

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLOTTE HIRSCH

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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: This is an interview with Charlotte Hirsch of St. Louis Park, MN, for the Holocaust Oral History Project being conducted by the Jewish Community Relations Council Anti-Defamation League of Minnesota and the Dakotas. This is Rhoda Lewin doing the interview and today is March 9, 1987.

A: I came from a very religious family. My mother was very religious, because she was coming from a rabbi's family, and my father also was very religious. My father had a very warm home, with lots of love and just the best parents in the whole wide world. My mother, she lost her parents very early, and she was growing up very difficult, from one relative to the other one. She was the older and she had sisters - six or seven, seven, I guess. And when she got older and can make money, then she was working and she was helping the sisters, the brothers, until they all got married. I remember our house always was full with kids, and one aunt was not much older than I was. My father, he was a very good man. He was very good-looking, tall, blonde. And always he helped my mother and it never was too much, helping my mother's family. My mother was a tiny little woman just half of my father's size. Always we were wondering, how can she find my father. It was a joke. They had a very nice life. My father loved my mother, and my mother always said she never wanted to survive one minute without my father. Unfortunately, he doesn't survive. He...she...died together. He was in the war, and he was injured.

Q: In World War I?

A: Yes. In the right hand, he was wounded. After this he was back and he was still working in the army 'til the war was over. He has another story, his family, because he was not from my town; he was in a different town, a village.

Q: What city was this that you lived in?

A: That was Transylvania and the city was Maroshvashsyeh; then was changed and was Tirgu-Mures. There was ten children. My grandmother was really religious. You know at that time the very Orthodox wore a wig. But not my mother. No. My mother was Orthodox, she was doing everything for my father, but did not cut her hair, no way. So my grandmother lost her husband after they had ten children, four girls and six boys. She lived in the village close to the town where I

was born. In this village was a princess. the name was Thebinger. The princess liked very much my grandmother and the kids, and my grandmother was working very hard, to keep them clean. So this princess was helping my grandmother, and sent the kids to the school. She was a Christian, not Jewish. My father was sent to school and he was supervising, a manager in the forest. You know in a forest they cut lumber. He was working all the time for a large company. He was speaking German, he was traveling in Austria for business. A very fat gentleman was the boss and he sent him to doing business with other countries. He was smart. The young one, my father's brother, was always looking for girls. Then, finally, he married with a shiksa, with a non-Jewish girl. That was a great tragedy for my grandmother. She was doing everything like he was dead. This I tell you because finally this brother of my father, he was deportation, after he has seven children, one girl and six boys, who was in the army and was in the front in the second world war. He was executed in Auschwitz with my father, together. So that's why I tell you. At home we was like a middle class. Not rich and not poor. We have everything. We was nice dressed all the time. Our house was full with food because my father brought the best food from the forest there and he has always a good salary and always was enough to have everything. We was going to the Jewish school, which is private. And always, all the time we grew up, all the time aunts was with us.

Q: Aunts and cousins.

A: Yes. Her cousins. And aunts, not cousins, because I was so young. So I had one sister and two brother. Two brother I had that alive in Israel, and my sister died not long ago, also in Israel.

Q: Let's back up a minute and, would you mind telling me when you were born?

A: How old I am?

Q: Yes.

A: It's necessary?

Q: Approximately. How old were you...

A: I'm sixty-seven. No, sixty-six.

Q: And were you the oldest of the four children?

A: No, I was the third.

Q: Okay. It's just good to know how old you were when the Germans came in, and so on. You were going to the private school?

A: Yes, we was going to the private school. I tell you because some people cannot afford this. But that did not mean we was rich, just we had a nice education. Also we learned to pray all the time. My brother was five years in, like, Ukrainia.

Q: A work battalion. Now was this a government-sponsored program by the Hungarian government? Or do you mean he was with the Zionist group?

A: No. I was born in Rumania, Transylvania, not Hungary. But in 1940 was coming the Hungarians. 'Til then we have a nice family and a very nice life. We have everything in Rumania. Rumania was not Paris, but everyone was living. No one was sleeping in street and no one was hungry. Now is nothing there. In '40, everything was changed. In '40 my youngest brother went to the army. He was twenty-one. After couple of months there was not any more soldiers. He was transferred to the war battalion. My sister was married in '39 and she was living in Bucharest, which was the capitol of Rumania. She was not deportation, I find out when I came home. My two brothers in war battalions, one was four years and the other almost two. In '44, I remember the seder table was nice, and my father was praying, and we was crying with my mother. And then, (hits table twice), just a knock on the door and was coming Hungarian soldier and two other persons insisting, "You have sewing machine." I said, "Yes, I have." He says, "Bring it. We have to take." Then he take all through the house, and left. I was working as tailor, when my brother was taken and we needed the money. I was working hard, but I was making good money and my parents never needed nothing. Was no problem. Also, my sister from Bucharest used to send, with one man who was the youngest brother of her husband, in Bucharest, who crossed to our town, silk stockings, blouses, underwear. And always she was running to the train. My brother-in-law was a very good man, down there in Bucharest, and he was looking for this guy who brought the package for us.

Q: Were these things for you to wear? Or were these things for you to sell?

A: My sister sent them for selling. You know that silk stockings, you can't wear two dozen! So then, this stopped. After the first seder night, they don't let go to the market, the Jewish people. Just only ten o'clock.

Q: These were the Hungarians?

A: Yeah. And then start to take the bike, the radio, the cars, everything. Almost don't let nothing to use, the Jewish. First it was taking in ghetto, which was in a factory. Not this (knocking on table); the solid houses.

Q: Oh, the brick burners, the places where they made the bricks.

A: Yes. Yes. We was taken there. In our town was two or three like this. But many, many years they hadn't been used. One day my father came home from the synagogue - he used to go every evening to the synagogue - he came home

and said, "It's something very wrong coming. The people was talking. We'll be taken to the ghetto, and the ghetto is going to be nobody knows where." My mother says, "Don't tell me, because this is making me cry." But I heard and I said, "Why don't you ask what the rabbi says?" Then after a couple of days one evening my father was coming home, and he says in the synagogue was a Polish. He says there happened terrible things. There is ghetto, has been killed the people. And he collect dresses and money and everything for the people in Poland. So I give two dresses, my mother says, "You don't have to listen because the Polish people, and who can be sure it's true or not?" But, unfortunately, was true. I remember I was in movie one Sunday evening from seven to nine and just at half the time somebody come out and says, "The movie is over," and everybody had to go home. Before this, used to be some alarm, like the airplane coming.

Q: Oh, air raid sirens.

A: Yeah. And when we came out from the movie was so dark. No lights. But, when I went to the movie, my mother said, "When you come home" - and this I never can forget. Was a kosher dairy cart, just like Lincoln Del, and there used to be sausage just like this.

Q: Like a little finger.

A: Yes. It's goose sausage. And my mother used to make with potato, paprika, that's how she made it. And my mother said, "You stop by Moshe and you buy sausage, because tomorrow I want to cook this with paprika." When we came out and the street was no people, nobody, then I was hurrying. I take the short way to go home. And I said, "Oh, mother, I can't stop there because it's so dark and strange, and no one in street." My mother was so good. "Don't worry, I can cook something else." Then not long after this again was the sirens and the people have to go to the basement or someplace. And so the next morning, that was Monday, the Germans just arrived in Hungary. Nobody want to be near. My father, he was wounded in the war, he was still so Hungarian. He says the Hungarian people is gentlemen, and nothing can happen. So then was there the Germans. Not a long time after this, one evening, my father came home and said, "Is something very wrong going to happen."

Q: Now, do you know when this was?

A: '44.

Q: '44. And what month?

A: May 3rd. In May we was taken to the ghetto. And on the 29 May or so we was taken to Auschwitz.

Q: Can you describe what happened?

A: My father came home and he says, "It's going to be something wrong." Not late after, my oldest brother was coming home from the war battalion. He was lucky. He was with a Lieutenant, the name was Fabian. He was one in a million. He was a very good lieutenant, and he was very hard drinking person, and the Jewish boy gave all the time to drink. He has all the time food, and was working them hard, but never beating. Never, never molesting. Fabian says, "How many I bring here that I bring home?" He brought back a couple that died, because was sick. So my brother was lucky because was with this Fabian. He went to Fabian and he said, "My father, he's disabled, and I wondering what's going to happen with my family. Can I go home for twenty-four hours?" And Fabian says, "Okay, you can go home." We was so close to the border; from Hungary to Rumania you have to go one hour, not more than one hour to reach the border, and you was in Rumania.

Q: Traveling how? By train, on foot?

A: Walk. And my brother says, "Fabian let me came home and I like you to leave everything," and we left to go to the border, and crossed the border. We going to this place. The name was Naratur, in Rumania. And my sister in Bucharest says she'll be there in twelve hours and stay there and you can survive there 'til over the war. And my father says, "I'm not going. I don't want to have different from other Jews. I have 80% disability and I don't get one penny from the Germans. One penny." And my father says, "I was working and I can't be working. I have no papers, and I'll have less than I have here." So my father says, "I'm not going. I wait, and I'm doing what everybody is." We was asking him, why don't we try, why don't we do that. My father says, "It's over. The discussing is over. I'm not going." We had a big house. There was two or three family there. In Europe it's different, not like apartments. A large house, like duplex, three-plex. We have three bedrooms, and big, big, like a whole house. One woman was coming home late and she says, "Tomorrow morning we're going to be taken to the ghetto." And my brother says, "That's true. That's why I'm home." So my mother says, "You go to sleep and you don't think nothing about tomorrow." The day before 3rd May, the rabbi ordered a fast, and the people was fasting. We was fasting, and next day was taken to the ghetto.

Q: The fast didn't do any good.

A: No, it did no good. Before that ghetto, the General wa coming. He ordered all the people from the big buildings, and that the Jewish girls had to go clean up for him. The rabbi says, "We have no choice. The girls have to go to him." And my father sways, "What you want to do?" I says, "I'm going to do what everybody else." So I went to that first building. The name was Apollo. It was a very big, large building, and expensive. there was only rich people who can rent there, like professors, like doctors. It was fancy. Now everybody was out from there.

The German soldier who was supervise, he was so awful. He would catch one girl and take to one room and rape, and say, "If you say one word, I kill all your family." And we know what was happening. I was a good-looking girl at this time, and I was so afraid. So I was going a couple of days, working very hard, very dirty job. Then I said to my father, "You have to go and tell the rabbi I cannot do any more. Just I can't do it." And my father went to the rabbi and the rabbi says, "Okay, she can not." So there was more like me, and the job was done. Then the German ordered to be furnished. The best from the rich people. My husband was a rich boy and had very beautiful house, full with oriental rugs and silver and crystal and everything.

Q: You weren't married yet.

A: No. For six years we was dating, because my husband was always in school or was in Rumanian army. We met in Zionist organization.

Q: Which organization did you belong to?

A: Hashomer Hatzair. And Nur Ha Zion. And finally he was in ghetto. All my life I was in organizations. that was the best place for the Jews.

Q: So here he had this very elegant, wealthy family.

A: And I saw when a wagon with horses, a big, big wagon was taking his mother's furniture. His mother was doing needlepoint all the time, and was a big chair, something special. I saw it was put in the wagon, and everything else. And was taking not only from my husband family. But we had not such special things. But he has such a beautiful home and full of all kind of expensive things. The finest crystal imports. The best, whatever people had. So then was coming the ghetto. My father says we can't take with us everything what we want. Down quilts, clothes. We can take for cooking, dishes, pots. Everything. And if we have, food. My mother don't want to leave. We have some lamb. In the morning she got up, and was with white on the head, always so clean, with apron, and she put on the lamb. For dinner we used to eat one o'clock, and she was cooking that. Then the neighbor came in and says, "Look, come to my gate." And I saw a long line people with a lot of packages on the back, in the hand. Then my mother says, "It's true, what you say." So we fast pack in what we can. Was May, first day or second, and was a very ugly summer, rain and cold, just terrible. And my father says we have to take the blanket and comforter and pillow. And my brother was with us. And we was taking what we can. Was not too much food, because at that time was not refrigerator. What we had, we put all together, and we went to the line. There was old people, was young, was sick, was big. Everybody was crying and everybody almost can't walk because they was so packed in, and was so hard to carry those packages. My father was like a statue. He was tall and very proud. My mother and me, what can we do in this situation? And my brother, all the time saying, "You have to be strong until it will

be over. The Germans lose the war. You must be strong.” So we went to the line. Was a very, very long day, and on one was in the street. Just this terrible line of people, sick, and pregnant, and everything. So when we cross one place, two gentlemen come out. One was an officer, the other one was a civilian. And one was asking, how can this happen in this time? He don’t want to believe.

Q: Oh, he couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

A: Yeah. Then it was, I don’t know how many hours. We reached the brick factory at three or four o’clock.

Q: About how many people were you?

A: In our town was 8,400 Jewish people. And we came about 1,500, but maybe 300 died early.

Q: So then all 8,000 were walking...

A: Walking, but was three places. One part went to the synagogue, and the other in another factory, also a brick factory. We went also into a village, it was very far and was very difficult, and carried the heavy packages.

Q: And it was hot.

A: And everybody already was in very bad shape because in ghetto we had no food, we can’t wash regularly. The ghetto, it consumed us. It was terrible. Finally we reached the brick factory. There was a different kind of police...like a feather...again, I don’t know how to say...

Q: With a different kind of hat.

A: Yeah. This was the most bad part of police.

Q: These were now the Germans?

A: No, that was the Hungarians. We saw couple of Germans but most was Hungarians. We leave the factory then; my brother says he cannot come in, he have to go back to the battalion and he have to say good-bye because he only for twenty-four hours. Before this whole thing we use the yellow star and he says it’s very difficult traveling, but hope he can reach the battalion. I was happy, when I saw everything what’s going on there, and my father was happy he can be free, and not with us. My mother was crying, all terrible. My brother left us. Then we have to hurry in to somewhere we have a place for the comforter. We had to put down in the dirty place where there was only rock and dogs and dirt. The roof was all holes. In night when it was raining.

Q: It came in through the roof.

A: But before that, we have to take off the jewelry; just left the wedding ring. In the minute we arrive there, was coming something...

Q: Like a basket.

A: Like a basket. Yes, it was. And everybody have to put their things.

Q: You mean they had taken your other jewelry before?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they take it away or...How did you get food in the ghetto? Were you selling things like your jewelry?

A: In ghetto? No, in ghetto most of the time people was starving. And we who had food was sending to some friends. But most of the food was taking to the Hungarians. We have a nanny, all my sister and brothers. She was wife of man who was the fisherman, a poor woman. And she was there with packages all the time. And we don't get not one. The police man was taking...

Q: This was your sister in Bucharest? The one who was sending you the packages?

A: No, the nanny. Our nanny. But married. The same street, all the time was there, the coat, the dress, everything...even the name was Jewish. And she was suffer because of that. So one guy by the name of Cesar, with whom I was very good friends and I saw many times on the tennis court, he says, "You have a necklace." It was really nothing, just a narrow necklace. He says, "You have a necklace," like I never saw before, and he take my necklace. I got home, then; he was paid for this. Then not long after was called my father. There in the front was some rooms very fast built. There was the police, and the people who was called. The first who was called there was my father, and everybody was in so shock because my father was such a quiet and honest and good person, and was not rich, and he was called to go to the police. And my mother, she says, "You not going. No, you not going." I say, "I'm going." My father says, "No way, I don't want you go." My mother says, "If you don't want I die here, let her go." So I went to the police. The head there was a man who was a officer, who all the time was after me. The Germans all the time want to make me, and I hate it. At this time, if somebody not introduce me to somebody first, I don't want to know, nobody, especially a goy, or poorer. I never met this official, and he was all the time after me. And when I got there he says, "We know each other, from this way." I say, "We saw each other." And I say, "I am William Sidran's daughter. My father is an invalid from the first war and I don't want to upset him. I have no idea what for I'm here, and just you tell me what for I'm here." And he says, "You

have a brother." I says, "I have two." And he says, "Where is your brother?" I said he was twenty-four hours from the war battalion and he went back. He says, "You absolutely sure your brother is not here?" I says, "I think you know this is not a place where somebody gets, who you don't want to be here. He is not here, and you can check. It is not so difficult. My brother went back to the war battalion and that's all." And he says, "Okay, I believe you," and let me go.

Q: Now, where was the other brother?

A: The other brother was four years in some other place. He was not lucky, because he had a terrible lieutenant. He was twenty-one and he was a normal soldier. He went to the war, and then he was in the ghetto; the life was terrible. There they start to build some latrines, and we have to stay in line, hundred and hundred person, 'til get the door. They start to take the rich people who has something, and beat, and beat. Some was not conscious. There was one doctor, Schwartz; he was a gynecologist, he was working very hard. We was not rich but everybody had some jewelry, some money, some reserves, something. That Dr. Schwartz was almost killed there, and his wife, also. And one other doctor was beat with a stick. You know what they're called...emergency bring this...

Q: Like a stretcher? You mean when someone has fainted and they carry them on a stretcher?

A: Yes. Cannot walk. In the ghetto was not medication, was not food, just what some people had. The morale was high. The people tried to encourage each other. And who have more food they give it to the other one. And everybody give to the children. The children was crying for that. Even we had no water. And one day, one morning, it was ten or twelve, we have to stay in line, five and five and five, and they start to do some administration. That day was also miserable, because was so hot. And the people just one after the other...

Q: Fainting?

A: Yeah. And my mother, too. We cannot help because don't let to move from the line. People have no idea how much somebody can summer. So then, after that, on the 3rd of May, we was taken again. That time they say no packages, because we going to a long trip. So we was taking what we can. And again in line, to the station.

Q: You walked to the railroad?

A: Yeah. the railroad. We walked to the railroad station. And again the street was dead. Nobody was out. We just saw people looking, in the windows, and very curious what's going on.

Q: What's happening to the jews.

A: Everybody was looking so terrible, because three more weeks with this condition, even for the young...So we was put in the railroad cars, 80 to 84 people, babies and pregnant and everything, everybody. So, that was Thursday. Friday was Shabbat. Friday evening my mother almost die; she start to cry, because she cannot do Shabbat and cannot light candles. We arrived in Auschwitz Sunday morning, early morning, 5 o'clock. Was dark and always was like rain but was not rain. Like...

Q: A little mist? Fog?

A: Fog. yes. And the door of the car was opened, and they beat us. Everybody want to be together, the family. You know how the car is?

Q: High off the ground.

A: It was difficult. And right away, very fast, the Germans. We saw one officer, very good-looking, very clean, very imposing. Mas Mengele. He was coming with a stick.

Q: Like a riding whip. How did you know it was Mengele? Did other people call him that?

A: I especially know Mengele because I was talking with him, because I want he meet my mother. He says, "Right, and left." I saw my father. He cannot be on right side. He had lost his hand. He had surgery, because of it. I remember my father's arm was bandaged, his hand. He was working in the forest most of the time, and was cold, and maybe sometime was infection; there was not penicillin. And the doctor says to my mother, "If you want to see this man, you have to amputate." My father was with her brother, Benedict, together, and my mother was with me. And I had a red frock and I roll it in two and I put in my mother's hand. She was looking very young; she was very pretty, and she was with me. When I reach Mengele he was speaking Hungarian perfectly and he says, "You can't see at night." When Mengele turned to do the job I went for my mother, and he took me back to the right side. And in wartime, was a girl, the name Maria Sidran, and this girl was working in pharmacy and Mengele was visiting; he like a lot this girl. She was a blonde. Straight, blonde hair, blue eyes, like a German. So I was staying on the right side and went to the barrack. And my mother went to the other side. Far away we saw some woman who pushed a carriage. Her head was covered in white and somebody says, 'Look, there are the kids, the babies. Let's take care of the babies.' But there was no taking care of the babies. They were taking the good things to Germany, in the carriage. Then we saw the wire in Auschwitz. if somebody touch it...

Q: The barbed wire?

- A: Yeah. Then I said to a good friend, she was holding her mother, and also she was taken away. I guess I can't talk too much about it. My mother was born of five children; and nobody make it. When I think she have to be with allt hese strange people, naked...
- Q: Did they make all of you take your clothes off?
- A: Yes. Oh, yes.
- Q: You can just go on, then.
- A: Then I saw my girl friend. "Look at these people. they must be crazy." Because you see, it's such a large place, and my girlfriend, she was a very intelligent girl. "You notice that wire, if you touch that you can die there." It's a terrible place, this. So then the next stop we have when we went to the...
- Q: To the bath...the showers?
- A: The showers, yeah. In the door, the SS woman says, "Everybody take off everything and go inside." She was a fat German woman. I had ski shoes and I keep it all the way, because in the wagon was so dark. I was a skier. I was not a good one, but I used to ski. And I have very pretty ski shoes. And I thought I keep this on my feet because if I have to go to work that's the best to wear. So then the German dog saw my ski shoes. She said, "Take off and leave it to me." And I take off my shoes and I give it to her and she pushed me and we was in the shower. In the shower was start to cut our hair, and everything. And there was the German soldiers. It was so terrible. He was looking at us, he was watching us, a lot of men there, and a machine which cut...
- Q: They used clippers? Scissors to trim your hair?
- A: No. That's a machine. And was not cutting good, and we move, and was cut our head. I had long hair, and he was saying, "Look at this hair." I had black, beautiful hair. So then he says we have to go to the shower. In the shower first of all was very little water. Not too many douche.
- Q: Not too many shower heads.
- A: Yeah. And many have to go in under one shower. But when start to came this water there was something to pinch us, was so strong.
- Q: And it was cold?
- A: It was cold? Everybody said, "What's going to happen with us?" Everything was so fast. Take out, no dress, no hair, nothing. We was wet, and was cold, like an

animal, "Everybody go out, take a dress, take shoes, in the line." So when I got out and I catch a dress that was silk, short, white and red, nothing else, just one dress. It was very thin. And I went to the shoes and I picked up two shoes and both was for one leg and one had high heel and the other was flat. Then I start to...

Q: Try to walk?

A: Walk, and...how does one say in English...

Q: Oh, like you were crippled, like you couldn't keep your balance?

A: Yes. So then we was taken to the barrack, where we went 'til early August. There we was staying. No water, no food, no nothing. And then noticed was coming a group of young men, dressed to go out from Auschwitz to work, in a hat with stripes and a blouse with stripes. I was staying there, and somebody pushed me a dress. It was a woman dress with long sleeves and high collar. It was 1200 girls, and he gave it to me? And right now, minute, I run around, and I take off my dress...

Q: Your silk dress...

A: Yes. That was some(thing) in my life. Otherwise I die there.

Q: And you don't know who gave it to you.

A: No, I don't know. I don't know when, and who the guard was. Just that can be. And later we was staying in line, and then was coming Mengele. He was coming to me, because he was asking for "Sidran," and everybody says me. I was tall and I was in front, and he was coming there and he says, "Are you a Sidran?" I said, "Yes. She (Eva) was here just now, and we can't find, right now." And he asked, "When you saw your sister?" "I saw, it's here." "You're sure?" I said, "Yes." And he was taking...he has a private room. That's why I know, so closely,; I was talking twice with Mengele. I was three months in Auschwitz. When I was there we went to work. Later we was doing trenches. I was in Stutthof, a couple of days, and then they let us go from there, for work.

Q: Can you go back a minute and tell me which factories you worked in, what kind of work you did?

A: We was digging. Trenches. And always we was in forest.

Q: Was this men and women together.

A: No, no. Just women. And the Lithuanian who supervised us, he says, you don't worry, because anybody who work, we don't kill you.

Q: And what did they feed you during this time?

A: We had one meal where we went for evening. And also we have a piece of bread and a piece of marmalade or margarine once a day. And coffee. We work all day and don't have nothing.

Q: No breakfast.

A: No breakfast, no. The piece of bread always was old, and the piece of margarine or the piece of marmalade like this, and we just got it the same time very evening. And we have to dig.

Q: So then you were taken to Stutthof?

A: Yeah. Everyone was taken to Stutthof for gas chamber. But was too many before us and had no materials and so we escaped from there. Then we was taken to another prison.

Q: I think in the letter your son said from Stutthof you went to Bromberg.

A: Yes.

Q: And you worked there, too?

A: In Bromberg I became a tailor. I was working for the SS, part of the time, because first I was digging and I was so sick and I was so beaten. I have broken ribs in Auschwitz, and I had a long hemorrhaging. And I had a spot in my lung. And my feet is frozen. My nose was broken. You see this...

Q: On the bridge of your nose, a scar.

A: Once, when we went to the shower, there was English soldiers, prisoners, and he threw to us something very dry to eat. I don't remember what it's called.

Q: Hard tack, maybe? Toast?

A: Yes. And everybody want to have a piece. And then catch me one, immediately one of...

Q: Your teeth broke.

A: Yeah. I had beautiful teeth. And so then in January sometime when they left us, the Lithuanians and the Russian was coming.

Q: In January, 1945. And this was when you were in Bromberg.

- A: Yeah. Seven days, we walk. The road was slippery and was very difficult to walk and the soldiers always shot the people. And after seven days, all the time we was in bombs, and then one morning we get up, no Germans. So it was over for us. And then, really a big mistake, I discovered that a nurse who my husband's cousin like was in another state, and she convinced me we have to go away from there. So we went away from there, until the end of March.
- Q: You mean you were traveling, you were trying to go back home?
- A: Yeah. Was not bridge, was not possibility to travel. And everything was so dangerous. And the Russian could not give you ride, because was war.
- Q: You must have been so weak. You were liberated in Bromberg, but then where did you find food, where did you find clothing? Did somebody help you?
- A: Clothing we don't find. Food from the soldier, the Jewish soldier, the Russian.
- Q: The Russian Jewish soldiers. They helped you. Okay. And who were you traveling with?
- A: Just three girls. One had typhus. One was like a skeleton.
- Q: And so the three of you traveled. You walked. Did you ever find a train? Or a ride?
- A: First walk. After Lublin we find some train. But there was no window. Was cold, and was sitting from evening 'til morning and the train was not moving.
- Q: And you traveled all across Poland, and finally you got home.
- A: Yeah. I was across Warsaw, which was flat, just wires.
- Q: And this was the end of March, 1945. And there was no Jewish community left?
- A: Yes, was.
- Q: There was? In your hometown?
- A: Yes, because I got back in March, and six months, before, was free.
- Q: Ahhh. And so people had been coming back.
- A: My brother was, and my sister was coming, too. And after I was very big trouble, because I was so sick. I had a migraine, because three times I was in front of gas chamber. I was selected three times! And so the tension was there

each day. I had a migraine headache which almost killed me. And I was for weeks, rheumatic pain. I was young, and sick, and I can't forget my parents. I was waiting all the time, like a crazy.

Q: And when did you realize that they weren't coming back?

A: Oh, I know clear he never come back, my father. I realize right there. But my mother, I just didn't want to believe it. I always was stubborn. You know, I was talking with her...

Q: And then she was gone. So here you were back home and gradually you began to feel better.

A: Not very gradually, I went to Bucharest with my sister. I had everything, from my brother, from my sister, from my brother-in-law. I became elegant again, like at night.

Q: And then when did you meet Alexander?

A: Six years before.

Q: But then...

A: I got home; not long after, somebody came and says, "You don't have to wait for him because when I left him there he had typhus. And next day he must be died."

Q: You mean he'd been in a camp, too?

A: Yes.

Q: He hadn't been in Auschwitz, had he?

A: No, he was in war battalion. And I was with his sister, to Mengele. She just stood next to me. I remember, first of May I went in Bucharest. Maybe two and a half months I was in Bucharest. And then I said I feel like I have to go back. It was too strange for me. Everyone live different life, and cannot understand me. So I went. I could have married there, and I said I don't want any man from there because what is going to say his mother? She's sick and old; why he have mother and I have no mother?

Q: You had to find somebody who understood what had happened.

A: I said that's not for me. I don't want somebody who have mother when I not have mother.

Q: So then what happened?

A: I don't want to talk about it. I can't.

Q: But you and Alex were married.

A: Yeah.

Q: Had he lost any of his family?

A: Well, I'm not going to say.

Q: Okay. So then you and Alex came to the United States. And you have two beautiful children.

A: And he's the best husband in the whole world. And he was a very good man, and was working hard, and was very good to me. Also my son-in-law is very good. It's like a piece of diamond; I like a lot. And we have a very close, very good relation. Also his parents, very, very nice. And we used to have nice Friday dinner, and used to be here, and I light candles every Friday, and my husband do Kiddush. My daughter have an absolute kosher house. And I believe in God. I always believed I was in front of God's children, and I believed God helped me, and God is here with me. (And when I stood in front of the gas chamber,) then came a big alarm, and the German says, "Go away," and I run back to my block. This happens three times with me! My belief is very strong. Very, very much I believe in God.

Q: What synagogue do you belong to?

A: Beth El. Before Adath Jeshurun. I went Adath Jeshurun but then my friend knows about Beth El. It's closer, and we liked Rabbi Goodman, and Goodman changed (left Adath Jeshurun).

Q: So now you're members of Beth El. Are you active in the synagogue? Or, in the community?

A: No. Some days I feel I just cannot bear it.

Q: You still have...

A: I learned to live with pain. I have pain every day.

Q: If you have a chance, could you just talk about one more thing? You said you do a lot of reading about the holocaust. And you watch the films. How do you feel about them? Do you feel that they do an honest, accurate job of telling the story?

A: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: What have you read? Which books do you think are good books, that you would recommend?

A: My husband buy everything. I said you have to go to the library, because too many. I read Auschwitz. The writers live in Canada. Everybody, everybody happened different things, but everybody just the truth. No one, which not true. Nobody can exactly tell, because it was so terrible.

Q: But, everyone gives a little piece of the whole picture. Well, the last question I usually ask people when I'm interviewing them, is, is there something else that I should have asked you, or that you would like to talk about? A message you would like or some experience you had that you've thought about?

A: I guess it is never to forget. This always have to be in front of Jewish people. Because when this happened to us, we lived a normal life. And this come, just like this. And we lost in one day all friends, everybody. We have to be Jewish, we have to believe in God, and we have to stick together, and we have to feel with each other. We have never to forget we are Jewish. We are different, maybe, but not so many; we are Jewish. I am happy because my son-in-law is religious, and the kids grew up in this. And I believe very strongly, and my son and my daughter are like me. We celebrate Pesach like the kosher Pesach, and I believe in God and I do believe 'til I die.

Q: Okay. I thank you very much.

A: I never, even when I was in the most terrible situation, all this time I was praying to God. Always.