HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ALEXANDRA GORKO

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Eileen Steinberg
Date: August 19, 1985

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AG - Alexandra Gorko[1] [interviewee]
ES - Eileen Steinberg [interviewer]
Date: August 19, 1985[2]

Tape one, side one:

ES: Eileen Steinberg interviewing Alexandra Gorko, August 19, 1985. Please tell me where you were born and when and a little bit about your family.

AG: I was born in Russia, Kiev, in 1916, and I remember very well my grandparents. My grandfather, grandmother, and two aunts who lived in Russia. I knew that my parents lived before in Poland where my brother was born. My brother was five years older than I. I remember very well when the Communists came and wanted a letter from my grandfather, who had a tanning factory or tanning mill. I remember that they came with their bayonets, and stuck the mattresses, the couches, the chairs, and were looking for gold, for leather, for jewelry, etc. I also remember that it took us after, I don't remember exactly what year it was, but when I was six or seven, I, we ran away to Pol-, back to Poland. And it took my mother and me and my brother and my wet nurse three months to get to Lodz, Poland.

ES: What was your...

AG: My father ran away before that.

ES: Where did he go to?

AG: To Poland.

ES: He went first.

AG: Yes.

ES: And then the rest of the family came afterwards?

AG: Yes.

ES: What was your life like in Lodz before the war?

AG: We were well to do. I went to private school.

ES: What did your father do?

AG: My father had this spinning mill. We weren't very rich, but we were well off.

ES: Did your family experience any anti-Semitism before the Hitler period?

AG: No, not to my knowledge. We were living between Poles, and I didn't re member that I had any incidents of anti-Semitism. As a matter of fact, I married a Pole. My first husband was a Polish man born in Russia.

ES: Did you or your family belong to any Jewish organizations or to a synagogue before?

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[1]née Paley.
[2]See also a follow-up interview with Alexandra from 1986 and two testimonies of her husband Anatole Gorko 1985 and (not transcribed yet, 1986).

AG: No.

ES: None.

AG: No, no. My parents didn't belong to any synagogue.

ES: Did any men in your family serve in any national army?

AG: No. No.

ES: Can you tell me a little bit about your life in Poland in the early part of 1939 just before the German invasion?

AG: Before the German invasion. I only remember, well what do you want me...

ES: How old were you?

AG: I was working at the national health.

ES: You were already a nurse at that time?

AG: Yes, I was. Yeah, I was 23 when the war broke out.

ES: And you were working as a nurse?

AG: I was working. My husband was a jurist. He was a judge and he went to, he was a captain in the reserve, and he went to the army in 19-, in 25th of August, 1939. We knew already that the war was starting, in August. And I never saw him again.

ES: So he enlisted in the Polish Army?

AG: He didn't enlist. He had to go. He was a reservist.

ES: Okay.

AG: He was a reserve. Kept in the reserve.

ES: About how many Jews lived in your town?

AG: Oh, about a million, a million, and, Jews, oh, Jews? About 400,000.

ES: Okay.

AG: Maybe even a half a million with, [husband says, "No."] no, exactly.

ES: Okay. You were in Lodz, so there was a highly organized Jewish community there.

AG: Yes, it was.

ES: Was there a *kehillah*?

AG: Yes. As a matter of fact, a doctor who was in that community, Jewish com munity, asked me before they closed the ghetto, they all started to organize the ghetto to go there and organize a hospital for the Jewish population. And I did.

ES: Did you feel that the *kehillah* represented the best interests of the community?

AG: At that time, yes.

ES: What...

AG: Later was different.

ES: What happened to you and your family during the weeks right after the German invasion?

AG: As I told you, I went right aw-, what happened? The Germans came and took, of course I didn't live with my mother. My brother was single. He lived with my

mother. I had a, we had a house in the suburb. They came first of all. They took paintings, they took my dog, and they took my piano. The Germans. And they wanted to know where is my husband. I don't know if you know that right away when they came in, they took away all the education that, intelligentsia. They took lawyers, teachers, doctors. My husband was a judge, so they were looking for him, too. And I didn't know where he was. They let it go at this, but a week later they came again and they wanted to know again where he is. And I said, "I don't know. I know that he went to Warsaw. He went to the army. Went to." They took me to jail. And they kept me 24 hours, didn't give me anything to eat or drink and kept asking me, "Where is your husband? Where is your husband?" And I still kept answering them that I don't know. And the light was burning all the time day and night in the room where I was. I was alone in the room. Finally they saw that I really didn't know where he was because I didn't, I couldn't tell them anything else, so they let me go. Then they came again and took ev-, all the furniture, everything what was in the house. I don't know exactly, but I think someone moved in after this. Was it the Germans, was the Germans or Poles, I don't know, in our house.

ES: Where did you go?

AG: I went to my mother, to my mother's apartment.

ES: Did they bother your parents too?

AG: My father was dead.

ES: Okay. So it was just your mother and brother living.

AG: Yes. My brother was a lawyer too, but he wasn't working in his profession. He was a manager of a stocking factory, nylon factory. So they didn't know he was a lawyer. They didn't take him. A few days later one of the doctors from the *kehillah* like you said, called me in, asking me to work and I says ask me to and I went. I was there about two months when one day when we knew already that all the Jews have to get to the ghetto and the ghetto will be closed. And my mother and father came one day to the hospital where I was working. With, only what they could carry. And my mother found an apartment with another woman and they lived together, four people in one room. I was all the time living in the hospital.

ES: During this period of time when you were, when the ghetto was being organized and everyone was being rounded up, did you or your family receive any help from any non-Jewish people?

AG: At the beginning, yes, from...

ES: What kind of help?

AG: Mostly food. We didn't need anything else but food. Yes.

ES: What, was this was from neighbors and friends that you got help?

AG: This was a friend of my mother who used to, her husband used to be our neighbor. This was before the ghetto was closed.

ES: All right, after...

AG: It was very difficult to get food.

ES: After the ghetto was closed, were you able to have any contact with the outside?

AG: Only one time. A friend came and we were behind barbed wires. He came and brought a package of food and dropped it and ran away. This was right at the beginning of the ghetto. Then we didn't hear from him.

ES: Once you were inside the ghetto and the ghetto was closed, how did you and your family support yourselves?

AG: I was working in the...

ES: So you were able to get your food, and you had a place...

AG: Yes.

ES: To stay.

AG: Everybody had food. Everybody was working or not received a portion. We had cards. We had to register and have rations.

ES: Rations.

AG: Rations.

ES: How would you describe the *Judenrat*? The *Judenrat* in your town?

AG: They took bribes. They, they, how to explain it to you? Their friends and relatives were better off if not. For instance, my brother could not get a job in the ghetto. Everybody else had a job. He couldn't get a job because, as a manager of the factory, he sorted or threw out the *älteste* (oldest) Jews, Rumkowski because he wanted, he used to be an agent, this, "King of the Jews" they called him. It was an insurance agent, and my brother didn't want to buy insurance from him. So later on he took revenge on him, and my brother couldn't get a job. It was two years he was in the ghetto, he didn't work. My mother got a job from one of the, they were called [unclear], not factories, [unclear]. One of our friends was a manager of a leather factory. They made belts and pocket books and all kinds of leather boots for the Germans. So my mother was able to get a job there sewing or something on the machine. I don't even know.

ES: So your brother was the only one that was not working.

AG: My brother wasn't working.

ES: Did you have any communication with the outside world through newspapers or radios? Did you hear anything at all about what was going on?

AG: No. Only what my brother heard from BBC and his friends. I told you that they listened to the radio.

ES: Okay. Tell me about that now.

AG: Yes. This was, I think in 1940, end of 1940. Thirteen young men built a radio in a bottle in the cellar, not in the basement, in the cellar. And someone denounced them. The Germans came and arrested all thirteen men, all their families, and even people who carried the same last name. It was about 150 people. On a very, very cold day in January 31, 1940. [husband says, "It was January 31."] January 31, 1941. They took them all away and we never heard from them. After the war, we heard. We don't know exactly

the truth that they were taken to Chelmno, which was a little city near Lodz, and they were all shot. I remember that a man who was wearing my brother's winter coat. I, in Europe we didn't buy ready-made outer wear. We bought material and we had it made by tailors. And I remember exactly how this coat was made. And I was two or three years I followed this man and didn't, felt, I hoped against hope that it's not my brother's coat, that my brother is alive and well. And I never found out about this.

ES: Were you aware of any underground in the ghetto?

AG: No, I didn't. But I didn't have any contact with people outside of the ghetto. Only with nurses and doctors. It was, I was very busy. I was supervising a hospital. I was working very hard, 48 hours, sometimes 72 hours without rest. We didn't have many trained nurses. We took in everyone who wanted to help. As a matter of fact, my mother was helping too. There were a few nurses who were sick, and my mother took care of them.

ES: Did you have enough...

AG: One day, this was the first time when they, when the Germans came and took our patients, our mental patients, away. And I took it very hard, because between them there were a few, patients, I knew their families. They also took people from an old age home which was near the hospital. The hospital was in private homes. They took them, they rebuilt a few houses into one house where was there in the beginning the hospital.

ES: Did you have enough supplies, medicine?

AG: No, no. We had, in the beginning we had whatever we could take from the city, but later on after their syringes that time were glass. We had to sharpen the needles. At one time I remember we had 90, 91, 90 or 91 bed hospital. We had only three syringes and ten needles. The Germans gave us iodine. They gave us aspirin. They didn't give us any pain killers. They didn't give us anything else. It was very hard to work. We didn't get sheets or pillow cases. We had to change every two weeks the sheets for the people. Some private people donated their own linens and this way we could wash once the ones who were soiled and use the other one.

ES: To what extent did the Poles help the Nazis persecute the Jews?

AG: When we were in the ghetto, we didn't know what they did. We only found out later when we went to the camps that they took part in that. As long as they didn't help us they helped the Nazis.

ES: How long did you help in the hospital in Lodz? How long were you there?

AG: It was until the end. Until the hospital existed.

ES: Until the ghetto was liquidated?

AG: About the hospital where I worked, one hospital was closed. The other one was open, and it was about a month before they liquidated the ghetto we didn't have hospitals. But we had near there, factories. We had a private home. We were organized to a camp office where there were doctors and nurses. And I was working in one of them, near a bakery which was, I thought it was very good for me because near the bakery I would have bread. But I didn't.

ES: Why?

AG: The bread was counted. They couldn't give anyone anything. Everything was counted as a regulation. We got soup and one tenth of a kilogram, well how much was one tenth of a kilogram? It was about eight, ten ounces of bread a day and a plate of soup, which was made out of a kind of greens. Probably grass, and potato peels.

ES: When was the ghetto liquidated?

AG: The ghetto was liquidated in August, 1944.

ES: And what happened to you?

AG: We were running away from the Germans. One of my friends who was, her parents they died in the ghetto, and my mother. And we ran from one empty house into another. And this way we were ahead of the German ambulances. Of the German, cars, buses really. They had buses.

ES: To round you up?

AG: They followed us, to round us up. And it took us about two, two weeks. We didn't, whatever we had to eat, we finished. We didn't have what to eat for about three days. And we came to a house where we saw a cellar. And there were a lot of grass and it looks like the people just moved. And this was near the Polish part of the city. Next to that part of the city. And we noticed that there was a cellar. We took, there was a big basin we took and put water in the basin, and we all three got in that cellar. We covered that, it was a little rug. We covered the rug and put a table over us. We pushed the table over us. And we heard the German shepherds dogs running around, smelling this. They smelled us, but they couldn't find us, because we were our, we were, how you call it, crouching?

ES: Crouching down in the cellar?

AG: Crouching down and our feet were in water, so they couldn't find us. And they, we heard the Germans swearing, cursing that the *Verfluchte* Jews are here, and we cannot find them. The dogs know that they are here. And they left. After they left we didn't hear them any more. We got out of the cellar and we were very hungry. And we felt that we couldn't take it any more and we have to give ourselves up. So we got out from the house and as soon as we got out, they knew that we would not stay there long. And they were right there in the, how you call, em...

ES: Right outside the house?

AG: Outside the house, yeah, in the, we had courts.

ES: Courtyards?

AG: Courtyards. In the courtyard. And they took us right away and put us in the bus. There was a full bus already of people, and they took us, I don't remember where, but there were a lot of people in, was a factory, or it was some kind of a big room they took us. And the same night they put us in the cattle cars and we didn't know where. They told us to take whatever we had. So we had knapsacks in the house, so we took the knapsacks, and from there, from this big room, we went, I don't remember how long it took us to get to Auschwitz. I don't remember. It took about three, four days. Three days.

ES: You were the only one from your family?

AG: No, with my mother.

ES: Your mother was with you?

AG: Yeah.

ES: Okay.

AG: Yes. I told you.

ES: Okay.

AG: That my...

ES: And the two friends, okay, your mother...

AG: No, one friend. One friend, my mother, and I. The three of us. And we came to a, I had a pocketbook where I had money. I had American dollars which lately we couldn't even buy anything for, ‘cause there was no food to buy. We, I had morphine. I don't remember where I got it, but I had morphine. I think I got it in the, in the contagious diseases hospital. But they had morphine. I had enough for my mother and for myself, because I understood what will happen. We didn't know about gas chambers, but we knew that we are too exhausted and too malnutritioned, that we couldn't stand anymore life what we led the last few years. When we came to Auschwitz, they...

ES: Just for a minute, tell me what the trip was like on the train.

AG: I was thinking about my past. I was trying to tell my mother that everything will be okay, that we will go with, we were told that we are going to work, that we are just going to be transferred to another ghetto or another work camp. That we will get work. My mother didn't say a word all through the three days. She was, she had probably a premonition what it was. I didn't. My friend was trying to talk to my mother, explain to her, tell her, give her hope. But my mother didn't answer, didn't talk to us. It was very crowded in there. We couldn't, mostly we were standing. Couldn't lay down. There was about 90 or 100 people in the cattle car. They opened it once a day. We had a bucket for extremities. We, they gave us water. They didn't give us any food all the three days. When we came to Auschwitz, was night. We didn't see what was there. But as soon as we came in, there were Jewish men and women and they were directed by the Germans to take everything away from us. Right away they took my bag with the morphine, with everything. This was the end of my...

ES: Everything you had.

AG: All, yeah. I even had a big diamond in, big diamond ring in the bag. And the Jews told us, the Germans didn't talk to us, but the Jews did, "See? See this?" We saw smoke and we saw and felt smoke, and we saw, we thought is oven baking bread or some thing. And the Jewish people who were there longer told us, "See? These are your brothers and sisters, your mothers and fathers burning." We said, "What are you talking? How can you say a thing like this?" We didn't believe them. A German soldier told my mother to go on one side, and me and my friend on the other side. We didn't, I didn't want to. I wanted to go with my mother. My friend was holding me very tight, my hand very tight. She didn't

let me go. And my mother just stood there and looked at me. And I saw in her eyes that she knows that she will never see me again. But I didn't feel this way. I didn't understand. I didn't know what was going on. My mother probably did. And I wanted to go to my mother, but she, she didn't push me away, but she, she made a move like, "Don't go with me." And my friend was holding me tight. And the German soldier said, "Let her go. She wants to be with her mother." And she said, "No," and she knew German, she-

Tape one, side two:

ES: Eileen Steinberg interviewing Alexandra Gorko, August 19, 1985. Side two. So your friend saved your life by saying, no and holding onto you.

AG: Yes. Next day, I don't remember where I, where we spent the night, but next day we all had to get up very early and stay for, it was called an *Appell* where they were counting us. They were counting us and they were asking the names, where we are from, how old we are and they told us our numbers. But I don't remember. I never remembered my number. They didn't...

ES: Tattoo.

AG: Tattoo us. They told us that some of us will go to work. They didn't tell us where and when. The whole day we stood in the hot sun and nobody knew what happened, what will happen, where our relatives are, where the mothers with children are, where the older women are. They were all women in the camp. We didn't see any men, and we didn't know where the men are. Even that they were together with us in the cattle cars. After it was maybe six or seven in the evening, it was still light, they brought us food. We didn't eat anything for three days. We had only water. They brought us soup and a piece of bread. And they separated us. We went to different barracks. I was still with my friend in the barrack. Then next day Germans came and asked if there are nurses between us. And there were three. I, and two others. They weren't really nurses. They weren't trained nurses, but they were working in the hospital as nurses. For some reason they only took me. I was very glad that I will be able to do something. I knew that there are Jews who are sick in the ambulatorium [unclear meaning]. And when I came in there, they gave me a white uniform and that time Mengele came. And he looked at me. He asked me how long I am a nurse, how old I am. I told him. And he said, "Here are some pregnant women. You have to give them some injections." And he showed me where the syringes are, and there was a can, and I was, I smelled kerosene or gasoline or something like this. And I said to him, "This I have to inject?" And he said, "Yes. I am making, I am trying to do an experiment. And you will be helping me." And I said, "No. I will not. I took a vow to save people, not to kill them." And he said, "No?" And took out his revolver. And I said, "You could kill me, but I will not do it." He looked at me, he took the revolver, put the revolver back, and said, "Take her and beat her up in front of the whole camp." The two Germans took me and beat me with probably a belt or whatever. In the beginning I cried. I hollered. I yelled. Finally I lost consciousness. When I woke up it was night and I thought to myself, "I'm still alive. How could I be alive?" And I moved and I felt that there are bodies around me. And I couldn't move much. I couldn't get up, but I tried to touch, and I touched and they were cadavers. They were people. Cold people, and I thought to myself, "I cannot move." I can-, I was in pain. So I probably will die. No body will know where I am and what happened to me. And my friend, her name was Toby, Tosha. She would not know what happened to me. At, it was maybe four, five o'clock, the sun started to come out. It was still dark, but in

the east the sun was starting to come up. And I heard that two, two people are crawling. And this was my friend, and she found someone, and they had their-, then I was conscious again. When I felt that I am not going to live, I will not, nobody will know where I am, what happened to me, I was conscious again. And when I came to, I felt that cold water was running over me and my friend and her, another girl, brought a bucket of water and they revived me. How we got to the barracks, I don't remember. We crawled all the way. And that time I slept on the floor under the, under the...

ES: Bottom of the barrack?

AG: Bottom, no, they were cots, like shelves.

ES: I've seen pictures. [Husband says, "Bunkers."] And you slept under the bottom?

AG: Under, yeah, I couldn't get...

ES: Up on top.

AG: On top.

ES: I understand.

AG: In the morning they told us all to get up. I don't know how I got up, how I walked, ‘cause it was very painful. I thought that I will, that I have a broken back, but I didn't. I forgot to tell you. Before, in the ghetto, when they, it was about three months before they took us to Auschwitz, they took all the children away. And they told us, we were at that time in another hospital, they told us to drop children, the babies, you know, babies, two-year-olds, infants, from the windows, into, from the fourth floor of the hospital—it was in a factory—to the trucks, and I said, "I will not do it." And a German kicked me. And I was conscious; I was unconscious for three days. And that time my mother revived me and took me to some room. I don't know where I was. One of the doctors said that I have a broken coccyx. It's the...

ES: Bone at the bottom of the back.

AG: Yes. So I had already a broken coccyx. And that time I felt that I think I had a broken spine. Toby and another girl held me up and this way we were standing on...

ES: Line.

AG: Line. In line. A few days later, I don't remember how long or what it was, but a few days later the German woman, how they call them?

ES: The *Kapo*?

AG: The *Kapo*? Yeah, *Kapo*. Said that we have to get undressed, leave all our clothes in the barracks, and Dr. Mengele came. We were all standing in lines, and he, he had a club. Eh, he was, he came on a, dri-, riding on a horse. But he led the horse, he gave it to the German, and had the crop. With the crop...

ES: The whip like...

AG: Yeah, club it's called. He showed who was to go right, who was to go left. And Toby was behind me, no, she was in front of me. She went to the right, and I went to the right. And the girl who was in back of us, who saved me, he put her to the left. This I

remember, and later I don't remember. We went back to the barracks. We had to get dressed, and they told us that we are going to a work camp. By that time I already knew about the gas chambers. I already knew what was going on in the gas chambers. We were told to go to take, a day later, we were told to go and take a shower. And we were sure, they gave us soap, they gave us towels, and we were sure that we are going to the gas chamber. But, when we turned the taps, water was running, so we knew that it's not gas, it's water.

ES: A real shower.

AG: It was cold water. But it was worth it. After about, I don't remember how long it was, two or three weeks or before two or three weeks, before we couldn't bathe, we couldn't wash. This was a luxury. They gave us different clothes, not our clothes. They gave us the prison uniforms, blue and white stripes. And they gave us clogs, wood en clogs. And the same night they put us again in cattle cars. And we were, I don't remember, about a week it took us to get to Milha-, to Ravensbrück. In Ravensbrück we were...

ES: Now you were in Germany?

AG: Yeah. Ravensbrück was in Germany. And we saw Polish women, not Jewish women. We were, a few of us, were with Polish women. The few who went from our barracks were the Polish women. The rest I don't know what happened to them. We were told by the Polish women we were ridiculed. They had hair; we didn't. They shaved our heads. We didn't have hair at all. We were laughed at, ridiculed, cursed. They said that because of us they are in camp. They went to work every day, we didn't. A few days later we heard airplanes over, flying over us, and we were told that they came, this, that the Swedish, we saw that they were Swedish Red Cross, and they came for the children, to take the children from Ravensbrück. In our barracks there were no children, and we didn't see that there, that the planes, they were flying back. They didn't even stop. They were flying back. A day later, yes, and I don't know where Toby went, ‘cause she wasn't with me. She was probably in a different barrack, but she wasn't with me. But there was a young girl, and she asked me if I am from Lodz, and I said, "Yes, from Lodz Ghetto." She said she is from the ghetto. She worked in there. She was a dress maker, so she worked in some factory where they made uniforms for the Germans. And she said, "Let's us keep together." And I said, "Okay." She spoke Polish. Mostly the girls who I was in the barracks spoke Jewish. I didn't, so I couldn't communicate. I understood them, but I couldn't speak to them. I answered them in Polish, and they didn't like it. They said, "Oh, this is one of those intelligentsia." Even the Jews were ridiculing each other. "You don't know how to speak Jewish. What?" And, it was very unpleasant, but this girl spoke Polish. She spoke to me, and I remember one, and we didn't do anything. The Jewish girls didn't do anything. The Polish girls went in the morning to work. And they got different food than we did. One time they asked for volunteers to go to the kitchen to bring a kettle of soup. And this girl, her name was Paula—as a matter of fact, she survived too—she said, "Let's go. Let's try. Maybe we get more to eat." And we went. We carried a very heavy kettle of soup. We had

to rest a few times, and the *Kapo* was hitting us. Why do we rest? The soup will get cold. And when we came to the barracks there was, we saw a table, a long table, and a few Germans in white uniforms. And one woman was sitting there. And they were told, we were told that they are doctors, and they will examine us. So we felt right away it's another selection, that they will select some people to work, and some. I was very tired and because I was carrying this kettle my heart was beating very fast. As a matter of fact, I had rheumatic fever when I was 18 years old, and it left me with a myocarditis, inflammation of the heart muscle. I was in pain. Of course I didn't say anything, and they said we have to stay in line. They were examining us, one after another. Paula was before me, and then was my next. And when I came to and they put the stethoscope to my breast, the doctor right away put me on the other side. I was the only one put on the other side with the other girls. And I don't know, but Paula heard that the woman doctor spoke Polish, she thought she spoke Polish. But this was a Czechoslovakian doctor. She was also a prisoner. But they let her examine the, slaves. We were slaves. We weren't prisoners. Paula had so much courage that she went to the doctor and asked her in Polish, told her that we just brought, there's nothing wrong with me, but we just brought a big kettle of soup and she begged her to let me go with her, with Paula. The doctor spoke German to the German doctors and she told them what happened. And they let me go. This was second time, third time, really, that my life was saved.

ES: Two times by one person now? By Paula?

AG: For many years I tried to find Toby. In Lodz someone told me that she survived the war, but that she married a Polish officer who was in the English Army during the war. A Polish general had a brigade, the English Army general Anders, and her husband was in this army. She married him and moved to England. We tried to find her through Red Cross, through all kinds of agencies, and we couldn't find her. She changed her name.

ES: What happened after Paula saved you this time?

AG: After Paula saved me this time, a few days later they put us again into cattle cars. This time I didn't know anyone in the, in the car beside Paula. And they told us we are going to work camp. We came to that work camp was called Mühlhausen. And it was an ammunition factory. It was built this way, that on top of the factory were trees planted, so from outside...

ES: Camouflaged?

AG: You wouldn't even know that it's a factory there. It was about, it was two story factory, and it looked like woods all around. But there was, what you call, a basement, but it's called, it was called, a shelter, in case when they will b-...

ES: An air raid shelter?

AG: Air raid. And the air raids were very often. This was already fall of 1944. It was cold. It was rainy. But if there were airplanes fly, flew over us, and every time we thought that they will drop a bomb and bomb that factory. Our work consisted of taking little springs, springs, and putting them in little, bullets. I was very adept at this, because

we had to work in gloves. White gloves they gave us. And we had to use tweezers. And as a nurse I knew how to operate the tweezers. So I was always praised by the *Kapos* I am doing such a good job. I tried not to, but I had to. If not, they would beat me or they wouldn't give me my ration.

ES: What kind of *Kapos*, what nationality were the *Kapos*?

AG: The *Kapos* were German. German women. But one was good to us, good, she didn't give us any more food, but she used to bring us rags. We, and a needle, thread. We sewed brassieres. It was cold, so we made like bandages and bandaged our breasts. It was a little warmer. We were walking from the barracks to the, to the factory every morning, four o'clock in the morning. Before that we had to stay on the *Appell*, and they counted us. About, took about an hour. And we stayed, we stood in rain, in snow, and then we walked to the camp. And we passed a village. And the Germans saw us. Some good souls dropped a piece of bread or a potato or whatever. Of course, I wasn't the one, I wasn't, I didn't care, and I wasn't fast enough to jump and take it. That time it was already we were there in this camp about five months, five, yeah, about five months, five or six months. It was already Spring. And we heard, we didn't know how we heard, through grapevine, that the Germans are losing. And there is hope that we will survive. They let us there we will survive.

ES: This is the beginning of 1945?

AG: This was '44.

ES: Still in '44.

AG: '44.

ES: Okay.

AG: No, '45, '45, yes, '45. This was like in February, beginning, yeah, in February. Yeah, February because they took us that time again somewhere else because they knew that the front is coming closer. We are bombarded, not bombarded, but there were air raids. And every time the *Kapos* told us to go into the shelter we didn't. We were laughing and singing and dancing. And they were the ones who hid themselves. We didn't. We were sure that probably they will drop a bomb, but they didn't know there is a factory. They thought that it's woods, forest. One day, it was in February, yes, possibly, February, like half February, the snow was melting in some places. They told us to, we didn't have anything to take, just to stay in a field, that we are going somewhere else. That time I noticed one of girls I knew. I worked with her mother in the social health. Her mother was a pharmacist, and they used to live in the same house where my mother lived, so I noticed her. She was very happy to see me. I don't know how she knew. She said we are going to Germany back. We were, I don't know exactly where we were. We were on the Belgian, Dutch...

ES: Border?

AG: Border, yeah. Because sometimes we heard French singing. So we assumed it must be Belgian. They put us again in the cattle cars, but we were full of hope that time.

We were sure that on the way there will be an air raid and they will bomb us. But we didn't care. As long as the war will end. And many times they put us on different rails because they had to have the roads for the Germans for the soldiers.

ES: Soldiers on the train.

AG: Yes. On the train. It took about, it took us about two weeks to get to Bergen-Belsen. We came to Bergen-Belsen. We saw that it's a concentration camp.