HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ANNELIESE NOSSBAUM

Transcript of Self-taped Memoir

Date: May 5, 1981

AN - Anneliese Nossbaum [Self-taped Memoir]
Collateral Documents[1]
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Tape one, side one:

AN: This tape is being prepared for the World Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Jerusalem, June 1981. First, two poems, which were written during the concentration camp period. The first one by an unknown author. [A German recitation was given.][2]

The next one, by Ruth Kruger. [Another German recitation was given.]

My name is Anneliese Nossbaum. I was born on January 8, 1929, in a little town called Guben. When I was two years old, my parents, Siegfried and Irmgard Winterburg, moved to Bonn, where my father had the position of cantor and teacher. We lived on Am Hoff 22, *zwei und zwanzig*. Bonn is a beautiful city on the Rhine, very cultured, very musically, I enjoyed it there.

As Hitler became more powerful in 1933, life began to change very slowly. A scapegoat was needed for the many problems which Germany faced. The Jewish people were chosen. Signs bearing words, "*Juden Verboten*" began to appear, especially in store windows. The first painful experience I had was when I wanted so badly to learn how to swim, but I couldn't, because that sign was posted for all to see, near the swimming pool. More signs began to appear on more stores. Soon, there were only certain stores which a Jew could enter. Christian children began to make remarks. During this time, Jewish children could only go to a special school for them.

My experience was November 10, 1938. This is also known as the "*Kristallnacht*." It was on this night that all Jewish owned stores were either damaged or destroyed and the synagogues were completely burned. Also, many men were sent off to concentration camps when the SS came to their houses and arrested them. It was after this that many Jews attempted to emigrate to whatever country would take them. Unfortunately, few countries took them in. We tried to come to Los Angeles. Very distant relatives of ours had sent us an affidavit of support. My parents went to the American Consulate, where they received an exit visa for all of us, and then tried to book passage for a ship to the United States. The only way available, at the time was to go by train over Poland, through Russia, Vladivostok and then by ship to Los Angeles. Then one day, at the end of the summer, the phone rang, and we were informed that the passage was cancelled. This was because Germany had invaded Poland, and the border was closed.

[1]See pages 8-10 at the end of this interview. Also available through the Gratz College Tuttleman Library are copies of documents including passports.
[2]The poems recited are printed at the end of this interview with corresponding English translation by Mrs. Nossbaum.

Now we were trapped. In June, 1941, an order was issued that all Jews of Bonn and surrounding areas were to give up their homes in order to take up lodging in a former cloister. *Kloster Mariahilf, Bonn Endenich, Kapellenstrasse. Vier und vierzig* [This is the name of the place, Cloister Mariahilf, Kapellenstrasse – street name #44].

The children and parents were separated, except for myself. I stayed with my parents, as they had two rooms, due to my father's important position. There was a community dining room. We had religious services and schooling, until early 1942, when teaching of children was prohibited. We were not allowed to leave the area unless we had a special pass and we had to wear the yellow star. We were not allowed to walk on the sidewalks, only in the streets. My mother had to leave every day, to work in a ceramic factory. She was always under guard. And then, our last evening arrived. We were deported to several concentration camps, carrying with us all we could carry: clothing, bedding, a little food, etc. My parents and I were sent to Theresienstadt. It was considered a privileged ghetto, because it lacked the gas chambers, at the time. It was a town in Czechoslovakia, a former garrison town, where all civilians had been evacuated. The men and women were separated. My mother was with me. We had to sleep on the floor, and 20 people were in a small room. Sanitary conditions were very primitive, and there was a food and medicine shortage. Many people died of illnesses. Again, due to my father's position, I lived in a youth home a few months later, and remained there for the rest of the time in Theresienstadt. This was [unclear], *Vierhundert vierzehn* [Ger: 414] *Zimmer* 18 [Room 18]. I was forced to work in gardening in all kinds of weather.

As a result, I got very sick. The good spirit among all of the people was the only thing that helped their survival. They were very interested in Zionism, and learned all they could from each other. We sang Hebrew songs, learned history, danced, learned reading and mathematics. This knowledge was necessary to be acquired because it preserved us as human beings, even though we were not treated as such. During the stay, people were deported, unknown to them, to Auschwitz. Because of this, the rest lived in constant fear of getting a pink slip, which said that they were going to be deported.

In the early part of 1944, things began to change for the better. Inmates were allowed to receive parcels, mostly food, from a post office, which was established for this purpose. There was a marketplace built up with benches and flowers. A band stand was built for afternoon concerts, and operas were performed. My parents took part in several operas, and as a reward, got extra food rations. The food supply increased and medical facilities improved. A nursery was built where a little boy was taught to say something to the effect of: "Oh, we are getting meat again today?" to the International Red Cross of Switzerland. The Red Cross was inspecting Theresienstadt as an example of all concentration camps. This was the reason why things had suddenly become better. A film, a Nazi propaganda film entitled, "The Fuehrer Gives the Jews a Town," was made of this period. All transports to Auschwitz had been cancelled until after the inspection. But September came and most Jews were sent to Auschwitz. This included my parents,

my Aunt Anita Lewinski, my Uncle Heinz Lewinski, and myself. A few days before the upcoming holiday of Yom Kippur, my father received a pink slip to leave Theresienstadt the day after the holiday. The last evening he was in Theresienstadt was on the holiday. He was singing in the synagogue and I came to see and hear him. All through the service I cried, knowing that after tonight I would never see him again. I was right. He died in Kaufering/Dachau, in December, 1944, gangrene of the leg, they said.

The trip to Auschwitz took three days by train. Everyone had a horrible feeling within. This was because they had not been told where they were going. We ended up in a part of Auschwitz called Birkenau. The scene was like this when we arrived. Everyone was told to leave all of their belongings on the train, step outside and form a line. Now, came the selection, by which the individual was told to either go to the right or to the left by an SS guard. Since all of the other children were going to the left, it was only natural that I wished to join them, because in Theresienstadt the children were treated a little better than the adults. The SS guard asked for my age and I replied that I was 14 even though I was 15. Maybe it was because I was tall and blond, he sent me off to the right, with my mother. The women went into a room and were told to undress in front of the guards. In another room, their hair was shaved off and we took a shower, a real one. We were given summer clothes to wear, even though it was October, which consisted of a dress and a pair of old shoes.

Very few people can pinpoint the moment when they cease to be a child and become a young adult. It is, and should be, a gradual transition. It was this moment in my life, the arrival in Auschwitz, the silent inwardly screaming good-by to my favorite 29 year old aunt, the witnessing of the same good-by between my friend and her mother, the undressing, the shaving on all parts of my body in front of sneering SS guards, then seeing my mother bald, in rags and terrified.

This was the moment of my initiation into maturity.

I was only there for five days, but it seemed like forever. The women began to realize what had happened to their friends who went to the left, and to wonder where the men were. They had volunteered to go to Auschwitz because of the promises that they would be united with the men. Of course, this was not at all true. Besides, if they had not volunteered, they would one day have gotten the pink slip anyway.

The women had no personal items at all. I did not brush my teeth for eight months. Often, we were called outside to stand in line for hours, doing absolutely nothing. Lodging in the barracks wasn't any better. We slept on hard wooden slats, and sometimes, if we were lucky, got some straw or burlap to sleep on. There was no bedding, no pillows, no blankets. Four people slept in a single bed. The sanitary conditions were unbelievable. Open trenches served as toilet facilities, and the smell was horrible. The food was served three times a day. It was awful and insufficient. We had to take cold showers on cold nights. Even though it was indoors, there was no heating, and towel to dry up with. We had to stand, again, for all hours of the day and night, just to be

tortured, after the showers. On the fourth day, we were locked inside a barrack. Outside the weather was nice and bright and sunny, and people were screaming while they were being shot, outside in the beautiful weather. The women in the barracks were petrified. Would they be next? Would an SS guard come in and announce that we should step outside?

That night I was extremely cold. As I lay in my bed, I saw that others had straw or burlap in their beds. Somehow I collected enough courage to go up to the barrack guard and ask politely if I could not also have some in my bed. The guard was angry and hit me in the face. I hit her back. Then she made me kneel and she hit me some more. I went back to bed scared and cold. I would like to refer to this incident, not because it was a physical abuse or injustice overall, but in my life, it changed my religious belief. Having come from a structured religious home, with set prayers and tradition, I found out that evening that structure is not all. I prayed hard, and yet I lost my belief in a personal God. This caused me many conflicts, up to the time my children Ivette, Anita and Jeffrey were ready for religious instructions. I might add that today, I still cannot believe in a personal God, but have accepted religion as a vital part in my life for many moral, ethical and social reasons. Simply, what I am trying to demonstrate is how Auschwitz changed me completely--physically, emotionally, spiritually, within a matter of hours and five days.

The following day, my mother and I were sent off with the others, in cattle cars, to an airplane factory in Saxony, near Dresden. It seemed like a good contrast to Auschwitz. We slept in a heated factory building, slept two people in a regular bed. We had a pillow and some sort of blanket. The women also had a coat to wear, which was important because it was October, going into the winter months. I worked 10 hours a day, 7 days a week. We had a half an hour for lunch and toilet privileges. There always was a mad rush to accomplish both, as bathroom privileges were not extended during working hours. One day, I could not do both in the half an hour. I sneaked out of work. When I came out of the bathroom, an SS woman was there. She asked me why I was not at work and slapped me. I returned to work and my friends were frightened. I only laughed nervously about it. The same SS guard saw me laughing and thinking I was talking about her, or what had happened, came over and hit me again.

The evenings were free except for standing in line at attention to be counted. The women were able to take a brief weekly shower, with soap. There were washing facilities outside, but it was too cold to wash with cold water, and risk the chance of catching pneumonia and consequent death.

At the end of the year, there was heavy bombing in the area. Once, during the night, the women were sent to unheated barracks because of the bombing. Shortly, after they had been taken out, the factory was bombed during the night. This meant the end of work. For a few weeks we did nothing. It was a period damaging to our mental health. We now had time to recall and worry about our loved ones, and to contemplate our own predicament and fate. It was a difficult period, indeed.

In the beginning of April, 1945, we were put into an open cattle car and started a three-week trip. The destination was another camp called Mauthausen in Austria. Those three weeks were horrible. There was hardly any room to lie down. We got wet from the rain, and had only the clothes which we were wearing. I had on the same dress for eight months. Perhaps the worst factor was that we only got fed every third day. Between the meal of coffee or soup, we survived on drinking rain water. Later, we were changed into a closed cattle car. This was better because we did not get wet from the weather, and it was a little bit warmer. The women finally arrived at Mauthausen and were led to a special barrack. Here, we slept on the earth, in the mud. It had no floor. A child was born during this period, premature, dead. It was thrown outside the barrack, on top of the other corpses.

One day, we were told to go outside, as usual and be counted. We stood for a long, long, time. Suddenly, a German arrived from the upper part of the camp and said something to the SS guards. The women were told to go back in the barracks. I later found out what the message was all about. The Allies were very close by. My mother and I and the others were supposed to get gassed that day. We were supposed to be gassed in Gusen/Mauthausen. But since the Allies were so close, and the Germans could not get the Zyklon B gas needed, and not enough was on hand, we were saved. Two days later on May 4, the SS guards, dressed in civilian clothes, threw away their weapons and fled into the woods.

The next day, on May 5, a white flag was flown. It showed that the camp had surrendered to the Americans. The American troops came into the camp in tanks and when they saw the pathetic looking people, threw candies and gum at them. The Americans never looked so good I said.

After liberation, many people remained because of illnesses. Even though American doctors and plenty of food was there, many died. The people remained until the latter part of the summer, when the Russian forces took over, who were not as kind as Americans had been. I was transferred over to a small town and went to a hospital, together with my mother, because my mother had tuberculosis. Then, my mother faked having appendicitis, so that the two of us could leave and go to Linz, an American occupied territory, for an operation, and get away from the Russians. My mother died in December, 1945, of tuberculosis, and is now buried in Linz, in the Jewish part of their cemetery. I came to the United States the following summer.

In conclusion, I would like to make a personal observation. Germany had contributed a lot to the natural beauty of this world. It contributed greatly to music, literature, art, science, medicine, etc. But, after World War I, an air of permissiveness came into being: drugs, sex, followed by unemployment, inflation and other ills. During my years, it was an immoral society, one that had discarded its basic principles of right and wrong, as for instance, thou shall not steal, not murder. In 1935, the laws of the land were changed to conform to immorality. The Jews and others, Gypsies, for instance, were

no longer given protection of their personal freedoms. The days that the signs told me, you cannot go swimming, shopping, see a movie. You should war your yellow star. The day they burned our synagogue, the days we walked the open street with all our belongings on our back to the doorsteps of the gas chambers, those days were witnessed by the people of that nation, perhaps, the world. And the people, with a few noble exceptions, were silent. Silent! It did not affect them, yet. But, thirty million people died during World War II. What does this have to do with us? That is why I am here today to ask, please, never remain silent in the face of injustice, regardless of the victim's religion, color, or creed. Martin Luther King said, "Injustice anywhere affects people everywhere." Anytime a person is touched by this kind of injustice, a person is affected either physically or mentally or both. I don't know of any survivor who did not have to be rehabilitated, in order to return to a normal society thereafter, including myself.

What is the feeling that I have to have survived? Guilt. And many times I felt I should have died with the others. They were more deserving, more capable of life, than I am. But, I am alive. And therefore, willing and anxious to share my experience with others, especially teenagers. It is for this reason that I have outlined my story, in the form of teenage experience. My future generations get to know it and try to understand it, perhaps, in a small way, even identify.

Additional material added by Mrs. Nossbaum:

The ashes of our destroyed Synagogue contained G-d's laws. Nazi laws and authority had taken over and dictated our total being. Actions of that day burned into our memory.

Mine was the loss of our beautiful, spiritual "Home". The one shared with my people, my praying and singing mother, singing and preaching father, who was the Cantor of this Synagogue.

Another memory that made an indelible impression was the unexpected arrival of my aunt and uncle. Their phone call, late in the evening of 11/9: "We are coming to visit you NOW" [out of character for them] sent chills. I remember I crawled into my parent's bed and saw the panic-stricken face of my mother in this well lit room. There was a reason for this visit: in their village the pogrom had already taken place and my uncle had been thrown into a well!!

A local policeman [with a conscience] pulled him out or he would have drowned--hence the immediate urgency of leaving.

There is a question: who carried out these destructive deeds? Local people? Sure, some of them joined the organized groups who were sent on a mission of destruction. However, these groups were not the "locals"--no--locals could have been someone's neighbor, friend, schoolmate, customer of a Jewish bakery, etc. hence, the locals were sent to other cities where they became "THE GROUP", where they were not emotionally involved to demolish and through their participation proved their faithful loyalty to the Nazi Party.

Anneliese Nossbaum
11/9/2008

Fressen unsere Leichen Raben?
Muessen wir vernichtet sein?
- Sag, wo werd ich einst begraben -
Herr, ich will nur Freiheit haben
Und der Heimat Sonnenschein.

Are our bodies devoured by ravens?
Do we have to be exterminated?
- Tell, where will I be buried in days to come -
Lord, all I want is liberty
And homeland's sunshine.

Mauthausen 1945 Anonymous

[Copied and translated by Anneliese Nossbaum]

Taeglich hinter den Baracken
Seh ich Rauch und Feuer stehn,
"Jude, beuge Deinen Nacken
Keiner hier kann dem entgehen,"
Siehst Du in Dem Rauche nicht
Ein verzerrtes Angesicht?
Ruft es nicht voll Spott und Hohn:
"Fuenf Millionen berg ich shon -
Auschwitz liegt in meiner Hand,
Alles, alles wird verbrannt."

Taeglich hinterm Stacheldraht
Steigt die Sonne purpurn auf,
Doch ihr Licht wirkt oed und fad -
Bricht die and 're Flamme auf.
Denn das warme Lebenslicht
Gilt in Auschwitz laengst schon nicht.
BLICK zur roten Flamme hin,
Einzig wahr ist der Kamin.
Auschwitz liegt in seiner Hand -
Alles, alles wird verbrannt.

Ruth Klueger

Behind the barracks day by day
I see smoke and flames arise.
"Jew, submit, bend your neck
No one here can elude this fate."
Can you not perceive the distorted faces,
The human reflections in the smoke?
Does it not shout with ridicule and disdain:
"Five million I absorbed so far -
Auschwitz rests in my hand,
Everything, everything will be devoured by its flame."

Behind the barbed wire day by day
The sun rises in a crimson color,
But the light seems desolate and dull
As the other flame ascends…
The warm light of life does no longer apply to Auschwitz.
LOOK at the red flame,
Unrivaled truth is the chimney.
Auschwitz rests in its hand -
Everything, everything will be devoured by its flame.

Ruth Klueger

[Acquired by Anneliese Nossbaum in KZ Mauthausen 1945 and subsequently translated.]