It's April 12, 1983. I'm interviewing Mrs. Ida Ender at the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Washington. I'd like to start by asking you, Mrs. Ender, what your maiden name was.

My maiden name is Roth, R-O-T-H.

And your mother's maiden name?

Hirsch, H-I-R-S-C-H.

Can you tell me something about your life before the war, where you were born, and when you were born?

Right. Well, I was born in Tarnów, Poland, and 1928, December 1928. Of course, I have happy memories from childhood. But this didn't last too long because the war broke out in 1939. And pretty soon, all those horrible things started to happen. So in no time, we were put into ghettos. And the German hordes were coming, taking away possessions-- gold, silver, whatever we had. Everything had to be turned over.

Where were you at the time this all started?

In Tarnów, my hometown.

And what family did you have then?

At that time, I had parents, my sister, and two brothers-- one older brother, one younger brother. And we had a large family of aunts, and uncles, and cousins. And I recollect how crazy I was about my cousins, babysitting for the little children, beautiful little children, blonde with blue eyes and dark-eyed children. And I loved babysitting for them. And we were such a close family with my aunts and uncles that till many years later, when I grew up, did I know that they were not my sisters and brothers. I thought that they really were my sisters and brothers. That's how close we were with my aunts and uncles. Then, of course, grandparents and a large, loving family.

And the only survivors from the family is me and my sister. And my little brother was so precious to us because he was born the last one. And he was like a baby to the whole family. But in order to get a kiss from my little brother, we had to bribe him with a candy. We were crazy about him.

And he unfortunately was the first one to go because when we were in the ghetto and the selekcja was starting, they were taking children first. And so when he was taken away, we all insisted, and my mother too, that my father goes with him. How could you let a child go alone? And little did we know that we never will see them again because we thought they probably would return. We didn't realize what it is all about yet. At the time, it was bad. But we didn't know to what extent. And they left. And we were ignorant to the fate. Later, we realized. We knew that we never would see them again.

But since then on, my mother never left. She never smiled. She was like a mask of tragedy because it was her baby, beloved baby. And we all felt a terrible loss. And we had-- I had an older brother, who was absolutely gorgeous, tall, 16 years old. And then he was taken away from us.

And slowly, we had ghettos surrounded. And this uncle, and that aunt, and the children were torn apart. And with years, we lost everybody except my mother. My sister and I were still together. But then they created the ghetto A and B. And ghetto A, the old people, so-called old people, because my mother was her early 40s at the time, she was put in ghetto A for non-working people. And ghetto B were young people.

And where was this?

In Tarnów. Everything's still in Tarnów. And we were taken every day in the morning to the big place where they were counting us going out to work and counting us coming back because somebody shouldn't just escape. And every day, we knew that we leave our mother in ghetto A. And we never knew if we will see her when we come back from work.

And my sister and I used to wait when the guard was on one side of the gate. We would sneak in. She would lift me or I would lift her. And we would sneak in to see my mother, to know that she's alive, and to tell her that we are still alive. And this was going on every day. This was at the risk of our lives because if somebody would catch us, we would be shot dead at the spot. But we had to know how she's doing. And she had to know that we are still alive.

And the day came when they sent us out from Tarnów to labor camp, concentration camp Plaszów. And there we were together, my sister, myself, and my mother. But the two of us worked daytime. She worked at night. And of course, hungry, and cold, and all that. But the tragedy was so unbearable that we hardly managed to go on.

And I recall, one day, my mother took sick. And we were afraid that they will just kill her if they find out she is sick. So when I came from my shift from work, I quickly went to the other one, trying to take her place, that she shouldn't be missing because they were counting us each time. And it so happened that the policeman recognized me, that I came back and went again. And he pulled me out. And he asked me, what am I doing here? I just came back from work.

And I had no chance to answer him because he pulled me in right away, hit me over my head. And I still suffer from a condition called tinnitus. And ever since, I have that condition. At any rate, it was somehow lucky-- I don't know, lucky that he didn't right away do away with me for committing such a horrendous crime as going to work instead of my mother.

Well, we were for a while in Plaszów, in concentration camp Plaszów. And then they separated me and my sister. They took out one night and sent us to Skarzysko, another labor camp in Poland, where ammunition was being produced. And my mother quickly put on her coat. And she wanted to go with us. But of course, the Germans pulled her away. They didn't allow her to go with us. And she was screaming. She wanted to go with us. And they pulled us away.

And the last picture in my mind is she was holding on to a fence, trying to go through to be with us. But of course, didn't succeed. And we left her in Plaszów. That's the last time we saw my mother.

And of course, at that point, life actually lost meaning to me and my sister because she was the only one that we had at this point. And we were sent to Skarzysko. And the trains were constantly being shot at. The Germans played games with us, trying to scare us. They were pulling people, us, killing people. We were traveling the whole night. And people were, of course-- everything was done in the car. People were on top of each other. There were no bathrooms. It was hot. We lived in fear that they are just going to do away with all of us-- not that we cared very much now that we left our mother behind us.

How old were you at this time?

Well, I was 16-- 15-16. We went-- we were sent to Skarzysko. And there, again, after that horrible trip, they started to segregate there. Because Skarzysko had three parts. And one was where ammunition was being produced with a yellow powder, which was deadly for the lungs. And if they didn't kill you, you just died from inhaling that powder. And they pulled me out to that line that was assigned to that camp, was called Section C.

And my sister, disregarding the danger, they knocked on me and tried to pull me back. And the German soldier there ask her, what she's doing? What she wants? And she said, she wants to be with her sister together. So he said, so you come here to this line. She said, no, I want her in my line. And somehow, again, by luck or whatever, he allowed me to go back to the other line, which was a labor camp. But it was in barrack C, so-called Section C, where people were just dying or being killed because they couldn't work anymore, just being destroyed by that powder.

How did you know that about that one line?

Because when we arrived, the people were there already that were there. And they knew. And they tried to tell us, don't stay in this line because that's a deadly line. Try to go here. And then I remember, at night, we

were all so dirty after the trip, and hot, and feeling that smell of those bodies around us. And at night, I tried to wash up. And again, the Germans that were watching not to get out of the line, of the place that we were, we had a tremendous rubber pipe. And he pulled me and hit me over my body, where I couldn't straighten out after that. But he didn't kill me again. I don't know why.

And in Skarzysko, we worked for a few months. And then we were sent to another camp, Czestochowa, where, again, we worked at ammunition. And there, we were liberated in January 1945 by the Russians. And that's about the story of the camps.

What kind of work did your father do before the war?

We had milk, milk products business. We talk about number, six million Jews, with this statistic, six million. But it's almost impossible to comprehend. But it was my little brother, Moshe-- Moshele, we called him-- who was in the Hebrew school. He was little, but he was sent to a private school. And he loved to run around. He was not so good, not such a good student. But he loved to ride bicycles and to play ball. He was not a statistic. He was a lovely child.

It was my older brother who was so gorgeous, and wanted to live, started to go out with girls, started to date. And it was my sister who was in Hebrew school. It was me who was the musical one and played the violin. Everybody is considered statistic. But everybody was a individual with so much to live for. But it's all gone. And now, we just have to somehow make sure that never again something like this should happen.

Tell me what happened at the time of the liberation.

We had a very sad liberation, actually, because we were sick and almost unable to go on, unwilling, unable to go on. It was January. There was nothing to eat. And we had a very bad time of just going from day to day because we were hungry, and not dressed, and absolutely heartbroken. But we managed to go back to our city, hoping that somebody, maybe somebody survived, maybe we will find somebody.

But coming back to my city, most Polish people greeted us with saying, so many of you Jewish people survived? There were only a few of us. But to them, it seemed so many of you survived? We thought the Germans did away with all of you. But yet, you are coming back. It wasn't that bad.

We came back, actually, also, to claim some of our possessions, which my mother gave to some Polish friends. But they, of course, denied having anything. And we realized that we will not find any friendship among Polish people. And there were a lot of cases where they killed Jewish people after the war, fearing that they would take back their possessions. So after a few months, we just decided to go away from Poland.

Where did you live for those few months?

Well, there was a Jewish committee, which took care of the people that came back. A Jewish committee was forming to take care of the people that came back. And I think it was through UJA that we had some food sent. And we lived wherever we would find an apartment. We lived a few families together. And I was working in the committee for the few months that I was there, hoping that somebody will come back. But as I said, nobody did. And we just decided to leave Poland. And never did we go back. And I really would never set my foot in Poland because too many horrible memories from that country.

How did you get out of Poland?

Well, we had to actually smuggle through. At night, there was somebody that took us through the border to Czechoslovakia. And from there, we were smuggled to Austria. Because we were told that in Austria are some people from Tarnów, from this city. And there, we came to Vienna. And from there, we went to Bad Ischl, where there was a camp already for refugees. And UNRRA was taking care of this camp, providing food and clothing. And from there, we managed to get to United States, where we had an uncle.

How did you travel through all those countries? There were trains. There were horse and buggies, whichever

way of communication was available. We just tried to get from place to place.

And how did you get in touch with your uncle in the United States?

Well, there were lists. The UNRRA had already lists of people, of the survivors. We knew we had an uncle here because he left very shortly before the war, in 1936. And through UNRRA, we got in touch with him.

And he arranged for you to come to the United States?

United States, right.

Where was he?

Well, was in New York. And we came to live with him for a while. And then I got married and I started my own family. And my children, when they were very little, they didn't know what happened, the tragedy that really befell us because we were unable to speak about it. We still didn't. We never accepted the fact that we lost everybody. We still were hoping against any hope whatsoever that somehow, somebody will come, we will find somebody from the family.

And it was such a very painful subject that we couldn't really talk with our children much about it. But they knew about the Holocaust. They knew what happened. But we could never go into details because we were just hysterical. We couldn't talk about it. And through the showing of the Holocaust on television, we could not talk about it at all. It was like a tremendous cancer inside us that you can't let out.

There was also shame attached to it because people, somehow, had an idea that the survivors did something, collaborated with the Germans, or that the girls somehow used sex to survive, all that. So we just couldn't talk to people and start explaining. This was too painful for us to be able to go and tell the truth, even though our motivation to survive was to survive so the world will know what happened to us.

We were sure the world cares what happened to us. If people will know what happened, they are just going to celebrate if we survive. And we have to tell what happened. But then came disappointment when we found out that people knew what happened but didn't do much about to save some of us. And also, that the world really didn't care one way or the other what happened to us.

And I think this, knowing that really, the world doesn't care was almost as bad as what happened to us because we were young and full of illusion that there is humaneness in the world, that the world would never stand for something like this if people knew what is happening. They would do something about it. Yet we found out that people knew what was happening, but nobody really cared or did something about it.

And yet we hoped for a better world now. And we were hoping that our kids will never know, will never experience what we experienced. But we cannot save them pain because they know the truth. And it's very painful to them. They knew they have no grandparents, no aunts and uncles, nobody except parents, who tried to hide for a while, not to give them pain. But as painful as it is, they had to know the truth. And they had to know how the world is indifferent to the Jewish faith.

Is your husband a survivor as well?

Yes.

How did you meet?

We met in Vienna after the war. And we knew each other three months. And he went to United States two years before me because he had here a brother who came before the war. And after two years, I followed him. And we got married here in America.

How many children do you have?

I have two daughters, Amilia and Risa, lovely children, very much aware of everything, of our tragedy, very Jewish-minded, very Zionistic-minded. This we instilled in them, and unfortunately, I think, suffering a lot from that. As I said, we wanted to save them the suffering. But life didn't allow.

Amilia is here. Would it be all right if I asked her some questions? This is Amilia Lampert.

Amilia Ender.

Ender. OK. Would you like to ask your mother anything before we start?

I'm very interested in knowing more about your life and your family before the war. I've heard some. I don't have a picture of it. I have little fragments of pictures. But I don't have a real picture.

So through this, before the war, actually, I was a carefree child. And my life as a child was much more carefree, I think, than the life of the children here because we were actually living carefree life, going to school, and to Jewish school, and playing outside with friends. And before I stop being a child, the war broke out. And all this tragedy took place. So it's not very much that I could tell about my childhood because it was a carefree childhood full of love for family, for each other.

What was your house like?

Happy house, happy house. We talk about it with my sister, that we were a singing family, always singing songs.

Was it a big house? Was it like a-- what did it look like?

It was a house that we had a square. And houses, we owned houses all around. We were-- had a few tenants. And all the kids knew each other and played at that square. We played all kinds of games. And also, we had a very charitable house, this I remember, that I used to bring food to poor people.

And my mother used to do it in such a way where I would wear a coat or at night so not to embarrass the people. I would bring food, whatever it happens to be so that people should not be embarrassed that we are helping them. So those are my memories of my house, as being a very charitable, happy house, lively, always people, and then uncles coming and going.

I'd like to know if you want to tell me about your father. I don't know very much about your father.

All I could say about my father, that if there was any discipline being done, it was done by my mother, rather than my father. He never screamed at us or hit us. He was very allowing us to do things where my mother was disciplined us. You have to come home at this hour. You have to do this on Saturday. You are not allowed to do this. My father, he was very loving and easy with us. He never criticized us. But we never minded what my mother would say. We accepted it. And we always laughed. And we never questioned.

Of course, we tried to be good students so the parents would be proud. We tried to please them in any way we could because we had a tremendous amount of love for our parents. We loved them tremendously. And the feelings that I had from my childhood is that feeling of love, warmth, love. Holidays were so beautiful. I still have the flavor in my mouth and nose. I smell it when holidays come. I still smell that beautiful flavor. When I came from school and Friday, smelled the good cooking and baking.

Whether I exaggerate it or not, I don't know. Maybe I was a child. And because I lost everything and I exaggerate the beauty of it, I don't know. I can't tell. But I see it in the most beautiful, loving light.

Can you describe a Shabbos in your family?

By us, Shabbos started Thursday night, baking. Thursday night, it was baking. All day Friday, there was cooking and baking. And then, as I said, the baking wasn't done only for us. Every week, we were bringing to some poor families the bakings for Shabbos-- challah, cake. The only thing that the Shabbat seemed long

to us because we couldn't read Polish books on the Shabbos. So it seemed like the Shabbos is so long. We were always very avid readers. And we waited for the evenings that we could already take a book and read.

But Shabbos, we were with our friends. And we went to Bais Yaakov. I don't know if you know that. This was a Jewish school for girls that we went. In the morning, we went there to pray. And then we sang the Hebrew songs. And we discussed issues. And we spent a few hours there, singing, and praying, and just being happy.

Did you ever have any disagreements with your parents?

Yes, yes.

What did you have disagreements about?

Yes. I was a very poor eater. And nothing was good enough for me. She baked so many cakes, but I didn't like them. Didn't like chicken, I didn't like fish, didn't like so many things that my mother didn't know what to prepare for me I should eat. Of course, I liked candy, halva, such thing, ice cream. But those disagreements were mainly on that.

To bake this or to roast. And I would leave one school under the bench because I didn't want my mother should know that I didn't eat too. So this wasn't very important disagreement. At the time, it seemed important, but looking back, it wasn't. And I think that history repeats itself because we had later on the same problem with my children.

I used to hide it under my bed.

That's right.

Amilia, when did you first become aware that your parents were survivors?

I think sometime when I was around seven or eight, I became aware that they were in concentration camps. And I didn't know what they were, what a concentration camp was. I remember thinking it was like a summer camp that you go to. And I guess they explained it to me in some way or other because I don't remember exactly what transpired, but I know that after that, I knew that my family had been killed. I was most conscious all my life, and I'm still-- I wonder about this a lot is the person I was most conscious of always was my grandmother, was your mother--

Yes.

--who I'm named after. Do you want me to? And she's still the person-- well, I'm still very curious about her. I feel like I want to know. I want to know her. I want to know more about her because I just feel like it's a very strong bond. And you didn't. You rarely talked about your father or your father's family. And it was only when I got older that I started wondering about other parts of your family because you focused so much on your mother that it really wasn't till I was much older that I started to wonder about everybody.

It's natural that we talk about our mother, mostly, because she was with us in camps, while everybody else was-- we lost everybody else. She was with us. And we saw her sufferings. And we always loved her tremendously. We had such amount of love for our mother that it was with us all along. And we always talked about her because we thought she maybe survived. Then we found out that she was drowned in camp day of liberation. She was.

On liberation?

The Germans drowned all the people there the day of liberation. She survived Auschwitz. She was sent from Plaszów to Auschwitz. And from there, she was sent to Stutthof. And I suppose that's why we talked about her, mostly. Because we, later on, being mothers, we could imagine what she went through losing everybody, losing her children, losing her husband. And then, finally, losing us when they tore us apart.

I suppose that's why we usually and mostly spoke about her. Because while we felt love for everybody, for the whole family, but we knew about her sufferings. And I suppose that's why we talked about her more than about my father and them.

And anyhow, it was always too painful to talk about it. It's still hard. It's still painful. It's horrible talking about it. It's still something sitting inside our heart. You can't-- like all the speakers that we heard today and yesterday, you try to express in words. You try to express. But I think you just can't say all that you feel. You just can't. It's impossible. Only a survivor knows what it is to-- and how it is, what it feels, how it is. It's very difficult.

No, I feel like the Holocaust was-- is, was, is the most important thing in my life, the most influential event in my life in terms of forming my perceptions, my ideas, my attitudes. I don't feel that there's anything else that was more powerful in informing who I am than the Holocaust. It was a really powerful experience. It was something unprecedented, something that no mind could deal with, comprehend, or understand. Nobody can understand. It is such a force and such a power that you just can't get away from it. You can explain it. You cannot rationalize it. And you almost cannot live with it, either. But yet, you live with it. And it is something that is with you constantly.

But I also tried to see-- to make my children see life before Holocaust, the rich life of us Jews and our family, the love, the way we lived, that we were people that had values, and life, and morals, and warmth, and love. And I would like that not only Holocaust should be influencing my children, but also the life that we have before Holocaust. Because I do talk about the loving ties that we had and the rich tradition and religion, how important all that was in our lives, and how it enriched our lives. And I was hoping that this, too, will shape the lives of my children, that will be a force, a power, not only the Holocaust, but also, our life before the Holocaust.

Well, when I say the Holocaust, I mean also-- I do mean the family experiences and holidays. I don't mean just the Holocaust. I mean, all my own ideas, and associations, and memories, and my values, and my Jewishness, and my identity, and all the things that really shaped who I am, which revolved much around your experiences, very much around. It was always life with Aunt Sara and Phyllis. And that was much more important to me than life with my American friends in school. It meant much more to me. I never had the same value on my everyday American life as I had on family things and the-- I mean, you know what I'm saying.

Well, I would think that, in a way, that that's almost complimentary, that we really did convey the message, that it was a strong message that the children really understood. And if the influence of the house was that strong, I almost feel good, that without us saying much, we conveyed a lot of the feelings that we had without words. Because we couldn't really talk very much about it. Was too painful. But yet, we did. In a subtle way, we did convey a lot about it, which is-- it has to be this way because you are born to us. And you have to know who you are. And as painful as it is, you are part of all that that happened. You can't escape it. So it had to shape your life.

Mrs. Ender, do you and your sister talk about it between you or you and your husband?

We don't talk about it, not often, because it's too painful, especially me and my sister, when we are together, we always depressed because we always talk about it. And we always feel how horrible, how unfair, and why. And why?

And now, I feel maybe a little better than I used to feel about all that because I felt like it almost made us feel like we are lesser people. If people could do it to us, it almost made us feel like maybe we deserved for some reason what happened to us. But during the war, when we were in concentration camp, me and my sister, we were hungry all the times. And we were beaten. And we worked hard. And we felt that we were treated worse than animals that we saw outside camps.

In order to preserve the feeling of being humane and being what we were once, we used to recite poems to each other while we were working. We used to talk about books. And we used to recite Jewish poems and

Polish poems just to bring into our lives something different, something else, and thus be on the very base a level of being hungry and being always like a hunted animal, fearing always the Germans, and fearing every-- not knowing what the next hour will bring.

We tried to think of something else than just that in order to remain sane, not to lose our sanity, and to know that we were somebody else, not just the people that the Germans tried to make us into, subjugating us to all that. We had to see that there is something else and we were something else, struggling against being just reduced to nothing, actually.

Thank god, we came out of camp, having all the feelings that we had, we didn't become worse people. On the contrary, we became more sensitive to other people's sufferings, to suffering in the world. This is painful, becoming more sensitive to what goes on and to other people's sufferings, more painful. But we became that way, much more sensitive too. Because every possible pain that anybody feels, I feel it with them. I felt all that. I feel like I lived 1,000 years and suffered everybody's suffering.

I just want to say that I don't want to escape. I mean, like you said, I can't escape it. That's never been my desire because I never felt that it was something I could escape. But I want to understand. I mean, as much as I understand, I want to understand more. And this is-- I think this is the first time I ever heard you mention what actually you felt like when you were in camp, or what you did to survive being in camp psychologically, emotionally, or whatever. And I don't know if you could talk about it. I'd like to hear something about that.

Well, there really isn't much more to say about the psychologically. As I said, we tried to preserve our level of-- we tried to know that we are still people the way we were, regardless of what the Germans tried to do to us psychologically.

And how did you do that? What did you do to feel like you were people?

What sustained us-- again, what sustained us are the morals that our parents instilled in us, the hope that we will see again our family-- especially, we were hoping for my mother-- and the fact that she was such a good person. And I was yet at the time quite a religious girl. And I was sure that God is going to reward us for her goodness and let her live. And she will come back.

And what kept us going, actually, was our background, the warmth in our house, the teachings of our parents, and the laughs that we had from them. And later, we tried to be the people that our parents would want us to be. And that what kept us going, to live in such a way that they would be proud of us all along, even in camp being hungry, being cold, being beaten. But this was always-- this was the thing that sustained us, our childhood, our love, and the principals that were instilled in us.

You said you recited poetry?

I mean, what did you do? What kinds of things did you do? What did you talk about with each other?

Well, from school, whatever we remembered, poems from school. We talked about our family constantly. We talked also about the outside world. We constantly were hoping that one day, they are going to save us. One day, somebody will come and take us out of camp, and that somebody from the outside world is going to rescue us.

Did you have any idea of what you hoped to do after liberation?

After liberation, my idea was just-- I was obsessed with the idea of having back my people or finding my family. We were obsessed with that, my sister and I, just to find family, to have back a family, and to bring the message to the world what happened to us, and hoping that nothing ever so horrible will take place, just wanting the world to know what happened, and of course, hoping that our family will come together. And this was our motivation for surviving. OK.

Thank you very much.