

Holocaust Survivor

Oral Histories

RUTH MUSCHKIES WEBBER

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Could you tell me your name please and where you were born?

My name is Ruth Muschkies Webber and I was born in Ostrowiec, Poland.

During the war, where were you? What different places?

Well, first I was in the ghetto in Ostrowiec and then we were in Bodzechow, Sandomierz, Starachowice, Austrovietz camp, Annopol and finally Auschwitz.

And you were liberated right in Auschwitz?

Yes, I was liberated in Auschwitz.

Were you alone all that time?

No, fortunately I was with my mother.

How old were you when you were liberated in Auschwitz?

I was liberated in Auschwitz, I was um about nine, nine and a half years old.

Nine years old?

Yea.

Tell me what you remember about the beginning of the war?

Well, um our home was a very happy one. I had an older sister, mother, father, my father's grandmother lived in our house with us and my mother's parents and family lived just a few doors down. My father was a professional photographer, and I remember very happy things um, Friday, Saturday we would always go over to my grandparents and have dinner and uh.

Was the family very religious?

My father was traditional but not religious, there was no Conservatism, it was either Reformed or Orthodox and my father did not wear a beard or anything of that kind...

he did not work on Saturdays. I don't remember him working on Saturdays, but um I guess you would not consider him Orthodox under American standards. My grandparents were. My grandparents were very Orthodox. My grandfather on my father's side was a Cantor in town. He died quite a few years before the Holocaust. That's when my grandmother lived with us. In 1939 when the Germans came into town one afternoon on motorcycles... and soldiers marching in, [pause] things changed drastically. I was not allowed to go out. I had to stay in the house or around my father's studio because it wasn't safe. There was shooting going on. Parents were always upset, always crying. They just didn't give me the attention that they did before. I was supposed to stay out of their way I guess but it was -- [pause] I had to do a lot of things that was part of life before, the happiness, the pleasantness that was at home, the looking forward to a weekend or a Friday night wasn't there anymore, everybody was tense. My father's, for instance, studio was taken over. A uh, either Polish or German was put into the office where, had control of the business end. I didn't understand it at the time. I knew that my father was upset. My father was quite, well um, accepted in the gentile community and he had a lot of gentile friends and somehow after the Germans came in things changed. He wasn't involved as much. He was home more. He was upset more. Things just weren't the same.

Did you still go to school? Were you in school?

No. No I was not in school. And my sister was not at home. My sister was a pianist and she was studying in Warsaw. So... I don't remember the span of time, but I

know that when things started getting very upsetting for my parents when incidents in the town became more intense where we had to give up everything that we possessed that was worth anything. People were being shot for no apparent reason. In fact at one time I walked into my grandparents home and everybody was crying. I looked at my grandfather he didn't have a beard. I didn't see the incident but apparently they, he was one of the people that was caught in the street and his beard was shaved off. I had an aunt, my mother's sister, that always used to pay a lot of attention to me and play with me, and all at once she just was completely changed. She would sit in a corner and be irritated every time I spoke to her. I didn't understand the reason why she was this way until actually just a few years ago when my mother mentioned to us that, to my sister and I now, that my aunt was raped and she I think was in her twenties at the time. I don't know what it means now to somebody, but I think it is much more accepted then it was at those days for a Jewish girl to be raped. Since then she was just not the same person. So, things were gradually changing, not for the better, and I think it was around 1942 when the Germans decided to make a ghetto. And they got all the people from the town into one section of the city and we happened to have lived in that section so we didn't have to move, but we had to make accommodations for these people. Again, my father wasn't allowed to go out of the ghetto so he couldn't do any of the professional appointments that he used to have. He, for instance, used to be the photographer for the iron works. It was an industrial town and all the workers used to have tags with their pictures on it and my father used to be the photographer, the

official photographer, and all that was taken away from him. So I used to overhear these little things and it was always hush, hush, hush, and I just wasn't allowed to say anything because everybody was very upset always. And an uncle and an aunt came in from Warsaw when the ghetto was formed because we thought it was a safe haven so they came to us for protection. There were a lot of people from Posnan and other places that were brought into our town when they were cleaning out Jews from other areas so the ghetto became very, very congested.

Where did you go in your house?

Well, we had two rooms, I remember a bedroom and a main room that I remember, and uh we had this aunt and uncle and I think they had a son that was with them, and my grandmother, my mother, father, my sister and myself. That was a big place.

Your sister had come back?

My sister was brought back just before the ghetto was closed in and in fact she continued playing. I remember that there were certain, I guess must have been German officers because they wore uniforms, would come and listen to my sister play and we used to have to hang sheets on the windows so others would not see that these particular people came in to listen to my sister because she was so talented and played very, very well. And because of all this, because of her recognition that she was playing so well, she was placed with a gentile family to continue her education and not to interrupt her musical career.

Did your parents arrange this?

My father arranged it, and I think maybe this particular German was involved in it too, because he knew the family that my sister was with during the war. These are just little things that I remember. I remember how she was prepared for going to that family. They, I guess, either knew or she was going to be part of their family so they assumed that she was Polish and she had to learn how to pray and she had to know what communion was and anything else pertaining to Christianity. She was being taught all this at home before she left.

She had a teacher come in?

She had, we had a friend, that was also involved in music, a teacher from Posnan, I think he was, and he taught her all these things. I remember him mentioning, talking to her about it and with me not being allowed to go anywhere... having to stay around the house I listened to all this and I too picked up quite a bit of it but she was taught all of this and she was told to forget everything else.

Did she?

Well, um, I understand I remember when we ran over to my grandparents when she was going to say goodbye to them, she had asked them that they should just let her know when Yom Kippur comes because she was born on Yom Kippur. That was her birthday. She wanted to make sure that she remembers that birthday, not the birthday that was on her papers, on her Aryan papers. She had fortunately a very easy three years in comparison to what I had to go through.

How did your grandparents feel seeing her go?

They just cried. I don't know how else they felt about it. It was a matter of fact. There was just so much chaos going on. There were so many decisions going on... so many changes. [pause] People were always crying.

Did anyone in your family, you were seven, mother, father or sister sit down with you and try to explain to you what was going on around you?

No. No. The only thing they sat down with me once and they tried to talk me into also to go to a gentile family and live with them until all this uneasiness is over. They tried to point out to me that my sister went and that she's happy where she is and that in a very short time they'll be back and pick me up and everything will be the same as it was. But, I guess, being the baby, I just didn't want to leave home and they couldn't persuade me and unless I wanted to cooperate I was endangering too many people's lives I guess. I didn't go. That was the only time I remember them trying to tell me something.

You said you had an aunt and uncle who moved in with you?

Yes.

Did you have other aunts and uncles?

Well my mother's side of the family there was an aunt and there were two uncles that lived with my grandparents still two doors down. My father had a sister in Lodz with a family and this brother in uhh Warsaw and then I believe he had another sister and family. . . None of them survived.

None of them?

None. No. None of them survived.

You were five when the war began?

Yes.

When the Germans marched down the street do you remember any feelings of any sort, frightened, excited?

In a way it was maybe. . . kind of a relief from the fact that every time there was a little siren or something, we had to put on certain masks and run to the basement, because I guess they thought that maybe the city was going to be bombed before the German walked in. We used to have to spend the night in the basement, unfinished cellar. That wasn't very pleasant. So when the Germans walked in, we... what I remember of it is looking through the gate from our house and seeing the motorcycles that's what attracted me and I thought it was a very wonderful sight. The soldiers with their helmets on, on their motorcycles and uhh I didn't think it was anything that terrible at the time.

But your parents were upset?

My parents were very upset. The whole mood, the whole way of life, so suddenly changed.

When your father lost, back in the ghetto, when your father lost his business, this was when the ghetto was formed so he couldn't go out anymore to take pictures?

Right. Well, he was slowly, things were taken away from him.

What did he do?

Well he still had to go into the studio you see, he still had to go in there so he was not home. He still was at the studio, but there was somebody else running his studio in a way.

Even after the ghettos?

Yes.

Your father, was he taken away eventually?

I guess my father had maybe the foresight to see what was going to be happening or maybe he listened a little bit more carefully and believed a little bit more of the stories that were brought into the ghetto about what was happening in other cities. When a camp was being formed, you see once you had a place where to work, then you were safe. When a Jew had a place where to work and because we were in an industrial city, we had iron works and making bricks and other things, then you felt that you were needed. There was another factory that was moving into our area which was in Bodzechow, I think it was, my mother said, electronics, a German firm and they needed a certain amount of people to work as laborers. Somehow my father was able to get himself as part of that group to have a place that he is working and my mother was signed up to be working in the kitchen. I didn't exist. You see children didn't have a place. He also made, somehow, arrangements, as I said, we were in a position that with giving favors or other things to certain people you were able to get preferred treatment. To get this card that allowed you to be legally in town, or legally at a certain camp, and you thought that you were safe. He was also able to get a card like this for that uncle of mine that came to town with his wife and

child. But the wife and child I don't think were involved at the time but for him so he would be also safe. Well a few days before the wysiedlenie [deportation], before our town was surrounded and the Jews were removed from the city, there was talk about it that it was going to take place. My father and mother were transported to the Bodzechow camp, and I was smuggled in there. But I was not counted. I was not a person that had a right to be there.

You went with your parents?

I went with my parents, yes. I really don't know. I don't remember. It was at night and we left our grandparents behind. We took our grandmother that lived with us over to the other grandparents and uh there was a hiding place made for them above our studio as we came in there was a little vestibule and there was a point on the roof and occasionally we pointed to it for my grandparents to hide there and my aunt and uncle, two uncles. If anything happens, they should have somewhere to hide, but later on I was told that my grandfather was coughing so he felt that if he goes up there and coughs he will betray the hiding place. So he didn't want to go up there. My aunts and uncles said, well if you're not going to go up there, my grandmother was not a very healthy women, so none of them went up and they all were taken on the first transport to Treblinka. [Silence, weeps] And that was the last we heard from them. [pause; weeps] Naturally we were safe for a little while in that Bodzechow, in the working camp. Uh my mother worked in the kitchen and my father went to the factory to work and uh I had to...

You were living in barracks?

Yeah. It was very specially set up for the workers.

What did you do?

I was trying not to be seen. Trying to find hiding places and just didn't do much of anything except that trying to keep my ears open and every time there was any rumor that other Germans than the usual ones that were guarding us would be coming in with a truck or anything meant that they needed workers somewhere else. What was happening is, there was the camp was set up for lets say 30 workers that had working permits for that particular factory. Well, some of the survivors from our town after the wysiedlenie [deporation], they sent all the Jews out from our town. After they came out of hiding and they heard of a camp where you can work and feel a little safe then they would come in. The doors were open to come into the camp. And when the population swelled, the Germans would come with trucks and load up a truck full of people regardless if you had a card or not and ship you off either to an extermination camp, because they needed more people for a transport, or to another working camp. That's how my mother and I wound up being in different camps during, from 1942 til 1944.

They moved you around?

We were moved around. During the time we were in Bodzechow, for instance, when a rumor would circulate that on that particular day they're going to come in with a truck and uh make a selection of the workers, my mother and I would sneak out of the camp . My mother and I and other women with their children and spend the

nights in the forest until the selection took place and it was again safe to come back to the camp.

Do you know why you decided to do that? Were they worried about the children?

Because the children were not allowed to exist. There was no place for children. It was only for able working bodies. The women were there to be in the kitchen and to cook, and the men were there to work in the factory, and there was no place for children. Children were not supposed to exist. They were supposed to have gone with the first transport out. So I remember in '42 was a very cold winter, at least it seemed it was cold, because at night we kept on walking, and even now I... sometimes when I see lights in a distance... at night when I walk, it brings me back the memories of that particular winter when we would just keep walking and walking all night long so we shouldn't freeze. And one of these nights I wanted a drink. So my mother walked up to a farm house and knocked on the door and asked would they please give me a glass of water or milk or whatever and she was willing to pay, because at that time we still had money and the women looked at me and decided we were Jewish and she told us to go away. Well that wasn't enough. Within an hour or so we had a policeman following us. Obviously, this woman went to the police station and told them that there was a woman with a child that she believes were Jewish were walking around. That policeman was ahh I guess he looked at us and he could see that we were Jews, and he told us that not far away there was a camp where Jews are safe. The camp that we ran away from that particular night, and we shouldn't be walking around or knocking on farmer's doors because the

farmers don't like it and they complain to the police. So he let us go. I really, now that I think of it, this could have been the end. Nobody would have questioned him if he would have shot us right there and then. Then came morning and we hid in a field, I guess, a corn field where the corn was cut down like half way and the stalks were still up and we were lying there and not far away some children started playing ball. I envied them. I couldn't even say anything, because I was afraid that they'll find us. Well, somebody threw the ball and it landed right by my feet, and one of those little kids came up, looked at me, saw me, picked up the ball and walked away. These things were happening so many times, I guess I could sit here for hours and tell you about these things. I guess the worst part of it all is that it brings back this certain feeling of fear that I had felt at that time, and that isn't very pleasant. But I guess it has to be. I think those first nights in the forest and all the times when I was so scared that if not for my mother and her kind words to me and all the crazy things I must have done at the time. I remembered one evening when we were supposed to leave for the forest I didn't want to go. I refused to go. All the other women with their children left and I refused to move. And that night we did not go out into the forest. Well, it seems like a German patrol found the other people. They never came back. We were saved. And that particular camp you asked me what I was doing there. There was a hiding place prepared for us over a office that was built in a auto shop in a big, like a warehouse. There was an office built where they were repairing the cars and we were on top of that office. The only way to reach the roof of that was with a ladder that was put up at night to bring us food.

It was like against one wall. You know like you put up an office and my father occasionally slept with me there at night or else if he had to be somewhere else or he had to be counted at work I was left alone. The first day or two, I was there with other children and then the other children didn't want to stay. I remember that I had to finish all the food that my father brought me while he was there, because there was either mice or rats, I don't know what it was, but they were running around and it was he felt safer if there was no food around so all day I would be there without any food and I couldn't move because the Germans were in the office and if I would have walked upstairs then they would have heard me. So all day long I couldn't move. And then at night I was able to walk around. I used to play little games with the animals. They used to kind of play little games among themselves and then they would get real close to me, and I would try to see how close I could really take for them to come before I would slightly move and they would run away. That was my game.

Which animals?

I don't know if they were rats or mice. I really don't know but they were rodents. To me they seemed awfully large when I think of it now. But it was just these little games that I always played to pass the time, not to move, not to say anything. One of the times when a truck pulled in and we were told to start hiding, I hid in a hole where they stored potatoes; myself and two other children, and then the potatoes were thrown on top of us. And we stayed there until they loaded up the trucks, in fact, at that time, that cousin of mine that I was telling you about and his wife were

shipped out and we never heard of them. We stayed in that hole, and then all the people were on the trucks I guess by then, the German in charge of the camp came to that hole where we were lying, somebody must have pointed it out that there were children still there, and he told us to get out. He pulled out the gun, he says, "Raus, raus!" So we came out, and he looked at us and he said, "stay here another few minutes, the trucks are almost ready to leave" and walked away.

It was an SS man?

It was an SS man.

Inaudible question:

I don't know. I don't know why he did it.

Do you remember fantasizing, having dreams, did you have a fantasy world?

Oh definitely. Definitely. All these times when I had to disappear and find a little hole where to hide I couldn't possibly think of what was going on outside, because I knew that if I'm discovered where I'm hiding, that will be my last minute. So I would fantasize about my sister. What a wonderful life she has, and what I could have had if I had only made the right decision. Of little stories that my mother would be telling me all the time about home, about my grandparents, do I remember when we would have Cholent or other things that were happening, happy occasions that were happening in our house. For instance, I had a favorite dress, and uh I always wanted to wear it and I talked about it. My mother would be talking about this. Anything that she knew that would bring me pleasure she would talk to me about. And at that time my fantasies were only of what life could be like for me if

I was not in this situation. And I couldn't understand why I was in this kind of situation, why I wasn't able to play like the children were playing ball outside, why I wasn't able to have enough food, not to feel a certain feeling in my stomach. I didn't understand it so I fantasized that I had all this. You see having my mother with me was such a wonderful thing that now that I think about it, when we used to get out our rations, [weeps] she would tell me to save mine for later and she would give me hers. So, I was very fortunate, really.

I lost touch with my father right there. He seemed to have been sent to another camp. He was aware of us and he was doing a lot of things for us that I wasn't aware of through connections that he had. People that knew him. People that he had done favors for that they were doing favors, paying him back favors like getting us back, let's say, from a very bad camp that we happened to be in to a camp like Ostrowiec or back to Bosahoff. That was all done for favors, in a way. Because there was a limited amount of people that they were just taking from one place to another and everybody wanted to be in the better camp. In a camp that you knew the people that were in charge, you had a better chance of surviving. You maybe got an extra piece of bread, maybe you were allowed to do certain things that you were repaid with, with a piece of bread. Like cleaning or other things.

You lost touch with your father?

Yeah.

In 1942?

About 1942-43 I don't remember exactly when, but we lost touch. He went to another place and we were sent to another place.

Did you ever hear from him again?

Yes. Heard we did. During that time. But I saw him... [cries] in 1944 in Auschwitz. He was sent back to Auschwitz from another camp. I really don't know which one. My mother was gone by then. I was in a children's home. No. He was brought to Auschwitz while my mother was still there. She saw him too. And then my mother was sent out and I don't know what happened to my father. I lost touch. And then when I was in the children's home, in the children's block, in Auschwitz, my mother was gone, somebody got in touch with me and told me that my father was in the next camp, and he arranged... he arranged a meeting for us at a certain time. My father was on one side of the electric fence and I was on the other side. And I saw him then again. [Crying] I feel bad about those times. I can't remember even what language we spoke. [Long pause... crying...] I guess I missed my mother very much at that time. And although my father was there, I felt kind of bad that he could not fill my mother's place. I felt bad about it. I wanted to talk to him I guess in a way like I did to my mother, but I couldn't. He wanted to help. He wanted to know if I needed anything. I guess he was, maybe, in a position where he could get me an extra piece of bread. He threw over the fence, I remember some cigarettes. He thought I could sell them for some piece of bread or something that I might need. I guess I saw him two or three times during that time and there was some talk already of them liquidating Auschwitz. That was towards the end, that was in

January. And our conversation was mostly about that I should do whatever I can to get on that last transport out of Auschwitz, because everybody that was going to be left there will be killed. So it was, "what do you need, can I do anything for you?" How important it was to try to say that I'm older, to try to stand on my tip toes, to do everything that I possibly can to leave with that last transport. That was the last I heard of him. Well, I didn't make the last transport. He did. But he didn't survive.

Question not audible:

Yea.

You said you came from... not audible.

Yes. We were brought from, I think there was one of my father's, no maybe not, they needed workers in the Ostrowiec camp so they came I think to Starachowice for a transport because the Ostritser, the people from that camp, heard that there was a lot of people from Ostrwiec in that camp so they thought they would bring their own and try to give them a place of maybe a little bit more security for a little bit longer period of time.

You were in Starachowice?

Yeah. I think it was in Starachowice. They came with a truck and uh they had a list of people and my mother was on that list and I was sneaked through onto the truck. When we came to Ostrowiec and the German that brought us handed us over to the commandant of the camp of Ostrowiec, you know we were treated like cattle, like animals, we were not people, we were numbers, in other words you walked off and

you were counted, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven and so on and so forth. You were supposed to have 180 people on that truck so they counted one, two, three, four and among those 180 people two kids were there. Myself and another one. Well, the commandant of the Ostrowiec camp didn't want any children. He said "I don't need these children" to the commandant that brought us to the soldier that was in charge that brought us and for some reason the soldier that brought us felt that we should be allowed into that camp. I don't know the reason why. It was just one of those things. In the mean time, the commandant from the Ostrowiec Lager put us on the side and told a soldier to shoot us. He was standing there with a gun and was ready to perform whatever the commandant told him. It was just unbelievable to see two Germans standing and discussing two children, two human beings, and my life and I'm standing there shaking with a gun over me. And these two Germans are discussing, should I be let into that camp or should I be shot right there and then. Because the German that was going back to that other camp wasn't going to take two children back with him. So they finally decided that they would take in the two of us and count as one person because we really don't eat much. And one of the arguments that the German that was on my side used that he used children to send messages with, to help out in the kitchen, that we really made it worth while for the little food that we ate. And we were let into the camp.

What was your mother doing at this time?

My mother was standing with all the other women and I suppose praying. I... it was an incident that is being talked about even now among the survivors as one of the

miracles that how these few children from our town have survived. They are just unexplainable.

Was your mother working?

Yeah.

What did you do while your mother was working?

Well, my mother was going out on work details to different places, I don't know what. We at one time were also taken to the bread factory, I remember cleaning off bricks for a short time, I was peeling potatoes in the kitchen at one time, I was taking messages from one area of the camp to another.

Did you have a place to sleep?

I slept with my mother. I was an ex... if there was six people in a [pritsche]... in a bunk, I was the seventh, I was not counted. These other women had to tolerate me had to squeeze me in. I was not a person.

Any objections?

Objections... I was just happy to..

I mean other women?

I really don't remember. I think that a lot of the people looked at me as their own because they have lost their own children by then and they try to give me a little comfort when mother wasn't there, when mother was out on a work detail, so they tried to give me a little comfort. No I don't remember any rudeness from the people, maybe my mother felt it at some point, I didn't. I didn't. I uh, I was uh... tolerated. Some people objected for me being there because I endangered their

lives. Children endangered adults lives, because children were not allowed to be there, and if Germans walked in and they saw children, they got mad and not only would they shoot the children but they would also shoot anybody else who happens to be in the vicinity, in the area. So, yes, some people maybe felt that we shouldn't be there.

Do you remember seeing people shot?

Yes. There was... oh I saw a lot of death. But I guess it doesn't make as much an impression on you as you see one or two. There was an escape in the Ausstraflager, and I guess they were caught, two or three people. They were brought, they were dragged back into the camp and everybody was told to go back to their barracks as these people were brought out. And I was on the way, and I guess I never made it, because I had to hide inside of the outhouse, which was in the center of the main camp, like the barracks were all the way around, and this was a big yard and the outhouse was in the yard like towards the side of it. And I heard some shooting. So I got up onto the seat and witnessed these people, two or three of them, I'm not sure now, brought in and other inmates were made to dig graves for them and the prisoners that had escaped - the prisoners - the people that had escaped that were brought in and they were shot, but they were not dead, and they were being thrown into the hole and they were screaming "Don't bury me, I'm still alive!" [crying] And the others just had to start putting the dirt on them and you could hear the screams. After that I ran - we were allowed to come out and I ran into the barracks, my mother was there, she was beside herself. She didn't know where I was. She didn't

know if I was still alive, because when you hear the shots going on you don't know who was shot, and since I didn't make it back to the barrack she assumed that something must have happened to me. Not knowing that I was in the outhouse.
(break) [long pause]

Inaudible question:

Yes, she hugged me and kissed me and I guess she was so relieved that I was alive she didn't scold me for not being there. I don't ever remember my mother scolding me in camp. Ahh, I guess that kind of made this terrible fear that I lived with constant fear of survival for the three years for however long it took that I lived in the different camps. Even talking about it now, this fear tends to kind of come over you and you really don't want it. You don't want to feel that way. I just think about it now and I don't know how I was able to survive, [pause] such tension all the... such acceptance that every minute might be my last. That whatever decision I made wasn't necessarily that it made sense its just that I just felt that way at the time. My mother didn't scold me, she just hugged me and was happy that I was alive.

Was all this before you - you also were at Sandomierz?

Yeah.

What was it like in Sandomierz?

Oh, there it was terrible. It was so dirty. People were lying in the streets, hungry. It was actually a ghetto. It was - I don't think it was a camp - I don't think it was a working camp. It was a terrible place. I've never seen such filth. I don't ever

remember in any other place that I was at that was as filthy and as dirty as that place was.

Were you also in a barracks there?

Ahh, yeah. But we were not there for a long time. There I think my father arranged for us to come back to Bodzechow with a gentile that came too and we followed him to the train and took the train back to Bodzechow and sneaked back into the camp. And that in itself was a miracle that we survived because on that train were two Germans from our town that had known my mother quite well. As I said, my father was a photographer and my sister played the piano so we were quite well known. And ahh my mother and I sat on the train and they passed us by because they were always looking for Jews or people that should not be on the trains with two huge dogs. And they came by us, and they looked at us, and they kept on walking. They must have recognized my mother. I remember the man that was taking us to the train wouldn't let us walk with him. He walked ahead of us and we walked behind him, because if for any reason we were stopped, he didn't know us. He didn't want to have anything to do with us. He was paid to do it. When we came to the outskirts of Bodzechow, there was a train, a railroad track that was going around the camp, and as we were approaching the camp, they were checking the rails because the train was coming up, you know it was an industrial area, and they were going with that machine that you propel by hand up and down to check the tracks if there was no sabotage, and so we were approaching that area at that time and we were right by those tracks. So my mother and I fell flat against the embarkment, you

know like the rails that are a little bit higher than the... and there's like a ravine... little bit... so we fell flat and that little cart passed by and they were looking on both sides to see if there was anybody that had maybe put up any explosive or anything on the rails and we were lying there and they didn't see us. It was a beautiful bright night, the moon was full. My mother and I looked at each other, and we couldn't believe that they didn't see us. And we sneaked back into the camp. We sneaked back and within a couple of weeks we were rounded up again. We were going to be sent to another camp. And we were sitting in front of the gate, standing first, then we had to kneel on our knees the whole afternoon. My father was working, he wasn't allowed to have anything to do with us. But my mother was there only because of me. There were old people, and my mother because she has a child. And we didn't know if we were going to be sent out or if we were going to be shot there. So my mother gave me instructions. I was to be, first of all she placed me behind her, we were five in a row, and she told me that if there is any shooting going to happen that I should slide in under her. I accepted it so matter of factly. Repeated it to her, she kept talking and telling me exactly what to do and kept repeating it to make sure that I don't forget to do what she tells me. To slide under her, not to look to the right and not to look to the back but to go right under her as soon as the shooting going to start. Well, fortunately we were not shot at that time. We were, I think brought back into the camp I don't remember what happened.

Do you remember at all what you must have felt like? You said you expected to be shot?

Yeah.

This is an eight year old child. Most eight year old children don't think about being shot.

What went through your head that day?

Well, I was so conditioned that my mind was set for survival. For instance, I would sometimes wake up at night after an incident like this, and I would sit up and I wouldn't know where I am. Am I dead already? Is this what death is like or am I still alive? Where am I? I laugh about it now. When Mark and I travel, we like to go by car and travel and we stay in different hotels, and occasionally, once in a while I'll wake up at night and sit up and wonder where I am. [Laugh] Well naturally, the circumstances are quite different.

Do you remember those other occasions when that happens?

Yes. It brings, when I sit up and I look where I am and I realize in a hotel room in this and this place, the feeling of fear comes over me that I felt at the time when I used to wake up and my question was not where I am as a place, but am I still alive or am I dead? Because, yes, I did wonder what it was like, but it was something that you were trying to avoid no matter what. People did everything possible to avoid being killed, or being dead. Dead was a state of being. I don't know. I accepted it as something that will eventually happen to me. That I'm going to do everything in my power to avoid it. It was just a certain feeling and tension that is so hard to make even myself understand now how I was able... the tension of not knowing from minute to another if you're going to live, because there was always a German, and there was always a Pole or something that will give you away that you were a Jew or being in camp that you were in the wrong place, or that you are not needed. I mean,

I was a no person. I was a nothing. We came into Auschwitz, and all I heard was when they gave me the number, or no matter who spoke to me that was taking care of us in Auschwitz the process of bathing and taking everything away from you, when they looked at us and saw a child they kept saying, you should be very happy that you are here. You should be thrilled. If I happened to cry or open my mouth or complain to my mother about something the question was I wasn't allowed to complain, I wasn't allowed to cry, I wasn't allowed to show any emotions. I had to keep it all in to myself. I lived in a dream world.

Question not audible.

Well, they - we were in ahhh Ostrowiec camp and they liquidated Ostrowiec, and we were supposed to, I guess, go to another working camp but we were sent to Auschwitz instead. We were put on cattle cars with a pail of water, and I think we were given some bread too at the time, and the doors were closed and we were off. We didn't know that we were going to Auschwitz, as I said, until I guess it must have been a couple of days, they lifted the children up to the window to look out and we would try to give landmarks or tell the people around us because we were very crowded, we couldn't move. So they would get the children up to the window and the children would tell the people what they saw and this way when we arrived in Auschwitz in early morning, it was kind of dawn, it was very foggy. In fact I think every morning in Auschwitz was foggy, we saw those beautiful gates, and I didn't know what it was. To me it didn't mean anything. It was a name. But ah, I was scared because everybody around me was scared. People started crying, and ah they

were scared so I was petrified. We... I was with my mother, I was huddled to her, we were towards like a corner so I, we had some breathing room. But when we first got in I remember standing there and I couldn't breath because everybody was standing and I was standing too, but I was so short that, and we were so close together until we all sat down I guess that's why maybe my mother kept pushing me over to the side so I would have a wall rather than another person standing next to me. So, it was like being on a really, it wasn't any different when we were transported from one place to another on a truck. It was the same way. But here it was over a longer period of time.

Did you have any sanitary facilities?

No. No. I think that we used the pail after the water was used up. But I'm not sure about it. It was not unusual I guess ahh with the little food that we really had and water that you didn't need any. I don't remember or else...I don't remember. It was something just that wasn't necessary.

Do you remember the sounds and the smells?

I was by then so used to the smell of human bodies of closeness ahh that ahh it didn't make an impression on me. It was just, when the doors were finally opened and ahh that sound of "heraus, heraus" again and the fear in the peoples eyes and we looked up and we saw in the camps people dressed in the pashax, in the uniforms of Auschwitz. It was like being in a different world. It was foggy, and ahh it was very orderly. Whatever anybody still had, little bundle, they were asked to leave. You will get it later. And ahh again, our transport was left on the platform for a day, and

I think a night. They didn't really know what to do with us. There was rumors, I don't know if it was true or not, but for what I remember at the time, that Mengele was sick and he couldn't make his selections. Later on I heard people say that it's because we had a certain letter that we came from a working camp so all the people on the transport were ahh of working ability so there were no selections needed to be done. How much truth there is to it, I really don't know. That's what I heard at the time.

Were there other children on the train?

Yes. Yes. There was a few children. Man and woman were separated right away. And my father wasn't with me all this time so it didn't really matter to me at all. I just remember there was a question of a few boys. Should they go with the fathers or should they go with the mothers. And in our case, the ones that went with the mothers are with us still. The ones that went with the fathers did not survive. The next day we were given, there was no food or drink or anything offered, I mean we just didn't know what was happening to us. I guess that they, there was talk of they were pointing to the ovens, the crematoriums, the smoke and all that. I didn't ...

Inaudible question:

The people are around me. You know, I understood what they were saying, but I took it as a matter of fact, but I don't think that I really understood what they meant until I stayed in Auschwitz. And this constant, because we were in a camp that was on the railroad track, in other words, we saw the railroad, and the trains coming in, the wagons coming in, and seeing these people going in and not coming out again,

I finally, came through to me what was happening. But when I arrived, I was scared as I was up to that point. I was always shivering, I was always afraid except when I had my fantasies, I don't remember anything that happened to me that I could be happy about really. Any experience ... Happiness was when I saw my mother, when I had an extra piece of bread, obviously, that my mother gave up for me. Ahh, when we came into Auschwitz after standing on the platform, we were allowed to sit down then, the next morning they decided to let us into camp and they decided to give us the... no the numbers came after... we were taken into a... we were lead into a huge room where we had to undress... and I couldn't get over the fact where, here I am standing, that was the first time really where I stood among, I don't know if it was a hundred or two hundred or four hundred, there was quite a few women... women standing naked and men parading back and forth. And if you didn't move over fast enough, you would be hit. And these men were walking back and forth, and I looked at my mother and I didn't know how to ask... how you can stand in front of people walking?, because up to that point, we, I didn't witness that. I didn't see that. We were completely undressed. The only thing we were allowed to keep was the shoes. And ahh, we went through like a little pool where we had to immerse our shoes in, to disinfect them I guess, and our hair was shaved, and we were lead into a huge room where some water came down. Squeezed in, there really wasn't any washing involved, and we were let out at the other end of the door, not the same door that we came in with, and we were thrown a dress, a dress or some kind of a garment. And we came out and for the first time in years I saw everybody laugh because they

would look at each other... and I guess they all looked so co... the people were laughing and I couldn't understand why. The women were looking at each other and laughing, because they didn't recognize each other. They were laughing, because a tall women would get a short dress, and a short women would get a long dress. And some of them were torn. Then we were marched into the ahh camp that had a brick barracks. It was Betsfibear. It was the first part of Auschwitz that was built - Birkenau actually not Auschwitz - Auschwitz was the city this was Birkenau. And ahh we stayed there for a short time. I don't know what I was doing there other than standing on appells [roll call] all the time. I really cannot remember. Once there was an appell and Mengele was coming. And they Shoepeltz there. She was a very nice woman. She would tell us when we should, she would try to let the children stay an hour or two longer in the barracks until the SS men came to make the counts, because sometimes you stood for two, three hours before the SS came to count. So she would be on the lookout and the children would be in the barracks and when the SS was coming closer she would call us out and we would be counted.

Was she a German prisoner?

Ahh, I think she was a half and half. Yeah. A ahh, she was a prisoner. She was not a soldier. At one time there was rumors that selections were being made because there wasn't enough, enough people that came in the transports and the crematoriums were going and they needed more people. So there was chaos. People were trying to get into other blocks that were more favorable. Don't ask me why they thought the others were more favorable, you just didn't know what to do. So

another child and myself ran into the block next door to us. The block next door to us had corpses. When somebody died you threw the corpse, completely stripped, because whatever you could save and use for yourself naturally you kept. So she and I ran into that block and made ourselves a little hole to hide among the corpses. We stacked them up in such a way that we could breathe. I mean, we thought of all these things and we didn't think anything of it to hide among them. We even sometimes played there too. That's why we thought of that place as a hiding place. We made up stories. Make believe stories. We told about our home. Not necessarily truth. We glorified everything. Ahh, my favorite story was to talk about my sister. What a wonderful life she's having. I thought about her all the time. We found a piece of yarn and a couple of sticks and we were teaching each other how to knit. We would pass it on try to teach each other how to knit. Ahh,

What was your mother doing?

My mother was taken on certain work details cleaning the toilets, going out and building bunkers and then taking them apart, I mean there was no constructive work I don't think that she did in Auschwitz.

Where you aware of what was going on in Auschwitz in the gas chambers?

Yes. Yes. I realized that for two reasons. One, observing the carloads of people coming in and being escorted into the showers, as they were called, and never coming out. So they had to go somewhere. Another reason why I realized what was happening and listening to adults always talk about it naturally made it more ahh authentic and you realized it more was when that particular transport would come

in and go in that door and not come out the next thing we would know is that chimneys would be smoking. And ahh, there was a very sweet smell in the air, I mean you could almost taste it, it was very unpleasant and I wasn't hungry for some reason, I was really not hungry in Auschwitz until they stopped using the crematorium. And it was part of conversation saying, oh a transport came in the crematorium are being used again. We didn't even have to go outside. We could taste it. So we realized what was happening, in fact, when my mother was put on the list to be transported out of Auschwitz at that time I was already separated from her and I was in the children's block, she came running to me at night telling me that she will have to leave me, because although I was not with her in the same block she made point, she made all effort to see me at least once a day and to bring me an extra piece of bread that she had or to talk to me or to just make me feel good and make me feel that she's still around. She came to me crying saying "I have to leave you." My answer to her was, "what good are you to me anyways. [weeping] You cannot save me. I mean, I probably will be going up smoke and you won't be able to do anything about it anyways." So I thought I was being grown up and making her feel good that she's leaving and she shouldn't feel so bad about it. But now that I think about it I don't think it was such a good thing to say. So ahh, I knew and I think that this is what we were expecting.

What were the circumstances under which you were sick?

Ohh, I ahh I became sick and I was sent to the hospital. And once you get into a hospital you know that's the end because whenever there is a the crematorium being

used the hospitals are always cleared out. I mean that was part of the routine almost, and there was a measles epidemic, was quite a few of us that got the measles in Auschwitz. I guess because of no medication, food or whatever you were supposed to get when you have the measles, I also got the pneumonia on top of it, but in spite of it there was supposed to be a selection in the hospital that particular day, and I had pneumonia, my spots barely were starting to go away, but my temperature had dropped that day. So the head nurse used it as an excuse that I am already well, because my temperature had gone down a little and sent me out of the hospital and sent me back to the regular block.

Was this a prisoner?

Pardon?

Was this a prisoner?

This was a prisoner. She was, yes, the head nurse of the hospital. Now when I walked into that barrack and the people saw me the way I came out of the hospital, first of all, I had lost my voice, in fact I did not regain my voice until sometime after the war. I was hoarse. I had lost a tremendous amount of weight, I was full of spots still and I just, as I'm told, I was green and nobody gave me much of a chance to survive let alone just being shot but to survive to live. But I did.

Then what happened?

Then what happened? Then there was a selection in the block for another disease that was going around in the camp. Some kind of a ahh eczema or, in Auschwitz they called it [Ashfeeairsba]. It was little pimples that you got on the arms and

under the arms, and because I had spots, they assumed that's the disease I have. So they had another block for that. They were very well organized, the Germans at the time. Auschwitz was running like a clock. They had a block for everything. They had a hospital, they had a block for the people that had this skin disease, they had obviously, already at that time, a children's block. I wasn't in it yet, but they did have it. They had a block with Russian families with women that were expecting babies that had babies in Auschwitz... that actually delivered babies in Auschwitz. I mean they had everything when I was there.

Did you know about them?

Well, I had seen them later because I was liberated and we were for almost 10 days to two weeks in all by ourselves so we got to see all these people later. Anyways, we went to that Cretza block, as they called it, and naturally my mother wouldn't let me go by myself, so she came along with me. And ahhh, they gave you some kind of medication salva to put on it and instead of my spots getting better, they were getting infected and was getting worse and I had a terrible infection under one arm and I couldn't pass the inspection to get out which was taking place every two, three days. After a while we found a little trick where I put the blouse over my shoulder so I didn't have to pick this shoulder up and the infection was hidden and they looked here and the measles spots went away so they let us out and we went again to the showers. We were marched to the showers. And there all the people that were in charge, which was the Canadians and so forth were, just couldn't believe that a child still was alive in Auschwitz. And at that time I was the only child there.

I forget to ask you, were you tattooed?

Oh sure, I have a tattoo. I have a number. 60989. I wasn't Ruth. I was a number. And because of that number a lot of people thought I was very fortunate. I got a number in Auschwitz. In other words, I was accepted, at least I will be counted. I don't know to do what. I guess, their plan was for me to be in the children's block to do what they feel fit to do with us.

How many children were in your block?

I really don't know. Maybe 100 - maybe 150.

Where there any adults in this block?

No. The block that I was in, it was just children. After I was separated from my mother.

How did they separate the children?

They just walked in and they said all children step forward and we'll take them to the children's block. They'll be better fed there, they'll be taken care of and the parents, the mother will have a chance to sleep so she can work better. And they took us away. And that was that. Now in the children's block they had a very nice way of doing things. They didn't force you to do anything. Ahh I remember one incident, two Germans came in, I don't know if one of them was Mengele, as I mentioned to you once before I, we never looked up at Mengele, he was a tall man, because we were afraid to meet his eyes. We didn't want him to see us, so we always saw the beautiful shiny boots that he was wearing and the buckle but you kind of were afraid to look up any further. They came in and they said they needed fifty children for a

transfer to go to Belgium. The Belgium government wanted fifty children. And ahh since it was such a wonderful thing, they didn't feel it would be right for them to do the picking and that we should volunteer, the ones that want to, should step forward and ahh they are the ones that will be out of this war. Well, each one of us wanted to be out of it, each one of us wanted a better life, but we were so conditioned by them that there weren't really that many volunteers although eventually they did get their quota. My reasoning was at the time, my mother was gone, I had known by then that my father was in Auschwitz, I hadn't seen him yet then, because it was during the time when I wasn't sure if he was there, but I knew that he had been in Auschwitz because my mother and I had seen him. And I thought to myself, here at least I know there is maybe somebody of my family. Where they're going to send us, none of us quite believed that it was going to be such a wonderful place. We thought maybe another camp, maybe certain work to do, or maybe the final solution, they needed another fifty people for the transport, as we called it. I mean we, we ahh were so used to being honest about it we didn't try to have any illusions among ourselves as far as facts were concerned. This one was killed or that one was killed or this one died or this one is standing on her knees with bricks up on sharp stones. You would just pass by that person and you wouldn't dare look at them. Because if you do, then you might wind up sitting or kneeling right next to them.

Was this a form of punishment?

Yeah. For maybe they didn't look the right way at a German, or maybe they... the German thought they were going to say something or maybe they went too fast and

grabbed a piece of bread. I mean you didn't have to have a reason. That's why maybe because being a child, we could hide better, we could disappear.

So when they came for these fifty -

Yeah.

You decided not to go?

I decided not to go. In fact a couple of other friends of mine decided not to either and ahh we never heard of the other children. We don't know what happened to them. And many other little things that they came into the block. They were not forceful. They did it a very nice way. We didn't get any more food, in fact, I think at the time, the crematoriums weren't working as much any more. I don't know why, I mean we weren't informed, and ahh my mother was gone, and I was really hungry. I really, this was the time that I was the hungriest of what I experienced through the years up to that point. I really missed her. And ahh we had some people come to the block also all dressed up with white bands with a red cross. Prior to that visit there was always making sure that we were nice and clean and that the beds are made clean and that ahh we should, we were in a nice way told we should appear that we're happy. And you do what you were told.

Do you remember any of the children disappear occasionally? You said there were twins there.

Yeah, these were twins. There were children taken and brought back continuously. You tended to mind your own business and try to survive and ahh just be concerned with things that were going around you immediately. As for myself at that point in

my life, I at this point, if I think that if not for the fact that I thought that maybe my father is somewhere in camp it was really the lowest point in my life where I felt that, what was the use of surviving? Up until then, you heard people say all the time, "oh we've got to live, we've got to survive, we've got tell the world what is going on that people are treated like animals that there is all this killing going on for no reason, all this burning, all this... we've got to live." At that time, at that point of my life I really felt it wasn't worth it.

Have you ever thought to yourself - If I weren't Jewish this wouldn't be happening to me?

Oh definitely. Absolutely. When I saw those children playing ball. When... even on the way to Auschwitz when they picked me up and I looked out the little window and I saw all these things, normal things going on, the fields, the people walking, and I thought to myself - why not me? I mean what is it so terrible of being a Jew? I mean what am I doing any different? Yes, I did question that. I couldn't understand that. I didn't know why I was there. I just knew that my mother kept saying to me, just hold on, it'll just be a little bit longer, just a little bit longer everything will be fine, this will be over and everything will be back to normal. Grandparents will come back. She knew very well that they wouldn't. Ahh, we'll be a family again, and everything will be all right. And that's what kept me going, and I didn't have that reinforcement from her in Auschwitz, and really at that point I felt it doesn't matter what happens to me. I don't care. I really did not care.

How long were you there without her?

Well, I guess it was sometime in November when she was sent out so maybe two or three weeks before I, time didn't mean anything to me because, as I said, I lived from day to day from hour to hour from minute to minute even so I can only associate certain things with the seasons. I know I came into Auschwitz, it was hot summer, I know I was in one of the camps and I had the typhus and it was in the spring. We came into the camp and within ten days the whole transport became sick including my mother and me and everybody. No medication, no anything. We survived. There wasn't even one death.

Deaths from typhus?

Yeah from typhus. So I can associate this time to, I have a memory there that I'm very, that I tend to be upset when I think about it now too, when we came to that camp I was put on a pritsche, on a bunk on the top, and I guess I was one of the first ones to get sick and my mother prepared some food and was trying to bring it up to me because I guess I was, either I was too sick or too stubborn, I don't know, maybe I just wasn't feeling well anymore and I didn't want to eat. I just wasn't interested. And my mother tried to bring it up to me and she was already getting sick and she fainted while trying to give me, bring me up the food. I can picture that moment and ahh I even felt bad then, that by her trying to come up and give me that food I almost lost her because she fainted, I mean she just wasn't there. So ahh these are incidents that keep coming back to me and bring this terrible fear that I experienced over that long period of time back to me and that's why I'm a little reluctant to talk about this too much. I really am. Because I don't want to feel the way I felt then;

and I don't want to shut it out altogether, because I want to feel still now. I don't know how, I'm afraid to shut off the other so I should not shut off my feelings now. I have a good life. I have a wonderful husband and three beautiful children and I want to partake in that pleasure.

When were you liberated?

I was liberated by the Russians in 1945, I think it was January the 27th, the exact date. The Russians came in after being about 10 days or two weeks without the Germans. The Germans were the last selection the people that were able to leave were the last march left and we were supposed to be killed. But the Russians advanced a little bit too fast and the Germans wanted to save their own lives... ran away and left us behind.

Your father told you you would be killed then?

Right. But naturally he did not know that the people that stayed survived because the Germans had to run away to save themselves. Now during that time, I think a day or two after the Germans returned after leaving us they returned and they drove into the camp and they started screaming "Heraus, Heraus!" to everybody and whoever managed to run out during that time they indiscriminately shot. So there were some killed. But then they continued and escaped. I guess it was like a group of Germans that felt that they hadn't done their, hadn't completed their job and they returned to finish it so they went around the camp and then they left. I didn't manage to make it out at that time and I survived. So the Russians came in and we were very happy to see them.

You were still in the children's block?

We, all the survivors, the children and the elderly people that survived transferred over to one barrack in the beginning of the block where the elite of the prisoners lived, because it was a warmer block. It was in the winter, it was very cold and we were all together in that block. The people from that camp, oh no, the Russians were across the street in a barrack and there is where I saw the infants that were born in Auschwitz towards the end.

So the Russians got all the children together and filmed and photographed you?

Yes. Yeah, this is well they took a lot of pictures and they took a lot of photographs. This is one of the pictures that they took and some of my friends and myself, I'm right over here... got in on the pictures. I guess -

You're in the back row?

Yeah, I'm in the back row. Just part of my face shows. It was an incline. It's not that I was that tall, so it seemed that I was that tall but I really wasn't.

What did it feel like when the Russians came? Were you overjoyed? Were you just exhausted?

Oh we were, when the Russians came in we were overjoyed. We had, all the warehouses were torn open and we got whatever clothes we wanted. That's why we looked so stuffed here because we put two or three coats, one on top of the other, on us because we wanted things. We had all the bread we want, they gave us chocolates. They gave us fruit, I mean we didn't know such things existed anymore. They were very nice to us. They took the very sick ones to hospitals and they took

a group of children, which I was among them to Krakow and we traveled with, on a buggy, on a straw buggy, in fact we went through Warsaw at the time, and it was completely bombed out, it was still in '45 before the war was over. We were taken to Krakow and there they set up an orphanage for us and they tried to feed us back to health.

End of Tape 1.

Tape 2.

After you got to Krakow, how long after that before you were reunited with your mother?

Well, my mother was not liberated until the war was over because she was sent into Czechoslovakia towards Germany. My mother found me actually coming back from after the liberation. Most of the survivors tried to go back to their towns hoping that the family, the rest of the family will do the same and on the way back to those towns, transportation was terrible, the trains were running very badly and they had to spend many nights on different train stations making connections and what people used to do is put their names, lists of names of survivors, people that have survived that have passed by this particular train station, and had written on the way where they were going to. Now the names of the children in this orphanage that I was in were posted on the train station in Krakow. And some of the people from our town that were passing by Krakow saw my name there and when they saw my mother in Ostrowiec when she came back told her that I survived and that I'm in Krakow. But my mother's main concern was to go back to Ostrowiec because she knew she had

a daughter there because my sister stayed with a Gentile family so she was anxious to see if she survived. I mean she was almost sure that she survived.

And she did?

And she did. And then from Ostrowiec she came to Krakow.

With your sister?

With my sister.

What was that like?

That was anticlimactic because my sister was not the warm person that I had remembered or fantasized about you know as I had wanted her to be. And now I realize that it was a very hard situation for her because here my mother and I had this very unusual relationship, this closeness. I survived really because of her and even if I didn't realize it at the time, I felt it probably and my mother was very close to me too because she was with me. You know when you're with somebody you develop a certain relationship. And things for us naturally were 100% better than they were for the last three years. My sister on the other hand, had a very good life the last three years and she was taken out of there because the people that she was with, the lady was half German, so she had to leave before the Russians came into town, so they left for Germany and left my sister with certain people that my father had arranged. My mother came and picked her up and put her in a situation where everything was chaotic. It just, nothing was going right. There was still a lot of anti-semitism around. My sister felt very comfortable being Gentile and here she was thrown back into being Jewish. My mother wanted to do so many things for me

because she knew what I had gone through the last three years and she was concerned I guess about my well being and my sister, I guess, did not fit in. And it must have been very hard for her.

Do you remember when you saw your mother? Was she tired looking?

Yeah, she came into the building. She came into the building and it was like seeing a ghost but I had known that she is alive because people that were with her, preceded her, and they had told me that she's alive. But then, now that I look back at it, there is so many people that said that certain people are alive they said the same thing about my father, and he did not survive. So, ahh it was just unbelievable and then she left me in the children's home and had to go and kind of try to straighten things out and see how she can reconstruct the future and see who else survived from the family. And I was very upset with her. I gave her a very hard time every time she came to visit me in the orphanage and left me because she knew that there I had school, I had food, I was taken care of. But I didn't want to be there, I wanted to be with her and I was very upset with her. I gave her a very hard time because I wanted to be with her. It was very, it was I guess impossible. In fact, my mother was in Ostrowiec during the time when the Kielce pogrom was on and Ostrowiec is very close to Kielce. She was in the apartment that she stayed in with other women, with other people, for I think a week or two weeks they were not allowed to go out because they were afraid of another Pogrom in our city after the war.

So she made arrangements to pick you up and leave finally?

Finally she made arrangements for me, she placed my sister also in another children's home in Bielsko because she was very concerned that we have some normality and she placed my sister in Bielsko because it was a good children's home there and she, you see, even after the war you could not feel safe in the city that you came from, from our city anyways. We couldn't go to school there, we couldn't live in our city. It wasn't safe. So they set up those children's homes and ahh I guess money that came from America or many other places supported these homes because we were well taken care of. After she placed my sister there, she made arrangements to take me from Krakow over to Bielsko also, so we would be together. She finalized her arrangements to get out of Poland. After a while she realized that nobody else survived. The Jews tried to get out of Poland. My mother felt that we had to do the same. Through certain organizations, which I'm not aware of, what kind of arrangements she had made, at one time she came and picked us up and we went with a group, an illegal group naturally, into Czechoslovakia and from Czechoslovakia into Germany. And from Germany we found some cousins in Canada that insisted that my mother, my sister and I come to Canada. They sent us papers and we went to Canada. Toronto. We lived in Toronto with the Barkin family which were absolutely wonderful to us.

Were you encouraged to talk about this when you came to Canada?

Ummm, the family did a lot of questioning and yes we did do some superficial talk of places and things and people and incidents but not feelings, not experiences. As a child I did not remember places, I did not remember people I only remembered

faces and I remembered and felt things differently than I heard the adults around me discuss things and I felt well maybe I don't know. Maybe I didn't hear it right, maybe what I felt or saw at the time wasn't really so because after all these people are talking about an incident and it's different the way I felt about it so I didn't talk about it. I didn't talk about it at all. If anybody would ask me about where I was I would say. They would ask me about certain things in my life would make me feel or take me back to an incident that was very unpleasant and I would maybe talk to my children occasionally, very seldom though. Or among survivors, we would reminisce about places and things, but that's as far as it went until I was at the gathering I think in Philadelphia. I heard some children survivors speak and she said exactly the same thing of what I felt that we as children have different experiences of the same incident and have seen it differently and should not feel guilty that we do not remember the date or the place or exactly how it came about because I really don't. I heard a lot of things but I didn't feel they were important at the time to survive and anything that did not pertain to survival wasn't important to me.

When did you find out about your father?

Ahh, my mother had found out about my father I think from certain people still in Poland. But she did not believe it. She was still reading lists and going to different organizations that had survivor names and I think we finally faced the fact in Germany. I think that's when we set a date when to observe his Yahrzeit [memorial]. I'm not sure. It's something that kind of crept up. I knew he was gone, so it didn't matter if it was official or not. There was still kind of a hope in the back

of our mind, the back of my mind, but ahh it was anticlimactic at the time. It didn't make an effect on me. It's just that when somebody would do something to me that I felt was not right, I would explain it to myself, well it's only because I'm, originally when I didn't know my mother was alive, I would say because I'm an orphan. And then I would say it's because I don't have a father that's why I'm being screamed at or I'm not allowed to do this or I'm not allowed to that. In Germany we lived in the city, we lived in Munich because my sister had education all through the war so she needed higher education. Not like they had in the DP camps after the war so my mother was advised that it would be better for us to live in Munich because there was a Hebrew high school there that my sister could attend. She wanted us to be in a Jewish atmosphere. We lived among normal people. People that had homes, that had families. We lived in a room with, that was, we used a room in an apartment that was occupied by a German family, a very affluent German family. They had to give up a room for us. They had such a normal life. They had a son that was about my age. I resented him. He had a father, he had a mother. They were able to enjoy the holidays. Theirs was Christmas, ours was something else. All right. We had some of it in the school, in the Hebrew school they tried to give us a lot of tradition. They tried to give us one full course meal before we went home because we really didn't have a home. My mother was working in Germany. I resented that child and any other child that I happened to have crossed while I was coming from school. Why don't I have a home to come home too? Why do I have to live just in one room? It's already after the war. I mean I'm supposed to be already free. And yet,

I didn't have any of that. We, you know, I'm a very lucky person in so many ways, I guess most important because I'm sitting here, but in Poland while I was in the orphanage I had, they had a correspondent I think it was from New York come and interview us and talk to us and he took our names and distributed it to a Hebrew school in New York. The girl that picked up my name started sending me letters, and not only letters but she started sending me parcels to Poland, to Germany wherever I came, when I came to the Kommitet or the center of Jewish offices, there was a parcel always waiting for me. That's another thing that very few people had. We didn't have anything. And these parcels were like a God send. There was clothes for us, there was certain foods that we could exchange for other things in Germany after the war. Later on we found out that that particular family was struggling. They couldn't make a living but yet they took away from themselves and they send me. None of the other children received any parcels from New York. I was the only one. So it's like somebody was watching over us.

Did you know, of course, how rare it was to have someone your age survive Auschwitz?

Yeah.

Have you thought about why you were among those few children to survive? Why you didn't leave the barracks that day? Those who did were all killed.

I think it's a matter of fate. I guess I was at the right place at the right time. I didn't make decisions because I had facts that I could base them on. I made them out of a whim, out of a feeling that I should be somewhere at a certain time caused a lot

of problems for my mother because of it, but it made us survive. I really don't know why.

What are those events that you told me about or others? You said someone asked you something or makes you think of or takes you back something that you do during the course of the day? What in particular still haunts you, anything?

Almost anything can set me off. I can walk, as I said, at night in the forest we will be sometimes vacationing and I'll walk out and I'll see lights in the distance and I feel like I am in the forest with my mother and I see the uh, the houses of the peasants of the farmers that betrayed me or wouldn't give me the glass of water and that fear that I had at the time overcomes me. Um, anything, I will see a piece of bread on the ground, and it makes me think of the times when I would have fought over it, to have it. I mean there is anything, anything can set me off at any time. And I don't mind it to think about the incident, I just feel so helpless when almost the feeling I that had then overcomes me. That's what maybe moves me a little... I think that after the war, or should I say during those ten days that we were alone, I had such terrible, terrible hatred toward all these people that had done everything to me and the things that I was going to do to them. When I think of it, it's just worse than what they have done to us and then I thought to myself, I'm alive. That's when after the Russians came in and my mother wasn't there, my father wasn't there, we were amongst strangers and I said to myself, I'm alive and I can think. In other words, I am the winner. I won. What I went through, and I'm able to, I think what is very important to me is to be able to feel joy and sorrow, I wouldn't want to lose

that. Because I think that this is what I did during these years. I wasn't allowed to feel. I was just allowed to think. The only time I felt was when I was living in those fantasies, then I felt good things to push me across, to pass the day or the time. That's very precious to me, I don't want to lose that. And when I start feeling this fear, and I'm afraid if I shut it out all together that I would not be able to enjoy the joy and the unpleasantness about other people to be able to feel with them. But, I consider myself extremely, extremely lucky because I live. And I resent the fact when people feel sorry for me because, although I suffered all these years, I survived. I think that all these people that have suffered the way I did or maybe worse, and probably a lot worse some of them, and they did not survive. Not only did they not survive, but none of the families to even mention their name. It's just like they weren't, they didn't exist. I mean that's the terrible thing. I think that is why I, myself decided that maybe that's why I was spared. To continue this link. To, maybe, the time has come where I can juggle the two, feel what I felt at that time, re-feel it and continue with a normal life... I don't know.

Your three children.

Oh, I have three lovely children. And I have a son-in-law too.

What are their names?

My oldest is Shelly and then Elaine and Susan. Three girls.

And you have talked to them about it.

Um, I have not sat down with them and talked as I have with you. We had always geared certain books to them to read and if they had any questions, I told them they

should feel free to come and ask me. I am open to answer questions, but I have difficulty to sit down and to arrange my thoughts and to talk about it. Exactly as it happened. I can't do that. It's too painful because it takes me too long to look back and I feel like I have to live it through again and I, at this point, I just don't seem to be able to do it.

Do you feel like you are getting stronger into the future?

Myself, I at this point, I certainly do. I have a wonderful life and I'm very thankful for it. I hope that things will continue and that I will be able to share with my children all their future and continue the link. I think that my children know enough of the Holocaust, there is never enough, but they know a lot about it that they would pass it on, and hopefully wouldn't allow a thing like this to happen again.

Thank you.

Thank you.