

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ANNA ROTH

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Patricia Rich
Date: July 14, 2010

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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AR - Anna Roth¹ [interviewee]

PR - Patricia Rich [interviewer]

Date: July 14, 2010

Tape one, side one:

PR: Tape one, side one, Anna Roth interviewed by Patty Rich on July 14, 2010. Anna, can you tell me where you were born?

AR: In Stopnica in Poland.

PR: Okay. And what was your birthday? What year were you born?

AR: 1929².

PR: 1929. And can you tell me a little bit about your family?

AR: We used to live in, in a small town and we were like middle-class people. There were six children, six girls in the family, and we used to go to Hebrew school and public school, and it was nice life at that time, and we enjoyed it. It was real good.

PR: Now did you live in a house or in an apartment?

AR: We lived in a upstairs apartment, and downstairs lived my grandmother-- my father's mother-- and with her daughter and a husband and later on came children downstairs, and we lived upstairs.

PR: Oh okay. And was it like a farming area or more like a city?

AR: No, it was a small town. It wasn't farm. Farms were, maybe 2 kilometers which I don't know how many miles it was, that was farmland, but where we lived it was a small town...

PR: Okay.

AR: Houses one next to the other.

PR: Okay and what kind of work did your father do?

AR: My father was a roofer.

PR: Oh, okay.

AR: He would get to work from out of town and sometimes like in big buildings and he make like roofs or all kind of stuff.

PR: Okay, and was your family religious?

AR: Yes, very religious. We were orthodox, Hasidic.

PR: Oh.

AR: Very religious. My father was very religious. I think my mother was a little more modern, not as much as my father was very religious. He went to synagogue three times a day and Saturday he went to synagogue and he prayed and everything. My father was very religious. We were more like a little bit, the modern way.

PR: Mmm hmm. Do you remember-- did you keep kosher in your home?

¹née Weber.

²Ms. Roth indicated that her birthday is December 29, 1929 on her personal history form.

AR: Oh yes, definitely kosher. We kept kosher and it was, it was ni-- and we would buy stuff like goods, they had, they had meat. And you had to go everyday to buy the meat and make it kosher yourself, not like you get it here.

PR: Oh.

AR: And cook it for that day and you couldn't actually put it away for the next day, sometimes only for Saturday. We put it in the basement downstairs that it was nice and cool. We didn't have a refrigeration.

PR: Oh, okay.

AR: So everything was cooked day by day.

PR: Okay, and were there none-- was it a lot of Jewish people in your town or...

AR: Where we were lived were most-- a lot of Jewish people. Not in this neighborhood, some place else were non-Jewish people, but in this neighborhood where we lived were most Jewish people.

PR: Okay, and you went to public school?

AR: Yes, public school and Hebrew school, Hebrew school was in the afternoon.

PR: Oh okay. And did you encounter any antisemitism when you were a kid?

AR: Yeah, when we went in the fields sometimes for a walk but the grass was not very near where we lived and so some of the young kids would throw stones at us. It was, it was always there. That's why we didn't go back to Poland ever. They were like that. We were scared to walk, unless in the daytime. And if a lot of Jewish people walked there-- we went for a walk like on the field to see the grass and the trees maybe they were not so much involved, but to go by yourself, someplace in the evening, wasn't great. It was really scary.

PR: Okay. And-- so you belonged to the synagogue?

AR: Well it wasn't-- at that time it wasn't like belonging to a synagogue, like now. We, we had like a small place to go to pray and my father used to go there three times a day and the rabbi lived across the street from us. And it wasn't like belong-- I don't remember like this kind of like belonging to a synagogue. You lived across the street and you went in to the pray across the street and that's what it was.

PR: As girls did you go to the synagogue?

AR: Not as much. We went on the holiday but not sitting there the whole day, no.

PR: Okay.

AR: But we prayed. We had to, like after meal we had to pray and say a prayer every time we ate, we had to say a prayer and before we went to sleep we had to say a prayer, and Saturday we had to pray. If we didn't go to synagogue, we prayed at home in the siddur.

PR: Okay. Did any men in your family serve in the Polish army?

AR: I don't think so. First of all, in our family we were only girls and they were very young, and no, my fath-- I don't think my father was in the army either.

PR: Okay. Alright. So when did you first become aware that something was happening in terms of the war?

AR: It was in 1939 that the war-- that we knew that the war broke out between the Polish people and Germans. But we didn't know what to expect and we didn't know what the war was. But then, I think it was September 1939, it didn't take long for, for the Germans start-- just to occupy Poland. They couldn't, the Polish army wasn't any good to fight them back. And we knew that the war was going on so we were scared. Our house was small, so--but across the street was like brick, a brick big building and that's where the rabbi lived. And we went across the street to stay there because we were scared whatever would happen, ours would pull apart and this was a more, more stronger building. So we were there maybe for a day or so, and after they came in the Germans, they came with parachutes on the roofs. After they came in, we sort of like-- it started out to be more normal and then we went back to our houses.

PR: Okay. And then was life different after the Germans arrived.

AR: Completely different, completely different. First of all, they were after men. They would take them out to put them to work and if they came home, it was a, a joy because sometimes they took them away and we didn't know what happened. It was real hardship. We were real scared. They would go for no reason and, and burn houses. It was a disaster for kids. I mean...

PR: How old were you then?

AR: I mean, maybe...

PR: ...were you 10?

AR: Something like that. I was, I was young.

PR: Right, so nine or ten years old when it started.

AR: Yeah and everything was bad. We were just scared of them. If we saw a German walking in the street, we-- first of all, they were after the men and we didn't know what they are going to do to them, and my father wasn't-- if my father was in the house, we would watch outside if the Germans were coming so he would be, he would try to escape. We had an attic on top of, on the-- where we lived...

PR: An etting?

AR: An attic, attic...

PR: Oh an attic.

AR: Yeah, so he would go upstairs and there was, there was a wall like with a, with a board that you could take it away. I mean you slide it back or forth, you could take it away and go in the other side of the building. And this is the way they tried to protect themselves that the Germans shouldn't catch them. If that's what happened, and we were outside watching the kids and say a German was in the street, that's what my

father would do, go upstairs and try to go across on the other side. There were other people living there but they were all Jewish people and they could do it.

PR: So then what happened?

AR: Well, if nothing-- if they went away, my father came back to the same-- and the same board was moved. I mean it was like you could slide it this way or this way, so you would come back to the house.

PR: Did they ever capture him?

AR: No, they didn't go particular for any person. They just went after any man. They didn't care. I mean they didn't go in the house and say is this so and so here. But it was like they went just to catch people.

PR: Okay. So the Na-- what else changed when the Germans came to town?

AR: Well we were scared. We were always scared. If we saw them, they did something bad. There was a lady that she was a little crazy you know, and we were used to her because it's a small town and she was walking around all over, and people didn't pay too much attention. But one time she threw something on a German soldier, like a piece of bread or something that she didn't know what she was doing. They took her up on the cemetery and they shot her. It was bad because we sort of knew her already, you know...

PR: Right.

AR: ...and it was real sad to hear that they went just because she took something that she was eating and just threw it because she was a little crazy actually, you know. Like we knew, we coped with it and we didn't make much of whatever she did but we didn't expect that somebody because she's doing something that they're going to come and take her and kill her...

PR: ...and kill her...

AR: This what we didn't expect. And things like that upset the kids.

PR: Right.

AR: And life wasn't the same.

PR: Right.

AR: Everything was upside down. Then when like it came for Passover, the people from across the street, from this big house you know. On the *seder* night, the first *seder*, they went in, and that person, he was already an older person and he wore a white outfit, a white outfit-- I meant this is what the religious people...

PR: A *kittel*.

AR: A *kittel* yeah for Passover and they took him out and for no reason at all, they killed him. And we were in the middle of doing the *seder*...

PR: Oh no.

AR: ...and we couldn't do it anymore, everybody-- we took off everything from the table and you know, it was just across from us. It was a hectic life to live...

PR: Right.

AR: ...with the Germans, hectic, and we went to sleep, we didn't finish up the *seder*, we didn't do anything and that's the way it went.

PR: So that was around September?

AR: No, it went on later [unclear].

PR: That was around the Pesach, I'm sorry.

AR: It was already, I mean it wasn't-- it started out in September, when they came in, when they started all the mischievous things that we didn't expect, and...

PR: Were you still able to go to school?

AR: Actually they, they stopped the school, public school, they stopped. Jewish children couldn't go to the public school.

PR: Did you have to wear the star? Did you have to wear the star?

AR: Yeah, most, yeah they had to wear the yellow star, and it was scary to go out in the street. And my mother saw that we don't have the public school education, she went to a Hebrew school teacher that we were involved with from before the war and she asked him that he could continue teaching us Hebrew. So he said that you have a few people to be involved in order for him to give up time. So my mother got in touch with, I think, [unclear] three people. They were the upper class people that they could afford it and they had buildings, big ones, so they-- my mother arranged that we should go and learn. They had children at the same time as I did, and she took me, there were six kids, but she took me. She wanted me to be good educated in Hebrew. So these people had a group every, every other day it was some place else to go to learn. And they give up a room and we came and learn Hebrew there. And then some other time we went to another room. One was Neiman and one was Kupfur.

PR: One was what?

AR: One family was Neiman.

PR: And that's the family name, Neiman?

AR: Neiman and the other one was Kupfur. They had a, they had a ice [unclear], ice house to, because there wasn't any refrigeration, so they send out people, a lot of people with ice, selling ice for people to keep butter or things like that, it shouldn't melt away, so one of them and the other one was Neiman.

PR: So then what happened, in terms of the war, what happened next?

AR: Well it didn't go good. We were always scared. Whenever we saw them we were scared. Sometimes if they were not in town, we went for walks where the fields and everything was so nice and, but eventually it didn't-- it wasn't any good.

PR: Did you make any attempts to leave? Was there any discussion of trying to leave Poland?...

AR: ...no, no we couldn't if we wanted to. We didn't have the means of doing it. I think I'm almost sure if my parents would have enough money to try to, they would probably leave, but the people there they had food it was more than enough. Food and

shelter, middle-class was already good but not good enough to go away overseas someplace.

PR: Right.

AR: Very few people had that, but the majority did not.

PR: Okay and did you hear news about what was happening in other places?

AR: Yes, they kept saying that the Germans will kill us.

PR: Who was the rumors amongst?

AR: ...you know, it wasn't like real modern like here today, where you hear everything, but a bunch, some people got together and maybe one read a paper from who knows or maybe they heard the radio and they said that the Germans will eventually kill us. And I was a kid, I didn't believe it. I mean, why would people kill? I mean, I didn't believe that.

PR: Okay, so it was hard, so you didn't believe that?

AR: No, I didn't believe that they're going to kill us.

PR: So when was your, was your family deported or what happened? How did that happen?

AR: I think it was, maybe a year or two later that they came in. They came in and said that everybody should go out in the market. They're going to take us to work. And certain ages should go out. That's what they wanted. They didn't want women and children, but they wanted men who were not too old, and young girls they wanted. So everybody started out going out in the market and see, to go, to be shipped out. And there was a lot of people out there and they came, and my sisters Rebecca and Fanny went out. And I wasn't of age yet to be among, because they wanted a certain age.

PR: How old, how old were your sisters?

AR: The sisters were older than 16. They wanted 16 and above.

PR: Okay.

AR: So we-- and I was with my mother and the other smaller children in the house, and then my older sister sent home for me. She said they say that it is good to go to work, because that's where they send us to work from that market. So my mother dressed me in my sisters clothing, that I should look older. And I went, and I went out in the market waiting. And my father was already there too, my father and the two sisters. So I was waiting for them to take me to work. And they said if we go to work, the people who are in the houses won't stay there, they won't touch them. Look what they did! So anyway, they took us on buses. Well, I, they-- when I had to go up on the bus, I couldn't. I got stuck in the middle and half I went in the bus and the other half was hanging out with the feet. And one comes over with the pistol and the people from the bus see what happened. They all went and grab me fast because to them a person didn't mean anything. If anything didn't go their way, they shot them. They walked around in the street and if some-- if they didn't like somebody walking or something, they killed them.

That's the way they were. So they took us to Skarzysko³ was the name. It was a munition factory. There was one big building with windows, all black, painted with paint, and you saw maybe two people walking around, you were scared just because the way they looked, and this was supposed to be our way to sleep. And then they took in another barrack.

PR: Was it a barrack or a factory?

AR: Another one, not, they didn't take-- I mean like I don't remember my father being there with us, you know, but only the girls were in this one and they took them in another one. But that was-- not far away was a fact-- a munition factory, and when I first came there, I told my older sister I want to go home. I didn't want to stay there. At first, I missed my mother, my sisters and it was...

PR: Scary.

AR: It was terrible.

PR: Terrible, right.

AR: And my sister said when they take people from here they kill them. She said, you don't have a choice, you can't do it. And that's what they did. If anybody didn't like it or something, they took them, just killed them away. So I remained there. And then in Skarzysko. There was-- the food was like water, they gave us like soup once a day. There was almost nothing in it but water. And they gave us coffee twice a day and one slice of bread. That's all there was.

PR: And you slept in a, what was it?

AR: The place to sleep was like the chicken coops, one on top of the other, you couldn't sit up. You had to sit like that. One was on top, three layers.

PR: And what kind of work did you have to do?

AR: The next day we went, they took us to the ammunition factory and there were like machines that made shells, shells for the ammunition, you know. And each person got to operate these kind of machines, you know. I had four, four machines to operate. They shouldn't-- I should see that they are always in the go. They shouldn't stop or they shouldn't-- if something was wrong with it, they fixed it, but my, my aggravation was that I had to, I had to see that it doesn't stop. I mean it should be going all the time or else I got beaten up.

PR: Mmm. And how long were you there?

AR: We were there maybe two-- I'm not really sure, we were there maybe for two years.

PR: Oh a long time?

AR: Yeah.

PR: And your father, did you ever see your father?

³Skarzysko – also called Skarzysko-Kamienna, a slave-labor camp located in south central Poland in the town of Skarzysko-Kamienna,

AR: Yeah, my father was later transported to, not far from where we were and I had a chance to go, I think they built a barracks and my father was transferred over and I had a chance to see him.

PR: Yeah.

AR: [Unclear], I don't remember everything to tell you like to here. I went...

PR: Yeah, that's okay, that's okay. Anna is looking now at her written memoir to consult her notes.

AR: See this is 1940, Passover.

PR: Yeah, okay. So Anna, at that time were you there until the end of the war or what happened to you?

AR: No, they-- one time, I don't know which year it was. Oh, yeah I also-- I wanted to tell you what my father did when they brought him in first. He had to work in a factory to, from iron to, with a hammer to make whatever they wanted him to form and it was like a piece of fire, it was very red. And my sister at that time decided that we should give him an extra piece of bread and we should divide two for the three of us and that's what we did. And later on they came into the place to ask about if somebody is a roofer or something. And my father said he is. So they took him out, and they put him in a place to, roofing, to do stuff for them like roofing, and that became a little better for us. Because he got a little bit extra soup. And for him it was not to stay there, over the iron and, and...

PR: The work wasn't as...

AR: And like pieces of fire...

PR: Yeah.

AR: And that was better for my father. And when he had, he could get extra soup. So he brought it into the barracks and we shared with the other people. That was good at that time.

PR: Yeah. So...

AR: And sometimes it got a little bit better but they tried to make barracks for us, instead of this big building, and they, it was not too big an improvement from the building to the barracks. But something happened that they found out that somebody escaped going from the factory to the place to be so they just took out people and they killed them right there where we walked by every day. That's our constant fear of that, that people didn't mean anything to them.

PR: Right, mmm.

AR: And later on they, and later on they told us to go out in the market, in outside [unclear] and they started out to take out all the people who they thought gotten old since they came to the camp and took them away.

PR: The older people?

AR: Yeah, they weren't so old, but I mean...

PR: People that seemed weaker or not as useful.

AR: But they could, maybe two years later or so, you know...

PR: Worn out.

AR: It was already was so scary that we were always scared they shouldn't take out our father from the groups, you know? A few people were taken out from where we lived in the barracks, a few people. The mother, one mother was taken out, and they never saw them anymore. They didn't think they're good enough for work. This is the way they did their work. I can't remember everything...

PR: That's okay. So how did that time period-- how did you leave Skarzysko? How did you leave that area?

AR: Well they started out to fail in the war and they started up gathering up the people from Skarzysko and send them some other places. And this was before we left. They took out some that they didn't think they want them, like I told you they killed them. And then we were sent to Chestaholeek [phonetic] to Czestochowa, Czestochowa and that was where my husband was, in Czestochowa.

PR: Was that camp?

AR: Yeah, also on the...

PR: A concentration camp?

AR: Yeah, it was a munition factory.

PR: Oh a munitions factory.

AR: Everything that-- ammunition was concentration because we were not free.

PR: You were slave labor, yeah.

AR: We had to do what they wanted. I mean we were always under their control and they could kill anybody they wanted. That is concentration camp.

PR: Right, right.

AR: If a person doesn't know any...

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

PR: This is tape one, side two with Anna Roth speaking, interviewed by Patty Rich on July 14, 2010. Continue...

AR: We were in Czestochowa for a little while, a few months maybe. And my sister Fanny and I were working a day shift and my older sister was on night shift and my father was on night shift. They come in and they take my father. They take him out and we didn't know where. But my sister was overprotective of my father, so she-- and the factory where we worked was right on downstairs where we had living quarters. So she comes down and says like this, "Both of you are coming with us. They're taking our father and we're going with him." And that's what we did. It wasn't so bad, in Czestochowa the way it was because you could go up and down and be of almost not so much watch. But that's what we did, we went with, with my father and it was Przedborz.

PR: It was what?

AR: It was Przedbroz, another city.

PR: Okay.

AR: Not far from Czestochowa. And they, they-- we had to dig the ground because they wanted to protect themselves so that nobody should be able to go across. So we made ditches.

PR: Bunkers?

AR: Ditches, ditches.

PR: Ditches.

AR: So they wouldn't-- the other party, whoever they thought, would not be able to cross and they took us there. So we all worked for that purpose. And it was very hard. They were going for the horses. The horses digged the earth, and we had to take it away as fast as the horses digged it. But I was always behind because I couldn't do it as fast. So, but they didn't let people go home if they didn't finish their share of what the horses digged up. And I, I worked with others, French people-- my sisters were in another section, so the other people saw what was going on, and they came over to help me. They had to work for me in order I should be able to go home, and finish up this kind of what the horses digged up.

PR: So people helped you?

AR: Yeah. And this was the kind of life it was. It was-- but we, every day was worse, every day.

PR: So you were able to follow your father. You just said we want to go?

AR: Yeah, we went with, yeah we went with him wherever he-- he was sent there, we went with him. But one day two people ran away from this group, not from the women. First, they counted all the women, and send them in the barracks. But the men, two men were missing from my, where my father worked. And everybody was sitting in the barracks crying because we knew what would happen. They take out other two people

to kill them. So that's what they did. They count them up, 10, 10, two people out. They kill them. One was the father of my friend. It was terrible. It was very, very terrible.

PR: So they just...

AR: They just killed them and...

PR: ...grabbed two people in place of the two that ran out.

AR: Yeah, they, they, they count to 10, every tenth person to step out, two people. And this was what life was all about under the Germans...

PR: Right.

AR: ...always fear...

PR: Right.

AR: ...and never free.

PR: And did you have any contact back home?

AR: No more, no.

PR: Were there any letters or any communications?

AR: After months we didn't hear any more, anything. In the beginning they wrote letters to us, they sent us packages, and afterwards nothing. We didn't hear anything anymore.

PR: So what happened-- so you were digging ditches, what happened after that?

AR: After they, after they finished up and it was almost like at the end like they killed away the two people. They shipped us back to Czestochowianka, not to Czestochowa but a smaller town right near Czestochowa and to Czestochowianka and they, they gave them all some ammunition groups, the factories but a different kind. It was like with oil, a machine with oil. And my sisters, Rebecca and Fanny, they wounded up to do this kind of work and from the dirty oil they got like-- I don't know, what it's called. It's just like something from dirt, it comes up...

PR: An infections or rashes...

AR: Yeah, a rash, yeah and it was painful and they were crying at night. It was terrible. But I, I got a different kind of work. They chose me to work outside with cabbage and carrots, and things like that. It was freezing but it was better than-- this was very, very...

PR: Than being in the factory.

AR: Yeah.

PR: Were you able to eat anything when you were doing that work?

AR: They were, they were watching us.

PR: Yeah.

AR: We were not allowed to do anything, even under their control. I mean, they might decide that if somebody takes a carrot they might want to kill them.

PR: Right.

AR: That's the way-- the mentality of the soldiers.

PR: Right.

AR: All the time.

PR: So what happened after that?

AR: So we worked there for a while. We tried to adjust to whatever it was. And it was like, this goes already near where already it's finished up, they, with a Czestochowianka they decided like every time they send in for somebody else to be shipped up. They took my father and sent him someplace, we didn't know where. He was sent to Buchenwald. At this point, I was like every day they took away somebody else that I was so close to. Then and maybe a few months later they sent my two sisters to Ravensbrück and I was left by myself, in that camp for that time being. I mean, you know when I say it, I can't believe I was, I was so young and I, and I, and I was so left.

PR: Were you like maybe 14 then, 13?

AR: No I was young, and I was left by myself and later on, they-- after a while, I, I mean according to here, I wrote it a long time ago, so--. Anyway a lot of stuff I left out.

PR: Yeah.

AR: Because I didn't read it. So, I think it was 1945, this was already, no 1944. They send me away. They took us out from the barracks, and this was the whole, whatever was left behind, they're going to ship them out. And we were sent to, actually to Czestochowa but not to stay anyplace. There were trains. To be, we, we were supposed to be shipped out from Czestochowa. So a lot of-- and we were walking in the streets, we could see that they were losing the war. Because the German soldiers were all wounded, and the war was going on between our-- between them, and, and we were walking and hear the bullets were flying all over. And a lot of people took advantage and they walked away, because they were already in a disarray situation but I was scared to do it by myself. I thought if I walk away from everything, I don't know anybody, what am I going to do? You have to eat or what, you know.

PR: Right.

AR: Not that it was good with them but I was just scared.

PR: Right.

AR: So in midnight a train came and picked us up, and they shipped us out to Bergen-Belsen, and then from Czestochowa, and you know my husband has a sister. And I didn't know her before, but he protected her so much. And one day he was at work and they grabbed her and she was on the train there to Bergen-Belsen. And when we came to Bergen-Belsen as bad as it was to now, it was even worse there. People were walking and eating the ground. They were looking like sticks. They had these striped suits. It was terrible. And when we came, they said they were going to kill us there. What so. We didn't react in any way, to know that this is it, you know. So they, so I was-- they sent us in to get washed, the people, gave them these striped suits to wear. We didn't hear from them as soon they left. And I thought to myself, if this is the end,

what do I have to run first, I'm going to wait until the very last group is going to go in. I'll go in then, okay. So anyway, we go in, I go in the last group and nobody was left behind go in to get washed. And they announced they didn't have any more striped suits. We have to wear those clothes that we wear. It was good. I...

PR: Right.

AR: I had a pair of boots and a nice warm coat. It was, for me, it was good, so maybe this helped me to survive.

PR: Helped you to survive.

AR: Because they, later on they took us outside to wait, to be counted. They took us at 5 o'clock and it was January and it was freezing weather and they let us stay there for two hours. Some fainted and some died from the cold, and it was very bad. Then three months later, they come, that they want to take out people for work. So I was right away I want to go to work. Everybody who-- everybody wanted to go for work but they didn't pick everybody. They-- all the people started out pinching their cheeks, standing on their tippy toes if they're not tall enough to be, they should be picked. So this commission with the SS come and they, they looked to the people, and if people were lucky they wrote down their number. I don't have a number. I don't know, but they had some other number, not on the hand. So they wrote down that I'm going to work. And other ones like me were written down. I had a few friends like that. And afterwards they left. We didn't know what happened to them. We didn't know if they are going to come actually and take us for work. But okay, we left it as is. Meanwhile they took us for work, I don't know what kind. It was, it was a bit of freezing weather. They made us work, pick up like [unclear] wrenches. We were so skinny people, we couldn't do that, but we had to do it. To take it someplace they wanted and put it down there and pick it up and take it back. Just to, not to let people live...

PR: Like psychological torture.

AR: Something like that. So anyway, we went by awhile, I don't remember how long, and, and finally they came to pick the people for work and they wrote down. And when this happened, the whole barrack was running. It wasn't the people, they didn't call out the names or the numbers or anything. The whole barrack was running. I was running and I saw it was no use. They counted up so many, not by number but so many people were signed up and this is how many they wanted to send. So I was beaten up. And I wasn't in the number that they counted. So alright, I go back to my barrack and the others were sent in to get washed and to get examined if they are alright. And they, and they got dressed and we were sitting, even so, we had the numbers written down. We were sitting just. The next day the SS comes in, they bring back people who were not written down, the numbers. They pull out the numbers that they wrote at the first time and lined them all up and taked them on the train. And I was one of them.

PR: And you were one of them. So you went after all.

AR: Isn't it-- I mean, you would think--I mean it's plain miracles like things happened as bad it was, that you count again that, and when they took me, and then I had a friend there and I, I told her, you know what, when I'm going there I'm going to meet my sisters, just like that. And she just sort of like, meet our sisters. We were in Bergen-Belsen. They were in Ravensbrück. Okay, but meanwhile there were trains going back and forth.

PR: Right.

AR: ...bombs were thrown back and forth.

PR: Right.

AR: And there was, it was a commotion all over. And it took maybe a day till, till we arrived Bru-gal [phonetic]. A small town, there were...

PR: What was it?

AR: Bor-gal [phonetic].

PR: Bor-gal [phonetic].

AR: Bor-gal [phonetic], from Bergen-Belsen to Bor-gal [phonetic] and they took us there and there were four barracks, which I liked. It looked like they just prepared it for us, and beds. It looked like a nice bed, I mean from all this stuff that we went through. So, and I stayed there and a I had a blanket in my hands, and I think, okay, I'm straightening out this and then I'll go out to see. And then my friend comes in the barracks, the one that I told her that my sisters, I'm going, "I can't believe it, it's true." It was true that my sisters were there [crying]. And the other side, this side was us come from this and the other side were the ones from Ravensbrück and my two sisters were in the other barrack.

PR: Unbelievable. That must have been overwhelming when you saw them?

AR: [crying] Yeah.

PR: You recognized each other?

AR: When she told me that I went in and it was such a joy to see them. From being separated for a while. And then it was good. I could see them every evening. I went in to see them, and then meanwhile the Germans wanted us to work, you know, they brought us to work. So they gave the people extra pieces of bread. So people who wanted extra pieces of bread took the bread and ran away, and then they came in the barracks and took people who didn't get extra bread to go to work. They caught me one night and they, I had to carry boxes of ammunition. They probably were, I don't know, hundreds of pounds, and I was with another person, but still it was impossible to do it, you know. But alright, we worked the whole night with the ammunition, loading up ammunition on airplanes, boxes. And when it was over in the daytime, we came back-- my sisters didn't even know that I was out working there over the airplanes and putting up ammunitions in the airplanes-- they were not aware of that. I told them afterwards, after I came back. And later on, other people went to work like this, and we didn't really stay there too long. I don't remember how long, maybe a half a year or so. But I could

see my sisters, and my-- Fanny was, didn't feel too good, she was a very weak kind of person but she was okay, and I could see them. And the Germans-- as long they didn't do good in the field, in the war, they kept shipping us from place to place. So they came in and they said they are shipping us out to someplace else. It was Turkheim.

PR: Too...

AR: Turkheim.

PR: Turkheim.

AR: Another city.

PR: Okay.

AR: A smaller one. So they picked us up and they shipped us out to another place. Every place, every time we went some place we were not sure if they tell us the truth or if they are going to kill us. We didn't know. But we had no choice. So they brought us to this place. It was in the middle of nowhere. It wasn't like barracks. It was like you make a place to put away potatoes, like this. It was like working, like in a cellar, that's the way it looked. They kept us there, and in the morning they took us out to, to get the spinach. It was, there were fields of spinach, and we, we, took the spinach, in the daytime we worked together, all the spinach, and the next day they make food for us from that spinach which we did there.

PR: Probably healthier food.

AR: And we were there not long. This is the way it was going, from a few months here and a few months there. And afterwards they told us they going to send us, but this time we wouldn't have transportation, we would walk, from Turkheim to Dachau. I don't know how far that was. So we walked, days, nights...

PR: Was it cold?

AR: This was, this was already near the springtime. But, but it was raining, they didn't care. And we walked and the food was very scarce. I don't remember if they gave us any or maybe a slice of bread a day, I don't know anymore. And then it became nighttime. There was a real big ditch, deep, so they send us down, down and they would watch over us on the top. It was raining, the whole night. It was raining. We were drenched. After we had to get up in the morning to walk, we were all wet. The ditch was full with water and we kept on walking. And they, and we walked until we reached Dachau. I don't remember how many days, it was very bad. And when we came near it, they said they were going to kill us in Dachau. Every place was the killing place, actually. So, or maybe they take us again for walking. We didn't know where. And when I came in it was also a big barrack, and I said to my sisters "If we have to walk, I'm not walking anymore." That's what I told them, "I'll stay, I'll do any, I'm not walking," because that's how bad it was, the walking. So the next day we wake up, no more Germans in the camp. It was 1945, on May, May 6, I think it was.

PR: May 6, wow.

AR: And we were free people but we were scared.

PR: Right.

AR: We were scared that every time we walked we were scared that they are behind us.

PR: Right. Wow. Did you-- were you surprised that they were gone?

AR: Yeah. I mean just when I said I'm not walking anymore, the next day to wake up and to see they're not there.

PR: Right.

AR: I mean in the meanwhile they-- the Polish, there were Polish people, like sort of, so not soldiers, but they tried to con-- to tell us what to do. And they said that because the Germans are not there, there is still a war between them, you know. And they didn't want us to be in the barracks and they wanted us to go down to the bunkers to hide ourselves. And there was going on a fight between the two of them, between it's-- I think the Americans took it over, Dachau and the Germans were fighting and this barrack was full with bullets, I mean-- but some people didn't want to go and they didn't survive. But some, most people went to the bunkers down there, yeah. And they came out okay, but this was-- some people just thought it, it's nothing.

PR: Right. Wow. So you and your two sisters were together at liberation?

AR: Yeah, at liberation, right. But not-- we didn't know anything about my father...

PR: Right.

AR: ...where he was, because he was in Buchenwald.

PR: So what did you do, when it was over? Where did you go?

AR: Well, the American people come through, sort of took us over, and they started out giving a lot of food, so people died right away.

PR: Right.

AR: Because, from not eating and eating too much.

PR: Right, starving, yeah.

AR: So came in an order, not allowed to give them food...

PR: Right.

AR: ...to give food like the Germans gave them, maybe a little more but not too much. And that started a lot died from that.

PR: Right. Did you understand why they weren't giving you so much food?

AR: They said for our good, they don't want to give us a lot of food but we'll have food when we need it.

PR: So how did you go to a DP camp then?

AR: Yeah, they send, from that place, they sent us to another place it was like Feldafing was the name.

PR: What thing?

AR: Feldafing, Feldafing. It was another city but this was Dachau where sent to the Americans took us to Feldafing and they gave us nice where to be, and there were

gardens and flowers and it was just nice time. And we were there in Feldafing and they had nice food and enough maybe not a lot but, but they had enough food and it was nice for a while. So my older sister Rebecca found somebody and they told, they told her that they know where my father is. He was in Lübeck near Hamburg. So she-- I don't remember whether she was by herself, and I know that she took me, and my sister Frieda, Fanny was in Feldafing, and we were going to see if it's true, if my father is alive and if he is there. So we went and it was-- the trains didn't work right and they didn't have a good transportation and we had to wait a long, long time. And then the, the trains, not like to sit down passenger train, but like you throw anything on it, that's the way we went, and we went to Lübeck. When we came to Lübeck we, we inquired about our father, where and sure enough we found him.

PR: Wow.

AR: Yeah.

PR: Amazing.

AR: And Fanny already liked Feldafing there was like a social life there and it started out to be more livable, more everything, and when Rebecca came and said that she has to go with us, she didn't like it [unclear].

PR: Did you go back there again?

AR: Yeah, we came back...

PR: With your father?

AR: We came back to Feldafing to tell her that father is in Lübeck and she has to come with us, and she had already had more like a social life and friends and everything and-- but she went with us.

PR: So did you stay where your father was?

AR: Yeah, we came and we got a place where to stay, not, not where my father because he had already assigned a place to stay. But when we came we got another place to stay and we, we were there for, I don't remember, for a few years, 1945, 1947. Then, then we started talking, my father had a sister in America, and she said, she will take us over to America.

PR: So when did you find out about your mother and your three sisters.

AR: Right after the war, right when the Americans came to liberate us. Not that we found out, we didn't find out. We never, we never find out what happened to them.

PR: Have you looked through the...

AR: Oh yeah.

PR: ...through the Archives and...

AR: We wrote names and you had all kind of written down everybody's name who is alive and people find them...

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

PR: This is tape two, side one, Anna Roth, interviewed by Patty Rich, on July 14, 2010.

AR: When we found out about it, did I cry? In the beginning, I didn't. I said "No, it's not true." I couldn't believe it. Not just in the beginning, but for years. When I saw somebody that looked like my mother, I would start up crying like a crazy person. It was terrible. That's the way I felt.

PR: So it took a long time to accept...

AR: ...oh yeah. It was a long time, a long time to accept that-- I sometimes still don't accept. [crying] This little, this little girl, I used to be with her so close.

PR: So your three sisters-- you were, you were only 10, so they were fairly close in age...

AR: Yes, they were. You can see how small...

PR: Yeah, yeah...

AR: Little ones, and the others ones, I don't-- the other two I don't-- this is the youngest one. The other two, [unclear] I don't have on a picture. This was here with my aunt [unclear]. So I took it and I made a duplicate. The others I couldn't find, I couldn't find the other kids, two more.

PR: Right. And where did you meet your husband?

AR: In Philadelphia.

PR: In Philadelphia, okay. Okay.

AR: My husband came to Richmond, Virginia. Now wait, I wanted to finish up this with the thing, that. I finished up with that...

PR: What?

AR: It wasn't easy, so anyway when we lived in Lübeck for a while and then, and then my aunt wrote to us. We found out from papers about where my aunt is. And she wrote that she wanted us to come there. So we couldn't come to, well Lübeck was English zone and we couldn't go to America from the English zone, so we, we decided to go to American zone, which was Stuttgart. And we went from Lübeck to Stuttgart just in order like from there we would be able to go to immigrate to, to America. So we decided to go from American zone. So we went to Stuttgart.

PR: How did you get the money?

AR: We didn't have the money. I don't remember how we went. Maybe the... What is it called?

PR: The Americans...

AR: Yeah.

PR: HIAS or...?

AR: The HIAS probably sent us.

PR: Yeah.

AR: We didn't have anything. We didn't have...

PR: Yeah.

AR: They sent us to Stuttgart and in Stuttgart we lived for a while.

PR: What year did you come to the United States?

AR: I think 1947, or 19-- to the United States, 1949.

PR: Okay.

AR: In 1947 we came to Stuttgart. I was there for a while, and I went to school, met some nice girls my age. And I had a little bit of school because my school was all torn out, you know.

PR: So the fact that you went to work-- you went on the, when you were first left your home-- the fact that your sister said you should work, it sounds like that was a life saving decision.

AR: Yes, my Rebecca did all that, and she did a lot for our father.

PR: Yeah.

AR: If he was sent away and she didn't want him to be by himself, and she grabbed both of us to go with. She really was a somebody.

PR: She was very sharp.

AR: Yeah, I mean, I don't know what would have happened if he would have been by himself. Maybe he would have been the tenth person, you know. But like if families like pulling together and everything...

PR: right.

AR: ...is a different thing.

PR: Right. And you had some luck. As horrible as it was.

AR: Yeah.

PR: Yeah.

AR: And we, we were close. In a way, I think she did a good thing...

PR: Yeah.

AR: ...to take us with, that he wasn't all by himself.

PR: Right.

AR: And thank God that he survived the war.

PR: Right.

AR: And that we could be together. It was nice.

PR: Okay, well this brings us to the end of the interview. I want to thank you so much for telling your story and because you have this really-- it looks like a very detailed autobiography, it's about 30 pages-- we're going to get a copy of it and I'm going to supply it along with the tapes to the Oral History Archive⁴.

[Interview ended.]

[Addendum follows.]

⁴After the interview, Anna Roth decided to retain her hand-written autobiography within her family.

Tape two, side one, addendum added to end of interview:

PR: Okay we're going to add on a little bit about coming to the United States.

AR: Yeah.

PR: Go ahead.

AR: So we went to Stuttgart for a while. And as I said I went to school there and afterwards we finally got some papers to go to the United States. And that was, not 1947, but that was 1949. And we went to Hamburg, my father and I, and my sister was left behind here, Fanny. Oh and I didn't tell you that my older sister went to Israel.

PR: Oh, Rebecca?

AR: In 1948 she went to Israel on the Aliyah Bet.⁵

PR: Oh.

AR: I was supposed to go with her but I wasn't allowed to because I was too young or too frail. I don't know. The doctors didn't permit me. I had everything packed all ready to go to Israel.

PR: How old were you then?

AR: Teenager.

PR: A teenager, 16, 17...

AR: Something like that. So I, so she went to Israel by herself, and after she left, a year later, they, they sent for us to come to the United States. And my-- Fanny wasn't included because they only took me and my, and my father and I were coming. And so we came to America in 1949 and a few months later my sister and her husband came.

PR: Fanny?

AR: Yeah.

PR: So she had married?

AR: She had married in 1947.

PR: Oh, okay. And you came to Philadelphia?

AR: No, I came to Ohio. That's where she lived, my aunt. This is like-- I had an uncle, my mother's sister lived in Philadelphia. So one day he comes to Ohio and he told me that this is not the place for me to stay, to be there, he wanted me to stay in Philadelphia. So he goes home. A few months later, he sends me a ticket to Philadelphia and a return ticket if I don't like it.

PR: Nice.

AR: And he-- and I, and I come here. It was like October time, something like that and he says to his daughter, Cherie was her name, take her to school. She should take me to school. And I thought it was a joke, because I didn't know much, so much English or anything. So she comes in the next day and she says, "Come on, let's go to

⁵Aliyah Bet refers to the movement of Jewish refugees to Palestine between 1920 and 1948, during British control of the territory. (USHMM.org)

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school.” I looked at her. Is it real? So she took me to school where she went to High School, and the counselors asked me all kinds of questions, what I know and what I don’t know, and everything. Finally, they decided to give me two years to finish up high school, but I can not stay. I’m not allowed to flunk anything. If I do, they throw me out. So anyway, I was, I was trying very, very hard and I finished up high school.

PR: Oh, congratulations.

AR: ...and I got my diploma. That meant an awful lot to me, because I was deprived for most of schooling.

PR: Sure, sure.

AR: And that was good, and my sister lived in Ohio. In fact, she was there almost her whole life. And, and my other sister was in Israel, and my father moved to Israel in, I don’t remember when it was, must have been in the 70s, he moved to Israel.

PR: Okay. Wonderful. Anything else?

AR: This is all I can think of.

PR: Okay.

[Tape two, side one ended; addendum ended.]