HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

CHARLOTTE BING

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Fred Stamm
Date: February 11, 1981

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CB - Charlotte Bing [interviewee]
FS - Fred Stamm [interviewer]
IS - Ilsa Stamm [wife of interviewer]
Date: February 11, 1981

Tape one, side one:

FS: This is Fred Stamm of Gratz College. This is a study of German Jewry under Professor Nora Levin. I will be interviewing Mrs. Bing, and the next voice you hear on this tape will be Mrs. Bing. Mrs. Bing, where in [unclear] town that you come from [unclear] part of Germany?

CB: Since 1918.

FS: And what's the name of the town?

CB: Bielitz [Bielsko].

FS: And near which big city is Bielitz located?

CB: Near Katowice. Gleiwitz, Hindenburg.

FS: How close to the German border would you say?

CB: About two and one-half hours by train.

FS: And did you have a large--you told me last week you had a large German population?

CB: It was mostly German in 1937. They didn't even have Polish schools.

FS: You went to a German school?

CB: I went to a Jewish school, four years, and then I went over to high school, to a German school.

FS: What do you recall from your school days?

CB: My director, who was a very religious Catholic but by no means an anti-Semite, but there was a professor, a young professor, who belonged to the Nazi party. In fact, there was an incident where he made a few antisemitic remarks, and I took the swastika that was behind his desk, I took his swastika, and he was just raving mad, but I took it to the principal. This was it.

FS: Well, the instructions in the high school, where you went to high school, the instructions were in German or in Polish?

CB: German.

FS: In German.

CB: They were called *Deutsche Stadt Gymnasium*.

FS: How did you find the student body, your fellow students? Did you find a good amount of antisemitism among them?

CB: There was antisemitism, yes, but there were a few that were very nice. Like, always, there's always a few very antisemitic. Yes. But since the principal was a big Jewish friend, I can say he kept them quiet.

FS: And when did you, from which year to which year did you attend this high school, this German high school?

CB: From ’29 to ’36.

FS: Okay. Hitler took power in Germany in 1933. Subsequent to that, did you find any change of behavior among the student body or among the staff?

CB: No. We knew that a few belonged to the Nazi party. There was a secret Nazi party in my town, and we knew that they had meetings, but in school, in fact, there was no incident whatsoever.

FS: The Jewish congregation in your town, did it function unhindered until…

CB: Yes. In fact, it was a big congregation.

FS: How many people, how many families would you say, were there?

CB: I just found out from my friend there was between 7,000 and 8,000 Jewish people in Bielitz.

FS: How did most of them make their living?

CB: It was a textile town. There was mostly textile factories and stores. Not all, but let’s say 80% of the people were very well off.

FS: So to the best of your knowledge, were any Jews in the judicial branch of the town government?

CB: No.

FS: None at all.

CB: And if, I don’t know.

FS: If Jews went to court against non-Jews, did they have an opportunity to win their case?

CB: Yes, because there were Jewish lawyers. Yes, they could.

FS: Do you know, were Jews drafted into the army?

CB: Yes.

FS: Did you know young people, young men who went?

CB: To them, it was a must.

FS: Okay. The young men you knew, did they complain about any antisemitism in the Polish army?

CB: Yes.

FS: Did Jews have the opportunity to advance in the ranks, or become officers in the Polish army?

CB: There was officers. I had an uncle, he was an officer, and my first husband was an officer. But you really can count them on the fingers. Very few.

FS: Do you remember the incident in 1936 when the Foreign Minister of Poland, Mr. Beck, called from the League of Nations to get the Jews out of Poland? Do you remember that?

CB: Yes. Mr. Beck was always working with the *Führer*. It was a known fact.

FS: Were there any opportunities missed to get out? Did you have any opportunities to leave?

CB: No. We had no opportunities to go out because from the moment Hitler started in Germany, my mother tried everything to get out. And we couldn't get out.

FS: Tell me, how many, did you say, Jews were in the town?

CB: About 7,000 to 8,000.

FS: Out of this 7,000 or 8,000, how many émigrés do you think you had until the collapse of Poland?

CB: I don't know if 50.

FS: Any more than 50?

CB: No. And in this 50, was mostly young people who went from the kibbutz…

FS: To Israel.

CB: To Palestine, what was then Palestine, in mostly illegal.

FS: Now, with the, with Hitler's invasion, you told me an instance the other day that the Jewish communities had distributed those Jews which were chased out of Germany in 1938, Polish Jews, which were chased out of Germany across the border. Can you repeat some of this, and maybe elaborate on the fate of these Jews?

CB: I forget to tell you, there was a special town where they came to. Just on the border from Poland. I forgot the town, but I visited the town with my mother. My mother went there from the sisterhood, and there came a few families to our hometown, maybe out of them, 20, 25.

FS: Did they live with other families?

CB: They did, in the beginning, yes. And then the Jewish community tried to give them jobs and living quarters, and little by little, they started living again, they fit in the community.

FS: Were there children among them?

CB: Yes, there were children too, yes.

FS: Well, with the collapse of Poland, tell us what happened then.

CB: Well, the Germans came in on Saturday morning, on the 2nd of September, and already they were greeted by the *Jugend Deutsche Partei* [German Youth Party, may be Hitler Youth] in their uniforms. And, a few days later, in the Jewish school, to the Jewish school, they called all the youths and all the Jewish men up to 50. And when we saw what was going on there, we just tried to get out.

FS: What was going on, can you elaborate on that?

CB: Yes, well, the Jewish men who went there, first they asked them a thousand questions, and then they started beating them up, and many of them were arrested, and the other ones, we never know, what fate will do with them. And a few days later came an order, we have to give up all the money we have, all the gold and all the silver.

FS: This order was to the entire Jewish community?

CB: To the entire Jewish community. And then they went from one apartment to another, from one house to another, and…

FS: Who went, the German SS? Or the Polish SS?

CB: No, no, the German SS. At that time, the Polish had nothing to do. Absolutely nothing.

FS: What was the--in the early days of Hitler's reign in Poland, what was the Polish population's reaction to these German…

CB: There was a few, there was a few who were, the real Polish, who actually believed that their homeland is Polish. They, of course, were against Hitler. But there were quite a few Poles when they saw the people escaping, women and children, they were shooting out of the windows. They had a few accidents, and children and women were shot, in Bielitz, on the street.

FS: You mean Jews?

CB: Yes, Jewish women.

FS: Jewish women. And what was the reaction of the Polish population to this? Was there any reaction? Did they sympathize with the Jews?

CB: Very few, very few, very few.

FS: Would you say that the antisemitism among the general populace was very deep-seated?

CB: Yes, yes. Because we had, two years before Hitler, we had a pogrom in Bielitz, when a Jew in a bar on a Friday evening shot a Pole, there was pogroms for the whole week.

FS: Now how did the Catholic Church react to all of this?

CB: Well, one Sunday morning, when it was really terrible, the Rabbi, in his [unclear], went to all of these priests, to the main street right up to the church where they were, it was 11:00 o'clock in the morning. He went right in and up to the priest, and he told him that after all, a drunk man killed a man, therefore not a whole nation can suffer, and the priest realized and he got up and he explained to his people and an hour later it was over.

FS: And up until that time there had been no reaction whatever from the Church or from the priests?

CB: No, nothing.

FS: To the best of your knowledge, was there any kindness other than this one incident, was there any kindness ever from the Church to help the Jews?

CB: I tell you, in the Catholic Church, there was a very old priest, and our Rabbi was pretty old and they were very good friends. But, if somebody had something against the Jews, the priest wouldn't come in if he wasn't asked. If he was asked, like the Rabbi asked him, look what's going on, then he stood up.

FS: So you not only had Catholics but you also had Protestants…

CB: Yes, we had Protestants too, but the Protestant community wasn't big. Poland, as such, is a Catholic country.

FS: Was there any actual fighting within the town when the Germans invaded?

CB: No.

FS: None at all. It was just an occupation?

CB: They just took over.

FS: Now, when, after Hitler had taken over, and after you had turned in the gold, silver, and other valuables, were there any changes made within the school systems? Could children attend these German schools?

CB: No. A Jewish child couldn't attend no schools whatsoever. The Jewish school was closed immediately.

FS: The Jewish school was closed immediately.

CB: A Jewish child could not attend, no school. Not a Polish school, and not a German school. There was no school whatsoever for Jewish child.

FS: Was stores permitted to operate after the occupation, was stores permitted to, Jewish stores permitted to operate?

CB: No. In fact, the stores closed two weeks before Hitler came, a week before Hitler came, the Jewish stores.

FS: How did people support themselves?

CB: What they still had, they had. It was a terrible mix-up, because the Polish police, like all the Polish people, were so disoriented, they had no idea what was going on. If you asked a policeman where should you go, everybody was running. So he directed you the same way the army was disappearing, you know, where the army was disappearing.

FS: The Polish army?

CB: Yes. And the German airplanes were shooting on the Polish army, and there were thousands and thousands of civilians, men and women and children, between them. It was terrible. It was just a mix-up. Nothing was in order. Everything was mixed up.

FS: Where did you go with your-- you were, I think you told me you were engaged at that time?

CB: I was at that time engaged, and we went to a town not far from my hometown, to Wadowice, near Krakow. At that time people believed that Hitler will only take--Bielitz will be the last town. What was Galicia, and real Polish, Hitler won't be interested, because of their language, there was no German, or very little German. They couldn't speak the language. This was our belief, but of course, we were mistaken.

FS: When you say people, are you referring to Jews or the general population?

CB: The general population. The general population, but especially the Jewish people, thought he will only take Bielitz. This will be the last town. And what is very

funny, after the war, the *Wiedergutmachung*[1] [Restitution] recognized only this town as the last, *zum Deutschen Kultur Circle ugehörend* [to belong to the German Culture Circle].

FS: Now, after you left, you went to…

CB: Wadowice.

FS: …Wadowice. How long did you stay there?

CB: Oh, about six weeks.

FS: You stayed there with your entire family?

CB: I stayed there with my parents, my brothers, my late husband, my aunt, my grandmother, and two people…

FS: And where did you stay?

CB: In my future in-law's house.

FS: And where did other Jews stay? Others who had fled? Were there many who had fled?

CB: Oh yeah. Not only to this town, but in different towns. They stayed, they stayed with relatives wherever-- sometimes you could rent a room. In this part, it wasn't so bad yet.

IS: Tell how you left your hometown, trying to save your husband.

CB: That was already in Wadowice. There was already in Wadowice. My first husband's father was a dentist. A very wealthy man, especially for such a little town. A very well known man, he was the president of the Jewish Community Center, and then we came to Wadowice. He had fled already from Wadowice and went to this part of Poland, where the Russians had taken over. We didn't know that, but one day, and SS man came in, a young fellow, with a doctor from the same hometown, and the SS man asked for my husband. And when my husband came, they asked him, "Where is your father? Because we have the *Jude* Goldberger, took all his fortune, and all his diamonds and gold, and, he's a Communist, and he went to the Communists. And you have to stay with us as long as your father comes back." And my husband answered him, "I'm very sorry, but I have no idea where my father or my mother is." He looked around, and finally he said to me, "I'll tell you something. You can take with you whatever you can pack within an hour. But this guy, this *Jude* Goldberger has to stay until his father comes back." And then he went around with me and he spoke with me German and he said he feels very sorry that with my German language, I'm Jewish. At least, he said, if I would have converted, I wouldn't be a real German, but at least I wouldn't be Jewish. And with this, he finds a room where it was a big library of my father-in-law. There was a book from Hitler in Polish, or about Hitler, that really smeared his name in the worst way, and he asked me if I can translate it, and I said yes. And I translated it to his liking. And he looked at me, and of course at that time I was a young girl, and he asked me if I

[1]Refers to reparations that the German government agreed to pay to the direct survivors of the Holocaust and those who were made to work as forced labor.

would like to have a drink, and I said yeah, of course, but as you know, you cannot get drinks if there is no permission from the German government. And he said, "Well, I will give you a note. Is there anyone who can get me some liquor?" I said, "Yes, my mother will go." He gave me a note, and my mother went for the liquor. She brought a couple of bottles. And I said to my mother, I try my best to get him drunk. Just get him out. Because if he is drunk, just get him out. So we closed the doors, and he was drinking, and he was telling me stories, on how beautiful Hitler is, and the daily plan, and how sorry he is that I am not a Catholic or at least a gentile person, and there was a big flower, and as quick as I could, he was drinking and I was pouring them into the flower.

FS: Did he make any personal advances?

CB: Yes, of course. And in the middle of everything, my mother knocked on the door and asked, "Everything is all right?" and I said, "Get out of here, yes, everything's all right." And he said, "You know, if this woman comes again, I'm going to shoot." I said, "You know, she wanted a drink, that's all." Well, he made advances, but luckily, he got so drunk that he fell in the floor and was asleep. And when I saw that he sleeps for half an hour, I went out and I knew where they were hiding. They were hiding with a, with a farmer.

FS: You mean your…

CB: You know, my whole family, yes. I went to this farmhouse, and my mother has told me that she has spoken already to the family, and at night they will try to get us to the next station in the next town. So when night came, we put my husband down, and put packs of straw on the top, and we were sitting on top. And we were passing the barracks where the soldiers were and as soon as…

FS: German soldiers?

CB: Yes. And as soon as they saw civilians, of course, they started shooting, and my mother was saying to the farmer, "I'll give you 10 dollars, I'll give you another 10 dollars, just go, go, go!"

FS: What, through the…

CB: Yes, yes. Another came to us, and another came to us. Well, he really went, and we came to the next town, that's about 3:00, 4:00 o'clock in the morning, and fortunately a train arrived, and there came a *Deutsche Flüchtlings* [German refugee] family, at least a high officer, but I don't know in what rank he was. A high officer approached me and said that is a *Flüchtlings* family, and the woman is very sick. If she can have the wagon…

FS: These were Gentiles?

CB: Gentiles, yes. And I said, "Yes, I can give you the wagon, but I have a sick old lady here in the wagon, and I need to go to Krakow to the doctor. If you put me on the train, you can have the wagon." So he put us on the train and we came to Krakow.

FS: And then how long did you remain in Krakow?

CB: In Krakow, we were about a year, a year and a half, then they put us to Plaszow, to the ghetto.

FS: And what did you do all this time in Krakow? How did you support yourself?

CB: You couldn't. You could do nothing.

FS: Did you have money?

CB: We had a little bit money. There still was a Jewish Community Center where they give you something. Whatever you had, you had a watch, you had a ring, you could sell.

IS: What was the date, what was the year?

CB: Forty [1940].

FS: This is my wife, Mrs. Ilsa Stamm asking questions.

IS: Now tell me something. This year you had to stay in Krakow, what did this more or less confined situation do to the morals of the Jews living there, to the marriages, to young people who were courting each other? What effect did it have on the morality of the Jews?

CB: The marriages were there in the hundreds in fact I might say…

FS: Are you saying that young people married?

CB: Yes.

FS: Go ahead.

CS: In fact, we were staying in line for a whole day to get married. Because it was the belief if you go into the ghetto, and at that time they were talking in the ghetto, if you were already living together, at least to be married.

FS: And how young were these youngsters who got married?

CB: Between 18 and 25, 26. Sometimes even older.

FS: So most of, most of the young people got married.

CB: They got married for different reasons. They got married because knowing in the ghetto we would live in one room and this was still another time like today, many of them went over to the Russians, and knowing-- not knowing where they would live or what they would live again they went together as a couple, it was much easier. Many of the people anyway wanted to get married, and were just surprised by the war. Like my wedding. I was supposed to get married on the 3 of September, and couldn't because Hitler was already here.

FS: Am I correct in saying that most of the Jewish families did not deteriorate?

CB: No. I would say the Jewish families got closer together, much closer together. Because we face death every day.

FS: Were there many children born?

CB: No, not to my knowledge.

FS: Were there many abortions that you know of?

CB: Yeah.

FS: Who performed these abortions?

CB: Doctors. They were not allowed, but they did.

FS: People simply didn't want children.

CB: We knew what was going on. There will be a ghetto. We saw already what was going on in Krakow.

FS: Yeah.

CS: So, for what reason?

IS: What did the Jewish community in Krakow, what were they able to do for you, in the line of food you said? Soup kitchen or…

CB: They gave out, at noontime we got soup, sometimes they had bread.

FS: Any clothing?

CB: No, there was no clothing, because there was no help from the outside.

FS: Were you helped from America in any way?

CB: Not at that time, no.

IS: Where was the wonderful Red Cross? Nowhere?...

FS: …I was going to ask the same question.

IS: Nowhere.

FS: Okay. Then, where-- did that ghetto eventually come about?

CB: Eventually, shortly after this, they opened the ghetto Plaszow.

FS: This was in Krakow?

CB: Not far from Krakow, in a suburb of Krakow.

IS: Would you spell that?

CB: P-L-A-S –C. I have to write it down, otherwise I cannot spell it.

FS: Please spell the town where the ghetto was to be erected?

CB: It's P-L-A-S-Z-O-W.

FS: Okay. Then you moved into this ghetto…

CB: They moved us.

FS: The entire Jewish community moved into it.

CB: The entire Jewish community.

FS: What were you able to take along into the ghetto?

CB: We had very little anyway. You could take, whatever you had you could take, what was very little.

IS: Did you have warm clothing? Blankets?

CB: Yeah. We had one blanket, one blanket. I had an old coat. Whatever was good, they had taken a long time ago. They moved us in…

IS: The Germans took, or the Polish?

CB: The Germans took of course. They moved us in, in one room, the whole family.

FS: Did you note that any-- did you have any contact with the Polish populace prior to this move into the ghetto?

CB: No, because in Krakow I was a stranger.

FS: Can you express your opinion whether the Polish populace was happy about this event of moving the Jews into this ghetto? Were they different, or did they help, or what was their reaction?

CB: It was a very mixed reaction. There were Poles who were very happy, because they themselves had become antisemitic. There were Poles who were scared to death that next they will come. Especially in Krakow, they were very, very religious.

FS: Did they ever come?

CB: They didn't come to the ghetto. There was no Catholic in the ghetto, no Gentiles there, in the ghetto.

FS: How long were you in the ghetto?

CB: I was in the ghetto about two years, about two years.

FS: Did you work there?

CB: Yes.

FS: How did you spend your day? Tell us about a typical day.

CB: We worked. A typical day, 8:00 in the morning, we went to work. There was different work. There was a factory where they were sewing dresses. Sometimes they had trucks, when a transport came in from, from other towns, and brought the Jewish people to the ghetto. There was a kitchen where they, where they gave us soup every noon, every lunch they gave us soup and a piece of bread. Their work has to be done. And they would stick us where wherever they needed us, the work has to be done. Sometimes, they took us to and had us scrub there, where the big shots, where they were living, the floors had to be cleaned, the toilets had to be washed, whatever had to be done.

FS: Who selected you for this work?

CB: There was an office, and in this office there were Germans, of course, but there were always two or three Jewish people, too.

IS: Who were these Jews? They were apprised of the Jewish community, and then ratted on the Jews?

CB: They came out from the Krakow Jewish Community Center.

FS: Were these reputable Jews?

CB: Yes, two of them, and they were very, very nice. I don't know their names anymore. The third one I had very little to do with. But I heard from other people that he was working together with the Nazis. If this is true or not, I don't know.

FS: You don't remember his name?

CB: I don't remember his name.

FS: What was done with the children, did families live together?

CB: Yes, families lived together.

FS: You didn't have any children at that time?

CB: No, no.

IS: Was there any education going on among the people, to educate their children?

CB: Yeah, there was education going on secretly. The Germans didn't want to know, or they really didn't know. I couldn't tell you. But there was a woman we knew, on one street there was a room and there was school everyday, from 10:00 to 12:00.

IS: And what did the children learn?

CB: As much as they could learn. A little bit reading, a little bit writing, and whatever they could. Whatever education you could give.

FS: Did you have any personal contact with the children?

CB: No.

FS: But it would be interesting to know how they reacted to it, such a confined situation.

CB: The children were very afraid. The children were terribly afraid, because I remember when I went on the transfer to Majdanek, there was a little boy with his mother, an 11 year old child, and the boy asked his mother, "Is it true that all the children have to go to the gas chamber?" And the mother said, "Who told you so?" And he said, "I know. Why Mother, why? I am only a child." And he went to the gas chamber.

FS: And this was in which year?

CB: We went in '41. The end of '41. The beginning of '42.

FS: Now, in the ghetto, did you have a static population, or this was new people always coming in, or what happened?

CB: People came, people went.

FS: Were there transports out?

CB: Yes.

FS: And where did they go?

CB: I have no idea, like I never know where my mother went, or where my father went.

FS: You had no idea when you had to leave?

CB: No. No. We had no idea.

FS: How were the people who left, how were they selected? You don't know about that?

CB: Nobody knew, you got in the morning, usually it was in the morning, they came, an officer came, an SS man, and another officer, and just *raus*, *raus*, *raus*. You couldn't say why or what or where you're going.

FS: During your time in the ghetto, did you ever contemplate suicide?

CB: Myself?

FS: Yes.

CB: No, no.

FS: The thought never came to you?

CB: No. But I always said, I never will give in. I will fight to the very end.

FS: Do you know anyone who contemplated suicide?

CB: There was a few suicides, yes.

FS: So, the large Jewish population you had there, would you say it was an unusual number of suicides?

CB: No, no. In the ghetto, most of us still had hopes, or still didn't realize what really could happen.

FS: Were there any kindnesses, incident of kindnesses that you remember from the SS towards the Jews?

CB: They tortured the Jews, oh, we all got beatings.

FS: No, any incidences of kindnesses.

CB: Of kindnesses, no.

FS: Were there any Lithuanians or Ukrainians where you were?

CB: No. Yes.

Tape one, side two:

CB: One morning the SS went from one house, from one room to another, and told us to go out, and there was a big, big place, and we were standing there for hours, for hours. Finally, there came a big shot, I don't know who he was, some kind of a big German officer, and he told us the work here is done--I don't know what work--and we will be transported to another working camp where the food will be much better, and the rooms will be much better. The families will stay, of course, together, and we shouldn't go panic, because really it's for the best. In the late afternoon, we went, maybe, I don't know, maybe a kilometer, to board a train. It was not the station for a train there, people ride it, it was only for a transport train, and they put us in a train, which was completely shut, it was like an animal train, they had only very little windows, there was no water and there was no food, there was nothing. We stood overnight, and in the early morning, it started to move.

FS: Were there toilet facilities?

CB: There was no toilet facilities. They had there a pail. I don't know, probably in the other that was the same, but in our, where I was in this train, there was only a pail in the corner. [Tape goes off and then restarts].

FS: Tell us about the train.

CB: Well, sometimes the train would stop, and then they would call out two or three or four people, and they would, it's really funny, they would put bread in our hands and take pictures.

FS: The Germans?

CB: Yeah. And later we were told that these pictures went to the Red Cross to show them how good they were to us.

FS: [Tape goes off and then restarts]. Go ahead.

CB: Usually, we had very little to eat, very little. A little bit of bread they threw in, and sometimes an apple. We had very little to eat.

FS: When you stopped at these stations…

CB: They were not stations. They were nowhere. Wherever they felt like stopping.

FS: You didn't see any Polish population in the railroad stations?

CB: Yes, we saw the Polish from the train stations, the people who were working at the train stations, we saw them. But no civilian people were allowed to go near us.

IS: When they threw in apples and bread, it certainly must not have been sufficient for the amount of people?

CB: Of course it was not sufficient.

IS: How were the people on the train-- grab what you could, survival?

CB: Some grabbed. It was a fight for survival, yes. But some just…

FS: Were there children on the train?

CB: In my train, there were three children, yes. There was the boy who was 11 years old, and two smaller children.

FS: How did these children react?

CB: The two little girls, they were not so bad, but this boy got hysterical. He knew, I don't know if he heard from someone, but he was sure that he has to die, and he could not understand why. Only 11 years old, and why he had to die. And after a few days, finally we could go out from the train and here we saw, we saw the barracks, we saw the *den Aussichts Turm* [watchtower] *wo die wachen gestanolenhaben* [where they stood on guard]. And then we were separated, the men went on one side, and the women went on the other side, and then we went in the barracks, and when I entered the barracks, and then one of the SS men called me and said to me, "*Ich habegehört sie sprechen Deutsch* [I heard you speak German]."

FS: I understand you speak German?

CB: I understand you speak German, and I said, "Yes I do." So he said, "Wait here for me, I'd like to talk to you." And I was sure I'll be there first in the gas chamber. But he took me into his office and he explained that in the next day they are expecting people from Russia, if the Polish language is somehow related to the Russian language. Truthfully, I didn't know, I never met a Russian, if I will understand anyway, anything, but I thought, maybe it's a chance somehow, to do better in this camp or anything, and I said, "Yes, of course, Polish is very similar to Russian." So he said, "I will call you tomorrow." So at least I know I have a chance to live one day longer. We went in the barracks, and the next day, at 4:00 in the morning, they called us out. It was a rainy, miserable day, without clothes, without nothing, and two SS men went and selected, and one side to work, and the other side to the gas chamber. Well, I went on the side to work…

FS: Did you know that the one group was going to be killed?

CB: Yes.

FS: How did you know?

CB: Well, whenever there was a selection, this is what happened, they didn't tell us, but we knew. People who were selected, we didn't know what group is what, but we know. When we saw the elderly people and the children in one part, and the younger, strong people on the other side, we know what was going on.

FS: Did these people who were selected for the gas chamber become hysterical?

CB: No. Some were crying terribly. There were a few real orthodox, the *Chasidim*. They threw themselves on the floor and screaming terribly, *chai vekayem* [2],

[2]Hebrew words. Literal meaning is 'live and endure'. Here it seems to be used idiomatically in the sense of the will, the spirit, or the desire to live and survive.

chai vekayem, terrible. But many of the people believed what they were told by the SS, *sie gehen zur Enthlausung* [they are going to delouse them]. Many of them believed it.

FS: Were there any small children?

CB: Yes.

FS: How small?

CB: There were children 8 years old, the 11-year-old boy, but here were a few children.

FS: Any infants?

CB: There was an infant who was about-- it must have been born in Plaszow in the ghetto, but I don't know where they were, but maybe six, eight months old. I don't think that this child got ever to the gas chamber, because one of the SS men took it from the mother, and just threw it on the wall, and then it died.

FS: You witnessed this?

CB: I witnessed this. I don't think so that this baby ever made it to the gas chamber.

FS: And the mother was watching that?

CB: The mother fainted, yeah. The mother screamed and fainted. She couldn't do nothing.

FS: For what reason was this done?

CB: For no reason.

FS: Did you ever know this man's name?

CB: No.

FS: Did any of the people there with you react in any way to that?

CB: You couldn't react, any word you would say they would bring you right on to the gas chamber. You were just a number there. They didn't have-- they didn't put numbers on our hands, they gave us dog tags. Everyone was wearing them. In fact, these dog tags are still in the museum there.

FS: And then you were selected for work?

CB: I was selected for work, the same officer called me the next morning and he told me that they arrived that afternoon. He believed me as a translator, but he said, "For this reason, we cannot feed you. The Germans are in war, and food is very high, and we need food, we cannot feed you just as a translator, we have no ladies here. We need working people. So you have to clean the offices, and you have to clean this, and you have to clean that, and then we don't need you as a translator." They were building new tracks for the transports coming in. But we didn't know, but found out later, they were building the tracks because in the early spring, in March and April of '44, they brought constantly transports with German Jews. And for this, they were preparing the tracks.

FS: This was approximately when? When did you enter the concentration camp?

CB: When I entered or when I was out?

FS: When you entered the concentration camp.

CB: I entered the concentration camp in the late, I think ’42, yes, late in ’42. Because in the spring of ’43, I was already on the tracks.

FS: Okay, what happened then when these Russian prisoners arrived?

CB: The Russian prisoners arrived.

FS: But were these prisoners of war?

CB: No. They had no prisoners of war in [unclear], at least not in this part where I was. Jewish people

FS: Jews.

CB: There was-- not where I was, but we saw them behind the electric wire where the men were, and there were Russian priests…

FS: Priests.

CB: Yeah, Russian priests, different kinds of people. They couldn’t understand a word, not, not a word. So many times when he wanted to come find out what was going on, he called me, I should translate.

FS: In Polish?

CB: I made it up. But with time, in a couple of months, I learned the language, because it is similar to Polish. The language, not the writing. They had a completely other ABC, but the language is similar. And then, and then when they didn’t need me anymore-- so much for translating-- they put me on the tracks and then I had a very bad accident.

FS: What do you mean by put you on the tracks?

CB: For working on the tracks.

FS: Women did this?

CB: Women did. We went out 8:00 in the morning, of course, we had no clothes, only what they called *parshacki* [phonetic], it was like a housecoat in gray with stripes, and they wore this dress, and the wind was blowing, it was bitter cold in the winter, bitter cold. In fact, many, many had their toes fallen off from the cold.

IS: How cold would you say it was?

CB: I really couldn’t tell you. I forgot already. But it must have been very, because there they have Celsius. It must have been freezing cold, because many lost their toes, and our cheeks were black.

IS: Frostbitten.

CB: Frostbitten black. And I was there one morning working on the tracks. It was about 12:00, I couldn’t stand it anymore, and the wind was blowing, and I just couldn’t stand it anymore, and the SS man went by, and he took a piece of wire, you know, that you pick up the track, and he just hit me over the foot.

IS: You don’t mean wire, you mean, what do you call it? A *stemmeisen*?

CB: A *stemmeisen*, yes.

IS: What do you call it?

FS: A crowbar?

CB: Yes. And he hit me over the foot, and of course the bones broke in pieces, and the blood was pouring out. Luckily, I had a very good friend there, and she still was wearing what was very seldom, a shirt under this beautiful robe, and she took a piece off and she put it around my leg, and an hour later--of course, I couldn't scream [unclear]--and an hour later we finished ahead because it was too cold, and two people helped me back in the barracks, and there they put on cold water, and the foot was in there, in that water, and the blue and black, but I had to go back, because there was nowhere else. And since then, this foot is just no good anymore. The little bones grew together and pinched the nerve, and it's a crippled foot. And then in spite of everything, I had to work, of course, and then the foot never healed, because it couldn't ever relax enough to heal. So I have a pinched nerve, and it's a very bad leg. And the restitutions office of the UNRRA[3] recognized it and that the foot is black, it is bad, and for this I get a pension.

FS: Now, let me ask you, when-- in this camp, in these barracks you lived, were the men and women were separated?

CB: Yes.

FS: Did you ever see the men?

CB: Yes. We saw them in the morning when we went to work, and it is funny, what human nature is, though it was a wire fence between us. How they managed, I don't know, but there was a certain hole, and every so often a man would slip in at night and would come over.

FS: Where was your husband?

CB: In, yes, with the men.

FS: Did you see him at all?

CB: No. I didn't see him, but I left a note to somebody who came that at a certain place, he should look every so often, maybe I could get a piece of bread or something.

FS: What kind of health was he in?

CB: He was pretty well. He was a strong man, so he was pretty good. He never gave up hope [unclear]. Never.

FS: Did any of the women become pregnant?

CB: No.

FS: None at all that you know of?

CB: No.

FS: Did any of the women have affairs with the SS men that you knew of?

CB: Yes.

FS: Many?

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[3]UNRRA – United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – founded in 1943. It provided assistance to refugees after the war. (www.ushmm.org)

CB: I wouldn't say many, in particular but I know of a mother and a daughter, and the mother came out wearing the SS uniform, and they were running around with a beautiful German shepherd, they were beating up Jewish women.

FS: What eventually happened to them?

CB: They are somewhere in the United States, but I don't know where.

FS: But they survived the war?

CB: They survived the war, yes.

FS: Tell us about the food you had. Tell us exactly what the day was like. How many hours, what it was like to wake up in the morning.

CB: There was no hours, because they could call you 4:00 in the morning, or 12:00 at night, you never knew. There was no hours. I was given in the morning a piece of bread. It was like here two toast. By 12:00 you were standing in line and you were supposed to get soup, but if this German whatever he was, I don't know what you would call him, these human beings were not human beings, if he didn't like your face, instead to put the soup in the bowl, he just put it over your hand, and the soup was done. Then you had nothing. Fortunately, when I was working on the tracks, we went to fields, and you could steal a tomato, a potato, or when I cleaned the offices, I could steal everything. I could steal a piece of salami or a piece of baloney. This was a holiday. And from the garbage cans we were looking for herring heads.

FS: Herring heads?

CB: Yes. It was very good at that time.

FS: Did you ever have any contact with the German army people rather than the SS at any time?

CB: No.

FS: Did you find any SS [unclear] who would listen to you, gave you food, gave you anything?

CB: No. Not where I was.

FS: There was no kind of personal contact that you know of?

CB: No. They were just like beasts. There was a dentist, and I tell you from personal experience, from time to time, recollecting just what came to the head, to go to the dentist, and when we came in, open your mouth, and if he saw one gold tooth, like I have teeth in the back, instead to take a dental tool what he wanted, he just pulled like this. But this dentist was hanged. There were some people hanged.

FS: Do you remember his name?

CB: No. I don't remember any names. It was a little man, he, and a doctor, and another SS man, they were hanged in the fall of '44. In Lublin, they were hanged, I was there. They were hanged.

FS: How did you get news from the war front, how did you get news?

CB: For a long time we didn't get news at all. But I don't know who or what, but somebody, somehow, swindled in, maybe, maybe they got it from some Polish people

that were working, and when they went to work, the men. Anyway, one of the men had a radio.

FS: One of the men?

CB: One of the men, yes. And one day they find out, and they said there was a big fight in Ostrahan [phonetic], a Russian city, and Hitler is going back slowly but surely.

FS: Do you remember the month and the year? Approximately.

CB: Approximately it was somewheres in '43, somewheres in '43. And then every so often when a man came over, he came in and he said, "Sh, sh, don't say nothing, just don't give up hope. Pretty soon the Russians are coming. Pretty soon the Russians are coming." They never heard from the Americans because they didn't came there.

FS: How frequently did the men manage to get into the women's barracks?

CB: Sometimes you could have three a night, and sometimes for weeks there was no men.

IS: What were your quarters like? How many women to a barrack? How large was it?

CB: We were 12 in a, in a very small room. There were only, how you call it, *Bretter*…

IS: Boards.

CB: Boards, and whatever we could find we put on the boards, [unclear] a blanket or whatever you could. Lice, we were eaten up by lice. Mice were running over us, and then we had the flying bedbugs. Big flying bedbugs.

FS: Did you still have you and the other young women still have their periods?

CB: No. None of us had them. None of us had them. Even two, three years after, we didn't have.

FS: Let me ask you this, it's a personal question. Don't answer unless you want to. Since you were half-starved, were there any sexual desires from the young women?

CB: There were some, we said when-- we don't know what tomorrow brings, because as I said before, nature is very funny.

FS: So there was the opportunity…

CB: If there was the opportunity, look, if a man came over, and he brought us such a little piece of bread, for her it was worth it.

FS: It didn't matter.

CB: It didn't matter if today it was this one, today that one, no.

FS: It didn't make any difference?

CB: It didn't make any difference.

FS: Did you-- were there moments when you thought that, well, the last day is just around the corner for us?

CB: Yes.

FS: Tell us.

CB: There was, there was many moments when there came a transport from Germany, and we saw, this was the special transport, with elderly people, and I saw this screaming and I saw the *chai vekayem*[4], and the prayers, in Hebrew, I was ready to jump in the middle and go with them. My girlfriend kept me back. She said, "Don't, don't, somewhere, somewhere [unclear]." But of course, it never happened because it ended.

FS: How many people do you think, to the best of your knowledge, were killed in your concentration camp?

CB: I couldn't tell you. All I can tell you, after the Germans left, there were mountains and mountains of clothes, which they didn't transport to Germany yet. Because most of the stuff went already to Germany. But there were mountains of clothes. In fact, our first clothes, whoever survived, we got the first clothes from the dead people.

FS: Well when you-- what was your first inclination, your first knowledge, that the Germans no longer were so secure?

CB: They start packing. The Germans were not smart at all. Suddenly, suddenly, they were running around like crazy, they didn't care too much about us anymore. They didn't care if we were working or not, and we had a funny feeling once it's another look. There is no *appells* anymore in the morning.

FS: This was how long before?

CB: This was maybe four, five weeks before. And we saw, you know…

FS: Do you recall the month and the year?

CB: The year was '44. It was around the end of May, beginning of June. They start, you could see, you know, carrying out big boxes, and all the stuff, and there wasn't anymore so much personnel. The personnel got less and less. And finally when we saw that there is almost nobody there, and they had the shooting from the other side, we went into the gutter.

FS: Tell me that again. Finally…

CB: Finally they had shooting from all over. We didn't know what was going on, who was shot, so we went into the gutter. We saw no Germans anymore, we couldn't imagine. We stayed in the gutter about 24, 26 hours. And I was there with a girlfriend who was all the time very close to her and I feel very sorry for her, and the Russian soldier came in and told her in Russian, "You can come out. You're free, you're free." And I said to her, "Finally, come out." And she was holding on and she said, "Don't go, don't go. These are Germans. They will kill you." I said, "No, these are the Russians." But she wouldn't believe me, but I went out and the others went out and we blacked out and when she saw the Russian army and she got crazy. They had to put her in a mental

[4]See footnote 2.

institution. She was sure, you could not convince her that she is finally free, that these are the Russian people.

FS: What happened?

IS: Nothing. Nothing.

FS: When the Russians arrived there, what happened as far as food, and what arrangements, what happened?

CB: They had immediately food, and they had doctors, and they kept us there, most of us stayed for two weeks, in the barracks. The ovens were still burning. The smoke was still coming out. You could see bones and bones, and you could see burned up people, the bones, the dead people who were not burned yet. They left panicky. They really left panicky. We stayed there about two weeks, and the Russians stayed, they knew we had nothing. They let us into the rooms where these clothes were, and we could select whatever we want. In the meantime, the first Jewish community in Europe opened there. From where the people came, I have no idea. They were not in the camp. If, if they were somewhere in Russia, if they just came from Russia, I cannot tell you. But they opened, and the Russians gave things to all the survivors from the camps. They gave him a house, and there the, first he was living in a Jewish community, and then they gave him a house, and every couple, every two, three, four people had a room, and you were eating in the Jewish Community Center. 'Till the first help, these new clothes and this food, you know from where it came? From Palestine. The first clothes and the first help came from Palestine. At that time it was Palestine.

IS: That's probably where the help came from the Jewish community.

CB: That's very possible. I don't know. I don't know where the people came from. And then, of course, the American help came.

FS: How did the Jews, after this liberation by the Russian army, how did the Jews behave towards each other? Was there camaraderie or did one side rebuke the other?

CB: No, it was, in the beginning it was, you know, in this Jewish Community Center, and I was there every single day because after five weeks through somebody, through a dentist from my home town, my husband got a very good job, you could see tragedy there, just tragedy. There came a father looking for his son. There were children, the Jewish Community Center put out a leaflet, that for every Jewish child which was taken in by a Polish family, they were paying by day, I don't know, I think 10 dollars or how much I don't know, but they paid him by day. Now, they came by the hundreds, the Jewish children. Yes, the Polish people brought them in. When there were mothers, sometimes two mothers to one child.

FS: But did people simply claim the children?

CB: Sometimes, sometimes, okay, sometimes came a mother, a father, and they told you, you know, I know the woman, I give you the name, I give you everything. Fine. Terrible, terrible things was happening there. Terrible things.

FS: Did you know any, any mothers who found their children? In other words, what I'm asking you is, what were the relationships between these new found mothers and new found children, how did they…

CB: It was very hard in the beginning, it was very hard, but they had formed the Jewish Community Center. They had doctors, they had psychiatrists, they talked with the parents, they talked with the children. Of course it was hard from the beginning.

FS: Were there many children who were in Christian homes who had become antisemitic that you know of?

CB: No. No. But I had, when I was already in Germany, I had from my first husband's father's family, a child, and she came to me, she was 10 years old. She was hidden with her parents in the wood.

FS: In the woods?

CB: In the woods. She was wearing a cross. And for weeks and weeks I explained to her that she was only given the cross to survive. And everyone else told her the same story. And she wouldn't give up the cross. So finally, I took the cross off, and I threw it in the fire, and she got hysterical. She said Jesus will punish her. And it took me a good, good, a month, little by little. Do you know Vayella?

FS: No.

CB: You know her, she's now living in Elizabeth. Little by little, she came to, she understood what was the meaning. But this child didn't know that her father was her father, because when he came to visit her, he knew where they were hiding out, but he was, he took himself a girlfriend, a gentile woman, the father, and he played a Gentile. He looked like a Gentile. And whenever he came to visit, she thought it's an uncle. She never knew.

FS: He was not in a camp?

CB: No, no, no, no. He was as a Polish person. He had Polish papers. There was a few who were able to survive this way.

FS: Now tell us about the reactions of the Poles when the Jews came back to this town [unclear].

CB: Well, Lublin, Majdanek, near to Lublin was the first concentration camp liberated in Europe. And months later, let's say in October, November, there came there political prisoners from the Russian camp, Jewish people. And they came to Lublin. And with them came the Polish Russian Army which was formed from Polish people who were political prisoners in Russia, and then liberated. Between them was a lot of Jewish boys, many, many Jewish boys from my hometown too. And there suddenly, there came to life a Nationalist Polish Party and they were called *Acofta* [phonetic]. And they wanted the Russian people out, in fact, they are still here in the United States. They have an organization here. They wanted the Russians out, and they wanted a Nationalist Poland like it was before. And their idea was that all Jewish people are communist. All Jewish people. And when they found the Jewish soldier, they tried to kill him. They

bombed the trains. And in ’44, in September of ’44, my husband became a manager from this Jewish Community Center. And in September ’44, when I walked to our room up the steps…

Tape two, side one:

CB: I went back to the office to my husband, I said, "You know, they want to kill you." So my husband said, "*Ach*, children have guns. This is children's play." Two days later, my brother came on vacation from the army. He was in the Russian Polish Army, and we went to the theater in the evening [tape goes off]. And when the first act was finished, my brother turned to my husband and said, "You know, as soon as the second act starts, and it will be dark, we all will walk out very slowly, and don't talk." And I said to my brother, "Why?" And he said, "Don't ask questions, here are no questions asked." And we came out, and my brother said, "You walk fast," and my husband's name was Maurice, "You take Maurice in the middle." So it was my brother, my husband was in the middle, and on the other side was my brother-in-law, and my brother took the gun out, a revolver, and I didn't know what was going on. To go to our room, we had to pass the Jewish Community Center, and we came there my brother said to my husband, "Run up fast." He ran fast, we ran after him, we ran up to the Community Center and closed the door. And when they came up, I said to my brother, "What's that?" and he said, "You know, there were *Acofta* [phonetic] sitting, and they looked over, and the one said to the other, 'Now we have him, today we're going to kill him.' And when we walked out, they were on the other side. The only thing, they were waiting in front of the house where you live. We outsmarted them, because we went up to the Jewish Community Center."

FS: These were Polish nationals?

CB: Yes. And it wasn't 10 minutes when there was a knock at the door, and a woman's voice said, "I am tired, I am dying, could I please have a glass of water, could I please have a little water?" So we took the chairs and table and put them in front of the door in case they would come, but they didn't come. And maybe three weeks later, we were told that in Krakow there is an organization who helped Jewish people escape illegally to Palestine. Well, we went, we had very little money, so my husband was making money already for a couple of months, but we had very little money but we went to Krakow. We find this Jewish organization, and we went together with 10 people. And we were told we have to go as Greek Jews returning home. The trip went through Czechoslovakia, to Vienna, and in Vienna, the Jewish underground was supposed to wait for us. Well, we went on the train, we were wearing like the Greek people, berets and shawls, and we were not supposed to talk anything but Hebrew. Since we didn't say Hebrew, we just got through words, make believe. So one said *Sh'ma*, and the other *Israel*, whatever we could. And we came to Czechoslovakia and we went to there the Red Cross; they gave us help. They had *Flüchtlinglager* [refugee shelter].

IS: In Czechoslovakia?

CB: In Czechoslovakia. They had *Flüchtlinglager*. They fed us and suddenly we heard that the Russian people, in the Austria from Vienna found out about the Zionist

underground, and they stopped the whole immigration to Palestine. Now, here we were, not this way, not that, and we didn't know what to do. And we heard that there was a German *Flüchtling* [refugee] movement, there was a lady by the name of Meyer, she came from Munich, and she gave passports to return to Germany if you came from Germany. Well, you know, *Not machterfind ich* [necessity is the mother of invention]. So, many people, including me, whatever books they can find about the city, in this city they were born, and to this city they wanted to return. So, I found a book from Munich, and I was sitting in the *Flüchtlinglager* for days, and studying what in Munich is the traffic, the schools, the streets and everything. And I went up, and she said to me in German, "I tell you something. You're definitely from Germany, otherwise you wouldn't speak this German. But you're not from Munich. But since you are from Germany, I have to give you the passport. But I won't give a passport to your husband because he is not German." I said, "Well, then I am very sorry, I won't go." So we were sitting there another week, and another week, and suddenly my brother-in-law finds out that there is a Jewish guy, who was born in Czechoslovakia but went to college in Munich, and that illegally he brought people over to Germany, there already, were a Jewish Community Center, the UNRRA, was helping already at that time. So we got in touch with this fellow, and the…

IS: You mean, at UNRRA this happened? Or what about the Jewish organization?

CB: There was a Jewish Community Center, but the Jewish Community Center got everything from the UNRRA.

FS: [unclear]

CB: So, we spoke with this Jewish fellow, and he said it would take at least three weeks, because he had other people to take who came first. So, we really didn't know what to do, or what not to do. Then my husband said, "Do you know what I'm going to do? I was studying in Breslow," no, this [unclear] in Bratislava, [unclear], in Czechoslovakia he went to the university. Yes. "And I will go, and I will see how it looks. And maybe if she will writes in, that I was born in Czechoslovakia, and I went to the university, maybe somehow the Russians will give me a passport to go to Vienna, maybe somehow, I don't know."

IS: Who was this woman? This Mrs. Meyer? What was her--was she legal?

CB: No, no, no, this was legal. This was legal. *Das hat geheissen Flüchtlings* Commission [this was called Refugee Commission]. In Czechoslovakia, in Bratislava. He went to this university, finds there a young girl, and for cigarettes, which we received on the *Flüchtlingslager*, she found his name, but she couldn't make out the Polish name anyway where he was born, so he put down Bratislava. So he had this for himself, and he had it for my brother-in-law. They got out with two papers. And I'll tell you why it was so important. After three weeks, finally the guy came, and the guy said, "Look, I can take you. You three people, and I have other four. But I tell you, we have to walk for

five hours, walk and walk. So we said, "Fine." Then we went on the train, and we came to Carlsbad, the train stopped, and when I looked out I thought the Nazis are coming again because we were surrounded by Russian officers, and they came in and they checked all the papers and went from one to another, and people were screaming, "Let me go! I have, my child is there, please let me go!" They took everyone, here they took out, there they took out, and they came to us, everything is safe, and they asked my husband where he's going. And he said, in Russian, my husband spoke Russian, he said to him, "Well, I am a born Czech, and I am going to Carlsbad here." So he said, "You have papers?" And he handed him the papers and he said, "Okay." From all the people on the train, we three were left and the boy, who was Czechoslovakia born. We went then into Carlsbad, there we left the train, and he led us five hours through the woods, and then we saw already the German train, a Czechoslovak police, *Grenze Policei* [border patrol] catched us. And he came, and he was very nice. He told us, "You know, I know what you went through," he said, "Here you have the train. I will not shoot you, I will do nothing. The only thing I will do, I am poor too, whatever you have, you have to give to me." So, we didn't have much, but we had again a watch and we had a little bit of food. He took everything. He only left us what we had. And then we went on the train. And we came to the first town there was a Jewish Community Center in Kirchenau. And we went there and there we stayed.

FS: [unclear].

CB: [unclear].

FS: Tell us about Eichmann.

CB: Eichmann was very often in Majdanek. They usually used to call us on the big place to the *appell*, and then he had a whole speech, "But the big man is Hitler, and when we tell you what he has done for his *volk*, and the war is going on, but we will win, and you have to work." And then he went through the lines, and we had an [unclear] and he, [unclear] he was whipped. He came many, many times. He was really a beast. And many times when he saw somebody, just his eye fell, [unclear] that's it, in the gas chamber. Whomever he selected. He never got finished, never.

FS: Who was with Eichmann when he came? Was he by himself?

CB: No, an officer came.

FS: You don't know his name?

CB: I don't remember, no. Always a young fellow, always a young fellow came with him. They came by car, and they left by car. They never stayed overnight.

IS: Tell us about Kirchendorf.

CB: What is interesting from Majdanek, what I told you last time, we found a lot of clothes and what people believed. For instance, I found they had boots made of material, very important, it must have been for a Polish Jew; they were white with black leather. But one had a high heel, and one had a low heel. But when you have nothing to wear, everything is good. So my husband wanted to cut off the higher heel. And he said

to me, "You know what? Something is in the shoe, it looks like money." You have to understand that at that time we hadn't seen money for years. So he pulled it apart and he found 20 dollars.

FS: American dollars?

CB: Twenty American dollars.

FS: It must have been a fortune.

CB: It was a fortune. It was really a fortune. Then we found, like I told you last time, a letter from a woman she write to her husband. "The clothes were very well. I used them. Whenever you find clothes, please send them again. *Selbst when aufgespritz with blut* [even if spattered with blood]. It doesn't matter *das kann man* [that one can]…"

FS: This was a letter…

CB: From a German woman to her husband. The letter is in German.

IS: From a German Nazi.

FS: And you found this letter where?

CB: In Majdanek. It's there, in the office, it's there. Majdanek today is a museum. I went with my husband in the winter of '44, we went there. The letter is there. There are many letters there, there are many pictures there. There are the bones there, we found still when we were liberated[5]. It's today a museum. In fact, when the museum was opened, Russia had declared a holiday. All of the stores were closed.

FS: Did you find the Russian officer, did the Russian officers treat you decently or…

CB: Some, some were--for instance, the Jewish Russian officers were marvelous, they were marvelous. But there were some Russian officers who didn't like the Jewish people either. But they did really a lot of things, they were, in fact, when my first husband died--the rabbi mentioned it--the first transport of Jewish people from Poland to Israel, to Palestine at that time, was organized by my husband. He told the Russian government that people are going back to their hometown, and the Russians gave him as many products as they can, of course, sugar and canned food, and bread. They were very generous. And they came to the station and there they wished them good health and good trip. Some were very generous, very generous. Today, of course, everything's changed.

IS: How long were you…

CB: With the Russians? About a year, over a year.

IS: And then?

CB: And then I went to Germany. I was in October '45 in Germany and then we came here.

FS: And what did you do during that year with the Russians?

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[5]"July 23–24, 1944 Soviet forces liberate Lublin/Majdanek and find fewer than 500 prisoners left in the camp." (www.ushmm.org "Lublin/Majdanek: Chronology" accessed 10-10-16.)

CB: My husband was working in the Jewish Community Center. We were very lucky.

FS: Well, what did the average Jew, how did he survive?

CB: They were eating in the Jewish Community Center.

FS: Were they working?

CB: There was no work. First of all, the war was still going on.

FS: The Russian army moved, too. Did they leave troops in the town?

CB: Yes. Of course they left troops in the town, sure.

FS: And the army was running the town?

CB: The army was running the town.

FS: How did the Polish civil population there like it?

CB: They didn't like it at all. They were afraid, they kept their mouth shut, but they didn't like it at all. And who was most afraid was the Ukrainian people. They really were. There were thousands and thousands of Ukrainian people that came to Germany and from Germany they came here. And the Ukrainian people had it much easier to come to America than we had. We had a lot of trouble. Like I'm sitting here with you, I was sitting in the CID for two and a half hours…

FS: CID?

CB: CID. With the same story and you know, they knew exactly, he could ask you in what barrack I was, where I was working, and they had exactly from every camp. No, and if they caught you in a lie, you were finished; you couldn't come to the United States. And when we were sworn in in Bremen, in the consulate, my late husband had a very good friend and he was in a camp, or because he was in a camp, he was afraid of every uniform. So, when we were sworn in, he forgot to put the hat on. You know he couldn't come for six months.

FS: He forgot to put a hat on?

CB: Yes, when he was sworn in, he forgot to put the hat on. As a Jew he has to have a hat on.

IS: Well, who was this, and who was the CID? What does the CID stand for?

CB: It's an American organization, a government organization.

IS: Central Intelligence Agency?

CB: Yeah.

IS: CIA. But they weren't in existence yet.

FS: No, I don't know what CID was.[6]

CB: There was, and they called it American Military Government.

IS: They screened you?

CB: That's right. They screened, but they wouldn't take husband and wife together. I came, and then came my husband, and they, they compared.

[6]CID: United States Army Criminal Investigation Command (USACIDC) of which the operations division is commonly abbreviated to CID.

IS: This was not the consulate. This was other than the consulate?

CB: Of course. In the consulate you came in Bremen, this was the last stop. There you were sworn in. But we had a tough time to come here, it wasn't too easy. But a funny thing happened, you know. After all the trouble we went through, you know, for instance, they didn't speak German. They had a secretary to translate it. There was sitting a girl, who I don't know if she belonged before to the Nazi party, or if she didn't belong, I don't know. But she hated us regardless what. She was sitting there, and this guy was asking me, "How come, if you are married so long, you have no children? Don't you have sexual relations or do you have other boyfriends to go to bed?"

FS: He asked you this?

CB: Yes, and I wasn't the only one. I know it from personal experience, but I heard later many others were asked this question. And after all the concentration camps, and after all the travel to finally get here, we came in on a military transport that we didn't pay. We had to wash the rooms, the cabins, and my husband worked in the kitchen, and there was the cook, a colored fellow. I don't know what he, why he didn't like my husband but he said, "Get out from here, you fucking Jew." This was the greeting in America, this was the welcome. You can imagine what good taste I had when I came here.

IS: When you came, where did you come, to New York?

CB: Yes, I was in New York for 12 years.

IS: Did any Jewish organization help you?

CB: The HIAS was there, but we had a cousin in New York, and we stayed with her. So we didn't go to the HIAS.

FS: Thank you very, very much.

CB: You're very welcome.

FS: The world hasn't learned too much.

CB: No, I'm sorry to say, the world hasn't learned too much.

FS: The Jews are still…

CB: You know what hits me sometimes as funny? After all what I've been through, when people say to me, "Why are you so bitter?" You know, when sometimes we have people here, different people, from I don't know where, and I don't care. And knowing, because I make no secret out of it, everybody knows it. They know in my [unclear] was Polish. He came from Krakow. It's the heart of Poland. He couldn't speak a word German when I met him I couldn't speak Polish, so you can imagine our first date. And people knowing this they didn't make remarks. The Polish and the Polish and the Polish, and I could jump not because it's the Polish. They are Jewish people.

IS: That's right.

CB: Didn't they learn yet?

IS: No.

FS: And they are still learning. There were three million Polish Jews and there were only 560,000 German Jews.

CB: But they can't understand, or they give me a story when they tell me, but can you understand, after the war, the Polish, the Polish *Sie waren die grössten Schwarzhandler in Deutschland* [they were the biggest black market traders in Germany]. And the people weren't there, they just talk. I was there, because I came to there. The war was finished in May, and I came in October '45 to there. Now I ask you a question. People like me, we were very fortunate that my husband could open a *Weberei* [a fabric store or factory]. *Nicht vom Schwartzhandel. Nur die Bank hat uns gebrogt Geld. Es war der Zufall. Aber von wo haben wir oder die Leute die von Russland gekommen sind die Sachen genabt zum Schwarzhandel? Von wo? Das was die UNRRA gegeben hatte war zum Schwarzhandel nicht genug. Das hat grad zum Essen gereicht.* [Not the black market. Only the bank would lend us money. It was a coincidence. But from where would we or the people who came from Russia have things for the black market? From where? What we got from the UNRRA was not enough for the black market. That was barely enough for food.] But I will tell you because I lived through it. *Da war das Schuhgeschaft, von dem hat man nicht koennen Schuhe bekommen. Aber wenn man zu ihm geganen ist…* [There was a shoe store, you could not get shoes from it, but when you went there…]

FS: You have to talk English.

CB: When I went to him, and many times I did, and I told him, could you use gasoline, or could you use American cigarettes? Oh, sure. Could I have a pair of shoes? What color? You could have everything. So was the druggist. I went with my legs--I was recommended to a doctor who worked together with Sauerbruch[7], the doctor of big Mr. Hitler, Dr. Finzinger. When I came to him, he was living in a room and a kitchen. He was not allowed to practice because he was working together with Sauerbruch. I came for one reason, it was after the war, there was very, very little doctors, and I was recommended that he would help my foot. Mrs. Finzinger, who called herself doctor, of course she was the doctor's wife, *die Frau Doktor*, told me, "Yes, of course my husband will see you. But you see money is nothing today. What could we have, would you have bread, would you have *Bohnen Caffee* [Genuine Coffee]?" And I gave him the *Bohnen Caffee.* That he couldn't help me, I don't blame him, for him, because there was later many doctors later couldn't help me. But he was the first one [unclear], and [unclear] who put me, who gave me that test, that I came from the camp to him, and that was done for the camp, and what I had said, he had seen by X-ray is right. Wonderful. Only two years later, he opened in the suburbs from Munich a beautiful sanatorium *fuer Sportsfaelle* [for sports injuries], and then he was asked from the *Wiedergutmachung*

[7]Ernst Ferdinand Sauerbruch, [March 7, 1875-July 2, 1951]. Became Surgeon General to German Army in 1942.

[Reparations] if he gave me that test. He said yes, because I asked for it. But actually, he don't know if this happened in the concentration camp or somewheres on the street.

FS: Was this typical German, this typical German--this concerns an article which was in Time magazine a month ago, about the behavior of the German medical profession under Hitler. The full cooperation which these doctors furnished to the Hitler government, and what you say there really confirms the observations by this team who looked into the behavior of Germany.

CB: There was a doctor by the name of Dr. Bornman. He was in Kirchenau, in this little town where I came to Germany from Poland. When I came there he was already in prison, because he made all the experiments in Auschwitz with young girls.

FS: Were there any such experiments going on in your camp?

CB: Majdanek? Yes, but not where I was. Well, he was in prison. His wife was living in the next house where I was living, in a big apartment. She only had six rooms because she has two children, but she was very unfortunate because her maid came from my hometown, but accidentally, but unfortunately for her. When my brother came from Poland, my brother was in the army, and finally he had to escape with his wife, because he was afraid they will kill him. He came to Kirchenau. Well, usually the DP camps in Germany, if you are familiar, they were all together living in barracks. In this small town where I was, we had our own apartments. We liquidated [liberated] them from the Germans. I took away, I tell you openly, I raised hell. I took away an apartment from a German. I only put him in the basement. I didn't put him in a barrack. I raised hell with the *Burgermeister*. When my sister came, she was pregnant, and my brother, there was no apartment, so I went to the *Herr Burgermeister* and I told him, Dr. Bornman has only six rooms, and all I want is one. And he got the room from them. The office from him was liquidated [liberated] and given to a doctor, a German doctor, I am still in contact with him, by the name of Dr. Enders. A fellow [machine off and then on] the Nazi party, but he was a socialist. Well, when Hitler came, they took away this doctor, and they put him on the front to Kiev. When his wife gave birth to her first child, she was paralyzed. This officer called him and said, "Look, your wife is paralyzed. But when she dies I didn't think if I let you go or not, because you never belong to the Hitler party." And when he came back, since he was no Hitler, and Hitler took away his office, he gave him Dr. Bornman's office. Eh? It took only a year. Dr. Bornman came back. He had a lot of money, so he came back. They gave him back his office, they threw Dr. Enders out on the street, and they give him back the office, and Dr. Bornman was a doctor again. And people will tell me today that there are no Nazis in Germany.

FS: Thank you very much.

CB: You're very welcome.