Interview with Mrs. Helen Mastbaum
By David Zarkin
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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 Helen Mastbaum for the JCRC-ADL Holocaust History Project by David Zarkin at Mrs. Mastbaums's home in Saint-Paul on April 3, 1983. I'm going to start off, Mrs. Mastbaum, by asking you to give me your complete name, including your Jewish name if it's different.

A: My Jewish name is Hinda Kornweitz.

Q: And your English name is?

A: Helen. Mastbaum, my married name. I'm married to Allen Mastbaum.

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born on July 12, 1919.

Q: And what town and country?

A: Skalat, Poland.

Q: And what were your parents' names?

A: My father's name was Nachem, which is English --Norman -- and my mother's name was Shaindel.

Q: And do you remember your grandparents' names?

A: Yes I do. They died very young, my grandparents. My mother's parents, the mother was Esther, and Jacob, the father's name.

Q: And his last name?

A: Leventhal. My father's mother was Havah and the father's name was David.

Q: Do you remember your great-grandparents' names?

A: Well, I know I'm named after my great-grandmother.

Q: Where were your parents born?

A: In Poland -- Skalat.

Q: And your grandparents? Where were they born?

A: I think it's the same. The same town.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do?

A: We had a little store. We'd sell, all kinds -- pails, dishes. Like a hardware store they call this here.

Q: And your mother worked in the home? Or did she work in the store?

A: Well before she got married, she was a seamstress.

Q: What languages were spoken in your home?

A: Yiddish, and my second language was Polish. I went to school -- Polish.

Q: Was your family secular or religious in practice?

A: Well, I would say they were religious, because most of the Jews in Poland were religious.

Q: Were they Zionist or Hasidic?

A: No, Zionist, I don't think so. We were a religion people. We observed kosher and everything.

Q: Your father was Hasidic then.

A: No.

Q: And did you receive any formal Jewish education?

A: Yes. To dovin, you know, and to write a little bit. But if you don't use it, you know…

Q: Yeah, I understand.

A: But I still know.

Q: What local, national, or international events were you aware of from the mid-1930s to 1941? Like things that were happening in your community regarding the situation in Europe?

A: Anti-Semitism?

Q: Anti-Semitism, and what was that like? Can you describe any instances of anti-Semitism? Or how were you aware of it?

A: Well, when I was young, I didn't realize, but when I got older I belonged to organizations -- Zionism, you know, Batar. And then I was a Shomer. We changed when we were little. I mean, we didn't understand too much. But then we was always attacked, especially a Jewish girl, when we used to go into the parks, they used to throw a stone on us and this-and-that.

Q: The Christians would do this?

A: Christian, yes. We were afraid to go out late in the night if somebody would attack you. To rob or just mean things to do to you. Throw some stones on you or beat you up, or something like that.

Q: Did you have any contacts with gentile people?

A: No. Well, we knew them, because my mother died very young, and I was the oldest of the girls, and we need some help, the house, and we used to have a gentile woman. She used to come and help me out. And she was a Polish woman.

Q: Getting back to the international scene. Did you see any newspapers, or hear any radio programs, or hear anything by word of mouth of what was going on in Germany, or that kind of thing, regarding Nazism?

A: You know, we couldn't believe it. Because my father used to tell us, during the first war, there was very nice people, the German. And he couldn't believe -- he'd say, "Its propaganda, " my father. We didn't pay too much attention to this.

Q: So your father was living with you, is that correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have any other relatives who were either living with you or in that community?

A: Oh, yes. We had three brothers and one sister, younger than me.

Q: How old were you at the outbreak of the war? Do you remember?

A: Well, yes. Twenty years.

Q: You were twenty years old. And how did you receive news of the war?

A: We was isolated. We didn't know too much about the war. It was in 1939, was the day after Rosh Hashanah, we noticed planes flying over. My father said, "It looks like the Russian planes." And a few hours later, we noticed Russian soldiers in town, because we were kind of close to the Russian border, that's why we hadn't run away. After two weeks the war, the Germans with the Poles, didn't last very long. And then the Russians occupied us. People were very happy because we heard some rumors that Germany will kill the Jewish people. And then we were very happy with the Russians. Well, a lot of people had to close down their stores, because the Russians wouldn't allow you to have private stores.

Q: They wouldn't.

A: No, no. Everything had to be like "kahals," they called this.

Q: When the Russians came in, did the people in the Jewish community get together and meet?

A; Well, we used to talk, mostly to find out if any of the Russian soldiers were Jewish soldiers. We talked to them. We were not afraid of them.

Q: You weren't afraid of them!

A: No! Well, my father was afraid. He said, " Well, you remember during the war -- the First War -- they attacked the girls, raping, like that." But, they were more civilized.

Q: And what did you talk to the Russian soldiers about?

A: How is the life in Russia.

Q: I see. Was there any discussion about getting out of Poland? Amongst you and your family or in the community?

A: Not in this time. No.

Q: When did the Nazis occupy your town?

A: In 1941.

Q: What actions did the German forces take in the early months or years of occupation that you can recall?

A: The first day, when they came to our town, they took all the men to work, and they never came back. And my father -- we find out they take them to work, and my father was hidden. And one German came to the house.

Q: Who hid him?

A: We did. We had a bunker ready. It was in the cellar, in the basement.

Q: And were your brothers there too?

A: No, because one brother was married. In 1940, my younger brother -- he's in Israel, now -- they took him to the army, the Soviet army.

Q: Which army?

A: The Russian army. In 1940. Because he was supposed to be in the army for three years. I think, so they took him to the Soviet army. And in 1941, the day when the war broke out, they took away my older brother to the army. And, well, he just passed away last year, in Boston. He was my oldest brother. And we didn't heard from them till 1945, that they are alive in Russia.

Q: To get back to that scene where your father was in the bunker and the German officer came in. What happened then?

A: They just ask for men -- not for women. And I say, "They took my father away, and I don't know where." He opened two doors of my closet. And you know, this -- someone's men's suits. He says, "How come? So many men's?" He couldn't believe it, it's just my father. I say, " Well, it's my brothers, but I don't know where they are." I didn't tell him they are in the army, in the Russian army, they took them away. I didn't tell. And he started beating me, and I start screaming and yelling, and my father heard. And they beat me very bad. And then one soldier, between them, he was from Holland -- we know that because he had an armband, was written on "Holland" -- and he stopped them. He said, " What do you want with a dirty Jew? Let's go out." And then later he came back, the same soldier. And he says to me, " Wear dirty clothes on you. Put your scarf -- make you kind of older, you know, because they will come again." But they never came back. My father was hidden for two weeks in this bunker. And then a little bit, it settled down. They took all the men, what I heard. The next day we find out that all of them were killed. All of them. They took them to work, brought the cars and the soldiers, and this –and-that, and they never came back. Was about 500,600 Jewish men were killed. Young and old.

Q: And your father was hiding for two weeks?

A: Yes, and then he came out of his bunker, yes.

Q: And then what did he do?

A: Well, they tried to take us to work. And my father used to speak -- used to know how -- their language.

Q: He spoke German?

A: Yes. Jewish and German, it was kind of a resemblance, you know. And he, somewhere, he went to work every day, and they sent him home, my father, up to 1942.

Q: What kind of work did he do?

A: All kind, and the Gestapo, they asked him to clean, wash and that, because he speaked a little bit German. In the kitchen. All kind work.

Q: And what were you doing at this time then?

A: They took me and my sister to work in the field.

Q: On the farms.

A: Kind of farms, yes. In the morning, and in the evening they brought us back, because we had a Judenrat. You know what it means a Judenrat?

Q: Maybe you should explain.

A: A Judenrat is what the Germans make like a community. Because what they wanted, the Germans, they wanted not to the private Jewish people, they came to the Judenrat, and the Judenrat, they ask, "How much?" You have to give me this day so many people to work." "We need at this time so many furs." And they collect from us. Furs, silver, gold, all kind, or sheets, because they need it on the front -- the German. Especially white sheets. When it was snow, they needed to cover up on top. And the Judenrat used to come -- ask the private people for this. That's what they do. So hard to explain, you know. And it's so hard to understand this, too, for people that they didn't go through. "What you mean, fur?" You know? It's impossible.

Q: Well, we'll make an attempt here. How long were you in your town then?

A: I was from 1941 to 1943. But during the time, they made a ghetto. In 1942, they made a ghetto in our city which, in the war, was a very small area, and was living

in the one room, we had about three, four families -- one on the top. I lived with my sister -- younger sister, but she's killed -- and my father's sister with the kids. We were maybe about fifteen, sixteen people in such a small room. And then everybody got sick -- typhus. Hunger.

Q: Were there any medical supplies available?

A: Oh, no.

Q: What about food? How much food was there available?

A: Very little.

Q: How much?

A: Well, we were a little bit lucky with food, because like my father used to work for the Germans, you know, and they used to take him to work. And they used to give him, some of them, and he brought us home, little by little. My father had a lot of friends, with gentiles. And he used to sell them.

Q: He did!

A: Yes. We supposed to go in the ghetto, we left our big house with all furnitures, because we were pretty well off. And a gentile family took over our house there. He was a shoemaker, the gentile. And we went to live in his place, because this was the area for the ghetto. It was a very small house. And we tried to sell a lot of things out -- furniture --for nothing, very cheap. For potatoes -- 10 pounds potatoes. Could give away a bedroom set for a little potatoes, a little flour, a little chicken. This is the way we lived! We sold everything that was ours to them. For nothing! Just a little bit food.

Q: Who did you sell it to?

A: To the gentiles. Clothes, everything, we sell them, to let us survive! To have a little bit food.

Q: How long were you in the ghetto then?

A: From 1942 to 1943. In between the time, was a lot of killing! Oh! Yes! It was early in the morning…

Q: You saw? You saw it going on?

A: Some. But not much, because, like I say, one morning, it was in 1943, I think, or end of 1942, I think, right when they made it a ghetto. All the Jews, they wanted to have all the Jews in the one side. And one morning, we noticed all the ghetto

was surrounded with SS -- Gestapo -- "Raus, raus, raus, all people." And my father heard this, and he started running back to the house. He said, " We have to be hidden somewhere, have to hide someplace." We had an attic, you know, on top of the house. And he was hidden between, you know, was a lot of junk, because so many families it was, and we have to keep everything on top.

Q: You were in the attic, like, of the house?

A: Yes. And we were lying behind, covered up a lot, with junk. There was a lot of old furnitures, this kind of thing. Broken things. They came, and looked for us, and they couldn't find us.

Q: And then what happened?

A: After a few days, it kind of quieted down, because we heard people start talking. You know, we heard voices. And they said, "Oh, they took this family away, they took this family in…" and they say, "I believe that they took them to the depot and they were transferred away." But we didn't know where. They was packed in the trains, but we didn't know where. We didn't know about Auschwitz. We couldn't figure out what happened. And then again and again. When I heard what they did, they asked us to dig your own grave.

Q: They asked you.

A: No. People. I mean I never saw this.

Q: People in the Jewish community.

A: Yeah, I was the one lucky. I always was having, you know, miracles. They never could see me, find me. I always was hidden someplace when they made it this kind of -- they used to call this: oblava. This is a Polish name. This mean…

Q: This means to search?

A: Yes. And I was always the one. They never got me. Really.

Q: So you were in the attic then for how long?

A: For three, four days.

Q: And then where did you go from there?

A: Well, like they took the people away to -- it must have been to Auschwitz.

Q: Yes, but how about you? Where did you go?

A: We came down, and that was kind of again, back to work in the fields, again the same thing. Yeah, again, for a couple of weeks, a couple months. And then where we work again. And they always make the ghetto smaller and smaller, because we had not too many Jewish people, and they had to make the place smaller. What happened one day, what I did was, a neighbor, he was a tailor, and he used to do a lot of work for the Germans, and they let him stay -- not in ghetto -- on the other side, because he worked for them.

Q: For the what side?

A: For them. He was not on the ghetto side, on the opposite. Different, you know, in the city. He worked for them. And he said one time, " Listen, I have a daughter. And she's in ghetto. Maybe she will help me to do, to tailor, in my shop." And they believed him, I'm his daughter, and they gave me a card, I can go forth and back. Out from ghetto, into the ghetto, you know. And during the day I used to work, help him out.

Q: So you were working in the tailor shop. And how long did you work in that?

A: About three or four months, I think so. And I always used to see how they used to do across from the ghetto what they used to do. Kill the people, beat 'em, drag 'em. I saw everything. And then, they didn't put me anymore to the field. And then one day, the tailor went to see a Gestapo, to try on a suit, to finish up a suit, because his attitude was tailoring, you know.

Q: This is Gestapo officer.

A: Yes. And then I looked out through the window and I saw everything's like in a fire -- the ghetto. I could see across. A lot of SS and a lot of Gestapos with rifles. And this was the end. They cleaned up all the Jews in the ghetto. So then I run out through the back door ,and I start run and run and run -- so far. And I heard shooting. So terrible. And I notice, a little boy with his grandma. And she couldn't hear it. She was very bad hearing, and she didn't see me. And the little boy noticed I was spent and she had cows and horses. In a stable.

Q: She was a gentile woman.

A: Yes. And I run, and I open the door from the stable and I climbed in the hay and I was hidden in this hay. And she didn't see me. And the little boy saw me, but he couldn't say, " Grandma, a lady, a lady!" But she didn't see me. She was kind of deaf, you know. I was staying for all day and all night, and the second day I was afraid to get out, and finally got the second day dark, I figure, "Well, I have to get out." I didn't eat anything. It was in the night, and I knew my father was in the labor camp, already.

Q: What year was this now? About what month?

A: In 1943. August, I would say, or July, something like that. I can't remember exactly. And I figured, "Well, I will try to go to my father."

Q: He was in a labor camp. Do you know which one?

A: In the same city, Skalat. And I went to the labor camp. And it was wires around. I crawled under the wires and I came to my father's cabin. There where he was, he was working in the labor camp, too, and he was surprised to see me. And I say, "I survived." I told him how. And he asked me how about my sister? I say, "I don't know anything about her." Which I never saw her anymore. And I couldn't stay in this labor camp long. I was hidden in the labor camp, too, because they took all the furnitures out from the ghetto, and brought everything into the labor camp. All what the people owned, little furniture stuff. And I was hidden in a yard, in the furniture. And my father used to bring me, for a couple of days, some food, to eat something. And then all of a sudden my father heard rumors, they will come and search for people, because they knew. And then he brought me to his place, and he hid me under the bunker, too. In the labor camp.

Q: Was he living in like a barracks?

A: Barracks. Kind of like that. And one day, he says to me, I can't sit anymore longer in there because they would search again this place, because they knew. And he said he could go out from this labor camp. He took me to a gentile woman. And the gentile woman had a bunker in the kitchen. And I was hidden by her for two weeks. Then she came to me to say, she's afraid to keep me any lot longer. And then I find out they killed my father. She told me, " Your father's not living anymore. They killed a lot of people out in the labor camp. They took them out to the fields and they shot all, a lot of people." And she say, " Now I just can't keep you anymore longer in mine house." I went back to labor camp and they gave me a card. I'm legal to work in this labor camp. I was there for two, three months, I can't remember exactly. And then one day came an SS man in the night and say. "Listen, tomorrow will come the Gestapo from a different city and they're going to finish all. They're going to kill all the camp. All the people." And there wouldn't be anymore. It will be Judenfrei completely. The city will be completely frei -- free -- from the Jews." I went back to the gentile woman. She wouldn't let me in anymore. No. And she said to me, ' Do what you want, but not in mine house.' And she had around her house a big garden. It was growing corn. I didn't know where to go. I went in bushes around the house. I said, " Where am I gonna go?" I went, I was lying in the bushes. In the morning we heard --because the gentile woman didn't live too far from the labor camp -- and this was the truth. They came, the Gestapo, and they took away all the people from the labor camp. And later on they searched the area around the labor camp, and were searching this place where I was with the gentile woman. I saw them -- the Gestapo -- and they didn't see me. They didn't see me. When it got dark, I came out from the bushes, you know, and I say, ' Give me a little

water," to the gentile woman. And she said, " I will give you water and a piece of bread, but would you please leave mine house. I'm afraid."

Q: So the gentile woman didn't wanna hide you.

A: No. and then we heard, there's a lot of people, there in the woods. But how to get to the woods? You have to go just in the night. Not in the daytime. She wouldn't let me in anymore, so I started walking. And then I heard somebody behind me and it was a Jewish man and a Jewish woman say, ' You survived? How did you survive from the camp?" I say, " When I heard the rumors then I took off, too. The same way.' And then we were already three of us. And what next we gonna do. We just can't go back to the ghetto. The ghetto's not anymore people in there. We just can't go back to the labor camp. She said, ' Let's go to the woods." I said, " I don't know the way to go. How?" She said, " During the day, we will go and we will lay in the fields. In the night we will start walking." And this is the way we did it. We walked for a whole week that way, you know, until we came to the woods. We start searching for people in the woods. We didn't see nobody else, you know? And we wandered, we walked and walked, and in the meantime we heard voices. And I say, " Oh, I think I hear somebody talking." And then the people heard us talking. They were afraid this is Germans, you know. And then one woman, I heard – "Oye, I think that this is Hinda. It's my neighbor." And then I heard a voice, "Come out, we are here. We're here, we are in the bushes. We have to be hidden." I stayed for nine months in the woods.

Q: How'd you survive?

A: We had a bunker. They made a bunker. During the night we went to the villages -- steal.

Q Food.

A: Food. It's hard to say this. (Laughter)

Q: Well, that's okay. That's fine.

A: We steal. We went to the fields and we digged potatoes. Every night we went to the field, dig out the potatoes. All kind, corn. We ate this, you know. Beets. And we made "graves," and we put it up, because we know we will stay for a whole winter. We covered up with dirt, with grass, and every day we took it out, and we made it in the night, a fire. We baked potatoes to have for all day, because we couldn't make a fire during the daytime. Just in the night.

Q: How many were there of you?

A: I would say, was a few groups. One group was five and one group was three and one group was seven, you know, and we were groups. We helped each other. In

the winter time we melted snow, we had some water to drink. And we made a fire to keep us warm, too. Because we didn't have no shoes-- just rags, because we used to steal some rags in the villages from the gentiles.

Q: Were you involved in any partisan groups?

A: Partisan? No.

Q: So how long were you in the woods then"

A: We were in the woods till 1944.

Q: And what happened?

A; 'Till March, 1944 --March the 14th. The Russians liberate us. That's why we had it a little bit easier, like I said. We were close to the Russian border, that's why we had the Russians early.

Q; Did they just come up one morning or evening?

A: No, the fight was twelve days. The fighting in this town. We could hear the Russian, we could hear the Germans -- we were surrounded, you know -- talking. And then, was one Russian, a soldier, he was wounded. And he crawled. We had a bunker, room for people about six or seven, and we were afraid a tank will come, will run, pass through, and we were afraid, because it could have crushed us. And every few hours somebody came out from the bunker and was watching. And in the meantime, this Russian soldier was wounded. We took him into the bunker and he told us, " It's kind of close. Maybe in a few days we'll take over the city." And one day we heard a lot of Russians speaking, and we took out the soldier, wounded, and we brought him to the staff.

Q: The staff?

A: It happened it was a major -- a Jewish major. And he was kind of surprised to see people. We were hungry, cold, and he gave us something to eat. And he says, " You have to stay still another day in the woods, because it wouldn't be safe to go out to the city. You never know what can happen," he say. "And better stay another day, then you will be safe to go on the city." And we listened. We listened to him, and they went their way, you know. They didn't stay in one place. Then finally we started going to the city. Boy, when people, the gentiles, saw us walking, they were surprised. "Still Jewish people living! Jewish people living!' And everything was bombed! You should have seen, here Russian dead soldiers and German soldiers lay in the streets. You could see horses. Everything! Houses burn. It was a fight twelve days in such a small city. And then I notice mine house is still there. Everyone said, " Let's go." I say, "How? I'm sure the gentile people live there.

Q: Who were you with at this time?

A: In a group, people, you know. Few people. And she saw me, and she said, " You still alive?" She says, " I'll let you sleep, but you have to sleep on the floor." She wouldn't give me back anything. I didn't have no choice. I went to sleep. Next day in the morning I say, I don't wanna stay any more with her. She treat me very bad. And I came out and I cried. And then another one, was a captain, from the Russian, and he say, "Why you cry?" And I say. And he say, "You Jewish? You are yeraika" -- it's Russian Jewish -- and I say, "Yes." And I had my palm with blisters in my hand, and he was a doctor, too.

Q: Blisters from what?

A: Blisters from boils. All mine hand, all over my body. And he took out a little tiny scissors and opened all the blisters and put some cream, I don't know what kind, and then put bandages all mine hand. He gave me something to eat. And he say, "What do you want?" He say, ' I will kick her out." I say, " No, I don't want." I didn't wanna stay in this house, because it's too many bad memories. I don't want to tell him I'm afraid. "What I wanted is to take out, a few pillows mine and a blanket and I will go my way.' He went to the house and took away a pillow and a few blankets. And then, we all got together, all the Jews, maybe a hundred, and we all lived in not such a big house. The window was broken from the war. We were staying, and a little by little, "I was sick in the hospital," it's a lot to tell.

Q: Yes, I know. We're at the point now where you had gotten a few belongings from your home. You decided not to stay there, and then you had left there. Where'd you go from there then?

A: Like I say, we got together, all the survivors, and we lived in one big room. Must be 80, 90, 100, I can't remember exactly. And then we stayed for a few weeks and everybody got, you know, different places to go. We begged a lot of food from people, especially from the gentiles, because they tried to be nice to make up to the Jewish people what they had done bad. And I went to a woman, to a gentile, to stay because I was sick. To a gentile woman, because she used to know my parents very well. She used to work sometimes. And she shared a little bit food with me. I stayed until I took back mine house.

Q: Oh, you did.

A: I did. I took mine house back because maybe for two months, I would say, or maybe three months, because she wouldn't give me back this house, I went to the police and told them what happened, why she lives in this house, because we were forced out because they made the ghetto. And we trade, because she gave us a very old house -- house, ha! She called it a house, you know. Well, she didn't

want to go back to her old place. And they made her go -- to fix back this place, and they gave her about two, three weeks to fix up her place, and she was supposed to give me back mine house. She did. She didn't have no choice. She was ordered from the court to do that. And when I took back mine house, then I took a family to stay with me, to live with me, you know. A survivor, too, with her mother and her daughter, four people, with a cousin. She stayed for a little while. She paid a little bit money, rent, which helped me a little bit. And then I find me a job working in a restaurant. And then I got sick again. I couldn't work anymore. In the meantime, my brother wrote a letter from Siberia. And it was kind of a surprise for me to hear from him. And he asked who survived, who lives. And I wrote him back.

Q: Let me get back to your brother. How did he get to Siberia?

A: In 1941, the Russians took him to the army, you know. I told you in the beginning.

A: Yes. I just wanted a recap on that.

A: And we each had very little, but he heard I'm sick, and I just can't work. He heard that from a friend, too, and he sent me a little bit money, for a little while. That way I survived a little bit. I was awful sick. I couldn't walk. And I didn't know what to do. Then I wrote him back, I said, " A lot of Jewish people that survived, they are survivors, but they don't want to stay in the same city. They wanna leave." Then he told me I should do the same thing what everybody does. Go out and move and leave this place, because it was horrible to live in this place, just a lot of bad memories, you know. And he said, " If they will let us free from Siberia, we will come, too, where you will be." I went to Germany, to Gliwice. That's a German city that was occupied from the Russian. The Polish, they divided it again, they made it a Polish state again.

Q: You met your husband in…

A: In Gliwice, 1945.

Q: How'd you arrange to come to the United States then?

A: Well we lived in Gliwice for a while and then we moved to Valdenburg.

Q: Also in Germany?

A: Germany. It's Polish over there now. And we started writing letters to New York. He knew he had some family there.

Q: Your husband did.

A: Yes. And then we couldn't, you know. They just started writing and they sent a little bit us money. But then we find out the Haganah is working. This was in 1946. The Haganah -- the Israeli organization -- they had an office in Czechoslovakia and they tried to let people out from Poland to come to Czechoslovakia, and from Czechoslovakia to Austria, and from Austria to Germany to the American zone. They helped us, the Haganah. We crossed the borders. (At this point, Helen's husband, Allen Mastbaum, joins the interview.)

Allen: They paid the money from the people that was by the boundary. The Polish took the money and they let us go.

A: Yeah. They let us go through. We crossed the border from Poland to Czechoslovakia. They paid the money, the Haganah. They helped us.

A.M: 'Cause they took us to Austria, from Austria to Ulm, Germany.

A: We were in a D.P. camp.

A.M: This was UNRRA. That was the organization in America. They kept us over there, and give to eat, six years.

A: Well, then we start working a little bit, too.

A.M: Start working in a camp. We work in camp.

A: From 1946 to 1951. In 1949 we left Ulm and we went to Hamburg, to the D.P. camp.

A.M: By Munich. And then I find an uncle. My father's two brothers was here in St. Paul. And I wrote a letter to the organization in New York. I didn't know where they lived. I just know the name, so I wrote it to New York to the organization and it took six, seven weeks, and I received from New York, they sent me the address. They sent me the name and everything from St. Paul. And I wrote and they answered me.

A: They sent us letters and papers to come here.

A.M: Yeah, then they send me the papers. Then I come here. I got here three cousins, maybe you know them?

Q: Yeah, I might.

A.M: Leonard Mastbaum -- he's a doctor in Minneapolis -- and Joe Mast, a lawyer, and Sam Mastbaum.

A: We came here. We worked both very hard, very hard to raise our family. Worked hard until now.

A.M: After two weeks I went to Whirlpool Corporation to work.

Q: Yes. We'll get to your story in the next tape. I appreciate your input into this, to clarify what happened after the Russian occupation. That will be some ground that we probably won't need to cover in your tape. But I want to sum up here. We're kind of getting to the end of Mrs. Mastbaum's interview, and I wanted to know whether you maintain contact with other survivors -- or do you belong to any survivor organizations?

A: I belong.

Q: You are going to an event in Washington D.C. starting--what date?

A: The 10th of April.

Q: 1983. Which will be a gathering of, I understand, something like 15,000 survivors of the Holocaust.

A: Well, I heard, eleven, now it's fifteen. Yes, from Canada, too. Don't forget it will be the second generation, the third generation, because my son goes, my daughter goes, and my grandson goes. He's the third generation, already.

Q: So, we've discussed some of your experiences here, and maybe you can tell me in your own words what it means to be a survivor of the Holocaust. What it means to you?

A: Well, I should say -- painful.

Q: Do you think that being a survivor has changed your feelings about human nature? Non-Jewish people? Jewish people? Polish people?

A: Polish people was very mean to us. Very mean. If they saw a Jew, you know, they could chop off his head and buy a pound of sugar, take somebody's life away. It's a terrible thing. How people can do it?

Q: Do you believe that your practice in Judaism has been changed because of these experiences?

A: Changed a lot. Especially religious. I'm not changed. I'm a Jew through and through, but changed in different ways. I don't believe in a lot of things now. The one thing what I believe, I told my kids, I don't like a mixed marriage. I don't. I just don't like it. It's not I'm prejudiced. It's left in mine feeling, I just don't believe in it.

Q: I can understand. Have you seen any films or read any books about the Holocaust? Do you think they tell the story right?

A: Well, it did tell the story right, but it's not even half what they show. They just bat the ball. Did you see the movie, The Wall? It was last year, I would say.

Q: What did you think of that?

A: It's the truth. But not the half. What you see and what you read, it's not compared to going through this. It's completely different.

Q: Do you have any photos or mementoes or other things from those years that you'd be willing to share with the JCRC-ADL?

A: I didn't have the photos. I have bad memories. Very bad dreams. Nothing else. Just bad dreams left to me. Constantly. It's already how many years? Forty-three years? They still are. One day, when I hear him screaming and yelling, I was scared, and I woke him up. I say, "What happened?" He said, "They pulled me by my hair. They wanna kill me." They still are, still left in us.

Q: Is there anything else that we should say before we conclude this interview? Things you'd like to add or anything like that? If my memory serves me correctly -- the Germans -- did they ever compensate, or provide anything to the victims or the survivors of the Holocaust?

A: Nothing for me, no. I'm still sick. I don't have anything from them, nothing.

Q: You still suffer physically.

A: Well, physical, emotional, sure. Life goes on. You have to go on, you know, there's nothing you can do. I write my family, and I only get letters now, to see my family. And I hope they don't have to go through what I went through in my life.

Q: Your family's living in the Twin Cities area?

A: My daughter lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and she works. She has an education. And my sin-in-law, they're both working. She's a library scientist. And my son-in-law is a child psychologist. And a son, Norman, he's a psychologist, working here, and he has a son. And I have a third son Ozzie Mastbaum, he is disabled. And I believe that he's disabled, maybe, because of what I went through in my life. I don't know. Maybe it's possible.

Q: I want to thank you very much. I know this has been difficult for you.

A: Yes. It's very difficult. It's very painful. I don't think I can tell everything I went through. There's still a lot to add, still a lot to say.

Q: There's a lot you can't say. Yeah, I understand. I should explain on this tape that I'm at your home with you and your husband, Allen Mastbaum, who was helping us with this history regarding what happened after the Soviet occupation of Poland, and we're going to talk to Mr. Mastbaum on another tape, and he's going to tell us his story. So at this point I'd like to complete the interview with Helen Mastbaum by David Zarkin, myself, on April 3, 1983, at the Mastbaum home in St. Paul.