

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

SOPHIE ROTH

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Carol Solotoff
Date: March 9, 1988

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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SR - Sophie Roth¹ [interviewee]

CS - Carol Solotoff [interviewer]

Date: March 9, 1988

Tape one, side one:

CS: This is Carol Solotoff interviewing Sophie Roth, March 9, 1988. Maybe you could tell me where you were born and a little about your family and your early years?

SR: I was born in Poland. The name of the city was Zloczow and I lived in the outskirts. My father built a house because it was more convenient and better to make a living there. I had--we were four children, second marriage of my husband [probably means father]. Two sister--two girls and two boys, and we lived a nice living, medium, not rich, but not poor. And 1939, when Germany occupied Poland, life like ended for us. It was the hardest time in my life. Those murderers came in the first time and such bombing that the bigger houses were shaking.

CS: In other words the Germans started bombing?

SR: Yes. Started bombing...

CS: During the invasion?

SR: Yes. And it was awful. The second day, they had gone to take people to work and they gathered them in one place, but we found out it was not to work. They took them into the woods, tortured them and killed and buried them. Who were those people with the diplomas? Mostly teachers, doctors.

CS: They took the educated people.

SR: Educated people in the woods and they tortured them because the gentile people came later and told us everything what was in the woods.

CS: Okay, these were only the Jewish educated?

SR: Only the Jewish educated people.

CS: What percentage of the town was Jewish and what was gentile?

SR: We were like 3,000 people, Jewish, Jews. On the outskirts were mostly gentiles. In the middle of the city mostly Jewish people.

CS: You say the town was primarily a Jewish town?

SR: Yes, primarily. Not all.

CS: A lot of synagogues?

SR: Yes. Not a lot but we had synagogues. The people were very pious those days.

CS: Was your family involved in religious life?

¹née Parille.

SR: Yes. Absolutely. My father even bought a Torah because we lived in the outskirts. He got the Torah not for money, you know, just for grain or the food. He had the Torah, he had a lot of *s'forim* [religious books].

CS: In your home?

SR: In my home. I came from very religious home. My father started to become a rabbi, but apparently his parents weren't able to educate him, didn't have the money because they educated the older two brothers. One became a rabbi and he moved later, left Poland. He lived in New York in Delancey Street, my uncle. And but he died, as you know my father was very old and his brother was even older. And I have cousins, I still have cousins, the second line in New York. Their name Parille. And one brother of my husband-- my father, was a *shochet*, a slaughterer, those who slaughtered cows.

CS: Oh, okay, a *shochet*.

SR: Yes. A *shochet*, in Hebrew, I think. As I told you, when Germans then started looting, they were breaking the windows, they came into the Jewish houses, took away whatever was valuable, they took away the jewelry and the Jews didn't have the right to have a fur coat. It was ordered to bring for them, there was established a place where fur coat even fur collars.

CS: Well what about your Polish neighbors? Did you have help from them?

SR: No, no, no. Polish neighbors weren't as bad as Ukrainian. The Ukrainians, even little boys, they went running around and showing the Germans, "Here is a *Jude*. Here is a *Jude*." They learned this word *Jude*.

CS: You lived, it was near the Ukraine, there were Ukrainians living in the town?

SR: There were Ukrainian people and Poles. But they both helped the Germans, they helped them. They were Nazis. This is why Hitler chose Poland. Poland was very antisemitic.

CS: Did anyone in your family serve in the Army? Any of your brothers?

SR: No. Because of health problems.

CS: So in 1939, you started to tell me, the educated people were taken to the woods and shot.

SR: And shot.

CS: What happened next? To the Jewish community, were there work camps, were you put into ghettos?

SR: Next there were work camps and they established ghettos and people were forced to go to the ghetto, like one room, three or four families.

CS: A ghetto in your town? Or did you have to move to another town?

SR: No, no, we were still here in Zloczow.

CS: You were still in your home?

SR: We were still in our home, yes.

CS: Okay, now how about work for your father. Was he able to continue?

SR: My father was 90 years old.
CS: Oh, so he was retired?
SR: Yes, he was retired.
CS: How about your brothers?
SR: My brother was the one that lived there, and the livelihood making was my brother.
CS: Did anything happen with him and his work? Was he able to continue working?
SR: No, he was taken to a ghetto and later he escaped, he and my sister and my brother-in-law. They escaped from ghetto. They had some friends outside, gentile people who took us in somewhere. But before happened with my leg, this is very important. When I got shot in 1942 I was taken to the hospital, my leg was amputated, I was taken...
CS: What was the circumstances that you got shot. What was going on?
SR: They were crazy, they were drunk in the middle of the night, they begun to shoot people.
CS: These were Germans?
SR: Germans in a working camp.
CS: You were in the work camp?
SR: Work camp, yes.
CS: Do you remember the name of that work camp?
SR: I don't remember exactly. Because there were two, we were in two, I was in two, one was Laszczow and the other was Kosice. I think this was in Kosice. I don't know.
CS: How did you get to the work camp? Did they...
SR: No, we have to come there. There were also two--no, we were walking there.
CS: How did you get from your home in 1939...
SR: We were walking there and later we were there established, we slept over there.
CS: Was this near your home?
SR: No, it was far. It was few kilometers. But when you are forced to walk, you walk. You can walk a thousand miles.
CS: Sure. So they were drunk and crazy.
SR: Yeah.
CS: And so you got shot in the leg.
SR: Yeah. The leg was amputated and I got home. At home I can't just tell you what I saw in the faces of my parents when they saw me come in without a leg. And now I didn't have a doctor. Once came a doctor, he was in ghetto, and his name was Silver, and he was from Krakow, and he was very gentle but he promised that he will come the next

week but he didn't come, he died. He got typhus; typhus broke out in the ghetto. Because, as you know...

CS: This is the ghetto in your town or in the other ghetto.

SR: In Zloczow all.

CS: All this was there.

SR: All this was there. He didn't come. He didn't come. That's all. So I wondered why I didn't get an infection again because they didn't have sterile gauze or pads, nothing, but somehow you know when you have to live, you live. But later on, later on, let me tell you now that's like a miracle involved. Do you want to hear that?

CS: Sure.

SR: You know. It was this one day, ten o'clock in the morning, we heard knocking and we went to the door and came in two Germans and two Ukrainians, and they told us that they want our house next day. Ten o'clock we have to be out. I wrote a poem after twenty years about this. And they slammed the door as they left. We were shocked. My father couldn't walk naturally and I couldn't walk. I didn't have prosthesis yet. I just came from this hell. And I turned, as I told you, I was myself very religious. I knew the psalms; I knew the prayers, all the prayers, you know, without looking into the *siddur*, and I turned to God. I spoke to Him, and told Him it is impossible, You have to help. My father can't walk and I can't walk. And they will take us out and they will shoot us. And I am going, I'm not afraid, I told God, of death, if He wants me I will die, but the shame, the humiliation, that the gentiles will go out there and they will laugh and they will say, "Look now they are shooting him, now they are shooting her." And you know, I found in the psalms, I found such a psalms, by King David and Solomon, they were applying to my condition, and I begged them and I fell asleep. In the early morning I had a dream, that I am in school and a professor of religion with the name Chitai [phonetic], one who was killed in the second day of German-occupied Zloczow. That he asked in the class, "Who will translate the sentence "*Hine lo yanum velo yishen shomer Yisroel*."² And I picked up the fingers and I told him I will translate, and when came to like *hine* and *lo*, no doesn't sleep, doesn't dream and doesn't sleep and watches the Israelis. And when I came to this word, *Shomer Yisroel*, he said, "Do you know God means *Yisroel*?" And I didn't answer but the professor said, "Those who believe. Why don't you know?" He said, "Those who believe, you, I see you believe, so don't worry, everything will be okay." And I woke up in the morning and I felt like I was somewhere very far and I couldn't understand. I couldn't just make sure from where I was coming. Then I said, "Ahah! Professor Chitai at school!" And then I went to my father and almost hollering, I asked and I was so, so angry, I don't know what and I told him: "Daddy, please translate *Hine lo yanum velo yishen shomer Yisroel*." And my father wondered why I asked him and I said, "Daddy, please." So he translated and when he came to *Yisroel* he said the same words that the Professor Chitai of

² Psalm 121: Behold, He does not slumber nor sleep, the Guardian of Israel.

blessed memory, because, you know, he died. "And if you believe, those words means those who believe. And so don't have to worry, you believe and go to bed, go to sleep, your eyes are swollen." And I went to bed. I didn't fall asleep, naturally, because I was afraid. Ten o'clock exactly those four came in, like two Germans, the same, and two Ukrainians, and they told us in German, in German language, in German they spoke, that they found another house, we can stay for awhile there. They slammed the doors and they went. You can imagine, it was a *simcha* [joyous occasion] but with tears, we cried from joy. We stayed there a few months, and in the meantime my brother looked for a place, but before he got a place, there were such hours during the day that we have to leave the house because we weren't sure, because they told that they might come and take us out. So we left for the woods, so I was with my mother. In the woods, it was thundering, it was raining and I couldn't walk on crutches because you see on a pavement, a pavement, excuse me, you can walk with crutches but in the woods it is very hard. So it was torture. Later I was in a barrel, peasants used to bring fish. They used to have big barrels. I was there because German soldiers came to look not for Jews but for grain. And they just went in and moved in here and there. And later my brother found a place but on the manure in the stable.

CS: For you all to live?

SR: Yes.

CS: Which would be safer than the house?

SR: Yes, safer than the house. We had to leave. In the meantime...

CS: What year was this?

SR: Uh huh. Do you know what? This was when it came to *Judenfrei*. When I told you we were a few months in our house, our house, and later when it became free from Jews, a Jew had to be dead, or hidden, you know, somewhere.

CS: Right.

SR: So my brother got a place but it was an awful place. It was under manure in the stable. Far different the stable, where the peasants used to throw out the manure from the stable.

CS: A manure pile?

SR: Yes. In the earth.

CS: In what year?

SR: This was in 1942, '43 when it was *Judenfrei*, I just don't remember the year.

CS: That's close enough.

SR: But the condition was unbearable.

CS: How did you get food?

SR: Yes, he used to bring the food, twice a day.

CS: Your brother?

SR: Yes. No, no, not my brother, the peasant, we had a benefactor. The peasant took us in.

CS: This was a Polish peasant?

SR: A Polish peasant.

CS: Now why do you think he did that?

SR: He did it for money.

CS: Oh, for money.

SR: We promised him the house, we gave him the plan from our house, because my father built the house, so he got this plan and after the war we told him the house and the piece of garden it will be his, and we gave him \$200. This is what we had then and some other Polish money, and my daughter [her sister] gave everything; she had jewelry because she was only married two years, so she had a lot of things to give him.

CS: This was your sister?

SR: My sister and my brother, all his suits, everything, his nice clothes and money, and he took us in. The shelter was done very badly, poorly.

CS: How did you know you could trust him?

SR: Yes, we knew him. We had to trust somebody. Because it was...

CS: You had no choice.

SR: Yes, it was just horrible for the Jews, so we trusted him and we knew him a little bit. You know then it was no choice. The entrance was to the stable, it was like a sliding board to our shelter, and this board and our shelter was covered with a board, and on the board he used to put a lot of the manure from the inside. And the outside manure he had to cover the holes, because in the manure we made holes because we needed air. So this was hell.

CS: What did you do to keep busy?

SR: Oh, we were like crazy, oh, we were shaking, we were, do you know what fear--fear changes people. We were different people there, and he took in other people whom he knew. He took in a father and a son and two other people. So we came, we were four, and came to--to nine people and the place was like for two or for three people. Sitting together one touched the other.

CS: So you just sat all day.

SR: Sitting all day. We couldn't talk we couldn't sneeze, because we were afraid. Outside, you know, peasants were walking around, children played and this was hell. It was hell. The food was miserable. He was constantly drunk. And you know the most important fear I forgot to tell you. Once happened that his father who took in also a young couple with a child. At his father, was, a shelter was discovered and the people were taken away. Jewish people they were taken away. When he found out about, he covered the holes in the manure, the only supply for the, of the air, and...

CS: How did you get air?

SR: I am going to tell you. We were suffocating. You'll see later, a few minutes later, and you know, excuse me, and the boards he covered also with a lot of manure and he left, telling us he had to go away because this, Pepka Rosen [phonetic] with the family

was taken away, and he took away the wife and children, and the animals went in the woods, and he came. In the meantime, we became suffocated. Without air, it's impossible, for people, like, I saw like sparkles of fire before my eyes, and my head went on a side. I was sure that I am dying and all of us the same way. But there was a young boy with a father, he was very strong, he was like 16 or 17 years old, with his head, he went to the sliding board, with his head, he moved, he lifted the board, and came a little bit of air, and we all revived. At night when our benefactor came in and whistling in the stable and he saw that the board was moved, oh, he was outraged. He came in and the father of this youngster told him: "Listen your intentions were to kill us. You know without air, living things can't exist." He said, "What do you think, I have to be bad as Hitler?" This was once. Another time, he opened the, he came to us and he said that he don't want us anymore. This was on a Sunday morning, I wrote this, I have it here, and he told us to go out and we are now on our knees really, kissing his hand and we are begging him to let us just during the day to stay there and at night, the darkness will cover us so low, and then we will go. So he let us to go--eh, to stay there with him. He drew out a knife to my brother, he said he wanted to kill him. He said, "I am going to kill you." He was very often drunk. He had the reputation of a normal person but during the war, he changed. My brother found out that during the war, no one--he became influenced by Hitler, by the Germans. The Jewish people are bad people, they are Satan, they kill Jesus, their God, etc., etc. Later we got another place because--and this was a better place. It was a basement where it was very cold.

CS: How did you get another place? Did your brother...

SR: Yes.

CS: Did your brother go out?

SR: No, in the middle of the night because he gave us very little food and we were dying from hunger. My brother, yes, with my sister, they risked their lives in the middle of the night. My brother knew somebody, the name was Mamorsky [phonetic]. He was very gentle peasant and my brother with my sister used to come from time to time and they prepared some food for money. Like he quick made some pies from the stove or something and then my brother went there once and found out that the commandant's wife, she was a teacher, she had the villa not far from this peasant we were hidden at. She was looking for us. She knew us, she knew me very well and she knew about the tragedy with my leg. And she was looking for us. This woman, when my brother went in the middle of the night for some supplies because we were dying from hunger, so she told my brother that Mrs. Sczychowska [phonetic], was her name, Elena, she was looking for us and she was like a middle woman and she told my husband to come and that my husband came for some food.

CS: Your brother?

SR: Yes, my brother. Excuse me.

CS: That's okay.

SR: So Mrs. Sczychowska was there and she took us and the same night we went there. My brother carrying me on his back because I couldn't walk in the woods. We had to walk through the woods and without the knowledge of this peasant where we were, because he wouldn't let us go. He didn't know what to do with us. He didn't want people to know how badly he treats us. You see, so he wanted us to stay. He was like, not to live and not to die. He was awful. So we went there and she took us in a shelter. This was a shelter made for other people. She had 14 people in her house already that year.

CS: And also these other people.

SR: Yes.

CS: The man and his teenage son.

SR: Yes.

CR: They all came with you too?

SR: No, they stayed there.

CS: They stayed with the...

SR: They stayed there with the first benefactor.

CS: Okay.

SR: Because we were too many people there. And they didn't have where to go, only my brother knew somebody and we were connected, and he had some business, good business so, she owed my father [probably means brother] 500 zlotys and now later her conscience woke up, and you know, and she said I am going to do something for him, so she took us in. But it was very cold. Naturally the food was better you see, she was--the father, the husband was the commandant of the police and she was the teacher. She had to be close. This is why the house, they built the house in the woods, and there we stayed but not very long because it was at the end of the war. And it was also very bad. Because the Germans moved from Leningrad, in Russia.

CS: So they were retreating?

SR: Yes. Retreating and they were standing not far you know, they were scattered in the village and they were in the stable. You can imagine, and we had to, we had to do there, we had to clean up our bellies where we were sitting. I can tell you, and when the spring came, manure used to drip on us. This was life during the occupation. Some people who were in those camps called concentration, which were built later, and they hear that somebody was hidden, they think we were on roses, you see, and this was like I am telling you how it was. The other place was also bad, but at least she cooked better, you see it was clean, and to the end of the war, we was there and later we went home. We went to our house. The house was damaged completely and we moved to another house and it was not so very badly damaged and we lived there.

CS: How were you treated by your neighbors when you came back?

SR: You know what? They did not want to talk to us, the gentiles. One woman said--ah, because the father was so religious--and they saw my father, in the window over there with the *talis* you see and praying, so they said this is miracle because the father was

very religious. Now I would like to tell you about the pictures and about the pictures that are haunting me. I can still visualize shocking pictures of our barbaric past--the Holocaust. They are haunting me, compelling me not to forget. Among others the following come to mind: young mother with the baby in her arms, pressing it to her heart and revealing desperate and forlornness in [unclear] features, crying "*Vos makhst du* [unclear]." [What are you doing...] I heard from her that the husband was stoned to death the night before; he went to seek his brother who after the liberation lived in Kielce, city in Poland, where 200 of our people, the survivors, were stoned to death during a pogrom. A girl looking for her parents, or someone from her family, age 14 and pregnant. I cannot put it out of mind her distorted features, the distrust in her eyes. When searching brought only disillusionment, she committed suicide. A father forced among others to leave his two children to a place where they were taken to crematorium. About this, told me the father of the children. I encountered a young woman whose husband I knew. She was sitting on the ground twisting her fingers, mourning the death of her child. If I would be blessed with the capability of painting, it would be a good picture to reveal the suffering of the survivors of the Holocaust. When I approached her, she stretched her arms out and said to me, "I cannot forget my baby. It was pulled from my hands and choked to death." I learned from her that this happened in the shelter, with a lot of people. They got panic stricken that the crying of the baby would lead to their discovery. What an inhuman pain was reflected in her appearance. Our test is morbid. We were all stunned but we will strive forth despite the Professor Butz's book³ that the Holocaust was a farce, a made-up story to bring support for the Jewish homeland in Palestine. What an insult, how ridiculous, at the time when Germany recognized its crimes, when Minister Adenauer of Germany went to Israel and asked forgiveness. President Eisenhower showed the places of destruction. I am coming to the conclusion that these survivors will not die once when time comes, because most of us have died a thousand times already. It comes to my mind a quotation from *Hamlet*, by Shakespeare, "In this world are written a thousand deaths." We survivors of the Holocaust are alive by miracles. We have the debt to those who innocently died. It is our duty that the truth be known to the future generations in order to prevent another genocide. And books like Professor Butz's...

³*The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* by Arthur R. Butz, Los Angeles: Noontide Press, 1977.

Tape one, side two:

CS: Side 2.

SR: We understand human suffering and we will see to it that future generations should be alert, and this way, with God's help, we will not have to face another Holocaust.

CS: During the time you were in hiding...

SR: Yes.

CS: Did you have any communication with the outside world?

SR: Only through him, through the benefactor.

CS: Were you aware of what was going on in the war?

SR: We knew everything, yes, because he used to come every night about these things. He was very happy to tell us. That they shot this one, they shot yesterday this one. And he was in the middle of the city, in the middle, in the city and he saw the torture and he smiled when he told us of the atrocities they--they made fun. It was awful just like devils. All the men they put in the middle of the city, middle of the street. They cut their beards but with the flesh. They opened, I am ashamed to say, the zipper and they made fun of the old men.

CS: And these were German soldiers?

SR: German soldiers. And I have books I can show you of what I told.

CS: And your benefactor, did he enjoy--it sounds like he enjoyed telling you this.

SR: He enjoyed, because he used to go to the city every day. Coming home...

CS: Why do you think he told you these things?

SR: I don't know, he was drunk and he...

CS: This is the first benefactor?

SR: The first benefactor. The other was very nice. The other was a cultured lady and she was a teacher. She didn't make fun.

CS: What about the news of the war outside Poland? The Allied invasion, what was happening in Russia?

SR: Yah, this we knew that Russia is very bad, that Russia has to go w-...

CS: Did you have a radio?

SR: No, no, no, we didn't, we were disconnected. The only communication was the drunk peasant who liked very much to [unclear].

CS: At what point did you become aware of the death camps?

SR: Oh, we knew everything. We knew that they are taking away, that they are taking away to Belzec, that there was a concentration called already a concentration camp. That, we knew they are sent, that there were going to be crematoriums.

CS: So you knew about this.

SR: We knew what was going on.

CS: How did you find out?

SR: You know, this peasant informed us. But before we went to the shelter, we knew everything because Germany, Hitler begun in Austria, in Vienna. My father as [unclear] had the Jewish papers and in the paper was always what the news, what the Germans are doing in Vienna. So we knew that catastrophe is coming; we knew what they were doing in Germany. They used to punish the people. They used to beat them and there was a *Kristallnacht*, it means that Crystal Night, when they came in and it was awful. They broke the Jewish homes, the windows, stole everything, they tortured people and glass was thrown everywhere. You saw only glass. This is why they named this night *Kristallnacht*.

CS: Were you aware of any resistance groups fighting against the Germans?

SR: No. We didn't know. We didn't know. Later we found out. We found out about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, after we went out.

CS: Was that the end of the war? You found out.

SR: The end of the war. Yeah, when we came out, when we came out.

CS: How did you feel when you heard about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising?

SR: We were very happy that there was an uprising because you know, it was only way to do something to them and we felt, you know, we lost, you know, we lost everyone. Our dearest people, among them were educated people, and those little children, the Yankele, the Moishela, the Surele [Yiddish diminutive], you know, the names of the Jewish people. And we were heartbroken, you know, our life was shattered.

CS: How about after the war. And this whole experience did it strengthen your faith, did you become less religious?

SR: Many people became less religious, among them my husband, of blessed memory. He was very religious, just as most people in Europe. But after this, what he saw because he lost his father, his mother and four brothers, and children, their children, two of them slept with him in this camp, forced camp, I have documents about my brother, my husband's brother, and so after the war he said how could a God allow this? You know.

CS: How about you? How did you feel?

SR: I think that was the free--that God gives free will to people and they can do with their lives everything. They can become Satans and they become normal or pious people, more believers or less but still normal people. And this was, this was a thing of Satan, if there is a Satan, I don't know. We felt like something was very bad in this world. And I am a believer because I lived through few miracles and then recently I lived through a miracle [unclear] and still, I don't know, maybe because I am a believer.

CS: So you continued to be observant?

SR: Absolutely, I am connected with God, I speak to Him and I go to the *shul*. This is the place where we can communicate and helps me because life here was not in roses in America, who knows. It was very difficult for my husband because he, he also suffered, the same right leg, same place he was wounded. [laughter]

CS: Remarkable.

SR: Yes, it is remarkable, and life wasn't so easy because he became very nervous and I was also sometimes nervous because of the past. You know, it was too much, too much to endure. Those who endured, a lot of them they just are, have the nightmares, even now. My husband used to scream very often at night. And I used to scream and always lived like somewhere else, I thought that they were going to come. My husband, a few years ago, woke up very often at night, "*Zei cumin! Zei cumin!* They are coming, they are coming, oh, they are coming, Zahava, they are coming." I have the Hebrew name, Zahava, they are coming and then I went to him and woke him up and I said, "Where are you, what are you dreaming about." "They are coming." He told me he is in the working camp and they are coming to take away the children. Because he went to Lvov, [renamed Lemberg by Germans] where he had the brother. The brother with his wife was taken away, there were left two children. And somebody came, their friends, gentile people in Lemberg and they came and told my husband the two children are alone. My husband found the Germans with a truck, that was going to Lemberg; he approached them and he told them there are two children of his brother are alone, and my husband cried. You know some times can move somebody and they took him there and later I don't know how he got back with the children.

CS: What made you decide to come to America?

SR: Oh, this was the only place that we dreamt of, we dreamed of. Because it is a country of freedom. We went to Paris because my husband, as I mentioned before, had a brother in Paris.

CS: You met your husband in Poland?

SR: In Poland.

CS: After the war?

SR: After the war. Yes. I was employed in the dispensary. And I came.

CS: And you decided you didn't want to stay in Poland?

SR: In Poland, no. Poland was no--you know no...

CS: No future?

SR: No future. And it happened that I got married in 1947, and my husband had to get the papers for himself. The brother promised him papers and then we got married, the brother wrote to him that he has a wife. So we got papers to Paris. This was a good part of our, you know, after the war. Paris, you know, is most beautiful.

CS: Sure.

SR: And we revived gradually, gradually we came to our strength mentally and physically, and then was my daughter born in Paris in 1952.

CS: And then you--had you been thinking all this time about coming to America?

SR: Yes, because my husband and myself, we couldn't make a living there. In Paris you have to make, my brother was a lawyer and you know, if you have a profession

it is okay. And to make a business you know, we didn't have the language and we weren't up to it, so we came to America. Through HIAS. That was open to us.

CS: And how did you get to Philadelphia?

SR: We came to New York. We were promised to Los Angeles. But when we came to New York, they said, "No, Los Angeles is filled up with those survivors. You have to go to Philadelphia." So we came to Philadelphia.

CS: So HIAS directed you to Philadelphia?

SR: Yes.

CS: Were they helpful in finding jobs or...

SR: Yes. Absolutely!

CS: Housing?

SR: There was a small apartment waiting for us. A room with a kitchen, a kitchenette, a little one. And we had help, naturally, from the Jewish Family Service.

CS: How did they help you?

SR: They gave us weekly or monthly money to live on and they paid for the apartment. And later on my husband looked for a job and he got a job and he worked all these years in the one place. They liked him very much. He was a precise person. He worked in a bookbinding company. And he was not a bookbinder. He was a teacher, he used to teach Hebrew in Poland, but here he got this job. Novelty Bookbinding Company which now exists but it was sold, and he worked there and they liked him very much. My husband was also a talmudist. And...

CS: Was a what?

SR: He knew Talmud very well.

CS: Oh, a talmudist. I am sorry, I didn't understand you.

SR: I shall show you books from the city my husband was born in. And some other books from there, from the past, from the lost life, like lost the Jews, the Jews who disappeared and you will see pictures showing, pulling there, all atrocities you would find in these books I have. My husband used to like to buy books and I have many of them. And I worked.

CS: Yeah.

SR: After the war, in Poland, I was looking for a job. And I got in a dispensary a job. A foreman in a dispensary after World War II gave me the opportunity to meet people afflicted in mind and body during the Holocaust. Scattered remnants of our people were coming home from concentration camps, lonely and sick, looking for family and friends and waiting for them, brought only despair and disillusionment. Once a youngster who spent his youth at Auschwitz came to the dispensary and approached me asking me if I would get him to the doctor as soon as possible because he felt he was losing his mind. While speaking in a loud voice he kept on crying. His posture was trembling. His hands were shaking like a real old man and although he was only 18 years old, his face was bruised with wrinkles. I told the doctor about him and went with him to the office. The

doctor himself was a victim of the war, had been taken away during the Russian occupation to Siberia because Poland was also occupied by Russia. After returning to Poland he was employed in the dispensary, from there he was sent with other doctors to Auschwitz to witness the horrors. Upon his return he told us about the piles of human hair, eyeglasses, gloves and shoes he saw there. When I came with this boy, the doctor's face turned ash-gray. His eyes filled with tears on seeing the real victim of cruelty and inhumanity. Doctor stood up and greeted him warmly while the boy kept on crying. For a moment we was silent. We realized that we were witnessing a child opening his heart without words, trying to free himself from the tragedy of his life. He looked around suspiciously not believing that he was completely free. The doctor did everything he could to help him. The boy kept on coming and became very much attached to the doctor. Evidently he saw in him the image of a father he longed for. He could sense the doctor's affection, response and caring. So every time he came he told of the atrocities he lived through. He told us about being humiliated, beaten. About experiments, they putting cold water on him, forcing him to throw himself on his own father, marches to far away places in winter without shoes, and in worn summer clothes and constant hunger. Those who lost their strength were left to freeze to death. He continued to come for injections, vitamins, and food distributed in the dispensary. The food disagreed with him because of years of constant hunger. He was completely injured, mentally and physically, and he was looking for comfort and restitution. We were his only family after years of loneliness, torture, and shame. He was in need of a warm home where he could become normal again. I have forgotten his name but he is still so close to my heart. He wrote poems, revealing cruelty and inhumanity and things and conditions of death. Who knows how many more years this young man had to suffer to be able to face life, and he was not only one. There were thousands like him. Who knows if he ever recovered from the horrors of the Holocaust. He stopped coming. I am sure he went home to Israel and he was helped there with love and understanding, or was it too late? I hope not. You want some poems?

"We Shall Never Forget," by Sophie Roth.

[Do I have to say it or not?]

We shall never forget the young and the old
Who died from Nazi's hands in misery and cold.
We shall never forget the people of ours,
Changed into ashes, every minute of the hour.
To death, they were lead where only the Nazis came.
We will never forget their pain and their shame.
We will never forget the children pulled from mothers' hands
Without being able to help and defend.
We shall never forget the Nazis as long as we live.
Such atrocities we can never forget or forgive.

We shall never forget the young and the old
Who died from Nazis' hands in misery and cold.
We shall never forget the people of ours
Changed into ashes every minute of the hour.

This is a poem dedicated to the memory of those who were killed in the woods, of those with their diplomas who were taken to places the second day after Germany occupied Poland.

Graves without markers, mass graves without markers, without names.
Many are [unclear]. It's a shame.
They are trodden down by the cows that graze,
No sign is left, covered in haze,
And there is silence all around,
Not a whisper, not a sound.
Massacred in pits they were thrown in,
Without questions, not committing a sin.
And there is silence all around
Not a whisper, not a sound.

You want this:
"Auschwitz"

From mounds of earth,
Built from ashes,
A scream is heard, why?
And it's lifted up to the heavens above.
The souls buried there
Scattered everywhere
Are demanding justice.
What and why,
They're asking the heavens,
Asking the sky.
And the sun is shining,
Not caring, not minding,
And flowers they bloom
On the mounds of doom.
Silence alone speaks.

"I Missed So Much."

I see I missed so much, and the sun is going down.
In times like such my face likes to frown.
I see I missed so much.
I see I missed so much, with your happy smile.
Happy years of my life
So cruelly stolen where the war cut it off with a knife.
I see I missed so much.
I see I missed so much since dark days came instead
And took the real life away. Hunger and despair were our bread.
Heart broken, sick and dismayed. Oh! I see I missed so much.

"A Thousand Years Old"

I am a thousand years old.
I lived during the Crusaders cold
Blooded murderous time.
The name I have is not mine.
I was tortured in Spain,
My conversion was in vain.
I lived during the pogroms in Russia
When women were killed and raped.
And time the only friend
To me from land to land
Even Hitler's cruelty without end
Would not break my stand.
I am, I will be, I am a Jew. I am eternity.

CS: Good. Thank you.

SR: Now my answered prayer. This is what I told you that twenty years later I wrote about the miracle that they let us live longer in the house.

"My Answered Prayer"

I shall never forget the dream I had
After we were told by the Nazis, "Go out.
Ten o'clock tomorrow you must be out.
We need the house."
Then the door slammed, with anger they went.
And that was my father sick, sick from fear and pain,

With everything seemed in vain.
Myself with an amputated leg
I could only the room I did beg.
And with my prayer I alone
Have reached the highest throne.
At night my soul escaped
And reached the light beyond.
Expressed was a wandering in a beautiful sun.
The religion teacher who was dead patted my cheek
And said, "You believe with all your heart.
Do not worry, it's a good start."
And the early morning was destined.
My father told me, it is a good dream.
The time was ten, the door got opened,
The Nazis were there again
And the Gestanza [phonetic] announced
"We found another house,
You stay for awhile there."
The door got slammed; with anger they went.
Have faith, have faith, it's never too late.
Though it seems to be so, it's true,
The soul can wander too
And reach the highest throne.
I believed that my soul was somewhere.

CS: That is beautiful.

SR: "Broken Heart"

Nothing can calm a broken heart.
Nothing can mend from the start.
Nothing in the world can heal a scar.
If you alone do not think tomorrow
The pain and the sadness life can do
To you and yours again anew.
So often comes back the pain
And we think that life is in vain.

SR: I think this is good. Do you want the story about Yankele? This is a story that was told to me by somebody who lives here in Philadelphia. He is a builder of houses, rental houses. This was his brother.

CS: Okay.

SR: The aunt of this Yankele, the name of the boy written about, told me the story, and when it was told I wrote it down. And this was published in our Bulletin. The Bulletin I mean of our survivors⁴...

CS: Your survivors group.

SR: Yes. Do you want to hear it?

CS: Okay.

SR: Okay. "The year was 1939 and the month September. Autumn was already there. It was calm, beautiful and cold. One could smell fragrances from the abandoned flowers and trees. Yankele was then ten years old, and his perception with the world was one of confusion. For the events were at that time overwhelmed with turmoil, in which daily life patterns changed rapidly. The war broke out, with frequent German bombing. The bombing shook buildings like trees before the storm in the wind. The inhabitants took shelter in basements. Shortly after the numerous bombings, Russians suddenly marched in, producing feelings of relief and hope. However, relief and admiration changed to fear. For in the middle of the night, the police bombarded the homes of the rich, forced them out of that, jamming them into locked cattle cars, heading for Siberia. It was difficult for Yankele to understand such action and equal difficult the screams of anguish about it. When Yankele was 12 years old, the Germans attacked again. Ukrainian and German soldiers invaded Jewish homes, taking fathers away from their families, assuring the crying and pleading children and wives of their safe return. However, no one was ever seen again. Later ghettos were formed, which isolated the Jews from the outside world. That, hunger, hatred, cruel punishment, overwhelmed the people. Yankele was there with his parents and family. Soon he lost his father who could not endure the hard labors, constant hunger, and humiliation. By good fortune was Yankele's family was able to contact a peasant who was eager for money. He helped them escape, first into the woods and then rented an apartment on the outskirts of the city, moved there himself, and made a shelter for Yankele's family. Their living conditions improved but their benefactor demanded more money. Yankele's mother did have money hidden in their house, but to go back there was most dangerous. Yankele strongly opposed that his mother should carry out this dangerous mission and insisted that he should go in her place accompanied by the peasant, but keeping some distance from him. Yankele was recognized by a former classmate of his who promptly announced his presence to the Gestapo. Yankele pretended he did not understand the German officer. A translator was brought in and he interrogated him for three days in the hopes that Yankele would confess and reveal his family hideout. Yankele endured the harsh questions, the harsh questioning, not betraying his family, insisting that he was not a Jew. A local doctor was brought in to confirm his ethnic identity. He stated that Yankele was not a Jew, risking his own life. The Nazi interrogator then gave his verdict explaining

⁴*Bulletin*, Jewish Survivors Association, Philadelphia, PA.

that Yankele would be sent to a labor camp in Germany with other orphans, and that he could put on his hat and leave. Yankele, understanding German, but forgetting his previous pretense, hastily put on his hat. Momentarily it was obvious that Yankele had been lying to them, thus Yankele was tortured and shot." [Machine turned off and then on.]

SR: After I lost my leg and it was healed, I call it the miracle, or its [unclear]. We have to survive and go on with life something happens. I myself being very religious, I thought this, I am thinking, this is a miracle. I was sitting on the porch and my legs were covered with a shawl and it began to rain. And as I told before, we lived on the outskirts. A woman from Lvov came to shop some products like eggs, milk etc., and she was in a mourning outfit because her husband was an officer and he died in the army, so she was left with children. And she came by to shop something. Chickens and stuff like that...

Tape two, side one:

SR: When my stump was healed I was sitting on the porch and it was raining. A woman dressed in mourning clothes, I found out her husband was an officer and he died, and she came from a bigger city where she could not get anything, any articles to eat, and she came to shop. While she was standing outside in the rain, my mother called her in and told her, "Why do you stay so far, come into the porch," and she came. She noticed right away that the one leg was missing, because you know there was an emptiness where the shawl covered, and my mother told her to rest, and she knew a lot, because she saw what went on with the Jews in Lemberg, and she promised she would send me an address to a prosthetist and he does a very good job.

CS: What year was this?

SR: What year?

CS: Yes.

SR: I think it was 1943, I think, or 1942, because my leg was healed already.

CS: So before you went into hiding?

SR: Before, yes.

CS: Okay.

SR: Later on I had this prosthesis when I went to--and she kept her promise and she went home, she got the address and they got to me the address to a prosthetist. And now I had to send somebody. You see I couldn't go to him. Back then no one, no Jewish person could travel there.

CS: It was dangerous.

SR: It was very dangerous, so I had, I know German, and the next farm was a boy maybe 14 or 15 years old, a Pole, and he wanted to know German. Why? He thought that, he's going to have a position in the post office or something that he needed German, they thought that Germany would stay there, you know. He was like thinking of it. So he came with his sister every second day and I taught him German, and he brought me food. And I told him, no money, whatever he could get at home. It was a very big farm. And when he found out that I need somebody to send for the prosthetist to Lemberg, he volunteered and he said, "I shall go." His name was Mikasch [phonetic]. He was a very nice boy.

CS: A Polish boy?

SR: A Polish boy, and he left, and he came with him the same day. I wondered, the same day, that he came with him? And when the Polish prosthetist came in--why I underscore Polish, because she was a Ukrainian, and she told me to take the Polish, the Pole. And then he came in and he said, "I can't understand, you are Jewish. What is for you, because he really cry before me, he told me that this was such a young person without the leg, and please and please, and he made me, he forced me to go, and I left everything and I came here." And he took the measurements, and in two weeks I had the prosthesis.

CS: It's unbelievable that a young boy would care so much.

SR: Yes. One miracle that she was there and, you see, the woman who--you know, we were disconnected with the outside, the Jewish life was so very limited that we couldn't travel, we couldn't go nowhere. It was curfew at night, you could not walk only until this hour, and then we couldn't walk on the pavement. A Jew wasn't allowed any such.

CS: The degradation. You knowing this. The humiliation.

SR: Such degradation and humiliation, awful. So he came and he brought me the prosthesis, and naturally it is not one I'm now having, you see it looks elegant just almost like a leg. It was with iron, iron on the one side, a big piece of iron on the one side, and the other side, but I was there helpless. My father died in the meantime and I took his cane and I said, "Oh, God, Daddy help me, I am taking your cane and let me walk." And I walked with that cane. And whenever we had to leave the house, I didn't need the crutches. Because the crutches were out of working for me. I couldn't stand it. For me it was a real miracle. Then the boy used to come, you see, and I had the prosthesis.

CS: The second miracle.

SR: Yah. And one was when they found another house and they came to us telling us, taking off a load of trouble from our backs, because we thought we were going to be shot. They found another house. It was too--I think there was something else, too. But just finding a place was a miracle, you know, they didn't--no one wanted the Jews.

CS: Well, it was also dangerous.

SR: It was very dangerous. I understand, I understood them, that they were afraid.

CS: Sure.

SR: They could even kill. If somebody was disobedient their rules, their rules for killing. I have something from my husband. Do you want to read?

CS: Okay.

SR: What I am going to read now is from my husband, Chaim Roth, what he told me, and I wrote it. "With my memories retro I am coming to events that took place during the Holocaust. I would like to share them. I see myself after escaping with most horrible difficulties from forced labor camp and due to unendurable situation was forced to return there, to the labor camp. Here is my other statement. Alone in the woods and looking for a way home where my father built, with the help of an engineer, a shelter in the open. The entrance was so concealed that nobody could imagine that people could live there. I was a few days without food and not knowing which way to turn. It was Sunday. The darkness covered the world. From far I noticed two eyes approaching me. I knew it was a wolf. I was sure that the end of my miserable life is very close. I contemplated my bad luck. I escaped with extreme difficulties and insecurity, not knowing what lies ahead to me, from the [unclear] established labor camp and here waited me death from a wolf. This fear enveloped me. I began to cry and say the *Shema Yisroel*. I turned my head back

to make sure if the wolf was following me; there was no wolf. With sweat on my whole body, I was fumbling over broken branches not knowing which way to go. I walked crying not being able to forget the wolf's eyes. I was there completely alone, comparing myself to Robinson Crusoe. Suddenly appeared a young boy telling me that on the bridge that I have to pass is standing a policeman. He showed me a shorter way to my home. When I came there an old Ukrainian was living there already. It was raining and dark. Knowing where my father of blessed memory kept tools, I went there, and when I almost began to sleep, I heard the door opening. The peasant ordered me to leave right away. I pleaded to let me go to the shelter. He forced me to leave in torrential rain and immediately. Since the labor camp was not far, I went back because I felt that loneliness would drive me out of my mind. The head of this part of forced labor camp, seeing my appearance, simulated that he did not notice my absence. So I was with people again. The odyssey is not finished. I had to endure a lot until I was freed. I cannot forget this so horrible feeling. We have to hope that peace will come soon to the world."

CS: And this is, this is your husband's experience?

SR: Yes.

CS: During the war?

SR: Yes, this is what he told me.

CS: He felt the isolation would have been...

SR: Yes, yes, so he went back.

CS: Would have been terrible.

SR: He went home where he had the shelter the father built with the engineer, and the stove, but there was living already an Ukrainian and he didn't let him in, in torrential rain he told him back, you have to go, and he went back and the head of the concentration--of this camp--saw how he looked, so he made believe like he had not seen and he was with people again. You see, people can't be alone. You know about Robinson Crusoe, he found a friend Friday and called him Friday. He was also was lost. We can't be without--
[Machine off and then on.]

"Reflections: What is dying and how does it affect me? These questions often come to mind. It is impossible to forget the horrors of the Holocaust. The memories are so severely real that it seems like it happened yesterday, not forty some years ago. When we were young, we were eager to forget the atrocities of the past and go on with our lives. With age, the cruel memories are coming back to haunt us, like a shadow it becomes our constant companion forcing us to think of our loved ones, changed to ashes, of place and mass graves. Forcing us to think back to a time of insanity when we cried to the heavens to stop the planet and let us get off. Now we must think of our loved ones in our present, our children and their grandchildren. Their future freedom and their well-being must be insured. Thus we must put a stop to the ever-increasing activities of the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups."

I have a lot of this. Small writings. I think it's okay. "Reflections" by me. Do I have to say my name?

"As we came to face old age, true, not old as yet. Dependable era of our lives because of the decline of strength. How true sounds the prayer, "Do not forsake us, oh God, in old age." So deserved repose gets often disturbed by family troubles, or by sickness, or both. Before us in the lonely hours unfolds a film from our past. Our brain recorded our lives from early beginning and now it plays back. And we learn with a wise wisdom about ourselves. The errors and misgivings are forcing a deep sigh. In a new country we were not prepared to the assignments that time would, that time put before us. We were not ready to face the problems with a change of times set before us. As remnants from the Holocaust we had to rebuild our broken lives and adjust ourselves to new situations and circumstances. I hear often saying that friends are here not the same as they were in the old country. Life is here different. So our friends are different. What makes the difference, mostly the tempo. From my point of view, there is felt a lack of romanticism and fantasy, because this is what adds beauty to life. I notice that some families do not have time for their children and themselves. The tempo kills their pleasure and tranquility, so very much needed for a normal life. And this is happening to children. They think that we give them everything by giving them material necessities, but often the spirituality is lacking. Yes, we were, with exceptions, not right enough for the new life that we encountered here. Our life was shattered because of the Holocaust. The film further unfolds before us pictures of rigor, hope, prayers, and desires that accompanied our young years. A painful nostalgia envelopes and we feel that, we feel the hardship of old age. That knowledge means that we will not be able to feel the pleasures and risk walking [phone rings] [unclear]. And we will not be able to go out and breathe the early dawn and witness the wakening of the nature and the real silence of the morning. We eventually become shut-ins, remnants of being once capable and strong, and the film that was recorded so strongly reveals pictures of the saddest time in history, the Holocaust. A time when the sun for us was covered, and we were forced to live in the darkness, in pain and shame, like in an asylum. The time was a shameful record of mankind and a cry to heaven. Like in a jungle, people like beasts were roaming and joining with pleasure the greatest beast on earth, Hitler. Mother Earth that supplies us with sustenance and beauty is also spreading weeds, and when they are not pulled out in time, they cause harm is with people. Some are like weeds, and when not caught in time, bring calamity, terrors and destruction. Oh, let in the future love take over and illuminate the way to forgiveness and understanding, and, hopefully, individuals like Hitler, will be caught in time before they could grow into beasts."

CS: This is the end of Side 3. Interview with Sophie Roth, March 9, 1988, interviewed by Carol Solotoff. Mrs. Roth requested to read some of her writings and to tell a little bit about her husband's experiences.