apartment. They were staying up there. And when you went to the movies they had a, you know half way through they let you out. Then you walked around and –

Q: Intermission.

A: Intermission. And there were SS soldiers roaming around there in the lobby and since they were talking German and I don't know how it happened that I started to answer them. And they didn't know I was Jewish and they said we are going to wipe all the Jews off the face of the earth. And me, wise guy Agnes, 13 years old, said I am Jewish too. And he said oh no, no we didn't mean that. That isn't what we meant and they tried to make it look better. They were showing me their families' pictures, their babies and so we went back to the movies. When I came home and I told my mother about it, she says from now you don't go out of the house. Because I was a young girl, 13. I was not a child as such, but I was.

Q: What was your first reaction when you saw a German soldier in uniform, an SS officer? Was it frightening? To see?

A: No because they did not have anything to do with us, except in that movie theater when they were talking to –

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

13

Q: When you saw a swastika, did that have any meaning to you?

A: They were not obvious in our lives.

Q: The Germans invaded Hungary. You continued to go to school and be with friends and then what was the next change?

A: When they said you had to go to a ghetto, that all the Jews had to go into a ghetto. And the ghetto, the first one was an area of 33 streets and we had friends there who lived there and they let us move in with them at that time. Because we had to be in that area.

Q: How much warning did you get? How much time did you have to move from one to the other?

A: Not much.

Q: What does a 13 year old girl take with her? What did you take with you to the new –

A: Well basically some clothes. Very little. Because we didn't have a lot of things like here. And blankets and pillows and just basic –

Q: Did you take any favorite books or anything favorite that you personally loved and wanted to keep with you?

A: I might have taken something but we didn't have a lot of toys and books and things. We didn't have a lot. So basically –

Q: Just the essentials.

A: The essentials, yes.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

14

Q: How did you parents explain this to you and your younger sisters that you have to move?

A: Well I was old enough.

Q: To understand.

A: To understand. But the children, it wasn't, you know didn't need any explanation.

Q: You had grown up in an apartment?

A: It is –

Q: What you grew up before, was it a house or an apartment?

A: It was a –

Q: Townhouse?

A: It was not a house, not an apartment. It was a garden, it was like a small house.

Q: So then you moved into the ghetto. Can you describe the conditions there?

A: Well it was very nice. The people that we knew had a nice place. And we were not there very long. And they started to bomb Hungary. And actually they started, not in the ghetto. They started to bomb where we lived at first, in like a small house. But not like the American kind of houses. And they were bombing and we had to go down to the shelter. And my grandmother's sister Johanna, she would not go. She didn't hear the sirens to go. She didn't hear the airplanes and the bombing and we told her we had to go down. She says no. She sat down by the window and she was praying from her prayers book. So she stayed there while we were down below. And when we came back up, all around, they had bombed the area. But where she sat was perfect. She didn't even hear the bombs because that window where she sat was perfect.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

15

Q: What was a typical day in the ghetto like? Did you just sit inside?

A: Just it was a normal home that they had. The children were not in those days and in that kind of times, it was not like you. I don't recall us doing anything on the outside. They wouldn't want us to go outside.

Q: Then did you move to another place? How long did you stay in that –

A: At the very end, from there, they, it was an empty, in a factory, how do you call. Brick. A brick factory. And it had a place outside, a huge one, no sides. Only an awning over it. And we were there.

Q: How did your family know to go there?

A: Well they made us. The Germans came and they brought everybody how they let us know, I don't know. But everybody had to move in there. That was the next step before Auschwitz. And it, all you could take with you from your home was what you could carry with you in your hands. So we took blankets and pillow and whatever necessity we could carry with us in our hands. Because the people that we stayed with initially they had a home. And we were ok there. But –

Q: Do you remember being very frightened?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: And how did your mother and your father explain to you –

A: Well I do want to tell you something. When, the last time, just before we moved to the ghetto the first time, we had to leave our home, lock the door and give them the key. So as we stepped outside, last, after we locked the door, gave up the key, the mailman came and brought a postcard addressed to me. From my father. Because when they caught my father, they put him

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

16

in a camp in Hungary, in some kind of – and that was for political prisoners. Because he would, he took off the star. So –

Q: Do you know the name of the camp he was in?

A: No. We never knew. So the card said, Agnes, you are, you should help your mother with your sisters and you are now old enough to read Tolstoy's War and Peace and it is on the shelf and he exactly explained where it was located. He hid it. And it was too late to get it. The reason why he was saying that I'm old enough to read it and tell me he was hoping. He didn't know that we were going to the ghetto and he wanted us to, me to take the book, wherever we went. But it wouldn't have done any good because they would have taken, they took everything away from us anyway. So. That was – and, and then we were under the –

Q: You're in the brick factory.

A: In the brick factory. We were there for I don't know, one week or two weeks. I really cannot judge anymore how long, but not that long. And they were ready to load us up in car wagons and take us, destination Auschwitz.

Q: How much food did you have in the brick factory?

A: They brought some, they brought some but it wasn't very much. I offered to help serve. Actually they asked me how I could help and I don't know if I helped in the kitchen maybe one day. To do dishes or whatever that was. But that was it. Loaded us up and on the way to Auschwitz. We didn't really know where we were going. But my father was gone already you know, taken away before.

Q: He never came back.

A: Never came back. And I got the research here and can I tell you what it said.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

17

Q: Sure.

A: It said that from Hungary they took him to Auschwitz, but only for two days. From Auschwitz to Dachau, not Dachau. Another camp and from there to Bergen-Belsen and that was the last stop. The last information. And when I called my aunt who is older than I am and she was in Germany and after the war, she stayed for a while. I told her what they said to me about my father. And she said Bergen-Belsen, that's where they were killing them. That's why they had no more information after that. That was it.

Q: Now you're leaving the brick factory. What emotional state was your mother in, do you remember? Was she holding herself together or?

A: Yes. I wrote that she was only 35 years old but she had showed strength and did not show any fear and my grandmother also. She held some sisters' hand and she also was very strong. And gave us a lot of strength, not to, not to know really what was going to happen.

Q: When you were in the brick factory, did you get together with any of the other children your age?

A: No, no.

Q: You stayed with your family?

A: We stayed there. We were in one spot.

Q: Now you're going on the train to go to Auschwitz, but you said you didn't know where you were going.

A: Right.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

18

Q: Did Auschwitz at that time have any meaning for you?

A: Auschwitz.

Q: The name?

A: No, no.

Q: No meaning.

A: No.

Q: Tell me about the train ride, what the conditions were that you remember.

A: No it was how they load cows in there. They had no windows and so it was dark and there were no toilets in there. There was nothing. It was just a box.

Q: And so you and your family stayed together in the car?

A: Yes. And, yes. And cried and cried.

Q: Were you able to lie down at all to go to sleep?

A: No.

Q: Didn't have enough room.

A: Nothing, nothing.

Q: How long did the trip take?

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

19

A: No idea. No idea. You don't know.

Q: Then you arrived at Auschwitz.

A: At Auschwitz. We arrived in the middle of the night and they separated me from my mother and grandmother and my great aunt and my sisters. They said that women, they took women from 18 to 35 that they put in one group. So they took me, the SS took me and put me in with the women from 18 to 35.

Q: Did you look older than your age?

A: No. I didn't. I will show you sort of a picture afterwards. I was a sweet little frail little child, blue eyed and some blond hair and they – but I could speak German fluently and I said please, let me go with my mother. I am only 13 years old. And he said no, you stay there. He knew what would happen if I went with them. Then another SS came and I asked him and he said ok, go ahead. And the first SS said no, you stay there. And when they put my family, mother grandmother, the old people and my mother was holding the sisters' hand so they put them in the shower and gas came out. Then they put the women and me in a shower. Before we went in the shower we had to drop all our clothes on the floor and whatever else we had with us. And –

Q: How does a 13 year old girl feel about doing something like that? Do you remember being embarrassed or humiliated –

A: Well it was humiliated because you didn't know what was happening. We went in and the shower, when we came out, we were naked and then you had to pick up any of the outfits on top of the pile. Take one and put it on. And just happens so that the one on top when I came out, the one on top was a white flowered very long, of a woman's, an adult's dress, thin, real thin, summer one. It was June but in Auschwitz it was bitter cold. And I had to put it on. And when can I tell you, and they had, they had latrines outside and it was only some boards across. You had to sit on that. But there was no paper, no nothing and the German soldiers were standing behind you with guns. And so when we came out, I picked up that dress and it was lucky for me

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

20

because after that whenever I went to the latrines, and I needed to use paper which we didn't have, I tore off a piece of the bottom of my dress and I used this. And then after a while the dress almost fit me.

So when we came out they got us ready to go on wherever. We didn't know where and that's when they took us to Auschwitz. We had to march for quite a while. Oh, and because it was so cold, my mother tore off no she had, no. she had a scarf and she put it on my head which made me look older. And that is why I even survived, because I was not as tiny and young as my sisters. This 11 year old and I was 13. I wasn't much bigger or, or older looking.

Q: Now you've finished, you've gotten your dress on and then they take you to a barracks where

–

A: No, no. We marched, we marched for a long time.

Q: To where?

A: And made beatings to walk faster and no food and when we got to Auschwitz, they loaded us into barracks, about 1200 people in one barrack. Which means there were no beds, there were no blankets. There was nothing. You had to sleep on the floor and with 1200 people in it, you didn't even have much room. People were kicking each other at night. And –

Q: Did you know anybody there from home?

A: Not from home.

Q: Did you see any familiar faces?

A: No, but later on I had some, I made friends with people. There was one girl. I was 13, she was 18. Her name was Blanca Brown and we were like family, like sisters. And I'm going to tell you, you heard of Mengele. Well Mengele would come to make selections to take the skinny people, the sick looking ones. And he pulled them out of the line and put them inside the barrack

Interview with Agnes Hoffman **January 10, 2014**

21

until the search was finished. And that night a bus or truck came and they loaded those sick looking people on and took them to the gas chamber. And killed them because they had no use for sick people.

Only what they figured is 18 to 35 people who could eventually go and work in their factories. Now while I was, it's very important to me. While I was in Auschwitz, we were, Blanca and I were very close. And because she was already a nurse back in Hungary before they took her away young, they had, they put her in the infirmary to help the German nurse. One day the SS came when they had the selection, when Mengele put a young woman inside the barrack that happened to have been Blanca's best girlfriend from home. They put her in and Blanca knew what was coming. That night they would take her away and kill. So she tried to get her out of there. And they had only little window like very narrow little bitty window on top, up high. You could not get in or out and so she found a box and I don't know how because I can't recall any place that's possibly could have found one.

So she stood on the box, reached in and tried to pull her girlfriend out the window so she doesn't get killed. But they noticed it. They saw it and they put her in with her which means she would be killed. The nurse from the infirmary walked into the barrack and said to her, Blanca what are you doing here. Get back to work. She saved her life. That was most, most fantastic thing. So after a while –

Q: To go back to – did you get a tattoo? Did you get a number?

A: No because we got there in the middle of the night. They did not give tattoos. Otherwise I have none but –

Q: And did you keep your hair.

A: Oh, no, no. I'm glad you mentioned. They shaved your head and when, before we were marching to Auschwitz, I tore off a piece from the bottom, because it was freezing and tore off a piece of my dress and wrapped it around my head. And the German SS came to me, slapped me and pulled it off my back, head.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

22

Q: Did you, you're in Auschwitz now. You're in the barracks. Did you go to work at all?

A: No at Auschwitz there was no work. What they did was ridiculous enough. They had us go, carry bricks from one end of the camp to the other. And then back. That's it. For no reason at all. And after a while when I was so weak from weeks after that I could barely hold myself up, no less carry the bricks.

Q: What did they give you to eat?

A: In the morning black coffee or tea, mostly black coffee but they, we had us lined up five rows of people. So we had from the first to the last like that. We had, there were five people that they were giving coffee to in a pot. So they gave it to the first one. You drank some coffee, gave it to the person behind and then to the next one and sometimes by the time it came to the last one, it was all gone. That's all black coffee in the morning.

At noontime they had, everything was always that way in a, in one pot. It was a soup that was green, thin green thing. And when you drank it, you had dirt going into your mouth because it was grass. They pulled it out of the grass and put it in the soup pot. That's what they cooked. That was all. So I could not even drink that.

At night time they had, they cut the loaf of bread in small pieces. They gave you a slice of bread and you had either a piece of cheese which is one little slice and that was **Clodiglee** was the name of it, which was smelly cheese but it was very good cheese. Either the cheese or a piece, a little piece of margarine or a spoonful of jello, jelly, a spoonful. So one slice of bread with something on top. And –

Q: What did you know about your mother and your sisters at that point?

A: At that point the, you know in the barracks there was one woman always who had, from Poland who came two years before and they killed all of them except some of these young women that they put them in charge of the new transports. When they came they were in charge of the barrack. And they had one little room at the end of the barrack. It was one long, long empty, dirty room. And they had a small room back there and they had a little stove there that

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

23

these women had kept warm. They were not allowed to, these Polish women but they did because they had men come in from transports. Polish men were meeting the transports from Hungary. And do all the dirty work or what they had to do. And they would occasionally come and give these Polish or Czechoslovak women something that they would steal from the train. So they lit the stove and they could heat something. And now that was only for them. And they had another tiny little room very small with a bed. And they slept there. They had cover. These men had supplied them once and for all. And they didn't come, they couldn't come to visit. They came to do some work.

So these women gave me once in a blue moon they gave me a little something to drink or a little piece of bread because when I got my bread at night, when I slept, some of those women around me stole my bread. So they gave me a little something.

Q: Were there any women who helped others? In other words what was the atmosphere? Was it women helping women or, as you said somebody stole from you. But what about other –

A: Well it was rare. If you had somebody next to you that you were sleeping next to. And if they were hungry I guess they took the piece but it was not as a rule.

Q: Was it generally that women were helping other women to get through this?

A: Well we were together. We had the same problems and –

Q: Were you the youngest?

A: Yes I was the youngest, 13 because all the women were from 18 to 35.

Q: The only one that young?

A: Now at the -- oh yes, so then because I could speak German they made me a **lueforen** [ph], which means a messenger girl. Can you come closer? A messenger girl and they would send me oh and they gave me luckily, they gave me a jacket, a gray and blue striped jacket to wear and

Interview with Agnes Hoffman January 10, 2014

24

when it was bitter cold we had to stand outside for hours in wet and cold and I would have that on and it helped me. And so they would send me to the other barracks, to the women in charge or they would send me to the SS women who were guarding us. Or last of all they would send me to the gate, to the entrance, yeah to the gate to the SS soldiers with messages. I was always afraid to go there because I never knew what to expect, what's going to happen.

And but, there was one woman I wish I could find her. There was one older SS woman. Her name was Bruner and she was tough. But she, they all loved me because I was a child and I was a miracle child to be there with the women. So the people, these block guards or whatever in the barrack, the women that were in charge, they were not allowed to light the fire in the little stove. But and they used to put me outside the front of the barrack to watch if anybody was coming and if they did I had to run back and tell them and then they would put the fire out. So this time Bruner came. And I was watching. And I had no time to run back. She wanted to go back with me. So she went way back and she saw the fire in the little tiny stove. She said who did that. I said I don't know. The window was open and she said who was jumping out the window. I said I don't know. And she said was it someone who had hair or was, or did not. And I would not tell because those women had their hair. They didn't cut their hair and so she said was it a woman with or without the hair. I said just bare, no hair. And she knew that anybody who lit the fire who was in the back there it was the women who were in charge. And she loved the fact that I was so wonderful that I did not tell the truth because that woman would have had trouble. So I said it was no hair and she was sort of smiling and walked out.

And then this I have to tell you in a, before the rest of the story comes. But she loved me. And because I was such a, an innocent little child. And after at the end when they were dissolving Auschwitz, they sent all these women to factories and she came in and said **williste kleine mit de blauer algen** [ph], where is the little one with the blue eyes. And they said she went on a transport. Ah, that was, she was happy because she wanted to take me out of there. Out of Auschwitz. So there were wonderful people too who could do as little or as much as possible to help you.

Q: Did you see any bodies, any dead bodies, when you were in Auschwitz?

A: No.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

25

Q: You did not?

A: No. And when we, when they came from factories to pick people to go on the transport to work at the factory, others into cities, one there was a beautiful tall beautiful German SS, young SS woman who actually tried or wanted to get out of there with a Polish man. They were going to sneak away from there. But that was impossible. But she was very sweet and sweet to me always. And she said I'll tell you something. Don't go just with any transport. I will tell you what is the best and that's the one that you should go with. So but first the transports came and they were looking at the dainty fingers and somehow blue eyes are good eyes, blue eyes. And they picked me to go to that factory. And they also picked Blanca to go to that factory. It was such a thrill that we still were together. So she got me to change wherever I was, she got me out to go with that transport. So next day they took us. We marched and marched to **Weisswasser**. It was another city away. We had to march there. It was an ammunition factory.

Q: What month was this, do you know?

A: Oh who knew months? And so we were marching unbelievable hours, days. We didn't know. And we didn't get any food on the march there. And we got to this little town and lo and behold they had a house where they put us in there and they had bunk beds and they had some kind of water or shower or something. Once every in a blue moon you know they let us take a shower. But we had, you could wash your hands. There was water. You could wash your hands.

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Hoffman. This is track number two and you were talking about now being in this house with a little bit of water.

Agnes Hoffman: Yes, yes, yes. It was amazing. There was a bathroom. You could go to the bathroom and not outside. In the latrine. Because while we were in Auschwitz, they woke us up

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

26

at three in the morning to go to the latrine. And then back to sleep on the floor. So it was wonderful. Clean and we would sit on the bunk beds in the evening and we would talk about what we would eat when we got free. And we would only be able to think in association what we had. Bread, coffee, and soup. That's what, we never could remember any other food except to compare with what we had to eat. We got up very, very early in the morning. The stars were still shining. And we would march through the city, through the town, whatever, to the factory. And

—

Q: Were you still wearing your white summer dress that you had gotten?

A: Yes, the whole time. And it was amazing, the people. First of all the women, the SS women were local women who really did not know how to be bad. They, but after a while they taught them and a few of them were tough on us. But there was a family who had a little girl and as we were marching, the little girl ran out and gave me. She was looking. They knew I was a young child. She ran out and gave me some food and then ran back home, out. If they would have caught them they would have been punished. But they did not care. And they did that. It was fantastic. And she would come every so often and bring me something.

In the factory, where I was working, you had to have very delicate hands with, you had to straighten out tiny little wires which was part of an airplane part. And they were sort of twisted and you had to straighten them out. And that's what I was doing. Other, some people were blowing bulbs and heat with hot, with heat and they had tough work. But most of us were just doing parts of this for the airplane parts.

But they were standing behind us, the German and they made us work faster and faster. And we were -- and then we worked til late at night. And then they, we went back and they took us back home. Home. And the next day, we were there the longest time in Weisswasser. But it was better than Auschwitz.

When we started, we heard that there were airplanes coming and bomb these German factories and things. And they had us go outside and lie on the ground, on, and just be there while the bombs were coming. And we said thank God, maybe the bombs will hit them and we can get out of here. We were praying for that. But nothing happened. Then after some few months, we never knew what day it was or date or anything, then they moved us to another factory,

Interview with Agnes Hoffman January 10, 2014

27

Horneborg and if I tell you how one or the other was, I wouldn't know which one was which. So we were, I can say that one of the factories that we went to had, it was in a salt mine. Inside, that's where the factory was. And that's where we had to go. And it was hard to walk on the salt and all and that was a horrible place for us. So Auschwitz, Weisswasser, Port – oh **Portar**, **Portwesfall** was one before Hone, then Horneborg, port, no Horneborg, **Portal**, **Bendorf** [ph] was the worst. And when we got there, people, everybody was full, who were there, they were full of, a man is looking in here. What is he saying? Please, named us. You tell me. Ok. Bendorf was the worst place. It was filthy. The people were full of lice. And it was just horrible. You couldn't go to the bathroom. You could not have -- wash your hands or anything. It was just a horrible, filthy, dirty place. And we were there for a while. And from the, Port of Bendorf, then they sent us to Hamburg. And then they had a bestial SS who beat us a lot. And it was a scary horrible place where we just didn't know what was going to happen to us. He beat us. He just abused, abusive person, yeah SS.

Q: You're a young girl. Is this and this is happening to you. Did you talk it over with the older women about what was happening to all of you?

A: It happened to all of us the same way.

Q: I understand that. Is it something you shared with each other about your feelings or thoughts about what you all were going through? Or was it so traumatic that you –

A: Oh we were talking. We were all talking to each other about all this. What's going to be, what's going to happen. And it, yeah we talked but there –

Q: Were any of them very motherly towards you being such a young girl?

A: We were, we were all like close family so there were some girls and I think when they came to Sweden, one beautiful one. She got married there. But I feel and Blanca had a cousin and she came to America. And so we knew but otherwise, there we all stuck together.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

28

Q: About how many women were you with?

A: Thousand women in one barrack.

Q: No, but then when you left to go to the different factories.

A: Oh it was, I don't know how many fit in each –

Q: So now you're with this abusive guard. And you said he beat you –

A: Yes oh he was vicious. He was very, very vicious, very bad. But we were there for a little while.

Q: Did he beat you particularly? Did he – you were not beaten? Did he beat you?

A: No, no, no. But that was the last place. But when we were in the better places, like Weisswasser, we would dream about being home and we would sing and being, Blanca and the older girls, they were, when we marched. We had to march 100 kilometers one time and we would sing so the others don't cry.

Q: What did you sing?

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you remember the songs?

A: No.

Q: No songs.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

29

A: No, I don't know but we sang the whole time as we walked, we marched. We stuck together. And the unfortunate thing was well they had no use for children and babies. They took them all away. But one woman was pregnant. And she was due and Blanca took her into the barrack and she delivered a baby. And then she took the baby to the German nurse and asked her to take some care of. What they did was though, they destroyed the baby, most likely but she could not do anything. But she wasn't allowed to have a pregnant woman. She wasn't allowed anything. But we, sisters, that they had, the horrible brutal behavior of the SS by that time, it was all new SS, not the ones that were in Weisswasser. They had women, soldiers who were used to being bad. So it was very, very devastating.

Q: So the last factory, the last camp you were in?

A: The last place was Hamburg and I don't know if it was a factory or that was just a, I don't know which is which. I know that we were working in ammunitions factory in the beginning. I think. I don't want to quote Weisswasser was the big one that where we were there the longest. But we were working in other factories but I don't want to say it because if people will know there, they may say they didn't have one there. But I know that there were places that were out of sight. Like the salt mine. In there they were hiding those factories there. So they, we went through the hardest, the toughest and it was a miracle that I survived. I kept saying I wish we were all, did we wished that God would take us away so we wouldn't have to suffer any more. I was a skeleton by then. And at the end of the war, Hamburg was the last place. I had sores. I had --

Q: Lice?

A: What?

Q: Lice?

A: Oh I had lice from Bendorf. And it was -- you were not a human being anymore. Skeleton. I was a skeleton. I --

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

30

Q: Let's now talk about the liberation.

A: Yes, yes. So –

Q: You're in Hamburg right?

A: Hamburg.

Q: For liberation.

A: Yes. Ok. So one day we had a girl who they let us get out of the wagon to be outside the wagons. And one day she comes in and says I have news. Today they are going to cut the bread, the loaf of bread, cut the bread in six, in four. And we are going to get some other margarine and things but they will cut it in four which means you get a bigger piece, and not cut in six. And then when it came, he said no, it was still cut in six. That they lied to her. And we still had the same thing. And we always said oh, that girl, she always comes with these news and they are never true. So we did not know that the war was over until she, yeah then she came in and says the war is over and Hitler is dead. And we said ah, she comes with these stories. We did not believe her.

Then they let us get off the, out of the wagons. And there was an engine, a train on the other track. And the engineer gave me a cup of hot water and I wrote in my story I couldn't believe it. I could wash my dirty hands and face. And then he gave me and **Maggi** cube and from the rest of the water I put that in the hot water so I could have like a chicken soup.

Q: It was like a bullion?

A: A bullion and I said at home the chicken soup didn't taste as good as this. But again he also said the war is over and the head had fallen. Hitler is dead. And you are going to Denmark. We could not believe that we were free. So they loaded us in real trains and they took us, we really

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

31

took them to Denmark. And you asked the questions you want to ask. Then I'll tell you about the –

Q: Is there anything else you wanted to talk about, about the factories and the labor camps? Anything that you wanted to include?

A: Oh well, oh I see. Except the fact that we, from early morning til 10:00 at night we got back to the, to our quarters. And just –

Q: Were you still wearing that white dress?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Still?

A: Yes, and freezing. Freezing.

Q: At the time of liberation, you were wearing that dress?

A: Yes, yes. There was nowhere, and luckily the jacket saved my life too. Because you know how these jackets are. They are not, they were heavier.

Q: So you're 14 years old at the time of liberation?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Had you started to menstruate at all?

A: No, actually I started in the ghetto. For the first time, I didn't even know what it was. But they gave us the water they gave us had this medicine in there that stopped you from getting it. So at that time I didn't have it yet.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

Q: So from then on you didn't have it?

A: After that I didn't get it anymore. And I don't remember then when I got it again. And –

Q: So now it's liberation and you said you're going to Denmark?

A: OK they said we're going to Denmark and we said we can't, that's not true. We were talking to each other. Because –

Q: Did you and the women do any kind of celebration when you really realized –

A: Wait, wait, wait, wait. They said it's not true because Hitler would kill us, murder us before. He would not let us be free again. He would kill us before, so it cannot be true that we are liberated. So but then I said but it was really true. They brought us to Denmark. And they put us in a school, empty school. They had fixed up bunk beds and white sheets and blankets and white nightgowns. We could not believe we got them.

Q: Is this in Copenhagen? Or where, in Copenhagen?

A: No. No. I don't, I don't remember. It was close to the border. So it was the most heavenly feeling. And then we sang and we talked about happy things and what we're going to do, when we get home and then –

Q: Did you think your mother was still alive?

A: No, no because the women that were there before, they said that they had put them in shower and they were gone. And, and then when I spoke to a lady here who researched it for me, my father. Because he was the only one that I knew nothing about and she reached, and then she sent me the information and she told me that the last place that they took him was Bergen-Belsen and no more news after that. And that's where they were killing them. So –

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

Q: So now you're in Denmark?

A: We're in Denmark and when we got, the train stopped. The people, the Danish people were rushing to us and brought us all kinds of things, cookies, chocolates, food, drink, everything. And little children and I wrote in my story that that was the most, the saddest thing because we remembered that our family were killed. They were gone. And we'll never see older people, Our elders and our children. We remembered that they are all gone. And what are we going to do now without the family. And you want me to –

Q: Keep going. So how long did you stay in Denmark?

A: So we stayed overnight and they brought us food and couldn't believe the wonderful things like oatmeal or things. They had to feed us light food for the first, in the beginning and we could have all we want. And it was terrific. The next day they put us on a ferry boat and took us across to Sweden, because Sweden went to Germany and asked them for, at the end of the war, and asked them to give, they should give them 5000 survivors. They wanted to take the Red Cross, wanted to take them to Sweden. And they did. That's why we went to Denmark and Sweden. So then we arrived in Sweden. Next day. And they took us to another big school. And again they had fixed up all the bunk beds and all the – they had us, they fed us wonderful foods again, all we wanted. And it was unreal. We – it was hard to really grasp that after one whole year we were free. And, but then they took all the people who were sick and to the hospital and that was one of them was me. And I also had an infection on my finger that was very, very, very bad. And they did surgery on it. You know, they took care of it and they fixed it. And then they x rayed and all the things. I was coughing. They found that I had a spot on my lung. I don't know here in America what you would call it but it was on one spot that was like it was a sign of lung trouble. And oh and in that wagon. You know when they put us in the wagon and pushed the wagon into the woods, when they opened it, I don't know if I mentioned, 54 people were dead in my wagon and I was one of the six that was still breathing. So when I came to Sweden, they had to put me together. They had to nurse me back to life. And I was in the hospital for a while. And after that they fed me and got me healthy and didn't let me

Interview with Agnes Hoffman January 10, 2014

34

out until I was ok. And there we were very close again with all our friends because we were in the same wagon. And they had a lot of visitors coming. First of all they had people from every paper in the world, overseas and Sweden and everywhere. My uncle in Australia saw this story and saw that I was alive. It was amazing. And so it took quite a while before they let me out of the hospital. I have some pictures, very little but I'll show it to you afterwards. And they put us in – they had us in the school yard and people were coming. We were locked, closed off from the public because we were sick, but when we were at the fence and the Swedish people came on the other side of the fence and they kept throwing things over to us. And because I was a small child, they threw a small suitcase, this little one. That was the most precious thing in my life. That was the only belonging that I had.

And there was a young man, Leonard, fantastic. He was a gymnast and terrific. I don't know. He was 20 maybe or 20, whatever. And he would come every day to the -- and one day he took his sister with Ann Marie and then she would come every day with him. And they said when you get out, will you please come and live with us. I said I'll tell you when we get out of here, they are going to take us to a school. But after I get out of the school, I will come to you. I would love to.

And when I came back ten years ago to Sweden, the newspapers came out because they came out the first time when I was there. They came out and they asked Leonard, how come that you got friendly with her, a child. He said that's because she was so sweet. She looked so sweet that I had to, a sweet, a child that I had to take care of her. You know have and Ann Marie, his sister, he wanted her to come and live with us. And their mother had died, long time before, but their father, **Fabro** Gustav, Uncle Gustav was the sweetest man in the whole wide world and he loved me like he loves his own children. And he pampered me. He was so – I lived with them for quite a while.

Q: How long did you live with them?

A: At least one year, at least. I don't remember, but I know at least a year.

Q: And then where did you go after, where in Sweden, what town in Sweden were you?

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

35

A: Ok, wait, wait. I'll tell you. First after we got out of that school

Q: The hospital?

A: And the, yes.

Q: Then you went to the school after the hospital.

A: And they took us first to **Visingsö** which was an island in Sweden, beautiful island. And there they had us in a school. They were teaching us. They had profess – they came from everywhere. They taught us everything and they were both Hungarians and Polish and young and boys and girls and women. But the women, they had little cute little houses. It was like a resort. And we were very happy there. And from there on, later on they sent us to a school up north. Was another school. And we were there for quite a while. And last of all, they brought us back to Stockholm and by then we were well and –

Q: When you keep saying they, you mean the Red Cross?

A: Yes oh yes. Red Cross or the UN or whoever, all the people that were giving us their lives. You know help. And –

Q: So now you're in Stockholm?

A: Yes, but outside of Stockholm was a town called **Helsingborg** and that's where they brought us. It was a boarding school. And then they had people coming from everywhere. There were actors, there were – I mean every kind of company or organizations that would come and wanted, and wrote articles and treated us to certain things. So when we got out of there, one day I have to tell you a story. One day that is after, in Sweden after camp, that was the last school. And one day I said to a girlfriend of mine, let's go visit another school on the other side of Stockholm

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

Q: You sound like a very independent young woman.

A: Yes, yes. Yes. Well they told us how to take the train and take the bus to the other school. By that time we knew what was around. So we got on the bus and we went to the school but I had – oh I had my little suitcase with me. And when we were in Stockholm, in the street we saw a lady munching on an ice cream cone. And we had a little bit of money, not much. And we were excited. We wanted one. So we went up to the guy, the cart and we said two please. And he opened the top and gave us and opened up the buns, hot dog. And that's and when we saw it we were shocked. We never had seen that. We wanted ice cream. So we gave him the money and got the hot dog. So we were ashamed of having it because in Hungary when you went to the market people were selling sausage, hot dogs. And that was not nice thing to do. You know. I know in Budapest and in big cities they would sell those things but we didn't know. Its children. And so what we did was I put the hot dogs inside the suitcase and I was going to throw it away when we got to a place.

So we went to the school and then we came, when the end of the day, we came back. We were standing at the bus stop waiting. And the bus came, had to rush to get on it. And I forgot the suitcase on, in the street outside the bus. So then oh my god, once I was on the bus, took off, I said I left my suitcase and so I asked the driver and he said you can call lost and found. And I didn't even know what it was or the name. I called next day. I called lost and found and they said can you describe it. I said yes, a small suitcase. And he said what was inside of it. And I said a cold dog. Oh no he didn't ask then. So we went to pick it up next day and that's when he asked what was inside. And when I – I was so embarrassed, opened it up and there was the hot dog. And he laughed so hard and gave me the little suitcase.

And I had a fantastic life for a year with Ann Marie and Leonard. They were brother and sister to me. And then the newspapers came out to Ann Marie's, to their house. And they wrote the article. Oh but I forgot to say is that when we got back, the first thing they did to us before we even stepped into any clean place, they disinfected us. Cleaned us. No lice, no, no nothing so we were clean already. And but Ann Marie was working for a company but she was only a few maybe, six, seven years older. Maybe she was 23 or 25 but she was like a mother to me. And Leonard was like a brother who spoiled me and he was a gymnast and when he went on a trip

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

37

overseas with the gym, national gymnasts. He came back and he brought me a little ring from some other Middle Eastern country. I haven't got it. Somebody got it from me.

Q: Did you want to go back to Hungary at that point?

A: No.

Q: Did you have any feelings about –

A: No, no.

Q: You did not want to.

A: Not then, no.

Q: So then after you stayed with them –

A: So I, from Hungary. No I didn't go back to Hungary til ten, ten years.

Q: No, I meant did you want to go back.

A: No, no. I wanted to come to America. But first in Sweden, I was in Sweden for five years and they sent me to boarding school and they, then when I got out and I lived with Ann Marie, then I got a job at, with five of – by then I could, I taught myself Swedish. I looked the words up in the dictionaries and I was one of the few who could speak Swedish after such a short time. So I let's see.

Q: Now it's 1950.

A: Yes, but before that, in Sweden, I got a job with five of the top women's magazine to translate stories because I could speak languages from other countries to, into Swedish and that was such

Interview with Agnes Hoffman January 10, 2014

38

a thrill that here is a greenhorn who can work in, to do this for a magazine. It was unheard of, unbelievable. So but before that I had my first job there. I'm telling you about the fun one. Before they were making marzipan in big kettle and all I had to do is stir the big kettle with the marzipan. But after that I got that good job and it was fantastic. And we had this is – we had lots, in Helsingborg in that boarding school, we had lots and lots, the last place, lots of visitors. And they were like I said actors. They were pianists, they were – to entertain us and things. They had a Hungarian ballet dancer who had a place. You know she had a school to teach ballet. And she would come to the boarding school to check to see who would be good to bring to her school.

It's so funny. And of course I'm dancing with the movements and because my father used to teach me to dance. And I did Latin and tango and fox, everything, but here when the music was on, I was gyrating with my Latin movements. She says no, that won't do. No ballerina. So that was very funny. And then we, yes and then we had a pianist. A young man that was very good looking. And all the girls were surrounded him, with him. And I did not. I was a child still but I was still, I didn't. And so that was **Yalmar**, Yalmar. And that was the one time that I saw him. Then many, many years later, I mean towards the last year in Sweden, I was in, at a party and whom do I see but Yalmar. Then he started to take me out. And he had asked me to marry him. And I wanted to go to America. I said no but I – here I was a young woman before I was – oh thank you, thank you.

Before I was a child and now I was a young woman that he asked me to marry him. He wanted me to stay in Sweden and I just turned him down and I said when I come to America, if I don't like it I'll write to you of course. That did not happen but it was exciting to be considered a human being after that. So then Ann Marie said – oh we joined, they joined. They were in a sports club where the sports club had a base in, close to a wood. They had a building and the families could come with children or the young people to come and for weekends. And they had all kinds of outdoor sports and all so Ann Marie said to me, the vacation is coming. And we, the other girl, **Bisa** from the building, other friend and her, we're going to the sports club's headquarters, the ten. Are you going? I said no. Because I read a magazine that the Swedish peace organization will pay for any young people, anywhere in the world to come to outside of Stockholm to a farmer that will give you a job for six weeks and give you and pay you for the work. And you had to sleep and live in tents. I said that's where I'm going because they want to

Interview with Agnes Hoffman **January 10, 2014**

39

prove that young people, all kinds of people in the world can live together in peace. And I said that's where I'm going.

So when I went there they came out to visit us from the UN. And the Swedish organization. They said we are going to Switzerland to a UN world conference for three weeks. Would you like to go with us? We will cover all your expenses. And that was because I could speak all the languages and the Swedes at that time hardly knew English. They did. So I said yes, I would love to go and then in the mean, I said I'd love to go. As I said we're going in six cars and with the statesmen and their wives.

But then in the camp where I was in the tents, this young woman stopped by one night and said you know I was hitchhiking here and a man, 65 year old man, had given me a ride. And he asked me if I would want to be a governess for his 11 year old child, son. And he lived in a mansion and he was a president of the biggest steel factory. And she said I would have loved to but I told him that I'm getting married so I can't. But Agnes, judging you, the way that you speak languages, you are acting perfect for a job like that and I recommend you to the man. So she wrote to him and he invited me to his mansion to see if I would like it.

So when I got there, the chauffeur met me and then they drove into the front of the mansion. It was like a dream. And he, after a while, after he talked to me for a while. He said I'd love for you to come and take the job. I said I would love to but I can't because I am going to Switzerland to a UN world conference for three weeks. And he said I will wait. You come back and after that you come here. So I did and I took the job of a dream. The mansion was absolutely breath taking. He had all the servants, all the workers but he wanted someone who could always be a family member so when he went. He traveled a lot for business and he wanted someone who was close to the boy, not just the servants. So I said ok. I'll be back, yeah when I came and I took the job. My friends were dukes, baronesses and barons, all and every weekend he had lots of guests. He had this was his second marriage for the 11 year old boy and a six year old girl who was with her mother. But he had grown son who was running their plant in South America. He had a daughter who was in New York in a theater. She was a designer, stage designer. They were grown people. They were and so it was fantastic that he had chosen me to be able to meet all those famous people. They were all kinds of, and locally. And there was an engineer's hotel there. That he was associated with too. And every time he got an invitation to any big affair there, they sent me an invitation too.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

40

Q: When you were with these people, did you tell them about what you had experienced during the war?

A: I guess I did.

Q: You did tell them?

A: Oh yes, yes. And –

Q: Let's move on a little bit. So you stayed there and then how did you get to the United States?

A: Well. Finally I, oh I had been waiting for the Hungarian quota was filled and I had to wait for five years before it opened. And when it opened, then I could travel.

Q: This is 1950?

A: 1950. And my uncle, see I had a few relatives who left Hungary 25 years before that. They lived in Cleveland and in New York. And my father was in touch with them. My family, we were in touch with them the whole time and he looked, his, he looked at these Jewish organizations with – had lists of survivors and he saw my name only. My whole family, nobody was on there but me. So he wrote to me. And it was a thrill of a life time. And he sent me a ticket to come to America and finally I had the visa and –

Q: What did America mean to you as a young woman at that point in your life?

A: Life. And I wrote and a new life started for me. And by that time I was one year in concentration camp, five years in Sweden, it was six years later. And I've gone through so many different lives there, but this is going to be my future life.

Q: Did you come by boat?

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

41

A: I came on the Queen Elizabeth. That's where he had the ticket for me on that. And I came to America.

Q: What was it like to get off the boat and step onto soil of the United States?

A: Oh, it was, it was like a dream, a miracle. I could not believe that I was in America.

Q: Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you came?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Did that have any meaning for you?

A: Well I knew about that because my uncle in Australia, like I mentioned so many, they were all writers and he wrote a story about New York and he's never been here but how much he read and he described everything about New York, every little nook and so when I saw that I couldn't believe. And I had a cousin who met me. I had another uncle in New York and had two – a son and a daughter. These were grown people. Grown, not like me. And they met me at the ship and oh my god and I stayed with them for a few days. And on and on. My life was a dream after that. In New York. I lived in New York, but my uncle was in Cleveland and after a while sent me a ticket to come to Cleveland to meet all my relatives in Cleveland. It was just –

Q: Did you live in Cleveland after that?

A: No because he uncle Dave, David. He, his wife had a sister in New York who had daughters my age. But they were in Cleveland, they were older people so they said I should come and stay with the sister. And they were my age daughters. So I was in New York and from there it goes on and on.

Q: Just generally tell me where you were then after that?

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

42

A: Pardon.

Q: After that tell me just generally where you were. So you went back to New York.

A: First I was in New York and first I was staying with his, with the relatives. Then there was another family that had daughters and they were closer to the city. The other family was way out and so I lived with them. And I was getting offers from people to work in different capacity. You know like governesses and I think maybe I tried it one time but I -- was an actress that was working and wanted someone to watch it. But I didn't stay. That wasn't what I came there for. And then I got a job counting buttons in a, the packaging buttons, 144, one gross in each box. And I was doing that briefly because the owner liked me for her, for his son and that's why he hired me. He wanted me to be close by to his son. But I left that job because I could speak the languages and once I went to the airport. That was the Idyllwild airport, now it's the international --

Q: Kennedy.

A: Kennedy, yes. And I went out there for some reason and one of the airlines said would you like to work for -- it was Scandinavian airlines because I could speak the language. And the family I lived with, lived close to the train station so I could go out there. I said yes. So I got the job. I was on the switchboard. I was greeting people, important people and it was very exciting job, meeting all these very famous people. Then Canada, let's see. Canada Airlines was it. No I'm trying to think.

Q: That's ok. Let's move along a little bit. So --

A: Anyway so ok. So they hired me for ticket agent and they trained me and I could travel free, although I was working. I didn't have much time to travel. But there they mostly hired me to greet the famous people when they arrived and they wanted -- they had to change planes. I would take them to the lounge and entertain them and take them back to the next airplane when they

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

43

had to go. And I had politicians, I had Rock Hudson. I had Steve Cochran which you would not remember in the movie and many other famous people who came. And it was, that was very exciting. Steve Cochran wanted to take me away but I was not ready for that. And so I was working there and the ticket agent which made me meet the whole world. And I was in a uniform and oh it was just fabulous life.

And then I got my visa to come to America and that was fantastic. Oh and then in the meantime, Yalmar, the pianist, he begged me to stay in Sweden. But nothing could keep me from coming to America.

Q: When did you meet your husband?

A: Oh. I met him couple years later but let me see first. And I came to New York

Q: Yeah you went to New York. You worked at the airport. And then, is that when you met your husband, after that?

A: I met my husband at a family. It wasn't a party. It was a funeral and after the family, relatives. It was not my immediate family. It was my cousin's family who was another family. And that's when I met him. And he started to call me and date me and –

Q: Was he born in Europe or was he –

A: No.

Q: He's American. He was born in America.

A: No, he was born in America and lived –

Q: And what year did you get married?

A: 19, let's see I came here in 50. 53. 53.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

44

Q: And do you have any children?

A: I have four fabulous children. Shauna and I have Kerry. I have Keith. And Shauna, Kerry and Keith. And –

Q: Do you have another son?

A: And Craig. No but I started to think, not of the name, not because of the name. Don't you dare tell him because I didn't forget him. I was thinking ahead.

Q: Then where did you live after you got married?

A: You see that's why I got slowed down because of –

Q: Can we talk a little bit now about –

A: Yes, I will tell you. I'll tell what you want to know.

Q: I want to talk to you now a little bit about your thoughts and your feelings because you said you got married, you had the children. Do you think about, now that you're a little bit older do you think about what you went through even more. At this time in your life? About your wartime experience, your childhood.

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: Do you think about it a lot?

A: I think about it a lot on holidays and I imagine how we were together on holidays and whenever I speak and I speak all the time about the Holocaust, everywhere.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

45

Q: You speak publicly about the Holocaust?

A: Publicly, yeah and I think all the time, a vision in front of my eyes. I dream, I think about that all the time.

Q: Do you sometimes feel like you're two different people, somebody on the outside to the public and somebody different inside?

A: No. I am all that story when I speak. I –

Q: It's your inside speaking in a sense.

A: The people love to hear the stories. The children love to hear the stories because what the average person had heard was either on television or in a movie or in a book. Or newspaper. And they never heard the personal stories about the person.

Q: You said you do speak publicly. You, in a sense lost your childhood because you were so young –

A: Yes, right.

Q: When the war started. Do you feel you got it back or you just lost it? Did you ever get your childhood back?

A: Well yes with my children.

Q: With your children.

A: I want to tell you something.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

46

Q: I just wanted to ask you though this one question. When your children were the age that you were when the Germans invaded Hungary, did that bring those memories back, when they were 13 let's say?

A: No. I was so happy with my children that I did not connect them with such things.

Q: When did you start telling them about what you had gone through?

A: I don't remember. I guess when they knew it for, at a quite young age because I was up to speak from day one. And in school they learned, that's when they learned in school. And that's when I would tell them something.

Q: But you were very open with them about what you had experienced, when they were what – teenagers?

A: Yes, oh yes, yes. Now I forgot.

Q: What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? Do you remember having any specific thoughts when Adolf Eichmann was put on trial? In Israel? Do you remember that time?

A: Well, I don't really remember exactly. I was inside of me I was connected to that but I try not to –

Q: Do you have any feelings for Hungary now? Do you feel Hungarian? How would you describe yourself?

A: No, I don't feel Hungarian but I do, I mean I don't, it still is a life of mine that I loved. And I still, I still, I say things to the children. I taught them Hungarian words and sentences and Shauna and I and two friends went back with us to Hungary and had a – I was very happy that they could see where I grew up. And Hungary is beautiful and I wish that I could take all of them with me to Hungary even now.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

47

Q: What was it like for you to become an American citizen?

A: Well it was very exciting. Of course I got my green card and then when I got married, I turned American right away. And actually I felt like an American when I came here after that. And I was in the world, in that world, in that life. I had jobs. I had a job that no other woman had ever had here in America. I was the first lady commodity broker in America, trading commodities and still today there are a lot of women in the field but nobody trades commodities. I was the only woman. For 11 years I was the only woman. That's how I raised my children. After they went to school and it was wonderful because I dropped them off at school or they took the bus to school in the morning. And I was home in the afternoon because the markets close at 1:00. And --

Q: What city did you raise your children in?

A: In, I was going to say in Helsingborg. In Chicago. You see I still dream about Sweden and Helsingborg.

Q: I was going to ask you in a sense about that. Do you dream about your life in Europe in Hungary or in Sweden? DO you find that you dream a lot about that?

A: Oh yes, it comes up in different times, different occasions, yes. Specially when I tell them about our funny expressions about things.

Q: Do you get reparations?

A: Yes, from Germany for damaging for see from, in the factories. My hands are shaky and after the war also about my lung. But this is still --

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany today?

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

48

A: People have asked me often, do you hate them? No. I lived in Germany when my husband was in the army and we were sent overseas. I lived there with him. And there were many wonderful people and I loved it. And it isn't the country that you hated. It is the people, the bad people that have done terrible things. And that, those are the ones I hated. Otherwise people there are good and bad people everywhere and I love the good people.

Q: Do you feel that you're a different person because of what you went through, that if you hadn't gone through and had the difficult –

A: Well I am much more loving to people in general. Because I have been through so many bad things. But good people you treasure them and you nurture them and you love them so I don't hate anybody. Of course those who did wrong to us they're gone. They got their reward.

Q: Do you think the Holocaust could happen again?

A: I hope not, not if I can tell the world about it. No. There was something I wanted to tell you.

Q: I'm sorry. Do you remember what it is.

A: I'll think a minute.

Q: Did it have to do with life in the United States or back in –

A: I'll think a minute. If not, it wasn't important.

(someone speaking in background to remind interviewee of what she might want to say)

A: Oh yes, yes. Blanca. Yes a most important thing. I mentioned that Blanca was a nurse and that she pulled out her, tried to do. Well we came to America but we lost each other. We thought the other one was dead but we each of us were, we came to New York. We found out later on we both lived in New York and we both lived in Chicago. And I have, I worked then as a

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

49

commodity broker. And one day I was in a financial building in the lobby waiting. I had bought a, from Mexico I bought a big beautiful vase and it was next to me in the lobby and I was waiting for a friend to pick me up to take me home. And the, I was watching the people. And the elevator door opened and this woman stepped out and I said gee, she looks so familiar. And she wore French couture outfit, beautiful. And I yelled over to her. I couldn't leave the, my vase. I said you. You, you over there. I know you. So she came over to me. And she said what's your name? I heard her Hungarian accent so I said Aggie in Hungarian. Aggie. Aggie ooh, ooh. I am Blanca. I said Blanca. Then we both crying and there was a priest in the lobby and he came over and he blessed us. And then I guess the people in the lobby called the newspapers, the Chicago Tribune. And they took the story. They took our pictures and they took our stories to AP, UP, all over America and all over the world. And my uncle in Australia saw the article, the picture. And Blanca, this was 23 years later. And our homes were 20 minutes from each other but it was in an area that I never went to that part of the town. And after that it was on my birthday. I said that was the most fantastic birthday present I ever had. And then we saw each other constantly and we lived and we loved each other. And it was so fantastic. Then, and she got married and I moved to Texas and then her husband died and she went into a home here. Where am I?

Q: In Chicago?

A: No, in California. That's why I said where am I? In California and she lived there and just about eight months ago she passed away. I had visited her several times. We talked on the phone and her nephew sent me her album. And I look at it twice a day. And the greatest joy, happiness that I had while we were together there and it's –

Q: Wonderful story. How did you get the training to be a commodities broker?

A: I had a neighbor. I lived in Evanston, outside of Chicago and I had a neighbor who was a floor trader and one day he said, I'd like to take you down to see the trading floor. I said I'd love to. So we went and he introduced me to the number one wheat trader in the world. That was a company and he was doing work with them. And he started, the man started to talk to me about a

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

50

half hour. And after he finished he says, would you like to be a commodity broker? I said well I tell you. I would love to when my youngest child is in school all day.

Q: How much education had you had up to then? Did you do any college in the United States?

A: No but in Sweden we studied for three years all year round and that was the equivalent of college. Everything plus more than what they study. And so then two years later he called me. He said are you ready? I said yes. He was fantastic and they, and then they coached me. They taught me and 11 years. It was so fantastic. I made extra money to give the children but I was home before they got home from school.

Q: What kind of work did your husband do?

A: What kind of work, he was a sales rep for big chains. Yeah. So and then after I got out of the commodities, then I turned to be a sales rep. I came to Texas and I was, I had a business partner. He did mostly the, you know drove me to the different big chains and he entertained the customers and he gave me his brilliance because he had three of the biggest plants in America before he retired from that. And so we traveled and I was selling. I was doing the selling and it was for how many years? Also 11 years. And then I retired and I opened the shop and I did that for a while. Then I retired for good.

Q: Since you lived at a time and in a country where people's civil rights were taken away from them in Hungary were you in any way active in the civil rights movement here in the United States. Obviously your children were very young.

A: No. no.

Q: And you had other things to do.

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

51

A: No. First of all when I was in Hungary I was too young to know about it and here I'm not, I'm a peaceful person. I'm not interested. I don't want to hear any more bad things about anything, anybody, any people.

Q: Do you read about the Holocaust at all? Or see movies or films about the –

A: Well first of all I did see Schindler's List and I have read a lot. Years before. Not anymore. But a lot of years before and I lived for my children. I was lucky that I have them or I am lucky I have the most fantastic children and not because I am partial. But they all have had terrific education. They all have accomplished tremendous things. My daughter Shauna is an actress. And for 25 years and also wanted a profession. And she is a psychotherapist also. And she had seen a lot of the world and she is active in all aspect of the show business. And in therapy.

Q: Were you, because of what you went through, were you more protective of your children when they were growing up?

A: I was yes.

Q: More so than an average American family?

A: Yes. You know what I used to say. I could pick up my skirt, a big skirt that I didn't have. I felt like I want to lift up my big skirt and put them all under the skirt to safe to –

Q: To save them. So you were more protective?

A: Oh yes, definitely.

Q: In what ways?

A: And I divorced when the children were 2, 5, 6, and 8 and a half. So I raised them by – all alone. And they came out pretty good. And the other two boys are in the stock brokerage

Interview with Agnes Hoffman
January 10, 2014

52

business. They are quite successful and they, youngest one is not the oldest one is a – excuse me I can't.

Q: You mean the business that he's in?

A: Yes. Is mortgage banking. Mortgage banking. He has his own business, own company. This is what happens when you become 83. Excuse me.

Q: Before we end is there any message you wanted to give to your, I assume you have some grandchildren? Do you have –

A: Yes I have five beautiful grandchildren.

Q: Is there any message you wanted to give to them before we end?

A: I tell that not only for the grandchildren, but to all children. Love your, love all the people. Love them in your life. Love your family. Love your teachers because I have a lot of students, a lot of teachers. Don't let the bad things happen. The future of America is in your hands. You have to see to it that things like that never, never happen again. And you will and your children and your grandchildren will be safe forever.

Q: Beautiful note to end on.

A Thank you. I did want to, I forgot what I was going to say.

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Hoffman.

(end)