HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MINA LUSTIGER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Eileen Steinberg
Date: February 20, 1987

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ML - Mina Lustiger[1] [interviewee]
ES - Eileen Steinberg [interviewer]
Date: February 20, 1987

Tape one, side one:

ES: Please tell me where you were born and the year and a little about your family.

ML: I was born in Poland, Bielsko Biala, in German called Bielitz, in July 30, 1929. I came from an Orthodox family.

ES: How many children in your family?

ML: We were four children.

ES: Four girls?

ML: Four girls.

ES: What was your life like before the war?

ML: It was very comfortable. My father had a business.

ES: What kind of business?

ML: Scrap metal. And we were well-to-do.

ES: Did your family experience any antisemitism before the Hitler period?

ML: Yes we did.

ES: Tell me about it.

ML: Well, there were many incidents that harassed the Jews.

ES: In what way?

ML: Well, there was an incident that a Jew killed a Polak, it could have been a German because we were in Upper Silesia and then we all were harassed. We were afraid to sleep at night. They were breaking our windows and so on. For a couple of months it was very bad. The Jews were afraid to go out.

ES: You said that you came from an Orthodox family, so your family …

ML: Not an Orthodox…

ES: You belonged to a synagogue?

ML: We belonged to a synagogue and my father-- well, not every day, maybe he prayed at home, but it was Orthodox, my grandfather was Orthodox.

ES: Did your father belong to any other Jewish organization or just the synagogue.

ML: Well, I don't recall right now.

ES: Were any of the men in your family-- did any of the men, your father, serve in the national army?

ML: Not that I know of, but of course I was so young.

[1]Née Bochner.

ES: How old were you in 1939?

ML: When the war broke out, I just turned 10.

ES: And you were going to school?

ML: Yes.

ES: What grade were you in?

ML: Third.

ES: How many Jews lived in your town or city?

ML: About 10,000, I don't know for sure.

ES: Was it a highly organized Jewish community?

ML: Yes, it was a famous town. Most of the Jews in the town were well-to-do. There were factories in the town, mostly clothing factories, and that is what they were involved in.

ES: Was there a *kehillah*?

ML: Yes.

ES: And how did you and your family view the *kehillah*, did you feel that it represented your best interests of the community?

ML: As I said before, I was so young I wasn't really involved in it. I know there was a *kehillah*, but, of course, I didn't know if they represented or not.

ES: You were just too young. What happened to you and your family during the weeks that immediately followed the German invasion?

ML: Well, right before the war we were on vacation, all of us, we took our maid with us, and then I remember while we were in the mountains many people left because they were talking about the war breaking out, and we were one of the last ones to leave. When we came back to Bielitz, my parents sent us, the children, to Kęty, where my grandfather used to live. From there, we fled together with my grandparents and also some of my mother's sisters and their children to Krakow. My mother has a brother in Krakow. We were in Krakow no more than a few days when the Germans invaded Krakow.

ES: And what happened when the Germans invaded?

ML: Well, after the Germans invaded Krakow, of course, there was no use to stay there. My parents, we didn't know exactly where they are, but we thought they were back in Bielitz where we left them. And I remember going back after a few days when the Germans were there already they started to harass the Jews. They shaved off their beards when they saw them on the streets, they took them to dig ditches and so we figured there's no use being there. There was no room-- we stayed with my aunt [unclear] 'till we went back to Bielsko and my parents were there. They also fled, but they came back before we came back. We didn't know it at the time. I remember coming back, my father, his beard was shaven, but not that the Germans shaved it, he shaved it himself. It was very smart…

ES: Before they could do it.

ML: Yes, he did it anyway.

ES: And what happened after the family was back together again?

ML: We were in Bielitz no more than a couple of months, the Germans gave us a hard time. They came, they took our silver, I remember, and after I don't know how long exactly we were-- we had a choice. There was a ghetto forming in Bielitz. We could stay or go to the adjoining little towns, which one of them was Kęty. We chose to go to Kęty because, as I said, my grandparents had a house there and that's where we stayed with them.

ES: Okay, so who went to Kęty, just the four girls?

ML: The four girls and my parents.

ES: All of you?

ML: Yes.

ES: Okay, so you went to Kęty, and then what happened when you go there?

ML: In Kęty it was like a small ghetto, but actually there were no gates. We could walk, you know, freely, but we had to wear the Star of David and, of course, food was very scarce. We could not work.

ES: Were you staying in your grandparents' house?

ML: Yes, my grandparents still had the house. Upstairs, the apartment was upstairs. Downstairs, at one time, there was a factory that they made this soda water and, of course, that was empty, that belonged to my cousin and, of course, he couldn't operate it anymore, so that was empty. But my grandparents from my father's side, from Bielitz, also came with us, and they stayed where the factory was, so they had a room there and were upstairs with my grandparents.

ES: So it was all your family in the house?

ML: Over there, and also my grandparents had a daughter that married maybe three months before the war broke out and her husband wasn't with her. He fled to Russia, I believe. But she didn't know it at that time.

ES: How long were you able to stay altogether at that time, in the house?

ML: Until they told us again to move to Nowa Wieś, Neudorf, which was maybe five, six kilometers away. They wanted Kęty to be Jew-free, so they asked us to leave, so every time we fled we had to leave our belongings behind, and every time we went somewhere there was always less that we could take. In Nowa Wieś, we were living in a hut. It was only two rooms, a kitchen and one room, and there was a stable in the back, they probably had horses there at one time. It was a very, very primitive hut. The roof of that hut was from straw and it was in the middle of a square, that's where we were, and my sister became very ill at that time, and there really wasn't much that we could do, but eventually she got better and that time my grandmother, both my grandparents didn't live with us. They lived some place else, also in huts, and we also had many relatives there. As I said, my mother had sisters and they had children, and they were all there.

ES: In what year was it when you were in Neudorf?

ML: It was in about '41.

ES: And how long were you able to remain with your parents and your sister there?

ML: Well, we did not remain too long with my parents because my mother, in the meantime, was jailed.

ES: Why was she jailed?

ML: In Kęty, she sent me with a package for her brother in Vienna, sent some food, and they caught me, of course, I went as an Aryan, I didn't go, not as a Jewish girl, and I was caught, and since I was so young, they did not try me. At that time, they still had a little trial, I don't know exactly how they went about, but my mother was tried and when we were in Neudorf she went to jail for four months.

ES: They sent her to jail because she tried to send a package of food?

ML: Yes, and I was picked up at the post office with the package. I remember, some butter and some bread, I don't remember exactly, and so she was jailed in Neudorf, and my father, in the meantime, went to concentration camp. There were-- almost at the same time, they took some men to labor camp, I believe at that time it was. I don't believe it was a concentration camp. My father was among them. He was picked up walking on the street. Of course, my father was a young man at that time, so they put him to work.

ES: How did you find out that he was taken?

ML: Oh, we knew because as I said we were living at the square and that's where it happened, so we knew he was taken away. We didn't know where he was taken.

ES: When your father was taken away then, who were you left with, the four girls?

ML: Just the four of us.

ES: Just the four of you?

ML: At that time I was maybe 11, 12, maybe 12, and my sister, the oldest one is six and a half years older than me, and then there were two in between, I was the youngest, and we were left alone to take care.

ES: And how long?

ML: We were left alone to take care of ourselves and then we had to leave that hut. They needed it for somebody else, I don't recall exactly or maybe the Poles wanted it back and they gave us another place to live, which was a half-built hut, it wasn't finished, but it was more of a modern building. It was a hut, but still there was some bricks already, but inside it wasn't finished, it was just bricks, you know, and the floor was of cement, it wasn't finished, and we had one room there. I don't believe anybody else lived in that house, as I said, it wasn't finished. And we were there alone.

ES: How did you spend your days?

ML: Well, we didn't have much food. But we had a little, but where it came from I don't really know. I guess we had rations, it must have been something because we had to eat something; it must have been rations. And we had to work. I, myself, did not have to go to work at that time. I guess they didn't pick me because I was so young, but

my sister sticked closely to Kęty and did some work for the Germans and I remember once, we were sleeping in only two beds, and I was sleeping with my sister, and my other sister slept with my older sister, and I remember once waking at night and there's a man in the room. We got so scared. He was drunk. He found out somehow where my sister lives because she was working and he found out and we were petrified. I never forget that, it was terrible. He was drunk. We were very lucky he didn't harm us and he left us in maybe three, four hours. We started talking to him, you know, like…

ES: And he went away and he didn't bother you?

ML: Well, in the morning he went away. You see, there was no electricity, so we couldn't even see. Then we had to light a lamp, you know, a kerosene lamp, and I don't know if he was really that mean. What he intended to do, I have an idea, but he didn't go through with it because we were alone, completely alone.

ES: How long did you stay in this unfinished home?

ML: This must have been a couple of months. And then they were talking about-- we heard that the Germans are going to have a selection and some people mentioned that it would be a good idea if we will not be there while they do that because they said we might be selected to go to Auschwitz because my mother was in jail. So, in a day or two, we decided that we are going to go to Chrzanów. That was also a ghetto where my uncle, my mother's brother, lived. But we had to go as Aryans because we would not be able to leave, you know, to go by train. We had to go by train. I went first. I just had a little shopping bag and with a little bit of clothes, and my sisters coached me how to get there, because they were there before the war, and I didn't know the way. I had to, I had to change trains in Bielitz and I was afraid that somebody might recognize me. This was very frustrating. Of course, I did not wear the Star of David, just went to the train station. My sisters didn't go with me. I went by myself and they came later on. I bought the ticket and I took off the Star of David and I boarded the train. I remember I had to change in the trains at Bielitz. I got off, I was afraid to ask somebody, but I had no other choice, I had to ask. As I said, I was only 12 at that time, and then I boarded the train. The train went through Auschwitz and it stopped in Auschwitz and not only myself but also the Poles probably were black market, you know, they probably selling food on black market or something like that, and they thought I'm one of them and I probably have something in the bag that they would find because the Poles were not allowed to do that either, and I said, "No, I don't have anything," and they were searching the train and I was sitting and luckily before they got to me the train moved. Well, I can't tell you how relieved I was. I just cannot tell you, it's unbelievable. Anyway, I got to Chrzanów which was another half an hour ride, maybe more, I don't know exactly, and also I've never been in Chrzanów and that was a ghetto and I had to find a way to get into the ghetto and my sisters explained to me how to get to the house where my aunt lived. It was also a ghetto, but it didn't have a gate, so I was able to get in. They were concentrated in a few streets in Chrzanów. I got there, then my sister came, and then my two older sisters came, and in the meantime they

had a selection in Neudorf. My grandparents were sent to Auschwitz, only one set of grandparents. The other grandparents made it, they did not send them. They sent them to Wadowice [Vadovitz], which was a ghetto with a gate, usually concentrated in a couple of streets and there was a gate. After we found out that everybody that wasn't sent to Auschwitz was in Wadowice already, we had to make our way back to Wadowice and somehow get into the ghetto.

ES: You wanted to be with the rest of the family.

ML: This time I went with my sister and we also boarded the train and we went to Wadowice. Luckily, there were no incidents. We made it, and then we waited on the street for the people that were working from the ghetto. They were working in shops, they were sewing uniforms for the soldiers, I believe, and when they came out of the shops they were always guarded in a group walking towards the ghetto and we joined them somehow, you know, we went into the group, and that's how we went into the ghetto. And of course my grandmother and grandfather was there, and also some of my aunts and cousins.

ES: At least you were together with your family. At this time, is this 19…

ML: 1942.

ES: Did you know-- you said you were at Auschwitz, did you know?

ML: Oh yes, we knew about Auschwitz.

ES: You knew what was going on there?

ML: Yes, we knew.

ES: How did you know?

ML: Oh, the Poles were talking about it, killing Jews, not only killing Jews, burning Jews, and that the ovens were being made there, working there, the crematoriums. Yes, we knew because we were still together with the Poles. And then my mother, it so happened, she was jailed, that was in Wadowice prison, but she wasn't out yet, the four months weren't out yet for her to get-- so, we were by ourselves and one day they were gathering people on the square and those that didn't have families, parents, we were young, and they took all four of us and sent to a labor camp in Sucha. There was a brewery that was converted to a camp.

ES: So, the four of you now were without the rest of your family?

ML: Yes, without the rest of them in Sucha.

ES: How did you get there?

ML: By train, at that time there was a passenger, the train, we never mingled with the Poles and the Germans, of course, one compartment was probably just for us, you know, but it was a train with benches, nothing too…

ES: Okay, what happened after you got there?

ML: We went to Sucha, as I said, there was boys and there were men and women yet in Sucha. Girls in one big room. They sent us to work, we had to go by train to work. We were regulating water. There were nails-- railroads that were passing and they were afraid that water may spill over when there was a storm and flood. We were regulating the

water so it wouldn't flood buildings, dams, and other things. We were working very hard. Every morning we had to get up and go there to work and came back in the evening and from there they sent us to another place which we did the same work, they needed people in the other place, which wasn't too far. It was a very small village. There were also huts and that's where we lived. We had maybe three or four huts, that's all, and we were there for-- there was mountains, we had to walk for about 45 minutes, I remember because it was very cold. It was so cold that our eyelashes were icicles and I remember they gave us old rubber boots because sometimes we had to stay in the water, and of course, the boots were so big we used to put hay in the boots which was good, you know, because it helped a little, and newspapers when we had, and that helped a little bit, but as long as you start working it wasn't cold at all. We worked so hard with a pick and a shovel and wheelbarrows. I remember being there maybe for eight months or so because I remember being there in winter. We came there when it was warm and we were there in the winter and I remember being there on Pesach. The reason I remember that is because my mother, in the meantime, she was let out of jail and she was in Wadowice too, and as I said, at the time you still could somehow-- it wasn't easy, but she managed somehow to come to see us. She got permission to see us. I don't know how she did it, but she did get permission to see us and she came to Wieprz, that was Wieprz, and I remember that was Pesach and she came to the *Baustelle* [building site], that means the place where you work, and of course, as I said, I was so young, I remember it so well because usually a mother who sees her child hungry and working so hard, she is really distraught and my mother, I remember, she took the pick from my hand and the shovel and she tried to work, you know…

ES: To help you?

ML: To help me, not to help me, she just wanted to do it and she was very clumsy, of course. We were used to it and we really knew how to do it very well, and I remember my mother's words, she said, "Oh, nothing to it, anybody can do it." You know, she didn't want us to feel bad that we have to work so hard and she figured she might as well make the best of it, you know, so she said, "Nothing to it, anybody could do it." And I can imagine how her heart must have been breaking, and then I remember saying goodbye to her, she had to leave. And also I don't know how that came about, I was permitted to visit her in the ghetto once with another girl from our camp, and we got to the ghetto, as I said that ghetto had [unclear]

ES: Gates?

ML: Gates, and I came to that ghetto and I remember seeing all those people and to us they looked like death. They were so pale. They were working all indoors and we looked so healthy because we were outdoors. We were burned from the sun, from the wind and the sun bleached our hair and we looked so-- and I was used to seeing people like that and I never saw people like my mother, you know, the family, used to live in the store that -- and all the family was there, sleeping on the floor. I was there only one day and I remember when I had to go I said goodbye and my mother took me to the gate. I remember

her saying to me goodbye, we kissed and she said, "Who knows if we ever see each other again." And that was the last time I ever saw my mother. And, of course, we didn't know where my father was because he was in camp, but we didn't know where he was. And I went back to Wieprz and we were there maybe another couple of months when they told us to leave.

ES: Before you tell me about leaving, how did they feed you when you were there doing this terrible hard work?

ML: There was-- as I said, we lived in huts. There was a kitchen and there was two older women that were cooking and the food was very, very scarce, but we had a little bit of bread and we had a little bit of soup. I don't remember meat. I think we had some meat they said was horse meat in the soup, not too much, a little bit here and there, and I remember my sisters being so terribly sick that time, they had gingivitis, and they had such terrible mouths they could not talk. We couldn't' communicate and it was very contagious. I didn't get it. All my three sisters had it. Without medication, without anything and somehow they made it, you know. I remember they had a fever, it was terribly painful. I remember not being able to talk.

ES: But they finally got better?

ML: They got better. Then we got word that we had to leave and we went to Sosnowiec where a…

ES: You went by train?

ML: We went by train to Sosnowiec, but again, we didn't mingle with the other people.

ES: It was a regular train?

ML: It was a regular train, it was a junky train, but it was a regular train and we went to Sosnowiec and we arrived at night, I remember. They took us to that place where they had the selections. Over there, the people came from all over. When we arrived, there were so many people. It was in one big room. There were like-- there were actually no bunk beds. These were like two-- there was a floor where people were laying down, there was one…

ES: Layer?

ML: Yes, and then another one. There was three and they just pushed us in there. It was very dark and they didn't make the light and we were there in the morning, we found out where we are. We really didn't know. We didn't even know what's awaiting, again, a selection. We were there a couple of-- we were there a week actually. People were-- they were sent from there to camps and sent to Auschwitz, depends on the people.

ES: What you were selected for?

ML: Yes, what you were selected for, and the ages. The older people were sent to Auschwitz.

ES: The older people?

ML: Yes, and the young.

ES: The very young?

ML: Yes. So, me being so young, I was very, very much afraid and when I finally heard, "To the left" and not "To the right," I was much relieved and went to Germany.

ES: Your sisters?

ML: Yes, we were all together. It was really unusual. They did not separate us and in fact, when we came to Germany …

ES: Where in Germany?

ML: Freiberg[2], there was a factory, a spinning factory, and we were living in this factory, there was a room and we were only 70 or 75 girls, that's all. In fact there were no other girls in that camp. It was a very small camp.

ES: And what were you doing in the spinning factory?

ML: We were spinners.

ES: You were making cloth?

ML: It was a big factory, many Germans were working there.

ES: Was your treatment any worse or better than it had been?

ML: The Germans at that time, they took care of us. There were women and they did not treat us that bad.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

[2]Freiberg was a subcamp of Flossenbürg.

Tape one, side two:

ES: Eileen Steinbrg interviewing Mina Lustiger February 2, 1982, side two. How was the food?

ML: We were very hungry, I remember, at this place. We used to get two slices of bread, I remember that, and then soup and what we did, we tried from that one slice of bread, we always tried to make it three slices, so we figured once we have three slices. We figured once we have three slices, we know that one slice will last you longer.

ES: What did you do to break it into thirds?

ML: No, you see, in the factory, we had although it was a spinning factory, there was some tools that we could use for some other things, so when we found a pin, you know, a pin or something, we cut out a piece of metal from the pin and we'd make a knife out of it and it was very, very sharp just like a razor blade and that's how we cut the slice of bread into three or four as we could make it. I remember a friend; we knew her very well, she cut it once and she cut off a piece of her finger.

ES: Oh, my!

ML: And we had to take care of the place by ourselves, you know, we had to clean it, sweep it in the evenings, I remember, some girl finding the piece of her finger. That was in the camp.

ES: How long did you remain there?

ML: A few months, I would say maybe a year, maybe not quite. It must have been '43, not that it [unclear] in '43. And from there we were taken to Röhrsdorf. In Röhrsdorf, it was already a bigger camp, there were already girls from Bedzin from Poland and they were there for a while. There was also a spinning factory. We were in barracks there, living in barracks, 20 girls to one room, four rooms to a barrack, maybe five rooms, and we used to, in the evening about eight o'clock or so, we couldn't get out anymore, we were locked in from the outside, the shutters were closed from the outside, so we couldn't open the windows and that's how we stayed 'til the morning when they woke us up for work. In the morning we had to get up and get our-- first of all, we had to empty the buckets from the night and also every day some other girl did that and then we had to go for a piece of bread and coffee, if you could call it coffee, and then go to work.

ES: All the time that you were in camp that you've been mentioning up until now, were you in contact with any other members of your family?

ML: No.

ES: So at this time you still don't know what has happened to your father or to…

ML: No, no we didn't know, there was no way we could find out.

ES: Were you able to hear about anything else that was going on with the war?

ML: No, we did not.

ES: Because you were isolated?

ML: We were completely isolated. As I said, at work we were not allowed to talk to the Germans unless it was something about work and then lunch time, the lunch break that we had from the piece of bread we had in the morning we had to take it for lunch and we stayed together and then in the evening, we went back to camp and we were guarded all the time. The camp was on a hill and the factory was like in a valley, and we had to climb that up every day and go down…

ES: So you really didn't know what was going on in the rest of the world except for your little place where you were?

ML: No, no we did not know. Some girls could go out when the holidays came out, like Yom Kippur, I don't know how they figured it out, but some of them tried, you know, they were older, they were more knowledgeable in Hebrew and they figured it out and I remember at that point maybe we did not fast, but the previous years, right now I don't understand how we could have done it, we fasted on Yom Kippur.

ES: You were fasting almost every day to begin with.

ML: Yes, but we were fasting on Yom Kippur, working so hard and fasting. Right now I don't know if we should have done it, let's put it this way. And of course, in the evenings, we had plenty of time to talk, no matter what subject we started to talk about, we always came back to the same thing, food no matter what we started. Constantly, we were talking about food because…

ES: It was the most important thing. How long did you stay in this camp?

ML: 'Til January '45.

ES: Okay, what happened in January 1945?

ML: In 1945 the Germans told us to leave the barracks and we had to-- you see, the Russians were invading that part of Poland. That was already in Czechoslovakia, but it was not far from Czechoslovakia, we were in Germany and they were invading and we could hear the planes, we could hear the bombs and we could even see the sky light up at night in the barracks and we were overjoyed. We thought they were coming, we didn't even think about maybe they could hit us very easily. We were in the woods, isolated, but we didn't even think about it [unclear] let's get it over with. So that Monday, they told us that's it and we had to leave. They didn't tell us why, but we figured it out and while we were-- that was that march, you know, marching.

ES: Where did they march you?

ML: They marched us to Sudeten, you know, in Czechoslovakia, was a camp. We didn't know it at the time that we're going to another camp and at that time we didn't have much to take with us to begin with, but with every little thing, a blanket, you always had one blanket because that wasn't slept on and we wanted to cover ourselves, but we tried to take things, and then we still had maybe another dress, another skirt, so we put everything on us. First of all, it was very cold and of course, the shoes were the hardest thing, walking in your shoes, because they were wooden shoes and it was very hard to walk in them and if it wasn't for my sister I would never have made it.

ES: How long did the walk take?

ML: It really didn't take that long-- to us, I thought it lasted maybe weeks-- but it didn't last more than a few days. We slept in the open in the snow. We didn't have any food because they didn't feed us.

ES: No food at all?

ML: No. We slept in a barn. I remember one time, but the barn wasn't with straw, it was with machinery in the barn, something like that. We couldn't even put our heads down. And then again, in the morning we had to stay you know *appel*, they were counting us and counting us. We passed two camps, that's where we got fed in those two camps, a little soup or something. There were people, I don't know who they were. We could not communicate with them. They must have been from a different country, that's for sure, but I don't know how they spoke, I did not communicate with them. But German somehow they didn't know so we were there only to have just something to eat and then they let us march again. And of course the Germans were evacuating because they were afraid the Russians might catch up with them and they were fleeing. Horses and buggies and whatever they had. But those that marched with us, the Germans, they were watching us, but we didn't even think about escaping. There was only one girl that escaped—actually two that escaped one night, and we had a hard time of it because they were counting and counting, so they gave us a hard time, but then we walked on to another camp and then we slept over in that other camp. There was a bathroom, I remember, a barrack. I cannot tell you exactly where it was. It was not far from the last camp that we went and also they gave us some soup, something to eat and I remember being so exhausted at that time coming there that I couldn't even get up. Everything was hurting, it was just unbelievable, just could not get up to walk. And then we got to Kratzau[3], which was the last camp that we went to. It was a prison [unclear] and there were many, many people, I mean inmates from everywhere. They were from France, there were Hungarians, a lot of Hungarians and a lot from Poland, from Auschwitz, they sent them there. They went already through Auschwitz and they came there. See, we had no crematoriums in all the camps that we were, no crematoriums, but we were sent from those camps to Gross-Rosen, which was the closest. In that camp, I remember we had to be on the top floor, it was like five flights up and it was one big room with a broken window and it was January and it was very, very cold. It was [unclear] and for a few nights we just slept huddled one near the other because it was so cold. And we wished they would send us to work because at least when we work at least it's warm, but they didn't and then finally they got us some bunk beds which we had to put up ourselves, some were very old, and no straw, only on those boards we had to sleep, and two in one bunk bed because there was not enough room. That was a horrible place. People were very sick, typhus mostly.

ES: Did any of your sisters get sick there?

[3]Kratzau is a subcamp of Gross-Rosen.

ML: Yes, we were all sick, but we did not have typhus. There was one woman, I don't know where she came from, she gave birth to a child and she had to kill the child. She was sleeping not far from me. Nobody knew she was pregnant and I don't know even where she came from but I remember that incident. There was one woman there helping her to kill the child and then before it starts to cry, you know. What she did with it I don't remember. We were beaten there, we were abused there. The latrines were completely on a yard someplace else. We had to go out of the building go to the latrines, you know. At night it was so cold if you go and of course, food was very scarce. They woke us up so early. I remember they came and said, "Get up!" so early in the morning, around three thirty. We never got undressed. We always slept in what we had. There was never water. We never washed. It's hard to believe but, thinking back I can't believe that anybody could survive something like that, but we somehow did and we had to stay in the yard in the cold and wait for our turn to get transportation. They called us down and we had to stay [unclear] and they had to count us till we got this little bit of water, dark water, with a piece of bread and afterwards, we had to go to work, finally when we went to work.

ES: What did they have you do?

ML: There was an ammunition factory, a very big one, all kinds of work. I was working on a milling machine. I was-- my sister was working on a lathe and, of course, the foremen, the Germans, they were mean. My sister had one that was so mean, when you work on a milling machine it breaks, you can't help it, it depends on the steam if it's very hot. They were just too many, they were hitting us, it was terrible. When we had to go to the bathroom, we had to tell them we have to go to the bathroom. When we came back from the bathroom, we had to say we are back, but we had to say it in a nice way, in German, we had to say it nicely. And the only thing, I liked the night shift mostly, the foreman was nicer and sometimes I could-- there was hot water, I used to take hot water, which was nice. Sometimes, sometimes, we could shower a little bit you know when there was a break. It wasn't allowed. But we didn't have soap, we didn't have that, that's luxury.

ES: Just a little bit of hot water was [unclear].

ML: But you see, there was some things there that soaked in solutions and that cleaned too because that place was so dirty. We came, we didn't have lice, but being there you know we got lice, head lice, but there were [unclear] lice and they were terrible. They just got into your skin. I remember being in a dispensary once being sick and there was a woman dying and when she died the lice, they just came to the surface. I don't know why that happened, but it was horrible, just terrible. And of course, the people were dying. They got the ration of bread in the morning, they couldn't eat it anymore, so they were always swollen. They, they grabbed it from their hands, people were holding on to it with the fists you know so tight. Even when they died, they wouldn't let go and the people around them just took pieces which were sticking out from around. And we were lost otherwise, we went through so much and it went so gradually with us that we got used to it. And we could cope with it much better than the others. The others, when the war started

in '44 in Hungary, when they came to the camp, they came from the best to the worst, they just couldn't cope. They were from France, from Holland, people from all over. They really were dying, they couldn't make it, especially with the typhus, so…

ES: And you think that actually going the process the way you did…

ML: Yes, I know for sure, and not only that, I think, maybe it's my own feeling because I go by myself, I'm a small person, I didn't need that much. If you were told you needed more food and my sisters also, my one sister is taller but the other two are also short, relatively short, and I think that helped too because two girlfriends of ours from Bielitz, we went through the whole thing together, they were very tall and they were very sick. I remember there was a time they could not eat anymore. They were swelling up, the feet, the hands, they couldn't eat and we were lucky it was near the end of the war and I remember towards the end of the war they let us have a bath, you know, they wanted to show the people, the Russians, whoever liberated us, that they treated us a little better.

ES: Were you at this place until the end of the war?

ML: Yes, we were there.

ES: And at the end, when they knew the end was coming, they began to treat you a little bit better?

ML: Not the end, it must have been the end already, because we didn't go to the factories anymore and the big boss came one day and he stood on the table and thanked us for our good work, so we knew the end is near. But there was no joy because we were just as sick and just as hungry and just as dirty, just as cold as we were before. So you just don't rejoice that because you cannot imagine it being different. I remember one day I came back from work so exhausted, so sick, I thought I'm going to faint, I think I did, and waiting for that piece of bread and soup in the evening, and all of a sudden they take, not everybody that came back, but I was selected to go right back to work. And not do the same thing that I usually did, but to demolish a building. And they sent me to the top of the building, which the walls were maybe two feet wide and with an axe, with a pick, we had to take apart the bricks and somebody was handing it to the others and the third party had to wheel it in wheelbarrows some place and I don't know how I did it.

ES: It was your second shift and they hadn't even fed you.

ML: Well, when we were working at night, they came with some food at twelve o'clock, I remember that time they selected me from the yard I felt faint, but she just hit me and she swung me around and she said, You know "You're going to go and," You know, it's a funny thing, no matter how hungry you were and how dirty you were and everything, if somebody hits you or abuses you, you felt so guilty. I can't understand why.

ES: Because the dignity…

ML: Maybe, I don't know, that was the whole thing.

ES: Who eventually came to liberate you, was it the Russians?

ML: The Russians, yes.

ES: And what happened when they came?

ML: Well, they opened the gates and-- well, before the Russians came-- we were liberated the eighth of May-- but before the Russians came, for two days nobody was there. The Russians were not there and we were just like abandoned. The Czechs took care of us because they heard that the Germans wanted to mine the building, you know, and destroy all of us, so they heard about it and we could tell in front of the gates, you know, the barbed wires, they were patrolling. We didn't know what was going on, but then we found out that's what they were doing, it was to protect us, and of course, we could tell that the Germans were watching us. We were free, we were just on our own. I remember they had their own rooms in a different part of the building and I remember I was already late, but the other girls, nobody was there, they just walked in and took whatever they could. And then when finally the Russians-- the Red Cross brought us some food, the people were just like savages, were grabbing. They were afraid if they don't take much, you know, they wouldn't have tomorrow. They couldn't help it. And then when they opened the gates, we went out. We tried to get some food from the Germans, some of them fled and they left the houses. Some of them gave us something and then we finally, we went to a German family and they gave us a room and we stayed there for about two weeks 'till we got a little bit…

ES: You and your three sisters?

ML: Yes, they were afraid to let us to, you know, they knew that-- you see, they didn't want us, but on the other hand, they figured they better do it because they were afraid of the Russians, you know, in case we would say something, so they let us in and, of course, we were very naïve, I think, because after all we could have demanded much more. We had nice rooms and we took a bath, I remember, and gave us some food. We were four sisters together in one little room, but it was luxury compared to what we had, and then we tried to get home. But there were no trains running. It was bad after the war. And finally we got on a cattle train that went to Poland. And we made it after maybe a week.

ES: You got back?

ML: Two days maybe, I don't know exactly, to Bielitz. We figured if anybody was alive they will be in Bielitz, where else would they be? And so we went to Bielitz and somebody came to the train station and told us, "Who are you?" They wanted to see who came and we told them and she said, "I think your father is here." We couldn't believe it, She said, "I think he lives in the same place from before the war." So we went there, I went with my sister. He wasn't there anymore, but he did stay there with a Polish family and he was very sick. She took care of him 'till he could get on his feet and that's how we met.

ES: So he was back where?

ML: But he wasn't in this place. When we got to the family, she said he was here but he's next door with some man and there was an apartment. Of course, the Russians had some rooms there and my father stayed there. He did whatever he wanted.

ES: But at least you found your father.

ML: Oh, yes.

ES: And then when did you find out about your mother[4]?

ML: We stayed there, we thought maybe if my father was alive, she would come too, or somebody else. One distant cousin came; he found us and we stayed together. Then two more cousins came from Russia and they also. One cousin who was my father's sister's daughter, she was also my cousin, and she came. So we knew already that some people are alive and I was in Poland 'till February 1946 when a chaplain from England came and he said that anybody with children-- he took children to England.

ES: Tell us the chaplain's name.

ML: Dr. Sheinfeld.

ES: Dr. Sheinfeld?

ML: Yes.

ES: Okay, from England, and he…

ML: From England, and he came to the cities in Poland, wherever. You see, when you came to Poland after the war, they built a community, you know, a *Gemeinde*, you know, like a community center, and you registered there. That's what you did, the first thing in case somebody comes to the center to find out if you're there, so that's where he came and he found out that some children. So my father said, "Why don't you go to England, you have to go." We didn't have much either because he didn't work and didn't have food; it was very hard.

ES: You were about 15?

ML: I was 15 when the war ended and so my father said from England you can always come to Germany if we are in Germany, so that's what I did. He took us to Warsaw. He gathered all the children from-- we were about 130 children. We were in Warsaw about three weeks. We were staying in a-- there was a synagogue, a bombed out-- there was nothing standing there, maybe one room, also bunk bed, and he made the passports and took care of all those things. We went to Gdynia and from there, there was a boat to take us to England.

ES: And in England you were each placed with different families?

ML: Well, there was a hostel, we were taken to a hostel and some children stayed there. We weren't little children, I was already 15, some of them were much younger and some of them were older, but some of them were placed with families. I was placed with a family and if you needed some room you went to another transport in Poland to bring more children, so he needed the hostel for more children, so he placed as many as he could with families. I stayed with the family for about nine months. And I really wasn't happy there and then from the hostel there was a man and he was well to-do. He was also from Poland, but he left Poland in 1938 and he made money during the war, so he gave us a building. It was rooms and he said we could stay there, the girls could stay there from the

[4]Mina's personal history sheet indicates that her mother perished in Auschwitz in 1943.

hostel, so he has more room in the hostel so when I found out about that, I went to ORT school when I was living with a family.

ES: You went to ORT school?

ML: ORT, O-R-T, you know they have ORT here too, and before that I learned a little English and then I went to ORT school. We learned English in ORT school, actually, me and my girlfriend, we started with ORT school, it just opened, and I started with her, but there were men in ORT, mechanics, they were mechanics. And I was in ORT school about two months and then I wanted to leave the family and so I went to live with those girls. There were 10 girls in that building and we went to work and we paid him, but he didn't charge too much, you know, and he was very nice.

ES: You stayed in England until 1948 when you went to Germany to join your sister and your father. You married in Germany and then you and your husband came to the United States in 1952 to start a new life. Thank you very much for sharing your story.

[Tape one, side two ended. Interview ended.]