HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ANNA BERENHOLZ

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Meta Joy Jacoby
Date: December 29, 1990

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AB - Anna Berenholz[1] [interviewee]
MJ - Meta Joy Jacoby [interviewer]
Date: December 29, 1990

Tape one, side one:

MJ: This is tape one, side one. Anna, can you tell me where you were born?

AB: I was born in Czechoslovakia, Yasin, Y-A-S-I-N, Czechoslovakia, June 28, 1924.

MJ: Can you tell me something about your family?

AB: Okay. My family lived in Yasina for ages. My grandfather told me the stories about his grandfather, and they were landowners, farmers, and that's how we lived.

MJ: Did you have brothers and sisters?

AB: Yes, I had three sisters and five brothers.

MJ: Oh, a large family.

AB: Yes.

MJ: Were there many Jews in was it Yasin?

AB: Well, Yasina was a small town. It was a small farming town. It had 15,000 people. Out of the 15,000, there was about 900 Jewish people. My parents and grandparents were among them.

MJ: Can you tell me something about life there before the war?

AB: Well, life was really harsh. It was very hard because you have to dig out a living, grow your own food and grow your cows and horses. It was a farm and we didn't have--we couldn't afford extra hands so we did it ourselves. Like in the summer, we would pick potatoes from school vacation and dry the hay and before I went to school, milk the cows all the time. When time came, I went back to school, it was like a vacation. School was vacation for me, that's how hard it was. But at that time, we didn't know it was hard. Later, we find out. We just did it because that the way we lived.

MJ: Was, was there a synagogue? Did you…

AB: Yeh. We had two synagogues in the, in the out of town where we lived, we had a small synagogue and more or less, like the center of town, was a bigger one.

MJ: And your family went to one of them?

AB: Yeh, in the small synagogue, my family kept up the small synagogue.

MJ: Were they religious? Was your family religious?

AB: Very, very religious, orthodox. I was punished when I polished my shoe on Saturday.

MJ: Did your family experience any antisemitism before the war?

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[1]nee Bohorochaner.

AB: Not, not that much, per se. My parents because they were farmers, they had a lot of friends among farmers.

MJ: Who were not Jews?

AB: Yes. So, we didn't experience that much. Maybe on a holiday, Christmas, they supposedly preached that Christ was killed by the Jews, and I had a very experience because I was invited to a friend who was not Jewish and when this talk went on, I got up in the church and I said, "Well, there's Christ. He is a Jew. You're praying to a Jew."

MJ: You were in church with your friend?

AB: Yeh. I was invited to dinner and--yeh, yeh my parents wanted us to know everything. Of course, I was bored because of the preaching. A lot of things didn't make sense, but then they start saying the Jews killed Christ and then I couldn't help it. I was 16. I got up and said you're praying to the Jew.

MJ; Did they respond, did anyone respond?

AB: Yeah, there was commotion and yelling and she pulled me out, my friend, she pulled me out of the church.

MJ: Did you experience any antisemitism in school?

AB: No, because I went to Czech school, and we were mostly Jews and the Czechs, the officials, the police and all and there was a White Russian school then the local population went. They did not want to come to the Czech school. It was mostly Jews and the Czechs, officials.

MJ: Was your family involved in Jewish organizational life?

AB: My parents were just involved in the religion law, but my sister, my brothers, they were involved in Zionistic movement and so was I.

MJ: Oh, can you tell me something about that?

AB: Well, it was just starting. It was just starting. Like when we heard what's going on in Germany. We still--we were--then it was just starting. I remember we went and we met under a tree and we were singing.

MJ: What year are you referring to?

AB: I'm referring to 1936. Yeh. So…

MJ: You were aware of what was going on in Germany?

AB: Yeh, we heard--we didn't have newspapers. We didn't have radio. We just heard. Somebody came back so we heard what happened?

MJ: What did they say?

AB: Well, they said that the, the German Jews are being thrown out from their jobs and stripped of their citizenship and they have to wear white bands. Like we wore yellow stars, they wore white bands and, and they told us about all the problems and those that had money are getting out and those that don't are still in labor camps and there was talk already about concentration camps. We were not sure where. We, we at that time, we didn't know much what's going on.

MJ: You were how old then?

AB: Twelve years old.

MJ: It seems, I'm getting a feeling that the young people then formed…

AB: Yes. Yes.

MJ: …some Zionist organizations?

AB: Yes, well, this guy that came back. He came back from Vienna, Austria. He worked there and he told us about it. And I had an uncle in Vienna, and we didn't hear from him anymore so we knew. We didn't have newspapers or radio. It was really very bad for us. We were like choked in so we started to organize, and some people went to Czechoslovakia to *Hakhsharah*[2], like preparing to go to then Palestine, Israel. And they did, and they were saved. But you had to be past 18 or 20, I don't remember.

MJ: Were you able to get information about Zionism, about Israel? How did you organize this?

AB: Well, because the boys especially, the girls, were not, they were not going to Hebrew school or *cheder*, which is a Jewish school, but the boys did and my brothers used to read to me and tell me the history and my parents too tell me the history about the Jewish people and everything and that there's a Palestine and there is Jerusalem and all this. Oh, yeh.

MJ: Can you tell me anymore about this young Zionist group?

AB: Just a few meetings we had because then people started being afraid and we didn't have more information and those that organized it, they went to this *hakhsharah*. H*akhsharah* means preparing to go to Israel to build a Jewish country, and we lost contact with them, so just a few meetings.

MJ: You, you described the relations between your family and the non-Jewish families in…

AB: Yasina.

MJ: Yasin. Is it a village or a town?

AB: Where we lived, it was a town, like a center of town, but we lived out on the outskirts, it was just farm.

MJ: Were the relations really friendly?

AB: My mother had a few good friends, a few close friends, yes.

MJ: And your father.

AB: My father not so much.

MJ: And you and your brothers and sisters?

AB: Yeh, I used to associate with them.

MJ: Good. Now, at the time of the Munich pact in September of '38...

AB: '38, yeah, that was the biggest tragedy because then my two brothers were in the army. One was recruited and one was a volunteer, and they were prepared, the

[2]*hakhsharah* - agricultural training in preparation to immigrate to Palestine (article "Resistance in the Smaller Ghettos of Eastern Europe: Glossary," www.ushmm.org.)

Czechoslovakian army was prepared to fight the Germans, but Chamberlain sold, sold us out. At that time, we knew much more because the Czech officials, my teachers and the police, they had to leave. The Hungarians occupied. It was like divided. The Hungarians occupied the part where I lived and the others went to Germany. At that time, the tragedy really started.

MJ: What happened to your family? Your two brothers were in the army.

AB: My two brothers they came back, and they packed up and they came back with a lot of other young people and my older brother went cross, you see, Russia took Poland and was the border in Yasina so they crossed over the border. My older brother, who lives now in Israel, he crossed over and he went to Russia, and my younger brother still smuggled a lot of people and then he packed up and he went to Russia, just across the border.

MJ: And the rest of the family?

AB: The rest of the family, everything the Hungarians took away from us, the cows, the sheep, whatever money my parents had in the bank, absolutely everything. We didn't have nothing to live on. Luckily, it was like in the spring and we planted again, potatoes, whatever we could, vegetables, just to go by, but it was very, very bad.

MJ: Did your, did your family consider immigration then?

AB: Oh, yeh, they always did, but there was no way because England, England did not let the grown-ups. My parents hoped that they would be able to send us, the younger kids, and it was choked up or they didn't have enough money. I, I don't know, it just was impossible. They just hoped to send the kids away. They hoped. It did not work.

MJ: So, you made it through the summer by replanting?

AB: Yeah, we made it through the summer by replanting vegetables, whatever, potatoes, and the people still came [unclear] my two brothers left, and my sister, myself, we smuggled them through. We had connections. And then, one morning, they caught a group, the Hungarians. They caught a group on the border and they took them to the center city. Of course, they told them who smuggled them, and my sister and I were hiding like on top of the mountain and we saw everything that was going on in our house. They took my parents, they took my two younger brothers and my little sister, she was four. They took them in, and I said to my sister, let's go, let's go, let's free the parents. They had nothing to do with it, and she said she wants to go to Russia, too, and all. So, finally, we did go down to the police, and told them, I told them I was the one. They didn't want to believe, they didn't want to believe, because I was 16 and anyway, they let my parents go. All of my younger brothers and sisters, they let them go home, and they arrested us and beat me to death.

MJ: You were 14 or 15?

AB: I was 16. 1940.

MJ: And your sister?

AB: My sister, she was older, she was 18. But a, she was, she wasn't as strong and I didn't want her to be hurt so I said I did it and everything so all night long, they beat me with rubber. My hand were so swollen, my face. They just wanted to know where my two brothers are and all the other names. I said, "No." And a Hungarian policeman came over and said you stupid, you lay down and play dead. So, being what I was, I spit on him, too. I mean, you don't have what to lose as, you know, a young person. You get burned up tasting a little bit democracy from the Czech, from the Czechs and slobs like this came over and tell you that you cannot have Hungarian bread because you don't speak Hungarian, didn't speak a word of it. And we were arrested, we were sent to military prison. It was like the end of 1940 to 41. And we were there maybe a month.

MJ: This was a Hungarian prison?

AB: Yeh, yeh, we were arrested and sent to Uzhgorod[3] which was the, I guess top military government there. And they just looked at us. They couldn't believe who they brought. I mean, the dumb police and the dumb detectives, who did you bring? A big Communist. She's a big Communist. And my hands were still swollen. It was a month after. I didn't know Hungarian, but there were people with me that did and there was a general, he says who in the world--why didn't you bring the real people? She's a Communist, she's 16 years old? And they let us go.

MJ: When you say we...

AB: We, that was me, my sister, my younger brother. My sister was 18. I was 16, my younger brother was 14. So they said, "They, they are Communists? Look at them."

MJ: I assumed that it was just you because you were the one that confessed that you had done this.

AB: Yeh, yeh.

MJ: They kept your brother and sister?

AB: Yeh, they kept my brother and sister, too.

MJ: Did they mistreat them, too?

AB: Not in the military prison. No, only I got the beatings. I was--I spit at them. And I, I just said everything I wanted to. I figured the hell with it, I can't, I cannot let this go.

MJ: And you paid for it.

AB: Yeh. But in the military prison, they didn't mistreat us.

MJ: Then, after a month?

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[3]Uzhgorod – alternate spelling Uzhhorod, capital of Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine, a city of military importance which was in various periods, under the control of Russia, Ukraine, and Czechoslovakia; Hungarian occupation 1938-1944. Became part of Ukraine after WWII. (article "Uzhhorod, Ukraine", www.kehilalinks.jewishgen.org)

AB: After a month, once we were dragged in a snow-like from the jail to that military government, big *mahofs* [big shots], and I see my mother in Uzhgorod that was pretty far. I see my mother and she cried, she was just too glad. She thought they hanged us already because here, you don't have, you have nothing there. So I see her there, and I just waved to her. She said, "Don't," like put your hand down and we were released. That was like after a month, we were released like the next day. She did go to, to Jewish organizations there. They might have had a word. I still don't know. She never told us. They released us, but they sent us from the military prison, from Uzhgorod to Chust which was a smaller town to the civilian government and we were still there two days in jail. After that, they let us go home. But we had to report every Friday to the local police, every Friday.

MJ: The Hungarian police?

AB: Yes, the Hungarian. And after a while, it became dangerous because that was the time that they packed up girls under 18 and sent them to the front and my father had a friend from first World War, a doctor, in Budapest and somehow he got in touch with them and I was sent out to Budapest. And I worked for them as a maid, not as a Jew, as a maid.

MJ: Was the doctor a non-Jew?

AB: He was Jewish. He was a very religious Jewish. I don't want to put his name because he has a son in New York, Dr. Rosenau. He was just like--they were both just like my parents. I was lucky to fall in there. They were very good to me. I worked hard, but who cares, I worked hard on the farm, I didn't care. Then, then it got very bad. They sent me to their daughter, also to work as a maid.

MJ: Where did she live?

AB: In Budapest. Her husband was a lawyer, and I ran into a lot of trouble there.

MJ: How did that happen?

AB: The problem was that her husband told me that because our president, Benes, Czechoslovakian, was a Communist, so we had it coming. We were all Communists, that's why we suffered and we lost everything and I was in prison and it can never happen to him because he's a decorated general. So, I said to him, so is my father, not a general, but a lieutenant, very decorated from first World War, but he has no right at all. So, I ran into a lot of problems with them. I mean, I saw the do-gooders. I just can't stand the Jewish do-gooders. I don't mind the *goyim*, I don't expect nothing from of them, but the Jewish do-gooder, I go mad up to today, this date. The do-gooders are a tragedy, more than anybody else.

MJ: I agree. I do agree.

AB: So, then Dr. Rosenau took me back and gave me a few lessons. He said I understand how you feel but keep quiet, your mouth is going to get you into trouble. Talking to him was healing. I said how can I be quiet if he tells me that because we were

Communists, we suffer. And, then, they started to round up the Jews in Budapest. My two brothers were in Budapest. I got them apprentice in electric with an electrician through Dr. Rosenau. The apprentice couldn't keep, the apprenticeship couldn't keep them anymore and all and they picked up and went home and I begged them stay or maybe, I don't know what. I came to see them and they went home and they came into the biggest fire in Yasin. They were rounded up and put in a ghetto, straight to Auschwitz so I had my two brothers and I lost them.

MJ: This was after the Germans? The Germans were now occupying all of Czechoslovakia?

AB: This was already in Budapest.

MJ: I'm sorry, you were in Hungary then.

AB: Yes. As long as the king lived, I mean as long as the king was 40, he wasn't there, I was shocked how good the Jews still in Budapest lived. But then when the Germans came, Eichmann came to Budapest, in 1944, and, and that was very bad. It started to be bad and Budapest started to be bad anywhere.

MJ: Were you in touch with your parents during this time?

AB: I was in touch with them till about April of 1944 and then when they took them to a ghetto and send them--they sent a postcard that Dr. Rosenau didn't want to give me, but then he did and I had no idea, it was so hazy. That was the last time, the very last time till after the war that I found out what happened to them. They're under the [unclear] Passover and they kept them in the ghetto and [unclear] and from there, they put them on the trains and straight--and Eichmann was in a hurry. Yes, yes. It was very, very tough to run away. Even some young people run away, the local Hungarians killed them. People say that the Jews didn't fight back, or didn't, they did. My sister kicked an SS in Bergen-Belsen and was shot to death just before the liberation.

MJ: She did what?

AB: She kicked him. And that was enough. How much can you, how much can you--I mean, you, you have to have such self-discipline.

MJ: So, things are getting bad now?

AB: Things are going very bad. And Dr. Rosenau talked to me because I was so heartbroken that I lost my two brothers that they left. And I really already lost--I didn't care about nothing and I said to Dr. Rosenau, whatever will happen with [unclear] with anything, if I go, I have to take a couple of Germans with me. I cannot just die. He says, hold it, hold it. Jewish people need young people, and that was in the summer of '44, and Dr. Rosenau got me the first passport to a Swedish house where Raoul Wallenberg was. I had no idea what it is and he says don't question, I don't know myself. It just came out. He was very involved. It just came up. Go to this address and stay there, and it was with my picture and all. So I went to this address and he, he himself went to Swedish house, to different one. And I went there and I didn't have contact with Dr. Rosenau or his family and all. And when I came there, they gave me a

little cot with a lot of people in one room. I didn't care. About two days later, a woman started to cry. She was running from the street with two girls and she started crying. They like didn't want her there so I gave her my passport just to be able to save her and again, I lost hope. It was like the end of December.

MJ: When you gave the woman your passport, did you have to leave the house?

AB: Yes, because the Germans would come. The Hungarian Nazis would come with the Germans every day and once I hided under the bed, and I just saw a young woman with two children. Then I left and I hided out for a while, in bombed up houses with a--you know, there were plenty food there. They were bombed out. And I wasn't afraid or anything. Then, I just walked out I guess, got depressed or what and the Germans grabbed a hold of me. It was in December, '44. And they joined me up with the transport that they marched. It was a death march. It was very cold. And I felt good. Here I am between my own people. I'm sick and tired to hide out, and I'm lonely. I'm here with my own people, maybe I will see my parents. But as we marched and was snowing and cold, somebody just pulled me. Somebody pulled me and I said okay. They pulled me out to be shot or whatever because they did that, and I wind up on a truck and I was taken to another Swedish house. It was Raoul Wallenberg who pulled out all the young people. We were a truck full of young people. That was his aim, to save as much young. I wound up again in another Swedish house between December and January 20, 1945 and the Russians came into Budapest.

MJ: You were still in the Swedish house when the Russians came?

AB: Yes. I was still in Swedish house and there was a lot of commotion there because they were looking for somebody and all that, and I speak fluent Russian. And I said to some of my friends, let me go and talk to them, let me go and talk. No, they will rape you, you're a young girl, you can't. Hide out a few days then the more civilized army comes. It happened so we hided out in big barrels and they with bayonets, they stick the barrels. And, I think it was a week after when the, it already had settled a little bit, you know, the first are the wildest, they go and--I went to them--no, I just walked out and they were looking again from somebody and I started to speak to them in Russian. You're a spy and you're spying and what did you do; and I'm not a spy; and I'm Jewish and all that and I still had hidden my yellow star in my pocket. And they were ready to deport me, but then came a Misha, he was a driver to the captain that interviewed me, and he said, well, talk to me Yiddish so I start talking to him Yiddish. Misha. Oh, yeah, she's Jewish and all that and I got a pass and first, I begged they should send milk and bread to the house where I was, I know the people, children. They did. The Russians did.

MJ: To the Swedish house?

AB: Yeh. There was no bread so they did send bread and whatever. They did send for a few days. And they engaged me right away in translating. So, I translated for

them till Czechoslovakia got free. Then, I, I tried to go back to Yasin. I couldn't. Every time would go close, I would like pass out. I just couldn't and I never went back. I'm sorry I didn't because I should have. Twice I tried and I just couldn't.

MJ: I can certainly understand that.

AB: But it was wrong. You, I don't know, whatever, I couldn't go back. But as soon as Brno was free where I went to school, I went back there. And I stayed there for a couple years. I finished high school.

MJ: Who did you stay with?

AB: I stayed with two cousins. Yeh, we stayed together. We got a little apartment. We stayed together, and I went at night to finish high school. Then, I enrolled into nursing school.

MJ: In Czechoslovakia?

AB: Yeh. I needed a high school diploma which I didn't have. And I went for 18 months, then they demanded that you had to join the Communist party. I had nothing against the Communist party, but I just am cold for all parties, period. I didn't want to join the Communist party. I was thrown out of school.

MJ: What did you do?

AB: I volunteered to the *Hagannah* in Czechoslovakia and you were trained. And since I had that medical education a little bit, I knew how to do first aid. And I hoped to go to Israel, but they assigned me to pick up the Jewish orphans.

MJ: In Czechoslovakia?

AB: Yeah, so I picked up quite a few of them, quite a few Jewish orphans. On the last, there were about 18. Then I went to Israel with the Jewish orphans. They waited for them already. They waited, I mean the organizations and all, they knew that the Jewish orphans, that was the last group that they coming, and they waited.

MJ: Where were these children, where were they hidden?

AB: These children were with people, with non-Jewish people.

MJ: With Christian families?

AB: Yes.

MJ: Were there any problems?

AB: Yes, it was a big problem.

MJ: Can you tell me about that?

AB: Yes, it was a big problem. Some of them gave them up.

Tape one, side two:

MJ: I'm speaking with, to Anna now on tape one, side two. And we were just discussing identifying and getting these Jewish children. Can you tell me more about that?

AB: Okay. There was an article in the newspapers with the Jewish Agency that there is a reward, a reward of $1,000 which was a lot of money for each known Jewish child. Of course, the people who had them didn't volunteer. There were only two families that volunteered and they probably came forth which I had nothing to do with. All I had to do was talk to the people, because I'm fluent, it's my lang--was my school language. Talk to them, try to persuade them. I had quite a hard time, quite a hard time to talk to them and persuade them and I went again and again and I talked to them. It's nice of you that you did this and God will bless you and all that, but they Jewish children. Their parents were killed. I'm sure the parents rewarded you nice. And one family told me sure, we live in their house right here. So I say you have the house, let them go, they belong to the Jewish people, let them go. Some agreed and others--there were big fights, there were tremendous fights. We had two little boys. They were seven and they started to understand they were with, with them three years, but they started to understand suddenly what happened. And somebody showed them their parents' picture and told them what happened to them, so they run away and they came to us. The three little girls that I got, their father did not want them. The mother got killed, and the father remarried and he did not want them.

MJ: A Jewish father?

AB: Yes, yes. So, all in all, I took the last 18 children to Israel. But it was a heartbreaking experience because as good as the Czech people are, when it comes to children, they didn't give them up easily, but most of them did. I'm sure there was some hiding that we never find out, but most of them did.

MJ: Did people get rewards for turning them in? Was it the family that got the $1,000 reward?

AB: Yes.

MJ: Or…

AB: Those that informed and the family.

MJ: …someone who acknowledged that [unclear].

AB: Yes.

MJ: …who got--I'm just confused about…

AB: Okay, those that gave the names to the Jewish Agency got $1,000 and the families, if they came forward voluntarily, they got 'em, too. Okay. So actually, like we bought the children, $1,000 a head.

MJ: And where did you take the children?

AB: I took them to Haifa with the boat.

MJ: But what route did you take?

AB: We took, we went by train from Brno to Prague. In Prague, we took another train and we went down through Austria, Italy, Trani, and in Trani, a boat waited for us, and I took them with a boat to Haifa, Israel.

MJ: Was that--there was still-it was not an easy trip, was it?

AB: It was a very hard trip because there wasn't not much food and not much water. It was a some kind of a freight ship.

MJ: A freight ship?

AB: Freight ship. Yeh. But the children were used to hardships, and we got 'em there. It was hard, it wasn't easy, it was very hard. You need special food and care, and they had psychological problems, especially the two girls that their father didn't want them. I had a lot of problems with them. We got 'em there.

MJ: Was landing in Haifa, any problem?

AB: No, in 1949, no.

MJ: Oh, this is '49?

AB: This is '49.

MJ: Oh, I'm, I'm sorry, I didn't realize.

AB: This was '49. No, absolutely not, because it was already Israel. Okay.

MJ: Right. I didn't realize it was '49.

AB: It was in May, 1949. No, it was no problem.

MJ: Did you stay in Israel?

AB: Yes, I, I stayed in Israel. I went to the hospital and I find my professor who teach me nursing school and I got a job there. I stayed in Israel, but I met a guy on the boat. He was the engineer of the boat, and we got married there. He had his parents in Massachusetts so we came for a visit, and then he just didn't want to go back.

MJ: And you, and you stayed with him?

AB: I couldn't, I didn't have money. I went to the Jewish Agency, they said, well you're married, your husband doesn't want to go, you're not going to take the little girl, my daughter.

MJ: Oh, you had a baby?

AB: Yeh, I had a baby, it was born here, yeh, I couldn't go back.

MJ: So, you stayed.

AB: Yeh.

MJ: I wanted to ask you, if you will, to tell me--I think the, the march that you have described, was that the march to the border in Austria? The death march that you described.

AB: The death mar--I have no idea where they took. I have no idea. I know that the people that marched, they never got alive, they were shot on the way. I, I really don't know, and I didn't find out.

MJ: What date were they?

AB: It was like in the middle of December. The middle of December that they marched.

MJ: 19…

AB: 19-…

MJ: '44.

AB: '44. 1944.

MJ: That's when they decided not to use the trains for the Jews.

AB: Well, they, they couldn't.

MJ: They marched them to the--I think that what you're describing the Austrian border...

AB: They marched them, it was a death march. Okay.

MJ: Terrible, it was terrible.

AB: They couldn't use the trains because the Russians already were--the Russians surrounded Budapest. We used to hear the shooting. So, they couldn't use them--so they just, you know, the Nazis then, the Germans, they were so preoccupied with the Jews that they would have won the war, but to them, it was more important to kill the Jews. They were preoccupied. And when I worked--I don't know if you want this on the--yeh.

MJ: Yes, I do.

AB: When I worked for the Russian commandant, he took me to the military camp because I'm fluent in German, to translate.

MJ: How many languages do you speak? You've already named four.

AB: About four really good and Yiddish, of course. And when he took me to the camp to translate from German to Russian and from Hungarian to Russian, we, we took this general out, the German general took him to his office and he gave me a written list so he shouldn't talk to me, he should listen. But the Russian soldiers had somebody else who understands German to make sure that I translate right. So, and then the list says your name, your rank and where are you from, what's your family consists of and all that and suddenly, the trap, how come you killed another Russian, another German officer? How can one German officer kill the other one? You know, I, I liked that question, I asked him and he got deaf, I thought he was going to kill 'em. He says, "What do you mean I killed him, he's a rotten deserter. To him, he threw my soldiers out of the trucks and took the trucks to transport Jews. To him, it was more important to transfer Jews than to fight them, to the Russians." And the general, the Russian, says tell him to repeat it, again, and he repeated it so he killed another German office because the officer recognized him, that officer made him empty his soldiers so he should have trucks to…

MJ: Transfer.

AB: …transfer the Jews. That's one of the experiences that I have translating. But I'll tell you, if you would have seen them fighting among themselves, the German,

the noble parasites, that's all they are is noble parasites. I have never seen or heard that, that the, the hungry Jews should fight in concentration camp like they fought in the detention center in Budapest. Fighted each other.

MJ: Yeh. God that must have been hard for you to work translating for these Germans.

AB: Well, I spoke for the Russians. They gave me bread, they gave my friends bread, I worked for them, and I waited for the right time to get back to Czechoslovakia. I, I--it wasn't hard. I just make a big mistake that I didn't, didn't beat them up. I am still sorry. Didn't beat 'em up, but once this Mischa, this Jewish guy, the chauffeur, says here is a gun, go ahead, you're burning up, go ahead, go ahead. Oh, yes, I regret it very much.

MJ: The Hungarian, Arrow Cross, did you have any experience with them?

AB: Yeah, well, they were the ones who arrested me. They were the ones who beat me up.

MJ: That was the Arrow Cross.

AB: They were the ones who took me to a military prison; and they were the ones who tortured my parents; who put my parents in the ghetto; and they were the ones who killed people in Budapest on the street. You don't know how many. Once I walked on the street in Budapest you see them before, even before the Swedish house. Dr. Rosenau used to send medications with me to the ghetto, between one and three and what I used to see in those streets how they beat up the Jewish people is unbelievable. It just unbelievable. That's why I'm still mad at myself that I just didn't kill a few. I honestly regret that. It hurts me.

MJ: I understand. Were the Hungarians, the, I'm not talking about the Arrow Cross, the, the ordinary Hungarian Christians, did they attempt to help in any way, did you experience any help or on the other hand, any harm from just ordinary Hungarians?

AB: Yes, they harmed. They joined up. Not all of 'em. There wasn't that much time. You see, in April '44, the Germans occupied Budapest and threw the king out, Horthy.

MJ: Horthy.

AB: So there wasn't much time, but they helped, yes, oh yes. There's plenty scum there. They helped. As far as I should hear somebody help anybody, I didn't. I did not, okay.

MJ: What was life like in the Swedish house?

AB: Life like in the Swedish house, they got rationing, food and thanks God that the little children got first. And it was pretty orderly because they appointed Jewish people that worked there. It was pretty orderly. There were roll calls. When the Nazis came in, they hided a few here and there. I was hiding out a few days. And a lot of people gave up the bread, the little piece of bread and tea for the older people. It was, was great caring, what can I tell you, great caring from all sides. And it wasn't long

enough, you know. Thanks god, it wasn't too long. A couple months, but there was great caring there.

MJ: Did the Nazis come in? You said before that they would come in and look at papers?

AB: Yes.

MJ: If you had a Swedish passport, or papers, they would always leave people alone then?

AB: Yes. They would shovel 'em on this side. Then they looked again and they looked again and they're so dumb, believe me, they didn't know how to read. Some people had legitimate, some people had falsified, but they did check almost daily. The Germans was preoccupied with killing the Jews. Otherwise, God forbid, they might have won the war. On the other hand, they are lousy soldiers. They are--they claim they're noble, I say noble parasites. A German is not a fighter. He likes to enslave people, he likes to steal. They stoled everything from Czechoslovakia, everything, and if that doesn't go right for them, they start a war which they will soon. Believe me united German is the worst thing that could have happened to the world. The worst thing. I hope I'm wrong.

MJ: Did you ever meet Raoul Wallenberg?

AB: I never met Raoul Wallenberg. Even when he pulled me in, it was him himself because that's what a lot of people told me. You know, you take a look, somebody dressed with a hat and all. Never, I didn't know his name till after the war. After the war, I tried to [unclear] some other peo-. We tried to go to the Swedish Embassy. They didn't have an office. The Swiss represented them and we went already and we, we wanted to see him, we wanted--in fact, I have a whole diary here. It's written a lot about. I just translated not long ago from Czech.

MJ: Whose diary is it?

AB: My.

MJ: Your own?

AB: It's not exactly about me. It's all the things that I saw. Yes. It's all the things--and I had stashes of paper and the papers started to rot and I went in 1981 to the first Holocaust gathering in Israel, and they encouraged, they said let's not die with our memories. So, I came home and I started to glue together these pieces of paper and translating them in English and this is it.

MJ: Would you consider letting Gratz have a copy of that?

AB: I want to publish it, you understand.

MJ: Oh, certainly.

AB: I don't mind. I, I be glad to give them that.

MJ: Well, if you're publishing then we'll...

AB: Yes. Absolutely, I'm planning to give it to the Holocaust Museum everywhere, but I do want to publish it for my children, for my grandchildren because

there are things that I didn't dare to tell them so it's too bloody. Not that I want to protect them, but while they were growing up, I didn't want to raise them with so much hate. I told them everything as the time went on, but here is a lot of things that most of all, there's a lot of things about the Jewish do-gooders, a lot of.

MJ: Would you like to tell us more about that now? You, you talked about it somewhat.

AB: Well, like this guy, Dr. Rosenau's son-in-law helped me so much that he tells me, I have, I have no idea what Communism is. People call me a Comm-. They hit me. The Hungarians hit me because I'm a Comm-. I don't know what a Communist is.

MJ: You didn't know what it was.

AB: I had no idea.

MJ: But other Jewish do-gooders. What are you…

AB: Okay, the Hungarian Jews used to think that they special. They were lucky as long as the King Horthy was there, they were lucky, so maybe they were special, but that doesn't mean that they should put a curse on us. It's just one of those things so what I call a do-gooder is not only that he or she doesn't want to get involved with the goodness of his own people, but he creates hate, and he wants to be a better person. He's going to shake hands with anybody, even with the PLO on the account of the Jews because he wants to be good. The hell with you, sit in your own home, but leave us alone. That is what I call a do-gooder.

MJ: I understand. Your, you mentioned a brother who survived in Israel.

AB: Yes.

MJ Were there any other members of the family?

AB: Well, my both brothers survived in Russia.

MJ: The other one?

AB: Yes, they were, they were in a concentration camp in Kamchatka which is very cold and my brother who is in Israel, he lost a toe there. But because they were both tailors, they were able to survive. The other one survived, too. The one who is in Israel, he came back to Czechoslovakia. And the other one who also was freed, after seven years being in concentration camp, can you imagine young boys in the Czech uniform, they put them in concentration camps, it took him a year to go from Siberia to Kujbyse where he got very sick and they took him off the train and put him in a hospital. And when they put him in a hospital, he met this Jewish girl she worked there, he got married there, and he remained there, and I found out about him, and I got him out in 1970. He came here with his wife, two children, two teenage children, his mother-in-law. And then five years after living here, and things got calm, he died. He died at age 54.

MJ: And the rest of the family was killed?

AB: Yeh. Yes, and my brother in Israel.

MJ: Where, where's your brother in Israel?

AB: He lives in a kibbutz, he lives in a kibbutz for 41 years, yes. He has…

MJ: He's has a family.

AB: Yeh. He has three children, two daughters and a son and grandchildren eight.

MJ: Oh, wonderful.

AB: And his son was here living with me here for a year because he got a fellowship from Drexel. He's a computer engineer. So, I let him have the house for a year and his wife and two children.

MJ: Did they go back to Israel?

AB: Oh, yeah, they went back. They went back in August. He finished his studies, he got his Masters. They went back.

MJ: Is there anything else you want to tell us?

AB: Well, what I worry about now is Israel. Indifference about the Jews, the indifference about the Jews kill me and especially those that speak up against Israel. They should hide in a hole and leave, leave us alone. That's what I worry very much.

MJ: What happened to the doctor that was…?

AB: Dr. Rosenau came here to New York. He had a son. I hope his son still lives here, also a doctor. He came to New York and I don't know which year, but I wrote to his daughter in Budapest and she gave me the address. By the time the address came and everything, him and his wife died so I didn't have a chance to see them and thank them because they were like my family. They were very good to me.

MJ: When you mentioned in--were you in Buda or Pest when the Russians were surrounding the city? Where was the Swedish house in Buda or Pest?

AB: The Swedish house that were in Budapest.

MJ: I just want to know what side.

AB: Buda--on the side of the Danube, yes. There were several of them.

MJ: I think they had some on both sides, but most of them on the Buda side.

AB: I'm not sure.

MJ: You could hear the Russian army, could hear the guns?

AB: We heard the guns at night. We heard them.

MJ: Were people very hopeful then?

AB: Yes, yes, people were hopeful because at least they will, they won't, won't be killed because they're Jews. We sort of knew that the Swedish house could not exist forever and anyway it came down like from the skies, you know, Raoul Wallenberg according to history, came in June.

MJ: Yes.

AB: It was just a few months, yes. We were very hopeful, and everything the Russians did free the Jews and ripped up their yellow stars from their shirts. Yes.

MJ: During this time, prior to this, you know, when Eichmann was doing his terrible job, were you aware, do you, did you know about Auschwitz? Did people know?

AB: During the war, I didn't know. There was no newspaper, no radio, I didn't know. But right after the war, Even right after the Germans occupied Budapest, I realized, I realized it just hope against hope. I hoped, I hoped that they will live and there was some living but not my family. I just hoped, constantly hoped at least my two brothers that, that they sort of run out of my, of my grip. I had 'em there in Budapest, and they ran back home and got killed. Yes. Yes, I hoped but...

MJ: Were you getting any guidance from Jewish leaders? Was there any organized, organized guidance?

AB: There was any organized guidance in Budapest, you mean? I don't know. I never seeked them out. I didn't seek them out because I got busy with this, with this translation things and I was able to provide bread and milk for the people in that Swedish house. I don't really know. I was preoccupied with finding somebody from the family, I was preoccupied with finding Raoul Wallenberg, just to say thank you. So, you know some people, we went to the Swiss Embassy and they told us that the Count, Count Wallenberg, doesn't want to see nobody. He went back to Sweden. They didn't tell us the truth, then. Then, when I went back to Czechoslovakia, I went to Prague. I went into Swedish Embassy and I was told he's safe and sound in Sweden. I wrote to all the senators. I have a whole pile here. I wrote to the senators and congressmen and one senator wrote to me it's none of your business, he has a mother. In fact, in my, in my diary...

MJ: What senator wrote that to you?

AB: Excuse me?

MJ: What senator wrote that?

AB: I have papers here. This is, this is about Kowahezyk another story about the Ukrainians did. [short pause, going through papers] This committee, I didn't change much I guess. I went to a meeting, and they had this Unger, a Swedish helper, sort of for Wallenberg. He was there in this meeting talking, and I said to him, "Mr. Unger, how can it be that you are Raoul Wallenberg's coworker and you were in the same car, how can it be that they didn't take you and they took him." In the meeting here in Rittenhouse Square, the leader, Ms. Feldman, whatever her name, she was very, she was very mad at me for that question. But there was some young guy that said she asked a question, answer it. It was erased, the question. I still don't understand.

MJ: He didn't answer it?

AB: No. He didn't answer. How come you didn't know where he is for so many years, that we had to dig out. We had to get in, in contact with Israel with a guy whose daughter lives in Israel that supposedly was Wallenberg in prison. And here in my diary, it mentions a lot of time I had the feeling either somebody in the Swedish Embassy or in his family wanted him dead. Why didn't they do nothing for so many years? Why didn't they try to find him? Swedish, Sweden is a neutral country. I have here copy of a telegram then the submarine the Russian got stuck I sent to the Swedish government, a

telegram, don't let that sub, they go, they let Wallenberg go. They never answer. I mean there must be something very fishy went on, very fishy. A guy like this from a neutral country should disappear and nobody shouldn't know and this Unger supposedly that sells books now, he doesn't know nothing. He hated the questions, they resented my question, resented it very much. [short pause, looking through papers]

MJ: Would you like me to turn this off?

AB: No, I don't mind. I just want to find a copy of the telegram that I sended.

MJ: Is that the mailgram?

AB: Yeh.

MJ: That's it?

AB: Yeh.

MJ: Would you like to read it?

AB: Oh, this I wrote lately. Sure. I mean, I didn't stop writing and I didn't stop calling and I didn't stop and didn't get nowhere.

MJ: I think I want to read this into the tape. This is a reply from Armand Hammer. You know, he just died.

AB: Yes.

MJ: This is dated November 11, '86. Dear Mrs. Berenholz, I have your letter of November 2nd requesting my assistance regarding the release of Raoul Wallenberg from the Soviet prison. It is my understanding that Mr. Wallenberg is not alive. Thank you for writing to me. Sincerely, Armand Hammer. You have spent years trying to help...

AB: Yes, look at this, here is the telegram...

MJ: This is wonderful. Would you like to read that into the tape?

AB: Sure. Let me just find--yeh. Here, October 21, 1979.

MJ: What does it say?

AB: Okay, this mailgram I sent to the Swedish government in Sweden. [short pause] Oh, this something else. This from the State Department.

MJ: This is a letter of reply from Hodding Carter, III, Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs. In reply to your comments to President Carter on the fate of Mr. Raoul Wallenberg, we are pleased to have the benefit of your thinking. According to the Department of State records, Mr. Wallenberg was assigned to the Swedish mission in Budapest, Hungary during World War II and disappeared in January of '45 following the arrival of Soviet troops from Budapest. In response to repeated inquiries from the Swedish government, the Soviet government in February of '57, stated that Mr. Wallenberg had died in Oslo prison on July 17, of '47.[4] Despite the fact that the Swedish government has officially raised the issue of Mr. Wallenberg's fate on a number of subsequent occasions citing that several persons claim to have seen him alive in the '50s,

[4]Raoul Wallenberg "reportedly died in a Soviet prison in 1947, although the exact date and circumstances of his death are still unknown." (www.ushmm.org)

the Soviet government has provided no additional information. It goes on to say that what, what Wallenberg's family has done. I--this is, this is so wonderful actually from the time of the liberation until really even today, you have been working.

AB: Take a look at this. This is to…

Tape two, side one:

MJ: I'm on tape two, side one. We were off the tape and Anna and I were just talking, she was telling me how she saved Jewish boys because of her facility for languages and I thought this is also valuable. Would you--I'm sorry, but can you repeat, go back to where you started, please?

AB: Okay, I worked for the Russian military office, translating and it was mainly from German prisoners to Russian language from German to Russian.

MJ: This was in '45.

AB: 194--summer of 1945. And once, Dr. Rosenau's son-in-law came to me and he said I know you speak Russian, come with me. They caught my brother on the street. That's what the Russians would--they catch somebody on the street for the numbers, they had to fill out a quota. I said sure, anytime, I would do anything for Dr. Rosenau. And we went and it was another commandant, another one, not the one I worked for, and I translated for him and they let him out. I said, why do you pick up people just like that, let him out. They let him out and they let two other Jewish men out with this man.

MJ: Why were they picking these people up?

AB: They needed numbers and some run away, you know, some really prisoners, military. No military prisoners, Germans, Hungarians, they took off. It wasn't a real prison camp, it was just a detention center so they ran away so they needed to fulfill a prison, a number, and that's what they did.

MJ: The Russians would replace escaped prisoners with...

AB: With anybody from the street.

MJ: I see.

AB: I believed this man and I got his brother out, just by talking, by saying he's not guilty of nothing, why you holding him and all that, let him out. And they let two other Jewish men out with him and that makes my blood burn more because would I have known then about Mr. Wallenberg, wherever he is, we would have probably breaken down the, the detention center. We would have probably broken down--there were about 11 of us together at the time. We would have broken down any wall just to get him out, and, and we could not get any information from nowhere, never, nobody had an answer for us, nobody. And that pain went on year after year after year.

MJ: Anna, you said before that you have such pain for your parents, for those that you lost and for Mr. Wallenberg it's, and it's so obvious.

AB: This pain never goes away. You just learn to live with it. The reason I learned to live with it because I didn't want what the Germans wanted me to do, to die, to kill myself. So you just learn to live with it. It's hard. For me, it was a cure, I had to work very hard to raise my three children. I was busy. It was good to be very busy, but

if I have a free moment, it's bad, it's very bad. It never goes away, you just learn to live with it.

MJ: Thank you so very much.

AB: You're welcome. I appreciate your coming.

MJ: We appreciate you.