

Interview with Betty Migdol
April 12, 1992
Yonkers, New York

- Q: Today is April 12, 1992. I am Anthony Di Iorio and I am at the home of Mrs. Betty Migdol of Yonkers, New York and I am here on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington to interview Mrs. Migdol about her experiences during the Holocaust. Good evening.
- A: Good evening and how are you?
- Q: Okay especially with that chicken noodle soup. I feel fine.
- A: Glad I had some left over from Friday.
- Q: Now where were you born?
- A: In Ruscova, Romania.
- Q: In what year?
- A: 1927, December 19th.
- Q: Were you an only child or did you have brothers and sisters?
- A: No, I had three brothers and two sisters. I was the third of six children. My brother was in the forced, forced --.
- Q: The army labor --
- A: Army labor.
- Q: Now what kind of home did you grow up in?
- A: Well, we were a very, very orthodox home. It was called Hasidic. The holidays and Shabbos was just beautiful, very joyous all the time and Passover. I still keep the same way because I enjoyed so much as a child. I really loved it so I continue it on with my family in the same tradition.
- Q: What languages were spoken in your home?
- A: Yiddish.
- Q: Yiddish?
- A: Yiddish.

- Q: Did you and your parents, did you speak any other languages?
- A: Well, we spoke Hungarian, Romanian and the Slovak but mainly it was Yiddish. A little German --.
- Q: What kind of town was Ruscova? What kind of people lived there?
- A: Well, it was a lot of Jewish people. I would say it was a small town of about five hundred Jewish families, I would say. A lot of Christians also but they kind of lived on the outskirts.
- Q: Were these -- you mentioned Slovaks, were these mostly Slovaks?
- A: Mostly Slovaks. We had one Hungarian, very aristocratic family, Hungarians, some Romanian, one German family but they left before Hitler came, before the Germans came in. It was mostly the Slovaks and the Jews.
- Q: What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a Jewish neighborhood or was it mixed?
- A: Jewish.
- Q: Jewish neighborhood.
- A: One Christian family, the Hungarians, they lived across the street from us.
- Q: Did you live in a house or in an apartment?
- A: A house. Everybody had houses. It was small houses.
- Q: Did anyone else in your family besides your parents and your brothers and sisters live with you?
- A: No.
- Q: No. Did your grandparents live in the same town or did they live outside?
- A: Well, my grandfather passed away when I was -- before I was even born. We only had, the only thing I remember is one grandmother. She died in 1938.
- Q: What kind of school did you attend?
- A: Was the Romanian school up to 4th grade. Then in the 4th grade, the Hungarians came in. There was no school for two years because they didn't allow the Jews to go to school. The Christians didn't go to school, very few of them went so two

years later, they opened up the school again and they accepted the Jewish people but I didn't go back any more because it was optional. So I never went back, you know kids, kids rather not go.

Q: Yes. Now when the schools were run by the Romanians, did you experience anti-Semitism or any kind of problems?

A: No, not by the Romanians.

Q: The instruction was in Romanian?

A: In Romanian, Romanian teachers. They brought them in from different cities. They were very nice, the teachers, very nice. They had no problems with them.

Q: Who were the students in these schools?

A: Mostly Jewish, mostly Jewish, maybe five of the Ukrainian children. That's about all. They didn't go to school.

Q: Your older brother and your older sister went to the same school?

A: My sister. My brother was out of school. He was already six years older than me and he was out of school. My sister went with me.

Q: What did your father do for a living?

A: My father worked at the railroad station, loading and unloading whatever was shipped in or shipped out, food. We had a heavy wooded area; my section was the heavy wooded area so we shipped out a lot of wood. Then we didn't grow wheat or sugar or anything so everything had to be imported so everything was brought in. He was at the railroad station, him and two other men. That's what they did.

Q: Was he employed by the state railways or --?

A: No, no. He was employed by the people that got merchandise, either shipped in or shipped out.

Q: So he worked hard?

A: He was a very hard worker. Was like these people, what is it called now, people that exercise with the machines, iron-something?

Q: Oh, the weight lifters?

A: Yes.

Q: Pumping iron?

A: Pumping iron, that's what he did.

Q: Pumping iron, yes.

A: Yes, pumping iron.

Q: So he was a strong man?

A: Yes, very strong man.

Q: Now your mother had six children so she must have been working very hard at home?

A: No, she was a dressmaker also and worked at that also.

Q: In addition to raising six kids, she was a dressmaker?

A: Yes, she was a dressmaker and she sewed quite a lot also.

Q: At home or at a shop?

A: At home. We had a sewing machine in the house and she sewed quite a lot. I had to take care of the three little ones while she sewed.

Q: So you were the baby sitter, the resident baby sitter?

A: I was the resident baby sitter. When she cooked too, I had to take care of the three little ones.

Q: How about your older sister, what did she do?

A: She helped cooking and cleaning and then she learned also to be a dressmaker. She had more different job than me. Everybody was assigned to some job and that was my job, taking care of the little ones.

Q: Did you have a garden with your house?

A: Yes, we had a big garden right on the back of our house and then we had two other fields right near our house to grow corn and hay for the cow.

Q: You had a cow? Who did that work, your father?

- A: My father, that we all had to do. I never milked a cow though. I was afraid of that.
- Q: The cow was afraid of you too?
- A: I don't know but I never milked a cow.
- Q: It sounds like you ate well?
- A: Yes, it was -- everything was very, very good. Everything was made at that time, for when you are going to use it. Everything was fresh and everything was good until the Hungarians came in. When the war broke out, the situation changed drastically. Then you couldn't get supplies, there was a shortage of everything so everything changed.
- Q: Now you mentioned that when the Hungarians came in, you were forced out of school. Then you -- of course the war had meanwhile broken out. Did your parents ever discuss politics or your older brother or sister ever discuss politics, or the Nazis. Had you heard of the Nazis and Hitler?
- A: Well, let's say like when the Hungarians came in, they kind of made us use, have flags and greet the soldiers in and praise them. Of course we didn't want to; right away we knew the Hungarians are not as good as the Romanians and we were very upset. When the Romanians left, we were very much afraid that they are going to start something bad, the soldiers.
- Q: The Hungarian soldiers?
- A: The Romanian soldiers.
- Q: The Romanian soldiers?
- A: The Romanian soldiers when they had to pull out but everything went very smoothly when they pulled out. But when the Hungarian soldiers came in, after they occupied and after a few weeks, they pulled out, they started fires.
- Q: The Hungarian soldiers started fires around Ruscova or in Ruscova?
- A: Yes, in Ruscova.
- Q: What was the purpose of that?
- A: I guess anti-Semitic, no other purpose. But yet we were afraid of the Romanians and the Romanians didn't do it. I was very young at the time, you see. I really wasn't that much involved but I remember my mother like saying that we were afraid of the Romanians and yet they didn't do anything. The Hungarians we

weren't afraid of because they remained. They remained in Hungary and yet they did it anyway.

Q: That's interesting, that your parents would be afraid of the Romanians. Was there any --?

A: We were afraid when they pulled out. As a matter of fact, we didn't sleep in the house, we went to sleep in the fields when they pulled out. That they going to do some damages and they're going to do some killing.

Q: Vandalism?

A: Killing, vandalism because they had to pull out for the Hungarians to come in. I remember we were afraid and we didn't sleep in the house and yet they didn't do anything. They just pulled out and everything was quiet.

Q: Had you heard of Hitler at that time?

A: Me, personally, no. I didn't. It was a small town and nobody had a radio.

Q: No radio?

A: So you had to depend on a newspaper, you didn't get many newspapers either. We were very remote, you know, we are twelve miles away from the Russian border, the _____. It's a remote place, we didn't

Q: So you probably didn't even know where Germany was.

A: No, but we weren't involved, as I say. And even in 1942, even though it was Hungary, they were already taking away people that weren't legally married, from different towns and different cities, but somehow our town they left alone. They didn't touch us until '44.

Q: So from 1940 when the Hungarians came in until 1944 they did little other than close down the schools.

A: Right.

Q: And draft ...

A: Oh, no, no, no they did lots of other things.

Q: Okay.

A: The Jews couldn't, had to keep open the stores on Saturday and on holidays and then they had to hire, whether they needed them or not, a Christian person in the

store to stay at the store. They didn't leave you alone, they were, right away they showed their anti-Semitism in many, many ways. But it wasn't as bad as when they took us into the ghetto.

Q: Now another thing you mentioned earlier, your oldest brother he was drafted into the Hungarian army labor service.

A: Yeah, labor service, right and he worked in the coal mines and then he worked in the battlefield, they didn't let Jew fight, they couldn't fight. So he had to clean up the, after the battle, clean up the bodies. That was his job and he got liberated by the Russians and six months before, in '44, 1945, I would say in January, six months before the war ended. So he came back home to Ruscova.

Q: Now were there other changes under the Hungarians that you remember, other than the ones we've just mentioned?

A: Well, they came around, the Germans came around and they started to say they're going to start a ghetto.

Q: This is in 1944?

A: In 19...before 1944.

Q: The Germans came in before 1944?

A: Germans came in and they said that they're going to have a ghetto, they're just going to have us together, just for the duration of the war, and then they planned a ghetto and then they made the ghetto and _____

Q: Which is near where?

A: Next town, it's only a few miles away. But that was the nearest city.

Q: _____

A: Uh, huh.

Q: Did you do any traveling at all during these years as a young girl?

A: No.

Q: So you were always in Ruscova.

A: I was always in Ruscova.

Q: How about any of your brothers and sisters, other than the brother who was in the Hungarian army, were there other members of the family?

A: Well, my sister she was the one who went to Budapest, in '42 or '43, in between then she went to Budapest and she was a dressmaker so she was able to go there and work. And then when it became so bad for the Jews she had these Christian friends and they got the Christian papers and she lived under the Christian name all those months, but it was very, very stressful for her. Very scary for her and one man found out she's Jewish and he was going to report her and she was hidden for three days, she was hidden and without food or drink or anything and she was very upset. Finally she said she doesn't care, she has to give up and go out and see and go out because she can't stay there and what ill happen will happen. She found out that her Christian friends were looking for her and they couldn't find her. That man that was going to report her, got killed by the first Russian bombs when the Russians started to invade Budapest. He got killed with the first Russian bomb, so she got saved.

Q: She knew that? Did she know that he'd been killed?

A: After she got out, after the three days of hiding, she said she can't stay there any more, she's thirsty, she's hungry, there is nothing there. She got very scared, she says, they'll send her to a concentration camp, they'll send her if they catch her. There is nothing she could do any more. So that's when her friends told her, the Christian friends, "I was looking for you, Lily, I was looking for you. That man got killed with the first Russian bomb."

Q: Did she know how this guy knew she was Jewish?

A: I really don't know how he knew....oh he kind of guessed, he kind of guessed. She didn't look Jewish at all because she's blonde, and German she spoke. So the blonde people and speaking German, you could get away with it.

Q: So your sister Lily could speak German?

A: Yes.

Q: Had she learned it in Ruscova?

A: Yeah, we had a German family there and, like I spoke to them too. We were friends with the kids and we spoke to them, so you picked up these languages from that area, which I forgot most of them because I don't use them.

Q: Was Lily able to send letters to Ruscova?

A: Oh, no.

- Q: No, so there was no correspondence?
- A: But I knew where she lived so when I came back from the concentration camp I stopped off in Budapest and I found her. She lived at 31_____, and it's still there.
- Q: On the Pesht side of the river.
- A: Yes, when I went the last time I went to look at that street again at that house, I found it.
- Q: But until 1944, you living in this small remote town, near the Carpathians, the Hungarian police are running the town?
- A: Well the Hungarian police and we had, I told you, the aristocratic Hungarian family and they had a lot of children and their children took over everything. And everybody was kind of their slave, you had to do what they say, they said, and when you met any of them you had to say "_____" which you know what that means, "I kiss your hand." And to the older ones, the elderly you had to go over and kiss their hand, if not they would let your parents know that the children weren't nice to them and they were very anti-Semitic, but when my brother came home and two other guys came home, from the _____ they were going to kill them. So they took the Russian soldiers and they got after them, but somehow they found out and they all ran away and they don't live in Ruscova any more, they live in _____.
- Q: So when the Hungarians took over this local Hungarian aristocrat became the master of the area?
- A: The masters of the area.
- Q: In all probability, this same family controlled the area before the Romanians took over in 1918.
- A: They owned a lot of property, a lot. They happened to live right across the street from us, fortunate we were, huh? But, so we had to be their slaves all the time. I mean, whatever they wanted we had to do for them, baby sit, go shopping for them.
- Q: So you would describe them as anti-Jewish?
- A: Oh yes, and yet they were only friends with the Jewish people, they didn't have other people to be friends with.
- Q: The Slovaks were probably not their friends.

- A: They were too, very common people.
- Q: And Ukrainians.
- A: Very common people, they were not better class, so the only body they can mingle with was the Jews. So, they were all very friendly with the Jews. I played with their children and their grandchildren.
- Q: Until...
- A: Until...
- Q: The deportation.
- A: Yes, I played with them because they lived across the street and we were all friends. My mother was very good friends with them.
- Q: Did she do sewing, dressmaking for them?
- A: Oh yes, they would pay in food, most people paid in food -- beans, flour, potatoes, chicken.
- Q: Would you happen to remember their last name, this aristocratic family?
- A: You know, I really couldn't tell you because we called them the Preesin. You know what that means the Preesin? It's like a queen or a king.
- Q: The lords?
- A: The lords, like. That's what we referred to them. They're all in ____ now because when I came home none of them were found, they were all gone. They ran for their lives because they knew what they did and they were afraid the Russians were going to get them. One thing the Russians, they paid back for people, what they knew were bad.
- Q: Were there any Hungarian fascists, Herrocross, in your town?
- A: No, the only thing what happened, I remember once, maybe they came the Herrocross or somebody, they instigated those Christians there and for a little while they were very anti-Semitic, but then it calmed down. Okay, like on Christmas and Easter we would be afraid to go out, we kind of, even during the Romanians we kind of didn't go out too much because we were afraid of them, the Christians what they would do. So we kind of stayed out of their way. But otherwise they left us alone, they didn't bother with us too much.
- Q: There weren't any pogroms?

A: No, never.

Q: And you say you were told there would be a ghetto sometime in 1943?

A: They were coming to look who's where, what, you know and the pity is we had such deep hills we could have all hid and they could have never found us. It's such big woods, nobody ...

Q: Did your parents ever consider emigrating?

A: Many, many years ago they considered emigrating to Brazil, when Brazil opened kind of? Or Argentina, I don't remember the land. But it fell through, they never did. We had our aunt here which was my father's sister, so probably one of us would have come eventually, one of the children. And once one came, they brought out the rest.

Q: And you were still a little girl during these years, did you have any particular dreams about what you would do when you grew up or where you would go?

A: Well, there was one thing I always used to think to myself that I'm going to work for whatever I need, but I want to have everything nice. I was always thinking that to myself, that I like nice things and I would work for it. And that's what I'm doing, I'm still working to get whatever I like and whatever I want.

Q: How about your sister Lily now, she actually grew up and went to Budapest, did she have particular goals in mind, particular job or ...

A: She was a dressmaker, you really had, what should I say, you didn't have much in mind, the only thing you thought of was growing up and getting married and having children, actually because that's what everybody did. Here too in America, the same way, nobody had any careers in their mind.

Q: Lily would have been old enough to consider getting married by this time...

A: Well, kind of, kind of.

Q: You, certainly not, you were much too young.

Q: No, I was young. Kind of, she was too young also, Lily. The only body who might have been was my brother, but he was in the army. So he was the only one that was old enough.

Q: How did people marry in your town, did they get matched, or were they arranged?

- A: It was a match, they had a matchmaker, it was matched. And some people got together on their own, and those that didn't, the families made the match.
- Q: Do you know how your parents married?
- A: A match also.
- Q: But the families knew each other.
- A: No.
- Q: No?
- A: She was from a different town, my mother.
- Q: She was born outside of Ruscova?
- A: Yes she was from a different town. So it had to be a match. There was no divorce, not one couple got divorced.
- Q: Now you mentioned that after a couple of years the Hungarians decided to reopen the schools because no one was going any more and you decided not to go.
- A: Right.
- Q: What did you decide to do?
- A: Stayed home and helped in the house.
- Q: You were still making dresses?
- A: My mother, yes. I helped in the house, well, in the summertime there was a lot of work to do in the fields, in the spring and in the fall and in the whole summer. It's a lot of labor.
- Q: Did any of your brothers and sisters go to the schools?
- A: Yes.
- Q: So they did go?
- A: They all went, yes. The younger ones, right.
- Q: Did they have any experiences good or bad in these schools?

- A: No, there was no, everything was kind of peaceful. These Hungarian aristocrats, they were the teachers, their daughter-in-law, their daughter, the son-in-law, they were the teachers. So they lived in the town, so everything was, uh, peaceful.
- Q: So the main difference was that the language of instruction was Hungarian instead of Romanian?
- A: Right.
- Q: What about the signs on the streets and the notices and so forth, are they in Hungarian now?
- A: There were no signs on the streets, the only way you got news was with the drum.
- Q: So someone beat a drum?
- A: Someone would walk down the street, beating the drum, and as soon as a few people got around him he would tell you the news.
- Q: The town crier?
- A: Well, whatever it was, whatever news it was, that's how you heard the news.
- Q: That was your main source of entertainment, someone hitting a drum?
- A: He hit a drum, then you gathered around him, and he would tell you what the news is, or what to do, or whatever.
- Q: Now when was the ghetto set up, do you remember how the ghetto came?
- A: The ghetto wasn't in our time, it wasn't. All I know is after Pesach they took us all together in the synagogue and then they shipped us out to _____ by the train and then we were there for a month. And then they told us we were going to a main ghetto, a main ghetto, and that was Auschwitz and then we took like four days and four nights without water, without bathroom facilities, without anything, everyone sitting on top of each other, no room, everybody was scrunched together, there was no room to stand up even, they put in so many of us. Day and night, day and night.
- Q: Now who told you had to move to _____?
- A: Well the Hungarian soldiers.
- Q: The Hungarian soldiers came in and said you had to go, how much notice did your family get?

- A: They didn't give you notice for anything.
- Q: It was today, you're told, you go?
- A: Right, you do what you were told, they didn't give you notice.
- Q: The train was waiting for you?
- A: The train is waiting and you go.
- Q: Were you able to carry anything with you?
- A: Just what you carried.
- Q: So it was you, your mother and father, and your...
- A: And my two younger brothers and little sister. And aunt and uncles and cousins, cousins, cousins.
- Q: The whole town?
- A: The whole town, everybody.
- Q: And they used the train?
- A: They used the train and when we moved in we had an uncle living in _____ so we moved in with him. And everybody got a corner of a room, a whole big family got a corner of a room, and again you had to sleep on the floor.
- Q: What kind of train?
- A: The railroad.
- Q: So it was regular passenger cars?
- A: Passenger cars.
- Q: But no food, no water.
- A: In _____ it only took a few minutes, only half an hour or so.
- Q: And then how long were you in the ghetto?
- A: Four weeks, after Passover and before Shavuot. By Shavuot we were in Auschwitz already.

Q: And who controlled the ghetto?

A: The Hungarians and then they put Jews in charge and they handled the Jews. They told the Jews that were in charge what they want and that's how the messages came through.

Q: Did you ever see any Germans?

A: Not that I remember, I saw the Hungarians, the Hungarian police.

Q: The green?

A: The Green Feathers. They are scary.

Q: Did they have any help, you mentioned the Ukrainians and the Slovaks lived in the area, did any of these people help the Hungarians?

A: Not at that time, no. But when we left they destroyed, they took everything out of our houses, everything.

Q: In Ruscova?

A: In Ruscova, because I came back after the war and everything was gone, there wasn't a stitch left in our house or anyone else's house.

Q: So you were staying with relatives in the ghetto?

A: And my family, my mother, my father and two little brothers and little sister. The three little kids.

Q: What were those four weeks like?

A: Nightmares.

Q: In what way?

A: There wasn't enough food, there wasn't enough room, there wasn't enough anything, sanitary conditions were terrible, so many people in one little house.

Q: No work, no income, no school?

A: They were good at doing that, making the Jew into imbecile. No work, no bathroom facilities so then you're a filthy pig, of course.

Q: Were you able to go out?

- A: In the ghetto, not outside the ghetto.
- Q: But within the ghetto you could walk the streets?
- A: Yes, what do kids know. I was a kid, I made fun of everybody. Kids are kids, they don't take things seriously.
- Q: Did you have to wear a yellow star?
- A: That we wore even before the ghetto.
- Q: In Ruscova?
- A: In Ruscova, that we wore before.
- Q: Do you remember when you had to start wearing the star?
- A: That I don't remember exactly. Maybe like six months before the ghetto.
- Q: Six months before?
- A: Maybe eight months, I'm not so sure. You know, you didn't pay attention to anything because we always figured it's only during the war and after the war it will all go back to normal.
- Q: So you had to sew your own? Your mother sewed?
- A: She made a lot of them.
- Q: So your mother made them for other people?
- A: For other people. We sold them. We always kept on thinking that it's only during the war. The war will end and everything will go back to normal again.
- Q: So how did you and your family find out you had to go to another ghetto? An unnamed ghetto?
- A: The police again.
- Q: They made the announcement?
- A: They made the announcement that we were going to the other ghetto, the main ghetto, in Czechoslovakia.
- Q: In Czechoslovakia, they said. And how much time did you have to get ready for this trip?

- A: No time at all. No time at all. Right away. They didn't let you know in advance anything. If we would have run away maybe. Maybe some of us would have run away. Can you imagine. I can't believe that people were so ignorant to believe all those lies.
- Q: You mean about this main ghetto in Czechoslovakia?
- A: The ghetto and _____ and not run away. No family hid. Not one family from our town hid.
- Q: Either in Ruscova or?
- A: In some other towns they hid. Some families survived. All you had to do was hold out for three months, six months at the most. Like I'm telling you my brother got liberated six months later after he left. All you had to do was hid out for a few weeks, then the Hungarians left or something.
- Q: What's a little girl to know?
- A: I mean, there were the politicians.
- Q: The council the Jewish council?
- A: The Jewish council. They should have known. They were saying, "Follow instructions". Now I guarantee those Hungarian aristocrats knew what was going on. But they didn't tell anybody because they were friends with all the Hungarian officers and I'm sure the officers knew what was going on.
- Q: So suddenly you are ordered to report to the train station for another trip?
- A: Yes. They stacked us in again, locked the doors and that was it. And unlocked them and Auschwitz.
- Q: Now this time, was it a passenger train?
- A: No, a cattle train.
- Q: But you didn't know that until you got on the train?
- A: When we got on the train. But that was cattle train. It was nightmare. Plain, plain nightmare. Then when we arrived and we finally thought we were arriving someplace, like I was going to help my mother with the little sister to take her out of the train, and one of the workers, the Jewish workers, pushed me away. I understand they did it to a lot of people. They saved a lot of young girls. Because if you had a child in your hands, you went to the crematorium immediately; if you

were a certain age an a certain time and a certain body, they sent you to work so I guess those Jewish workers unloading the people from those trains, they knew what's what so as I was going to help with the child, he pushed me away and he says I should go away. I didn't know, so I listened and that's the last I saw of the family.

Q: Your younger sister and your parents?

A: My whole family and my parents, that's the last I saw of them.

Q: And you were alone after this?

A: Yes. Everything is rush, rush, rush. They take you away and I thought I'd see them. They told you you'd meet the parents at night. So then they took us to a different place, they showered us and they cut off our hair and took away our clothes and gave us the camp clothes. The striped uniforms, whatever. No hair. Nobody recognized any body Everybody thought, "I don't look like that, I don't look like that". You didn't have a mirror, you didn't see yourself. Until one day, I saw myself in a window. The kitchen had windows. Our barracks didn't have windows.

Q: Now, when you got on the train, your family was together?

A: We were all together.

Q: And a lot of the people that were on the train, you knew them?

A: Everybody, we knew everybody.

Q: Now, the trip you say took bout four days?

A: Four days and four nights.

Q: What did people do, what did they say, what did they think?

A: They cried and cried and cried and cried and cried and cried ----- the kids cried, the people cried, we all cried. We didn't have a bathroom facilities, we didn't have water. The little children were thirsty, we gave them urine to drink.

Q: Nobody fed you during the trip, no water to drink?

A: Just what you took with you. We didn't know what to take or how long it would take or anything like that. We didn't take water, we didn't know.

Q: You didn't know where you were going?

- A: It rained one day so we stuck a cup through the wire window, we stuck out a cup to catch a little rain. It was a horrible, horrible experience.
- Q: And when you arrive it is even worse.
- Q: When you arrive, it's even worse. They rush, rush, rush, here, there. Mengele did the picking.
- Q: Was it daylight when you arrived?
- A: Daylight. He did the picking. As I say, I didn't have a child so I went that way. I didn't know anything.
- Q: Were there any friends with you after the selection?
- A: Yes, my cousins, my friends. We stayed together the whole time.
- Q: What were you forced to do?
- A: Well, we got into the saylager in Auschwitz and we chopped down stones, broke up stones and carried them to a certain spot. Then we had to, every morning the saylafeller, I don't if you heard about that, the saylafeller, we fainted away, me too, we all fainted away, cause we stood there for hours in the same spot. And that went on for six months, from May to October
- Q: This was the first time you'd seen Germans, in Auschwitz?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Now, you were there until the fall of 1944.
- A: And you know what they did? On Yom Kippur, they came to see if we were eating. They didn't want us to fast. So some girls didn't fast. I fasted. Some girls didn't fast so they were eating and they were satisfied to see some girls eat.
- Q: What was the normal food when you weren't fasting?
- A: Well, you got a slice of bread, that sawdust bread that's what we called it. Soup and a piece of liverwurst for dinner and that was it.
- Q: So a normal day was almost a fast?
- A: Oh yes. What was it, 600 calories. How long could you survive on 600 calories, like six months or so and then you should die.
- Q: And that's about how long you were there.

A: And that's how long I was there.

Q: Performing hard labor for those months.

A: Definitely, definitely. And no clothes and no nothing. So, all that.

Q: And you knew what was going on in the rest of the camp?

A: Let's say we saw the smoke from the crematorium. Next door to us there was a gypsy camp also. And one morning we woke up and they weren't there. So they took care of them very quickly. We didn't see any of the crematorium, we only saw smoke.

Q: Did you know they were gas chambers?

A: We knew, and we knew and as I say I couldn't believe it. I couldn't absorb what was going on. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't understand it. I couldn't believe it. I just didn't believe that this could be going on. I always said we going to meet my family when this war is over. They were in a separate working camp and I'll meet the family. Until I went into the working camp, the labor camp, and then I began to realize I think, they gave us that stuff in Auschwitz that we shouldn't get our period.. I think that made me very blurred because I remember not being very clearly thinking. Could be that stuff made me not alert at all.

Q: You were like in a daze while you were in Auschwitz?

A: I remember always thinking not being able to think too clearly. So it possibly was that stuff.

Q: Did you see any people getting killed with your own eyes?

A: I was very fortunate. I didn't see anything like that. I saw once a lady went on the barbed wire. She didn't want to live any more so she threw herself on the electric wire and she died. The only thing I knew, we had a hospital in Saylag, the only thing I knew nobody should go to the hospital.

Q: And why was that?

A: Because then if they would go to the hospital, we would never see them again. So I happened to have been, as you say I ate very good and I was a healthy child and I was able to And in our area we weren't spoiled people. We were used to working hard. And we weren't used to sleeping on a soft bed because we had the wooded boards and a straw mattress and rough sheets. We didn't have the fine linens like the city people had. And things like that. So we were able to

withstand all that hardships better than city people. That's why a lot of us survived.

Q: From your town?

A: From my town. I would say, and I'm sure from a lot of other little towns. But if you were from any kind of softer upbringing you couldn't survive. Today, I couldn't survive that. My children could never survive because you would just go on that wire and kill yourself because it wouldn't pay to live. You have to give up all that. But we were very roughened up.

Q: O.K., we were talking about what it was like as a survivor.

A: As I was saying, city people could never survive. And they didn't. They fell like flies. They couldn't handle that bad situation.

Q: What else in your opinion, were important factors in survival in a place like Auschwitz?

A: Well, the thing was this. We were together. When they say misery wants company, that's the truth. We were all in the same situation. Nobody was any different. We were all kind of young and there wasn't mature person who was married and had children because once you had children, you went straight with your children. And we kind of stuck together the whole time. So that you didn't feel alone. You had your family, people that you grew up with, with you. Your family, your friends, everybody. And then we slept like herrings, you know like a can of herrings, this way and that way, that's how we slept, seven this way and seven that way and one blanket. And you couldn't turn around. And that's how you had to sleep, the way you lay down, that's how you had to sleep on the same side. And the one that was at the end, was never covered. That was Auschwitz.

Q: Now, when some people describe Auschwitz, they describe what you just described. They cooperated and helped one another. Others, sometimes depicted Auschwitz where everyone is trying to survive and where even a little bit of food is something you fight for. Did you see any of that?

A: I saw some of that, yes, not amongst us. Not amongst our friends. I saw some people were able to go into the kitchen, they went into the kitchen and they did get something extra and like you say, they would kill you for it.

Q: Now you were with women all the time, you were separated from men?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: It would be interesting to do a comparative study of how women behaved with each other and how men behaved.

- Q: Our barrack, I tell you -- there was never any incidents in our barrack. They came, they brought a pot of hot water, whatever it was. They gave you in a bowl a little scoop full, a ladle of hot water and you took it and you ate it and the bread and the kopel that we had happened to be a nice woman. And thanks to her, we went into the best labor camp when we went to work in the working camp when they sent us.
- Q: When you were transferred from Auschwitz?
- A: When we were transferred from Auschwitz. I think it was thanks to her; she was a nice intelligent woman. It must have been hard that she kept us in line, whatever.
- Q: Was she Hungarian?
- A: Czechoslovakian.
- Q: So someone you never, nobody knew before?
- A: You see, all the people in charge were Polish or Czechoslovakian because they were there years before us. Like they said, they built the camp for us. They had it very, very rough. We got there, they said this is a vacation for you. Because we had to build it all. They went through terrible hell, they went through.
- Q: You guys had a higher number than they did.
- A: But I didn't even get the number because we were not even considered people any more. Those that got a number were considered at least a worker. We were not even considered that. Because we were not given a number. We just had a number sewn on a piece of paper on our uniform. Most of the Hungarian Jews don't have numbers. Only those that went in 1942. Like I was telling you they took them whose parents weren't married and then maybe those that went at the beginning but otherwise once we came, it was already they didn't want us any more
- Q: Also when you arrived, there were such large numbers, massive.
- A: Day after day, day and night.
- Q: How did you get transferred, now, you said you think your kapo played a role in your transfer?
- A: Well, they came, in Auschwitz you mean to go to work, they came, I have to mention one more thing before I get to that. One day they came and took blood from everybody for the soldiers. I held out, I didn't want to give blood. And the

people that they caught to give blood, they said they were never the same again because they didn't have food to make up for the loss of blood.

Q: So you managed to avoid?

A: I managed to avoid. I had one motto -- I run to nothing and I don't hide from nothing. Whatever God will give me, that's what I'll take. I had that motto. That's one thing I ran way from, giving blood.

Q: How did you manage to do that?

A: I went to another barrack when they took our barrack. They only took the people in the barracks.

Q: You were the only one in your barrack that did that?

A: I don't know if others did it but I did it and I'm very glad I did it.

Q: Because you needed every drop of blood?

A: You needed every drop of blood but those poor people, the kids said they were never the same again since that blood, they were so weak.

Q: Do you remember whether this was soon after you arrived or much later?

A: Much later, much later. Shortly before they took us away to the working camp. So anyway, the kapo said they were going to come and select us, they needed 250 girls for the working camp and they took you to a different area, different camp, a different area and again they showered us, oh God, again, naked and disinfect you. A man had to disinfect you, prisoners, and we were shy, so shy and so ashamed for the man to disinfect you, with the hose, you know.

Q: Do you remember when this was?

A: When we got to Auschwitz and when we went to the working camp, again this was.

Q: No, I mean, do you remember when this was, when they were getting ready to move you to the working camp?

A: That was in October, October of '44. Then they showered us and disinfect us and gave us different clothes and they had us sitting in a room on concrete stairs. So that's where we spent the night, on these concrete stairs. And they came and took two girls out and they sent two nurses along, so we knew it was going to be a good camp. And then they sent us to the camp which was in Weisswasser and

they had the barracks when we got there, I don't know how long it took to get there.

Q: How did you get there?

A: By train. From Auschwitz.

Q: Weisswasser. This is in Czechoslovakia?

A: Czechoslovakia, yes. Sudatin.

Q: That was the German name for this place?

A: Yes. There is Rodwasser also, you know, there is red water after the camp, I saw it. It's red water too. So when we got liberated and we took a walk to the next town, there was Rodwasser and there was red water. Anyway.

Q: Were you transferred in a cattle car again?

A: I don't remember that time. It could have been a truck.

Q: The disinfecting and all that occurred after you arrived in Weisswasser?

A: No before, everything was in Auschwitz. In Weisswasser, we were treated like people. You got your own bed, your own sheet, your own blanket.

Q: So no cattle car this time?

A: No cattle car. Everything, they couldn't, the Wehrmacht, that's the _____, and the Wehrmacht ran the camp, ran the factory. They ran the camp. Actually, the Nazis ran the camp. But one day one of the SS women beat up a girl for some reason and the next day she wasn't there.

Q: The SS woman wasn't there?

A: Wasn't there. And there we had more food, another clothing, another change of clothing, they gave us.

Q: Did you get warmer clothing?

A: In the winter, we got warmer clothing for the winter, yes and a different pair of shoes already. There they treated us more like human beings. It was an ammunition factory. You made radios for the planes and the ships, we made. And there we were until May 9th. It got slow after a while and we got scared they were going to send us someplace else but we were very, very fortunate they didn't send us away. And the Russians came in and the head of the camp even held us a

speech and said we should all leave the camp and go to the next town is the Czechs and they'll take us in. Because the Russian soldiers will arrive and here there are so many women, they'll come and rape us and that's what I did, most of us went away and the ones that remained, they did get raped by the Russian soldiers. I did stay with a Czech family for three weeks and then I made my way home which took four weeks. On top of railroads. It didn't cost you any money because there was chaos. How I ever got back, I'll never understand.

Q: Because you'd never been away from home?

A: I'd never been away from home, I'd never traveled on trains and how to get back from there to Ruscova, I don't know how I ever made it. But I got back, it took like four weeks. And in between I stopped off to see my sister in Budapest. She remained there because she had her people, she already was getting married.

Q: So she did find a husband in Budapest?

A: Yes, and I came home and I found my brother there.

Q: The one who had been liberated by the Russians?

A: Liberated by the Russians. And a lot of other people came home and we were there until October. And in October already, a lot of people started to leave Ruscova to go back to Germany either to go to Israel or to America. So, again, it took four weeks but at time already we had a lot of help. There were a lot of organizations already working and helping us. They had already set up places in Budapest where we should stay and then they smuggled us across the border to Austria. We went to Austria. From Austria to Germany. But there already you had lots of organizations helping you. And then I wound up in a DP camp and _____ in Germany in the American zone. That's because we had an aunt here and we knew ---five of us came, my cousin Dave, my cousin Nathan, my cousin Ceil and my cousin Ruchel and me and we all made it to Germany on the American zone. And we were there 'till --- I came in February 18 1947.

Q: Were you in a DP camp?

A: I was in a DP camp. They treated us very good in the DP camp. We had everything. They threw out the Germans of apartments and they gave us their houses so we had a house and piano and they had kitchens for us. Or either you could go and eat in the soup kitchen or you could cook yourselves. They gave us packages of food from the joint and then the joint took us out here. And I came here on a Tuesday and Monday I went to work as a finisher. I had no trade.

Q: You didn't want to be a dressmaker again?

- A: Yeh. So I went to work as a finisher. And I worked until I became pregnant and I got married two years later.
- Q: You got married first and then you became pregnant?
- A: Yes. I got married and then I became pregnant. I worked until I became pregnant.
- Q: It came out the wrong way.
- A: In those days you didn't do those things. No, you first got married. I met my husband. His mother is from my home town, from Ruscova. So, I met him. And when I met him, we couldn't even talk two words because he doesn't speak Yiddish and I didn't speak English. I was here six weeks. So then we didn't see each other for a year and we met a year later and we started to date. And we got engaged six months later and six months later we got married which was June 4th 1949 and our first daughter was born November 15 1950. So, I worked and I'm still working.
- Q: And the family grows.
- A: God bless them. Should only keep growing. So now I have two wonderful daughters and a wonderful husband. He's a very nice man. And five grandchildren.
- Q: When did you realize that you lost your parents?
- A: In the working camp. By then, we knew already more what's going on.
- Q: In the working camp of Czechoslovakia?
- A: And then we had, we were only 250 girls and after a while they brought another 250 girls from another camp plus they brought a doctor to camp and they said what's going on. And they told us all the things what's happening and what's going on. So then we began to realize but I still didn't believe until I got home after the war and nobody came home.
- Q: When you went back to Ruscova?
- A: When I went back to Ruscova. I was sure the family was going to come home. And I understand my father lived until Purim. That's when he died.
- Q: In Auschwitz?
- A: No, in a labor camp.

- Q: So he was put in a labor camp?
- A: He was put in a labor camp, my father 'cause I know people that was with him. And then he got killed in the crematorium one of the crematoriums, possibly Buchenwald.
- Q: So when you arrived in Auschwitz, you were separated from your family and your father was also separated.
- A: After they went together and after they separated the men from the women, the children went with the mothers and that was it.
- Q: So your father was put into slave labor in Auschwitz and then transferred to a labor camp and then probably to Buchenwald until Purim. the following year.
- A: Which was another month, till May 9th, when the Russians came in and we got liberated. If he could only have survived.
- Q: He died about a month before?
- A: About a month before, 'cause that's what a man who was with him told me, that till then he was alive.
- Q: In Buchenwald. In fact, the man I interviewed this morning was in Buchenwald.
- A: The men, they went through horrors, the men. They were worse to the men then to the women, those Nazis. And they were worse to the Polish, then the Hungarians. They were pretty bad to everybody, they were pretty bad. Just no reason for it. I still can't understand it. How it happened, how the world allowed it. It makes no sense to me until today's date.
- Q: So although you were in a daze in Auschwitz, even when you came out of the daze, it still doesn't make sense to you?
- A: And it still doesn't. Does it make sense to you?
- A: Not really.
- A: No, it doesn't. I can't understand it. It wasn't one person who did it, Hitler.
- Q: Couldn't have done it by himself.
- A: He had to have, there was a lot of help, or Mengele. It's unbelievable. It's such a -- if I really think about it, I could just kill myself, because it's unbelievable, such a horrors.

- Q: For you, though, you didn't know anything about Hitler. It began with the Hungarians. Without the Hungarians, it wouldn't have happened the way it did.
- A: No, because I have my uncle, Mendel Hyam, he was in Romania and he survived with his families, three boys and his wife. My cousin Hycha was in Romania. She survived with her three boys and her husband. My cousin Shay was in Romania and she survived also with her four children and her husband. They had it very bad. They went through such hells. But they survived with their families. The Romanians didn't give out their families. They imprisoned them themselves. They made camps for them themselves but they didn't give them out to the Germans. The Hungarians gave them out immediately.
- Q: In your particular town, it was a particular family, this aristocratic family which you described earlier.
- A: Well, they were Hungarians and they could have saved us. If they had any kind of heart, they could have saved at least some of us. They were in business with a lot of the Jewish people and they let those people also go.
- Q: Now you said you played with their children, right up to the end.
- A: Yes.
- Q: You never suspected that they hated you so much?
- A: No. They were friends with everybody. We had to cater to them a little more when the Hungarians came in and everybody was afraid of them and they tried to please them and all of that but we never believed they could be like that. One good satisfaction, at least they are not living in that mansion and that mansion is completely destroyed. When I went back a few years ago, it wasn't there.
- Q: But it was there when you returned in the fall of 1945?
- A: When I returned, it was there. When I went back in '84, I had to go back once more and see; I went to the cemetery, I went to the synagogue. We had two synagogues so one synagogue is destroyed already and one is falling apart. By now, it is probably destroyed too. There was three Jews left and I understand one of them moved to Israel since then so there's only two Jews left in all of Ruscova. The cemetery is beautiful -- it's still there and they have, I guess, they hire -- the Joint has a caretaker taking care of it, which is very nice. I guess they must be doing it all over Europe to take care of the cemeteries that they shouldn't get destroyed.
- Q: You mentioned that your sister in Budapest married. Did she also come to America?

A: She stayed -- my sister remained in Budapest until 1965. In 1965, I took her out here and then her husband died, and then her two daughters came here. First one daughter she took out and then another daughter. She has two grandchildren. And they are all here now, thank God.

Q: And your brother also came to America?

A: My brother came to America in 1949 and at that time, they didn't let him settle here any more, so they sent him to California. So he had three children and he passed away in 1963 and my sister-in-law just passed away in 1989. And the three children are there -- he has three very beautiful children and three grandchildren but he is not here to enjoy them.

Q: Do you have any additional observations or thoughts about your experiences and your family's?

A: My family that is dead? All I can tell you is -- but I told you I was the baby sitter most of the time -- my two little brothers and little sister. But I remember from them. Whenever I used to sit down they used to hang on to me and kiss me and hug me and that is what I remember most about them. How they used to kiss and hug me. They really loved me. (survivor starts to cry)

Q: And you weren't even able to say goodbye to them?

A: No. One day in the concentration camp, someone told me that they saw my older brother Burachal??, he was twelve years old. He's alive (they said). I went looking in that camp every day to see him. And you know what? The whole time, I saved up four portions of bread to give him and I never saw him. So I don't know if they said the truth or not. And another thing I have to say -- when we went to the working camp, I had this very good friend of mine from my home town -- Rochela. And they chose us naked to go to the working camp. So she was very skinny and she was right behind me and I went forward -- they let -- they pointed me to go forward, I went forward and I am there and I am looking for my friend Rochela and she is not there. I give a look to the other side and she is over there -- purple and blue and that is the last that I saw of her. You see, you had to be perfect to survive. You couldn't have a pimple on your body and here they gave you for six months not to get your period and we broke out in all kinds of boils and as a matter of fact, I did have a boil on my belly but the SS men didn't see me, he must have been distracted so he didn't see the boil, he just pointed me to go ahead. But we all had something from that -- it wasn't normal and that is the last I saw Rochela. So they chose you naked -- you couldn't be too skinny, you couldn't be too fat. You couldn't have a boil, you couldn't can you imagine?

Q: You couldn't be sick?

- A: You couldn't be sick. Can you imagine how many people survived really? How few survived?
- Q: Very few.
- A: I mean just to think of it. If you had a child you went right away. If you were old, you went right away. So there was only a certain few that were old enough -- if you were young. I mean the youngest people that could live is two years younger than I am. There is three girls from my hometown and then there's me. Because I was sixteen. So you had to be a certain age and a certain weight and a certain shape -- too fat and they wouldn't -- you went right away if you were too fat. And then finally when you made it and after six months in Auschwitz you had to be -- you couldn't be too skinny, you couldn't have any pimples on you -- you know? It's unbelievable.
- Q: But you survived.
- A: I was husky.
- Q: And you didn't come down with any diseases? You didn't mention typhus, for example.
- A: No, no. I never was sick a day. I was husky and I had a very, very nourishing upbringing. Everything was very natural and very healthy and that is how we should eat today. All that good, healthy natural food.
- Q: I will say yes to that.
- A: Yes. So I had good stock -- as my son-in-law says "peasant stock."
- Q: Peasant stock -- good genes -- good upbringing.
- A: So all those little things that I guess God was with me. I put myself in God's hands. As I told you a while ago -- I made up my mind, I am not going to run to and I am not going to run away. Where God will put me, that is where I am going to go. And that is what I did. I didn't run to and I didn't run from. Like they used to say, they're picking from this block or that block and they ran to that block to be picked or ran away from our block so that they shouldn't be picked. I let God's hands and then I never believed ... Oh -- this you must hear too. In the labor camp, I have -- I happened to have a mechanical mind. So they put me to work -- to do a man's machine -- work a man's machine. So because I understand machinery.
- Q: This is when you were working on these radio controls?

A: Right, yes. So, some of the girls -- now here, I worked between all the men -- and some of the girls used to flirt with the men --they used to meet them in the hallway and flirt with them and I wouldn't. I said like this -- if I'm going to burn -- there will be less of me to burn. If they give you a slice of bread, an apple -- I don't need that. If I'm going to burn, there will be less of me to burn. If I am going to survive then I have a conscience I want to live with my conscience -- that is not to sell my soul for a piece of bread or for a piece of apple. And I didn't get anything from them, but I did the delivery -- the food, the mail back and forth. That is another thing -- I am very proud of myself that I was young and yet I had my principles.

Q: You had your honor and your dignity.

A: My honor and my dignity. First I didn't believe that they're going to let me survive. Would you believe they're going to let you survive and tell the world what happened? I never believed. The only thing I hoped was for the bombs to come. So then I said, if they put me in the crematorium, I will burn quicker if there is less fat on me. So that is my morals.

Q: So there was flirting between males and ...

A: Males and females. Oh, we had a French labor force. That is where the flirting went on -- they were free.

Q: These were French P.O.W.'s?

A: I forget what they are called.

Q: They were men though?

A: They were men. They were forced laborers but they lived free, they didn't live in camps.

Q: But they worked in the same camp as you?

A: They worked in the same -- they worked in the same factories. So, they met in the hallways and they flirted with each other. I was too young for that anyway. For flirting, or for anything like that. But I didn't get anything from them but I did deliver the messages. That was something huh?

Q: Do you remember anything else?

A: There were probably a lot of incidents -- there is probably a whole year of incidents that you can't just -- you know -- think of them.

Q: You remembered quite a bit today.

A: Yeah.

Q: On that note, I thank you.

A: I thank you Tony. You are a very nice man.

Q: You are welcome. You are a very nice lady.

A: Your mother did a good job. Thank her for me.

Q: I will.

A: Bye.

Q: Bye.