

*Holocaust Survivor*

*Oral Histories*

*SHARI WEISS*

*April 17, 1985*

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**This is an interview with Shari Weiss taking place under the auspices and at the location of the Holocaust Memorial Center in West Bloomfield , Michigan on April 17, 1985. My name is Robert Roth.**

**Could you state your name please?**

My name is Shari Weiss.

**And where are you originally from?**

Well, I was born in Rumania, which became Hungary in 1940. I was born in 1928 - 1929, excuse me, I'm making myself older already, 1929 April 28. Ahhmm.

**What was the name of the town that you were born in?**

The town was called Harina. It's a small village. It's a small village in Rumania. I'm sure it still exists, but I haven't been back since I was eight years old, actually, or nine years old.

**And could you describe the identity and number of your immediate family at that time.**

Umm. We - I come from a fairly large family. Besides my mom and dad and my grandmother who lived with us, we were seven living children. My mother had nine children altogether. Two of them died. One of them in a car accident and one of them I think was a crib death, which at the time they didn't recognize as such, of course. And uhh, we lived, my father was a wheat merchant, actually he used to go to fairs, I don't know if you call it fairs, it's markets really and uhh this is how he made his living by buying and selling wheat. I don't know what else you would like to know about it?

**What were your parents' names?**

My mother's name was Sarine and my father's name was, ahh, David Rosenfeldt.

Umm,

**And how many brothers and sisters - you had six others?**

I had living three sisters and three brothers, three living brothers, yes, and three sisters because we were four girls and three boys, actually.

**Ok. Could you tell me their names and tell us what the age ranges were?**

Well the oldest in the family is my sister whose name is Feigie. She lives in Israel today with her own family. She is the oldest of all of the children, of the surviving children. Then there is my brother Nehigh, who also lives in Israel in Haifa. He is childless. I don't know if it's due to the war circumstances or what, but he doesn't have children. And I have my brother Zvi, or Hairshe as we would call him. He also lives in Israel in Fardishanna. He has two daughters. Then I had a younger sister whose name was Marika who didn't come back. And then I had a younger sister whose name was Goldie -- she didn't come back. We called her Goldie but her Hungarian name was Arunka. And then I had a little brother whose name was Zelig after my grandfather who had passed away before deportation and all this.

**Could you give us a brief description of what your life was like?**

Well, we had a very, very beautiful family life at home. Even though we were not wealthy people, by no stretch of the imagination, we had a very, very close family contact. Ah, we were, of course, all our lives all our thoughts were, of course, connected greatly with religion. I come from a very religious family. I mean my

mother had a Sheitel and my father, as I think I mentioned to you before, didn't have a beard or anything, but he did, it was more of a, he didn't have hair but he had peos that he didn't, I mean they weren't down long peos just behind his ears you know because of commercial reasons he couldn't, he didn't walk around with long peos or anything. And ahh, very, very close knit family as almost all families were in the small villages. Families that were so concentrated, who were concentrating on religion as we were. I mean everything centered around our Judaism really.

**Approximately how many people were in your village totally? Any idea?**

It's a very hard question 'cause I don't know, I was a child of ahh eight or nine when I left there so we didn't pay any attention to numbers I mean we were ahh

**Do you recall anything about ahh - did you live together with non-Jews?**

Well, we had neighbors,

**Were the two separated?**

No, uh uh, we had neighbors across the street who were non-Jews. I mean on both sides of our own house there were Jewish people, but across the street and, I mean, we were scattered all over to the village. I mean, it wasn't a concentrated group of Jews and a concentrated group of Christians. I mean, we were intermingled really.

**Did you have non-Jewish friends, do you recall, as a child there?**

When a family is as numerous as ours is, was, I should say, I don't even know if we had a need for any outside friends, not only that, but we had cousins and people living so closely in the same courtyards that we didn't need to have any other friends. I mean, I know our parents had more contacts with other people, but we were pretty

much ahh together you know just the family; the children in our own family plus the neighbors' children that we were close friends with as I recall, I mean, uhhh.

**You mention that you left the village when you were eight or nine. What were the circumstances surrounding that?**

The circumstances were such that ahh I had an aunt and uncle, well actually it was my mother's brother who lived in Colagvar in Cluj at the time it was called because it was still Rumania, and they had an only son, ahh, and my aunt who dearly loved her mother wanted the child that was named after her mother, when her mother passed away, to live with her and that was my younger sister but she didn't want to go anywhere. And I had somehow, I don't know even at that age I had a yearning to get out of that small village and I said to my Mom, "well why can't I take her place and go and live with my aunt," which I regretted many, many times through the course of my childhood not because I was ill treated or anything, it's just that I realize now how important it would have been to be with my family for those few years that we had left together. But as a young child, I mean the lure of a richer life, evidently, I mean a more affluent life because my mother described the way my aunt and uncle were living, and it was very tempting, of course, and very luring, and that's why I consented to go and live with my aunt and uncle. Of course, I mean there is no comparison in the lifestyles, of course, because my aunt and uncle were doing very nicely and they lived very graciously, and of course, I benefited through that with schooling and foreign languages and taking piano lessons and all that. It is just

natural that I was very content with that situation even though many a nights I cried for my mother and dad.

**Did they have any children your aunt and uncle?**

Yes, they had one son. An only son who was eight years older than I. My cousin who lives in Germany now, but we don't have any contact at all.

**Your aunt and uncle's names were what?**

My uncle was Emmanuel Soloman and my aunt's name was Bertha Soloman. And when I was in camp, and ordered, I mean when we found out in Auschwitz, I mean, we thought if we say we are mother and daughter that we are gonna be kept together, I mean, little did we know that that was the exact intent of the Nazis to separate families and to divide them rather than to keep them together. But by then, I mean I took the name of Shari Soloman just so that we should have the same name. And I did call her mother just so that we should be identified as mother and daughter.

**You mention that they - that the little village that you were born in and grew up in until you were eight or nine was just that, a little village and Cluj I assume was a larger city.**

Certainly it was. I mean in comparison with an American city it's a small town, of course, because the entire population, I think, consisted of 100,000 people and 20% of that was Jewish. The population was 20,000 Jews were in Cluj where it was quite a nice Jewish community, of course.

**Could you describe the vibrancy of that community?**

Well, it was divided also in different factions, there were the reformed Jews, of course, and there were the Orthodox and the, what are we now, ??? what kind of a shul are we, I forgot?

**Conservatives.**

Conservatives. Right. And then we were the Conservatives which my aunt and uncle belonged to a Conservative Shul. But they were a lot more liberal with their religious beliefs and attendance of Synagogue and what not than my own parents were, of course. I mean even the consumption of traif food was allowed outside the home, I mean, it wasn't brought in the home but it was consumed outside the home. I mean, our life style was not centered around the religious rituals as they were at my own home.

**Were you Shoma Shabbas in Cluj?**

Ahhm, I don't think so because my aunt and uncle had a store which they kept open on Shabbas. My aunt used to go into the store and my uncle used to go to Shul. I remember that but as far as riding or not I don't know if he did or not because everybody walked, I mean, we didn't have the conveniences of the cars as we do today that we, even to the corner, we take our car and ride in. At the time we just walked wherever we went, Shabbas or not.

**Did you go to a public school or did you go to a Jewish school?**

Well, ahh when the Hungarians came in, in 1940, the first act that they did in making us realize that we are not the same as any other people is that the schools became



segregated. So ahhm, that was 1940, I said right, in September of 1940 and I was to enter into my first year of gymnasium which is Lycee or I don't know how you, high school and of course there was no school - until that point I was in public school. Yes. All of a sudden we found ourselves, all the Jewish kids, we didn't have a school to go to anymore. I mean, a decree came out that only 6% of the Jewish population could attend public schools and that left the rest of us who didn't have any influence with anyone to fend for ourselves as best as we could as far as schools are concerned. So the ingenuity of people, of course, cannot be cut down under any circumstances and right away they formed Jewish gymnasium which imported all Jewish teachers from different parts of the country who couldn't get jobs because of the same reason, not being able to have a job because of their background, because of being Jews. So we had a totally Jewish school which we were housed in three different buildings. It was a co-educational school but since we didn't have a building of our own and it was just, ahhh, it was just impromptu almost, I mean, they had to make a school right away. What do you do with so many children that all of a sudden don't have anything to do, so they had three different buildings in three different parts of the city. It was the teachers that were going to the different schools to teach. I mean we were non platoon, you call them, I mean, we were stationary, we stayed in our own rooms and the teachers used to come to us. That is here in the United States I think the children go to different rooms for their different subjects. Right?

**Right. That was the primary, uhhh...**

This is how it started.

**...change when the Hungarians took over?**

Right.

**Do you recall others?**

This was the primary change. At this point, uhh...

**At least that affected you as an eleven year old?**

It affected us, but in the long run, I think it made for a much easier atmosphere in the school because we were very much at ease with our contemporaries and our teachers since we all had the same [pause] enemy, actually, so we sort of banded together and it made for a closer contact between teacher and pupil.

**Do you recall any friction or any incidents between Jews and non-Jews prior to the Hungarians taking control?**

Well, when we were in school, I mean, we were called names, dirty names, but they, you know, we were so young that I don't even think we paid that much attention to it. We went home and we were hurt and you know as every parent you try to soothe your children, can I stop for a minute please.....[a break is taken]

**In what other ways was your family directly impacted by the Hungarians coming in?**

Well, I had a cousin that was an attorney like yourself who was not allowed to practice, of course he was disbarred because he was Jewish and in order to make a living luckily that he was a very, very smart man and a very eminent professor of languages he had a job at the Lycee as a teacher and he taught us German, well he

was an English professor, also but, of course that was banned that wasn't in our curriculum and he was fluent in Hebrew and German. He was our German teacher which was a compulsory language for us. Also, the cousin that I grew up with, my aunt's and uncle's son, he was a forced laborer, I don't know, you know the ones with the arm bands. He must have been about twenty or twenty-one at the time when they took him away from home and ahh, he was in different camps, I don't know, doing different work. But during the war while we were deported he was taken, he was taken deep into Germany and then captured by the Russians, I think, and he ended up in Siberia and he almost ended up losing a leg, consequently. He's fine now. He lives in Germany with his own family as well as his mother, his aunt who must be around ninety now.

**In the approximate four years from the time Hungarians took control until the time they started to deport the Jews - how was your uncle's lifestyle and even the livelihood of your uncle and aunt affected?**

Well, you see the funny part about life in Hungary at the time was that every Christian had a Jew friend. I mean, if you're not gonna hurt my Jew, I'm not gonna hurt your Jew. Like my aunt and uncle knew one of the Justices of the city so sometimes if something occurred that was really, ahh it would have endangered them, he helped them out at times. But then the time came when nobody could help us. And everybody was just deported when the Germans came into Hungary in March of '44. I mean, businesses were shut down completely. Schools were closed completely. We were wearing the stars, the yellow stars with our name on it and we

were under curfew. And I mean it was, it was a total change I mean day and night. Before, prior to the Germans coming into Hungary, we at least had enough freedom to go to school even on a segregated basis and to go to our own Synagogues and live a fairly free lifestyle even with the abuses and everything that we took like you know name calling and all this. But as soon as the Germans came in, everything ceased, I mean everything was at a standstill, and then they informed us that we better get ourselves together because section by section we're gonna be taken to a ghetto. And they told us just to make a few suitcases or a little baggage to take with us, whatever we can carry and then they'll take us to the ghetto. Which comprised of buildings that only had a roof over them. They were actually sheds to dry brick in. I don't know for what reason I was never in that part of the city before. I don't know how far it was from the city. But anyhow, that's where they took us, section by section and ahh.

**Do you recall how that was effectuated actually?**

I think that, you know something, I don't even recall if they came with trucks and took us there because I don't recall any of the means of going there. And they just deposited us and told us in which section we gonna stay in.

**How much prior warning were you given?**

I think just a few days. There was no set rule to it. I mean it was at the whim of someone, you know that said, well, today we will take this section and tomorrow we will take that section, because the Jews were not congregated in one place. I mean we weren't living all together. We lived in different parts of the city, so it was at the

whim of someone. I don't know how systematically it went, you know, how systematically they were about gathering us, I mean, the end result was the same. I mean, we all ended up in the ghetto.

**And that was a brick factory of some sort?**

It was a brick factory of some sort that didn't give us any shelter, there were no walls just a roof. And the way we improvised on that is that we put sheets and blankets so that we had some privacy from our neighbors. You know we were all herded together.

**There were no outside walls to this structure?**

No. No.

**What about the flooring?**

The flooring was dirt. I mean we put our sheets and blankets on the dirt and this is how we slept.

**And used sheets as partitions?**

Right.

**Were you provided food - did you bring food from your home that lasted you any period of time?**

No everybody was on their own as far as the food was concerned. There was some kind of a water system set up so we could have water. But as far as facilities for bathing or ahh, there was none. I mean we did as best as we could at night when nobody was around. I mean it was nothing. I mean this was our first taste of what it meant to have cultured German people come into a country.

**Do you recall the date or the approximate date that you arrived in the brick factory?**

This was May fifth and we stayed for approximately three weeks there and then they took us to Auschwitz.

**Can you describe the circumstances from the brick factory to the transports?**

Well, again they told us to pack our bags. I mean we knew who ahead of time who was going to go with what transport. They told us a certain section of the ghetto was going to be the first, second, then I think there was a fourth transport. I myself fell into the third transport which must have been about the end of May. And they marched us, we made our packages again, and they marched us through the villages until we reached the train station. We had no idea as where to we were going to and what was awaiting us or the mode of transportation that we'll get so as we were marching through the villages, I mean all of us pretty broken up because I mean no proper nourishment, no proper clothing or facilities to cleanse ourselves. As we were marching through the villages they were jeering at us and some people throwing stones you know and calling out "dirty Jews" and all that so...we finally arrived to the train station and I don't know what the name of it is, I mean it was just too stunning to even pay attention to details because as soon as we saw what awaited us, we almost knew that our fate was sealed. They had these cattle wagons that you had just recently seen, I mean on the story, *The Wallenberg Story*<sup>1</sup>, this was depicted exactly the way it happened. I mean they herded us into those cattles and the way you saw the little windows on, this is how people were reaching out to get a little bit or air.

<sup>1</sup> A television film broadcast prior to this interview.

And if you happened to be a child or of smaller stature there was no way you got air at all. I was among those that was small of stature, and I was a child. I was fifteen years and I was crushed between all the other bodies. We were about 100 people in this small wagon. There was standing room only. Now imagine all the packages that everybody was trying to get into those wagons. Yelling people, old people, young people, children ahh frightened and hungry and scared and all of a sudden even the air that you were breathing was taken away from you because the doors were shut on us. So we were scurrying like rats on a ship to find a place to get a little air. I mean I remember putting my face against a crack so that I should feel a little air coming through because otherwise you would suffocate. We even had some food that was, you know, that we were sort of trying to ration ourselves without food so we would have some food left. But who could eat? None of us wanted to eat. First of all there was no bathroom facility anyplace. It took us four days to come to Auschwitz. They rerouted us many a times, and every time the train stopped it would stop with such force that everybody was falling on top of everybody else. We tried to maintain some semblance of modesty by making a small corner for ahh bathroom purposes which of course sometimes worked and sometimes didn't because as soon as the train would going and you're being jogged back and forth everything just fell all over the place. When it finally rained one night because it was very hot, this was already the end of May beginning of June and all the heat from all the bodies and plus the weather was exceptionally hot, finally one night it was raining and then got through the slats you called them there was some water coming in and

it was like, like ahh a breath of life that was given to us. Every morning we were greeted with the same greeting, "how many dead in your wagon?" they opened up the doors. That was the only air that we ever got when they opened up those wagon doors to ask us for our dead.

**Were there dead in your wagon do you recall?**

I don't recall, I don't recall. I mean all I remember is that I was most of the time dazed because of the lack of oxygen on the train and being squashed you know with so many, against so many bodies. And as we were approaching Auschwitz they told us that we are coming to a place where we're gonna be working and since our packages cannot come down with us at the same time that we should take our packages apart and sew a yellow star on them and write our names and addresses on it. Now this was another method just to make us more uncomfortable, uncomfortable is an understatement, to make us scurry around more because everybody wanted their little belongings so everybody was trying very hard even under those conditions to put their name on their belongings so that when we get there that we should have something to put on our backs. It was an exercise in futility because nothing remained of our belongings. I mean even the little clothes that we had on our backs were taken away from us. Anyhow, after four days we arrived in Auschwitz. By this time it was a Friday, June 1, and once, I'll have to look it up to see if my memory serves me right. My first day in Auschwitz was a Friday. The first thing we saw were the shooting flames out of a tower-like structure. Needless to say it was the most frightening thing I did ever see. I mean I was only



fifteen and my imagination ran wild with me, I mean I didn't know what to think. But, it was so eerie. It was so frightening.

**What time of day?**

It was in the middle of the night. During the day you put things in a different perspective then you do at night so at night everything seems a lot eerier because you don't have ahh the vision that you have during the night so you imagine things of course and I was sure that they gonna take us and burn us alive. And as we were getting off the trains they told us that the men and the women should separate. And we said good-bye to my uncle and ahh.....my aunt and I proceeded to go with the women [weeping] so as we were going through the lines I mean the SS men were standing there and they were asking our age. So my aunt, I don't recall how old she was, but she must have been in her prime, I mean to me she was an old lady because I was only fifteen of course, and anybody above seventeen was old, so we got a nod to go to the left and then we saw some women with their children going to the right and we were herded into a huge room. I mean this took an awful long time I mean it took the better part of the night because this was an awfully big transport. And they herded us into a room that was full of SS men. This was still during the night. And they told us to totally disrobe and I said to my aunt, [weeping] "when will they leave? I'm not going to get undressed." And, of course, they had no intentions of leaving, I mean and they kept urging us on. So there was no room to hide or anything, they herded us, I mean they hurried us on so we had to take off all our clothes and if they liked something that you were wearing like your shoes, that's the

only thing you could keep, but if they liked your shoes, they took your shoes away too. And we were standing naked and going through different stages of the room until we came to the people who started shaving us. All parts of our bodies, our heads and our genital parts, everything. And then they herded us into the showers to be disinfected and when we came out of the showers they gave us a dress with nothing else, just one dress no shoes, no underwear, nothing and they herded us outside and they lined us up by five. This was for some reason they had a fixation with five in a row because all through my camp, my stay in camp, we were always placed five in a row. And then we were standing around for the longest time until they started marching us into the camp that we eventually stayed in. I don't remember the marching band because by that time I was totally, totally disoriented. I mean I couldn't imagine how is it that from one moment to the next you are reduced from a human being into a nothing. I mean just someone without a say so in your own fate. So, as they marched us into the camp, and we were in front of the camp like I was in the C Lager, just like your mom was, and as we were staying there and it was daylight already and we haven't had anything to eat or drink or sleep, nothing. I mean we were just there totally frightened like a bunch of children. And I looked around me and I saw all the barbed wire around me and I said to myself [weeping], I said,.....dear God even if I would have wings I could not fly out of here. Because as far as the eye could see there was nothing but barbed wire. So finally they assigned us to the different barracks and I came to number seventeen was my barrack, and that's where your mother was. Our block elders name was Vera

Fischer. She was a seasoned veteran of this camp. She had her hair, she was nicely dressed, I mean she was in charge. By this time she must have gone through hell already for so many years that she acquired a position and she made her life easier as best as she knew how.

**She was your overseer?**

Right.

**She was a Jew?**

Right. Uh-huh. So there was no room for us to stay. I mean there were a thousand women already in this place. And everywhere I looked I saw these people, they were staring out at me, these people that were with their heads shaved. And I said to my aunt, "they took us into an insane asylum. Look, look everybody's head is shaved", forgetting that my own was also shaved. So since we didn't have any place to sleep, we were just walking around during the night or even if they put us, they had these bunk beds. I don't know, did you see it in the movies or anyplace? That we were laying six like this and six like that. It was a square box like that actually and they were on top of each other.

**Stacked?**

Stacked. Uh-huh. Like bunk beds except they weren't as nice as bunk beds. There were no mattresses or anything. And that had a way of, I mean finally after a while we got assigned to a bunk bed that was our permanent sleeping place and the one consistency about the bunk beds were that they collapsed almost every night. I mean you could hear the women scream and yell at each other because the bunk beds

collapsed and you fell on top of each other cause they were only boards that were put together you know in a box. Can I stop for another moment please? [A Break]

It was, I mean, men and women were our overseers there in Auschwitz and they came usually together accompanied by a dog and they counted us and if everything went well, you know, if the number of people that were supposed to be in camp were found, then we were dismissed after two or three hours. But if somebody fell asleep or somebody died in their sleep and they were not aware of it yet, there were times when we could stand in line for hours on end and even, I recall one incident when they couldn't find a person they went over and over and they counted us. Now this was in the afternoon Zählappell, because, this is what it was called "Zählappell" they counted us in the afternoon and they counted us over, and over, and over and this person, one person, could not be found. I mean it wasn't a name, it wasn't a human being that was missing, it was a number or an animal or whatever. We weren't human beings to them. So we were kneeling for about six or seven hours until they found this person in their bunk bed dead. So our routine mostly consisted of standing in line being counted or being on blocksbetter, which meant closed barracks, because the transports were coming and we were not allowed to see who was coming and who wasn't coming. That meant we couldn't go to the latrines and that meant that you have to make makeshift bathrooms for people to go and during, towards the end of our stay in Auschwitz, which was around August, September, October people already had dysentery, and if you couldn't go to the latrine, I mean what happened to you? I mean there was no control over that so it was, the conditions were

absolutely, positively sub-human. The barracks that we stayed in, if it rained, it rained in just as well as out, I mean even worse because it came in in torrents. The roofs were leaking. People were sick and cold and tired. Either we were fainting outside from the heat of the sun by standing Zählappell or we were shivering and dying outside from the cold in the mornings. And then they used to take us for baths, for disinfectant baths which they usually did during the dawn hours. They took all the little rag that we were wearing and they put it in some kind of a disinfecting machine, so they said, and if you were lucky enough you got something back but many a times, something happened with the clothes. They got shredded or what and you ended up being naked. Not having any clothes whatsoever until the next disinfectant where you were lucky maybe to get a rag. For about two months the only clothing I had on myself was a pair of underpants, luckily it was one large ladies that reached from the thighs up to here, that's the only clothing I had and that's the only cover I had for a couple of months until the next disinfecting took place and then I got another rag. [Sigh] People ahh, our routine, other then trying to get up in the middle of the night and go and try and wash ourselves or, I attempted once, I think I told you that in my tape, one night I got up and I went, they had like stalls with faucets on them you know that you could wash yourself so one night I attempted to get up because you know it was a little more relaxed at night I mean there were no guards, there were guards but I mean not right on top of you so in order to go to the latrines or to go in the washroom you could go if you needed to. So one night as I went to the washroom I stumbled on a dead person and I gave up cleanliness.

I think that cured me. I didn't go anymore at night out by myself because that really shocked me. Many a times due to my age, even though I lied about it, but I looked like a little boy of ten without any hair, without any clothing, just that little pair of underpants, I was selected into the children's group which was Lager number eight, barrack number 8, and instinctively we knew that if you're too young you're not going to survive. So instinctively I escaped. I mean I always got out of that barrack because I knew that eventually what my fate will be because by then.....

**You slipped out during the night back to your other barrack?**

Yes. Uh-huh. We just knew that if I stayed there eventually what my fate will be and it did come through because when the big selections came when the Russians were nearing in October of '44, they were nearing Auschwitz, they ahh, there was a, the biggest selection ever, Dr. Mengele was there at every selection, of course. But in this particular case, he was there almost everyday for a period of a few weeks and he came into the barrack and you had to strip naked, and if you were lucky that you were big busted, you stayed alive but if you didn't have a bust it didn't matter how old you were I mean that was a sign of, I don't know what, that you weren't capable of working anymore or what, that was, that meant instant death. I mean because with a gloved hand he decided your fate, you will live and you shall die, I mean at least for the time being you will live, death was certain.

**Can you describe Mengele? His appearance?**

Mengele? His appearance? He was a tall man. Very good looking. He had a benign look about him. He was the angel of death. He was described perfectly

because in appearance he looked like an angel but unfortunately he brought death with him, with his presence. There was an incident in camp, ahh this mother that was very, very, very emaciated looking, very thin. And she had a beautiful little girl and even without hair she had such beautiful big blue eyes. She was really like a little angel, this little girl. And when it came to the selections Mengele threw the little girl away to one side and the ones that were more robust looking to the other side and the mother was on the side where she was a little more robust looking so she came among us who were selected for work and she kneeled down and she was kissing Mengele's boots so he would let her child come and stay with her and he just pushed her away with his boot so the mother decided to, to go with her daughter. [Pause...Weeping] I don't know what else you want me to elaborate on.

**There were other selections that took place during your stay?**

Constantly. I mean there were constant selections taking place. I mean there was, you know as the war, which we weren't aware of what was going out, I mean there were rumors constantly coming in, but as the Germans where doing less and less well on their fronts, that's how frantic they became about eliminating as many Jews as possible. I mean, it was, you could hear at night, I mean the yelling that went on and the screaming and the crying, you know I mean they were just picking people up during the night and taking them out while everybody was in their barracks, I mean under the cloak of darkness and you knew that ultimately that's gonna be your fate. I mean there is no way you're gonna come of this alive, I mean at this point you didn't even know if you wanted to. But for all the horrible things that happened and

all the happenings that I saw, that took place, there was such a determination in me, I said "Damn it, you're not gonna succeed because I'm gonna live." And I really believed that this is what got me through 'cause there was no reason for me to stay alive. I couldn't eat the food, I mean there was no way I could get that junk down my throat, it was just dirt and grass and whatnot cooked together, but it wouldn't go down my throat because, everybody had to take ahh, they gave dinner in one big plate and you had to slurp out of that plate and it just, even under those conditions it just went against my grain. I just couldn't do it. I didn't have hot food in my stomach for six months. The little bread that they gave us which was divided into I think a pound of bread was divided into, I don't even remember - 10 rations or what - I don't remember. Anyhow, we had a thin slice of bread. This is all the food that I took, I mean I didn't ahh..

**That was your daily portion?**

That was my daily portion. Uh-huh, yes. We didn't need any diet plans for sure there. We handed one and uh...

**Do you recall any, besides Mengele, were there any other German overseers that stand out in your mind?**

Yes. This was, do you know something, after forty years I forgot her name, but I think her name was Graza, and she was this, she was absolutely, I don't know how anyone can describe someone as inhuman, beautiful but she was a beautiful woman, she was a blonde. I think I told you on my tape she was like Grace Kelly. She looked like Grace Kelly. She was immaculately groomed always. Always with gloves



on her hands and always a dog but she was the cruelest, the most unfeeling person that I did ever come across. I mean with the flick of a finger or wrist she just as well killed you as let you live I mean without any compunction or without any feelings I mean you were a piece of dirt as far as she was concerned. On Yom Kippur, because we had Yom Kippur there I spent Yom Kippur in Auschwitz and for some reason even under these circumstances we felt if there is a God and we did - and if we did sin and if we do keep this Day of Atonement maybe we'll stay alive. We didn't eat our food, so ahhh, what they did with it they made a food that was edible that day and they just, when they brought it in front of every barrack they just spilled the food out so we wouldn't even get to it at night if any of us would have wanted it. We didn't get our rations that day since we were anyhow fasting. [Long pause]

**Did you ever see your uncle again after the initial separation when you disembarked from the transport?**

Yes. It was, this was a very, very funny incident. The way we were situated is, was, that I was in the C Lager and there was a road, a narrow road leading into my camp between another camp and I was in number seventeen and we used to go into number eighteen and the back, there was a back of the barrack, and just watch the road, just maybe we'll see somebody in the other camp and uhh the other camp was a male camp, an all male camp. One day just by accident we saw my uncle.

## **We meaning?**

My aunt and I. The two of us stayed together through all this. My uncle told us, we were you know he came, I mean we had moments where we could talk I mean where nobody paid attention to us, so he was telling us that he's working in a clothing factory. He's sorting out clothes, you know that people bring and they sort out the I don't know whatever they find, gold and coins and ahh clothing and shoes and everything and they sort it out and they, have to, they probably send it to Germany. So one day, my uncle, I was there ahh that was during the period when I only a pair of underpants on and my aunt became very ill so she couldn't come to the fence. I mean we called this was our fence ahh this was part of our curriculum that we knew already the time of day where we could go to the fence to talk to people that we knew across the fence I mean if you happened to have like we had our uncle I mean this was almost like a family reunited I mean you almost took a sigh of relief that somebody stayed alive. So my uncle used to sometimes be able to smuggle out a piece of clothing and sell it for a piece of bread then he threw it over to my aunt and I. And one day as luck will have it my little piece of bread got caught on the barbed wire. Now this was a big decision; do I take my life in my hands and go and get that bread and take the chance of being electrocuted, or do I die of hunger? Well, I figured maybe hunger I'll survive but electrocution I won't so I just stood there and waited you know looking really longingly for that little piece of bread that was hung up, he actually wrapped it in a piece of cloth and it was just hanging on a barbed wire. And an SS walked by very nattily dressed, very nicely I mean you know how

punctual they are and how clean and everything and I, like a little waif that I was, stood there and just waited I said whatever will happen will happen I mean I'm not going to budge from here because that's my bread. It belongs to me. It was thrown to me and by hook or by crook I'll get it. So he stopped and he asked "who does this package belong to?" bread or whatever he said I don't remember, and I said, "It's mine." And he says, "Would you like to have it?" I said, "I think more than I ever wanted anything else in my life" and he came up on the embankment because the barbed wires were sort of on an embankment, you know they were higher than the road, and he reached for it and he threw it over to me. So there are human beings among animals also. This was one act of kindness that I shall always remember and I thanked him for it and I said where there is a will there is a way. I had my piece of bread. Anyhow, after you know all the harassment and all, I mean, this went on daily, I mean harassment was such already that it was like when you punish a child constantly he doesn't even pay attention to it anymore you know. It becomes a way of life and you just live with it and this is what I think happened to most of us. I mean we were just sort of ahh almost to the point, even beyond resignation, I mean it was just ahh I mean we were here so we're gonna live, but if you don't live it doesn't matter at all. But still deep down, deep inside, there was this will to defeat someone that so wants your total annihilation. I mean I think it was this rebellion that kept us alive more than anything else, because strength we didn't have for sure. I mean physical strength. Also when we were bombed, and we were bombed in Auschwitz, or surroundings, we were jubilant. We weren't afraid. I mean this was something

that a bomb did not single you out. I mean a bomb fell on German and Jew alike and this was good. I mean I didn't care as long as somebody else came with me. So the bombing was a sign that somebody was out there maybe trying to fight for us or not only for us but for this whole madness to stop.

**After one of the - some of the selections that you described earlier, were you able to witness any reaction of those had been selected for the gas chambers?**

Well, as I touched upon that prior to this ummm, we were there until October and then in October the war effort I mean became such that they needed people from camps to work in the factories. It was every able bodied man was taken up into the military so these big factories came, I mean I don't know who the men were that came into the camp to ask for us. But ah I remember the one that came for us that I, I mean I ended up working for. He looked like Lord Fauntleroy, if you remember he was a tart and very tall gray haired man, very gaunt looking. And they came and there was the selections and he selected the group of people that he wanted or he was present at the selection so the myth of all the German people not knowing what was going on is totally, totally that - a myth - because they knew what was going on because they had slave labor, and we were them, we were the slave laborers because they were there at our selections, because I recognized the man that came into Auschwitz when the selections went on. Anyhow, of course this all happened. Without Dr. Mengele nothing ever happened so we were selected into groups and by that time, we were smart enough already, I mean it took us long enough to realize what was going on. You could smell the burning of the flesh I mean because the

ovens were going constantly and there wasn't room in the ovens anymore because there was so much gassing going on that they burned them outside so the smell of flesh was, the air was putrid with it. And we knew something was happening because they were frenzied you know in their selections and the goings on I mean everything was just, I mean everybody was running around like something is going to happen and we were selected, I mean the stronger ones were selected to go ahh to work and they selected a group of people that ahh were, they put them in that children's camp as I told you before number eight and you knew if you go in there that's the end of it. I mean sure enough after the big selection which was, I think I don't know for what reason October 12 sticks in my mind, but I'm not positive, I think October 12 was the biggest selection and we were all taken out from our old barracks and put into different barracks ready for transport. Overnight, I mean we heard the people that were destined for the gas chambers, we heard the cries and the yells and the macht schnell (hurry up), and the Souhunde (bastards), and all these expressions being yelled in the night and we were of course in our bunks shivering and waiting to see maybe we're gonna be the next transport to go during these night hikes which meant to the crematoriums. But as day dawned they took us out and they marched us into another camp. It was called the AB Lager. And they put us into a barrack that didn't have anything. I mean it was just cement and it was a frightful night because not only didn't you have already the familiarity of your own little bunk but this was an entirely different region of the camp itself that we had never visited before, never seen. And to say the circumstances were dire is an understatement

again. But we spent the night here, and half frozen to death and they transported us into another barrack just to, just to await transportation to another camp. We didn't know our destination of course. So already in these barracks there were a bunch of people sitting and they were all sitting on the floor and ahhh, praying and we went in to ask them "what are you doing, why are you sitting on the floor?" They said we are "Sitting Shiva for ourselves" [Sobbing] because they were destined to be taken to the gas chambers. And as we stood Zählappell that night, they didn't have a chance to take us into the barracks and there were trucks of dead bodies riding down, they were probably taken to be buried. And as we were standing in line we saw they were females, I saw the hands and the breasts of the women [she sobs] bobbing on the truck as they were [Long pause] passing by. The transport that was Sitting Shiva for themselves were taken away the next morning never to be seen again, and we were put into trains and we were taken to another camp after many bombings of the railroad and rerouting again, but we didn't care. I mean we were happy that we were out of Auschwitz at least we figured maybe if our trains get bombed or somehow we'll get liberated, but we did reach our destination due to their methodical perseverance. They did take us into Altenburg which was paradise in comparison. I mean we had regular bunk beds, just one person in a bed, also stacked up high. We had warm water and ahh the rations were very, very small but they were edible but the catch to all this paradise was the fact that we worked twelve hour shifts, from six at night to six in the morning one week, and from six in the morning to six at night the following week because we changed shifts. Every week

we took a different shift. Life, if it was bearable here, to a certain extent it was better than Auschwitz. We thought maybe that we escaped the death camps at least, but we weren't so lucky, because there was that camp 150 miles away from us. So what is 150 miles? I mean people who were ill or couldn't hack it, they were just taken to Ravensbrück. I think was the camp that was near us. We were bombed here too by the American troops. Again, we were elated of course. We sat in bunkers while we were bombed, and even though we were frightened at the same time as I said before, we were glad that somebody was doing something. Ahhh,

**What kind of work did you do there?**

We worked in a factory, but I was, I was working on a machine that was a stamping machine. I did a part, I found out since I'm in America I became very smart, we were doing a tool and die making, this was actually. Because, I mean this was a systematic work. I mean the raw material came in and then the women were washing that raw material through very hot steam they went through. They were on big blocks like this and they were put down, facing down you know with face down these screws like thing. And they had to be shaped in form and in depth and they also had to have that screw that winding around, that part...

**The groove?**

The groove. Exactly. So the older women were doing the harder work and us younger kids we either were measuring with a device the depth of the screw itself you know. It's actually not even a screw, I don't know why I call it a screw, it was a cap like thing that had depth to it you know and it had grooves around it and it had a

ahhh, where the ill people, where the sick people where it was called Revier. I don't know how you call it here?

**Infirmary?**

Infirmary, right. I couldn't think of the word and it was called the Revier. So I used to go in to her, and I used to tell her because she just absolutely adored her son so much that I knew this was the only tool that I had to keep her alive and for some reason, or for maybe more reason than I understood at the time, I became the mother and the strong one and she became the child. So I kept using psychology even though I didn't know the word at the time on her and I used to tell her if for nothing else you have to keep alive because you want to see your son and somehow she pulled through her illness and we were both liberated at the same time by the American troops. In Pfaffroda, which was about 20 kilometers from Altenburg. This was in April when everything was going already hay wire. I mean the SS was starting to desert the camp because they knew that the end was near and some of them even came in civilian clothes after a couple of days of marching and we saw the reason for all this because we saw the bombing that took place, we saw tree trunks that were you know seared by flames and ahh I mean the country side was just such that you could see the signs of war close by. So they started marching us out of Altenburg. But before I go into that this is one incident I cannot skip over. I have to tell you. They brought in from another camp ahh a group of men that they didn't have anywhere to put, I mean there was no room for them anymore. Evidently the territory that they brought them from was already occupied and what was more



important really during the war than to destroy Jews they kept these living corpses marching yet and they brought them into our camp and there was one part of the camp that they separated also with barbed wire, I don't know why they were afraid to keep - let us be together because certainly sexuality was not evident in the men nor the women. When I took a look at those men I just, I mean my heart broke I mean I said I am not that bad off, I'm not, I really am doing great. Look at them. I mean all you saw was a skeleton with two eyes. Nothing else. I mean the suffering and the degradation and it was just - the ravages of the inhumanity was evident not only in their bodies but in the depth of their eyes. It was, it was a terrible thing. It was ahh we gave them our own food because we couldn't look at them the way they looked, I mean it was just, it was the most devastating thing I ever did see. Today when I walked in I had that same image jumping at me from one of the videos [Crying softly] that you were showing and this is why, if you recall, when I walked in I mean right away I was ready to run out of here because it conjured up the same image in my mind. [Break is taken]

**There came a time when you said in April of 1945 that things were falling apart around the Germans and they started to march you out of the camp in Altenburg. Is that correct?**

Right. Uh-huh. We marched about, for about two days, and all during those two days all we made is about 20 kilometers. And we were marching with our few little things that we had. I don't even know, but I remember having something on my back. I think we had these white plates that they gave us our food in and of course first and foremost comes food, so we took those plates with us in case somebody is

gonna give us some food someplace along the line. I'm just mentioning it because it has a bearing on my story and as we were marching of course the Americans were bombing and not knowing who we are, of course, they saw people you know they were bombing and they came real low and they were just using like machine guns and since

**Strafing the columns?**

Uh-huh. And the way I mean, of course we threw ourselves on the dirt and we hoped that by doing this since we had a big cross on our back, and we had a big number, now I don't know if the number was in front or on the back of us, but we figured they have to see that we are prisoners I mean, they're not going to kill us, I mean they are so near. It's not at us that this is directed at. So we kept on marching and for two days there was no food whatsoever of course because provisions you didn't bring with you. You didn't have what to bring with you. There was no such thing so we, what we ended up doing, we eat the grass as we were walking we took a little grass and we were chewing on it because we had to have something. I mean this was 48 hours without any water, food or anything whatsoever and we had to march. We finally arrived into this small little village which was called Pfaffroda. And the SS was still around us. They were urging us to go on, but since gun fire and tanks were so near they decided to just let us stay outside and they were disappearing slowly and surely. All of a sudden we found ourselves without any guards so what we did is we saw a barn that we went into...

**How many of you were there?**

You know something, I really and truly don't recall exactly how many of us were, I mean there was no importance in number for us, I mean there was, of course there is an importance in numbers, but I just, I don't know, but all of us that we were together, the whole group that was shipped from Auschwitz, was with us.

**Approximately how many?**

You know something, I might sound stupid and I keep repeating I really don't know. I don't know how many of us there were. Quite a few. I would say about 200 - 250 people approximately. I mean this is just a guess on my part. I was only concerned with my little group. This is how you were taught to think. You were only concerned with the five people, the four other people that you were in line with. I mean your world was very, very narrow. I mean it was made so for you, not only by lack of food but I think by some of the medications that were given to us because all of us ladies were not having periods and that was due to the fact that we were given a bromide. I don't know if that in itself is a medication or this is what, that's how we call it, bromide we were given so your mind wasn't as sharp and as clear I mean it's just instinct that kept you alive and it did keep you alive. You know because you know the fear of dying was greater or the will to live was greater than anything else. That's what made us react to certain things the way we did react. But we were sort of ahh, I mean like I don't remember anybody's name, I couldn't remember the name of my best friend, I mean I was trying in vain for months to remember my best friend in school and I couldn't. I mean definitely our minds were clouded so that's why I don't know numbers. Anyhow, we went into this barn and it was Friday night and

it was April the 13th, I just had a fortieth anniversary last Saturday that I was liberated, and we heard this heavy tank type things going on in the street, I mean I didn't know what it was, but you heard that rumbling sound that was in itself very ominous and very frightening. But we didn't have anything to lose, of course, by then because later on we found out that if the Americans wouldn't have caught up with us, we were scheduled to be taken into a forest and just shot and left there. So when we peeked out you know, from the barn to see who was there, we saw this beautiful, beautiful young uniformed men in tanks and we felt, well, they might think we are the enemy so what did we do? We took out our white plates and with the white plates in the air as a sign of surrender we walked out of the barn as we needed that sign you know for them to know who we were because we were all emaciated looking and ragged and dirty and full of lice and tired and not human looking at all really. A bunch of zombies. The first man that stepped down from the tank was a Jewish boy and he talked to us in Jewish and we just stood there with our mouths open. Somebody from America knows how to speak Jewish? I mean is there such a thing you know. You know it was the most, it's a feeling that only a prisoner of war can relate to, somebody that was liberated from some of the countries that they thought they would be doomed to stay there or to die there. I mean that feeling of liberation was such that I don't think that you can compare the elation to anything else. Really and truly. I mean it's something so unbelievable I mean it's almost tangible. It's so believable you know that I'm free. Here is my liberator and the rest of the boys too were, I mean it didn't make any difference if they were Jewish or not.

They treated us equally with care and tenderness and respect. They gave us food. They tried to find us shelter. But the Jewish boy wanted to know how many of us were married and among my five little, you know the little group of five, there was one married woman and he made sure that the women had candles to light Shabbos candles that night. We were housed at the different German houses of the small village which I mean, can you imagine the Germans so immaculate and so orderly I mean were invaded by this lousy bunch of Jews and lousy is the right word I'm using because we were full of lice you know, I mean it was - we were an awful sight I mean we burned everything of course as soon as they gave us clean clothes and everything we burned everything and we became human beings. And the first sign of becoming a human being was when one of my friends that I stood in line with, she was there with two of her sisters and my aunt and I and she was a dressmaker and this is how she survived in camp. She was making dresses for the German *außerDienst*, you know the personnel. She was really an artist. She was a terrific dressmaker. She made the most beautiful things for them I mean and this is, she got a little piece of bread and an apple or something you know that she shared with her own sister so as soon as we got liberated and this Jewish boy, this was this Jewish boy I don't remember his name. I wish I knew because so many times I would love to write to one of them, I don't care who it is or where it is but this one boy's name was Stanley. I don't know why I remembered his name. He opened up, he found a big warehouse of textiles and he opened it up and he gave us material to make dresses and my girlfriend proceeded to make us all a skirt and a blouse and I'll remember

it til the day I die. She made us a gray little blouse with a navy blue skirt and her sister was my age. We were the same age and she made us the same dresses so we shouldn't have any jealousy I guess. [Laughs] And as a truck went by and our hair started to grow in already and I was all of sixteen, by that time cause I was liberated the thirteenth and the twenty-eighth of April I became sixteen years old. And the soldiers whistled after us and that's the day I became a human being and a female at that, because that was the first sign that anybody thought of us as females and human beings. Anyhow, we stayed here for a while because they were trying to arrange transports to take us home. But during all this time it was, we were housed by the Germans and they had to provide us with food. I mean the Americans saw to this. And they were doing it, grudgingly, but they were doing it. They had no alternative of course. And the Bürgermeister who just a couple hours earlier didn't want to let us eat, do you remember what we talked about, that Rappa and I told you, [Laughing] I still don't know how that vegetable is called that they feed the cows with. That's what we found in the barn. He didn't let us eat it, he didn't want us to eat it but three hours later, two or three hours later we were sleeping in his bed I mean and enjoying his hospitality thanks to our liberators, the American army. At this time we were too stunned to know really the extent of killings that they did. We didn't even think about it. We were just so totally elated with the fact that we are alive and we thought that of course everything is going to go back the way it was. I mean you didn't even think that things could change. I mean we'll go home and we'll resume our lives. So there were different transports made. You know I mean

by that time Red Cross came in and the Czechoslovakian people were transporting their people home and everybody was trying to make an effort, of course not the Hungarians. I came home with the Czechoslovakian transport because the three girls that I stood in line with, they were from Czechoslovakia so I resumed their nationality. You know you did everything to survive. Whatever was the order of the day, this is what you became. There was no reason to fight anything because if the Czechoslovak's were taking you home you became Czechoslovakian. The reason you don't know how to speak the language is because you were too young to remember it. You were displaced at an early age from the town of your birth. So these were, we found out later these were equally difficult times for us because we came home to nothing and no one. And we had the Russians to contend with who did not recognize the fact that we were prisoners of the Germans and not allies. For instance, my husband was picked up by them but the...saying that since you work for the Germans now you can work for us and he was taken into Leningrad and he was kept prisoner for six months there after the liberation. As far as I am concerned, I went home with my two friends, my aunt went her separate way for totally personal reasons, and I stayed with my married friend. I told you she had two sisters and I. We all went to her town where she was married in and she found her husband and I lived with her until I got married.

**That was in Czechoslovakia?**

This was, no, we came to Hungary. I, we just came home with the Czechoslovakian transport because they wanted to go home to see if their parents came back. And

since they haven't found anyone they proceeded to go into the town where the eldest was married and her husband was already waiting for her. He came back. And then ahh...

**Of your immediate family you lost...**

Of my immediate family I lost my mother and my father, my two sisters, my brother, my uncles, my aunts, cousins. My uncle who brought me up never came back. I mean it's just too many people to even individually bring up. I mean I don't even know myself the extent of the loss, because being that I was so young and I came away from home at such a young age... I don't even remember. I didn't even remember some of my cousins. And uhh, I mean I know of my aunts and uncles because they were old enough, you know, but the children were too little so we didn't have, ahh... I don't remember them.

**You eventually married and had two daughters of your own...**

Yes. [Smiling]

**The oldest of which has...**

Two children. The loves of my life and I have two grandchildren, two boys, Jeremy is eleven and Kevin is eight and I absolutely, positively adore them and every time I look at them I see a miracle because this is really, truly a miracle that I reached the age where I am a grandmother.

**Your daughters' names are what?**

Judy and Michelle.

**And they are how old?**



Judy is thirty-six and Michelle is twenty-nine. They are wonderful girls. I mean they gave meaning to our lives, my husband's and mine and they surround us with a lot of love and respect and we in turn do the same for them, of course. And through the adversities of our lives after the war, I think the children are the ones that made it possible for us to get through those adversities and come out smiling, because every time you look at them you say, "see I made it." I created another life even though mine was almost destroyed. I mean I was given a chance to have a family and children and to build on the destruction.

**I think that's a good place to...**

End it.

**To stop.**

What makes the telling of my story bearable is the fact that I'm telling it to a young man whose mother, I don't know if I'm saying it correctly, I was together in concentration camp, and she is a dear friend and her son is a dearer friend yet because he is here to listen to our, our anxieties and to hold our hand when we are telling our stories in this trembling fashion and for that I am grateful. Thank you for your empathy and sympathy.

**Thank you.**