HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

FRIEDA APPEL

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Ruth Hartz
Date: April 21, 1985

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FA - Frieda Appel[1] [interviewee]
RH - Ruth Hartz [interviewer]
Date: April 21, 1985[2]

Tape one, side one:

RH: Frieda, please tell me when and where you were born and a little about your family before the war.

FA: I was born in Czechoslovakia. It was the Carpathians in Klocsonova [possibly Kliachanovo]. We were Czech at first, then we became Hungary. We were a family of 11—9 children, 7 brothers and 2 sisters. My mother, father, and among these, forty-year-old grandfather. We survived five children. One died already in this country so we were four. I was constantly with my sister. We were together in a home. She never came out good from it. She's still in an old age home.

RH: Can you tell me a little bit about your life in your town before the war?

FA: It was a nice quiet life. Between the *goyim*, you know, the Ukrainians, plain folks and we were quite a nice community.

RH: What did your parents do?

FA: My father was a cattle dealer. We did pretty good. We were not rich or we weren't poor. We were middle class.

RH: Did you live in a house or an apartment?

FA: In a house. It was a small town outside of Munkács, about three miles from Munkács, kilometers from Munkács. It was a very good life, a hard life, of course, but it was nice. It was a Jewish community. I was a child, of course, everything is nice when you are a child. But trouble started when the Hungarians came in.

RH: Were you affected by antisemitism before the war?

FA: They used to call us dirty Jews and things like that but we fought back. We didn't—you know, the children. We used to tell them, "You dirty Ukrainian," or whatever. It wasn't that bad. It wasn't that bad until the Hungarians came in and it started antisemitism.

RH: So, you did tell me that you did have a Jewish life?

FA: Yes.

RH: There was a synagogue?

FA: There was a nice synagogue and very Jewish. Every one of us was very orthodox, not fanatic, but orthodox, kosher and all.

RH: There were kosher merchants in town?

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[1]née Gottesman.
[2]Recorded at the 1985 American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Philadelphia, PA.

FA: Yes, yes, kosher butchers. Kosher merchants went to Munkács to buy the rest of the stuff. Munkács was a Jewish community, a lot of Jewish people.

RH: Did some of your brothers and sister belong to any youth organizations?

FA: No. Only when the Hungarians came in, they took them as labor. Levenfast that was camp, slave labor, as young kids.

RH: So, there was no real Zionist group?

FA: No, not in my town. They used to dance the *horas* and things like that. There was a couple boys that moved to Israel.

RH: Palestine.

FA: Palestine in 1939. Only from one family, they were very poor and the parents sent them away. They survived of course. But our parents would never dream of letting us to go because it wasn't *frum* enough. It wasn't the proper thing.

RH: Oh, the Zionists, that's right.

FA: Yes, they were outcasts like, you know, they didn't keep the *Shabbat* like we keep and that's why they didn't let us participate. If you were a *Shiksa* you would participate.

RH: You said the relations with the non-Jews were really...

FA: Really, very good. I mean we understood each other. We dealt with them. What they thought, we all knew. None of them liked us, but we didn't care for them either. But we had to live together and that's it.

RH: How did Nazi power over Europe affect your particular area before '39?

FA: Before '39, we started to hear things and we started to shiver. As a child, I remember my father used to talk to my mother or to the elders, "*Oy hust du gehert der tsures* about the *Kristall* night." I remember I was 13, 12, the *Kristall* night and this and that but we all didn't want to hear it, we all couldn't imagine that things like were happening in Czechoslovakia.

RH: How was communication? How did you hear about it? Through the papers, through the radio?

FA: Somehow from mouth to mouth. We didn't have much in our village. We didn't have radio but in the whole town, and I mean Munkács, they did have radios. So, they went into Munkács and they heard all the news and from mouth to mouth everybody was telling something was going down, "It's very bad what they did to the Jews." I remember it well how they used to talk about it.

RH: So, when and how did the war affect you and your family?

FA: Well, you know, the last *Pesach*, it was in April 1944. We heard a lot of things before then but nobody believed until it really happened. Two weeks before *Pesach*, the sheriff, like you say here, came and the *gendarme*, Hungarians, and they wrote down all the names of the Jewish people, the whole list, how many are in the family, everybody's name, what we owe, what we have, and they took that down. So, we saw it was no good. So, the people were talking, oh something is cooking. The last day of

Pesach was very, very sad because we heard they took a town here and they took a town there in the last day, I mean the day after *Pesach*. My mother used to get up 4:00 to bake the bread and I remember it so well. It was in the morning. I look out and my father said, "They're taking away everybody." And it was like April, there were no trees, no leaves and I see across where my uncle lives. He was a pretty well rich man, very good off and I see already he is going with the packages on the shoulders and my father says, "I think we are next." But the sheriff was very good friends with us. He came in the morning and he says, "Listen, they are taking away everybody. I want to save Malka," (me and my brother). His son was crazy about me. At that age, as children, and he was a friend of my brother. He said, "But you must take those two kids in his home, the sheriff himself." I remember my father stood by the gate and he says, "Ah no, whatever will be with us will be with the whole family; nobody is going." He pleaded with my father he should leave us. Whether he knew what was happening, I don't know that sheriff, but he wanted to hide us and my father said, "No, whatever will be, will be." I don't know if I would have stayed anyway because I couldn't exist without my parents. Who could exist? You know, that sheriff, they surrounded the whole town, they brought home my brothers from some place. They brought them all home and the people didn't bake their bread and they took them to the synagogue in the outside in the gates there in the inside, then outside. It was quite a big community. I don't know, about 60 families or more with the children. My father said, "Well, they're taking everybody. I don't know what's going down." The sheriff was real nice and he let my mother finish the bread. The moment the bread was finished in the oven, the warm bread, we took the packages. That's when they came for us and they took us to the temple there and it wasn't long when the sun went down that day. We started. We should get together and go to Munkács to the ghetto.

RH: There was a ghetto in Munkács?

FA: The ghetto was in Munkács. You know, we were the last one. As soon as we came there, we didn't stay there a half hour and they started to march us by foot because it was three miles, three kilometers. My mother was very, you know, she wasn't that well. She had so many children, she worked hard and she couldn't walk. They allowed my father, that sheriff allowed my mother to sit on the wagon and she took me with her.

RH: Were you the youngest?

FA: No, I had a younger brother. Yes, he went with my mother. That's another story. You know, what I do remember, my father had a little jewelry and over the gate and we had one *Goy* in our town, a very nice boy, he handed to him a bundle of jewelry. He gave it back. I remember he said, "Malka, only till you come back," and he also took his *tallis*—we found that too—and they took us to Munkács and we were there about four weeks in the ghetto. There were Hungarian soldiers surrounding us, the *gendarmes* and soldiers with the machine guns. We stayed in the line for things and I couldn't see my mother should stay in the line. As young as I was, I didn't let her stay in the line. I always

slipped in when I took over for water, for bread, whatever we got. It was hell from then on. We were there about four weeks.

RH: They were all Jewish in that town?

FA: Yes, it was all, we were living, I'm telling you I don't know, like it was, a brick factory actually.

RH: With no heat?

FA: Well, that time wasn't that cold. It was after *Pesach* but still it was a brick factory and that time, they stopped and they pulled all the Jews up and down and I remember we had very good bedspreads and things like that. And my mother says, "Oh, what the heck, it was only for *Yomtov* we used it." She says, "What the heck, it was velvet, you know, I'll use it now. I don't know what will be." And we used it.

RH: You slept on the floor, right?

FA: Yes, everybody had a section. Now, here we slept everybody, one next to the other. We slept on the floor. We had to keep it clean. I don't remember what it was with the bathrooms, the showers, we used to go to the river and they allowed us to wash. And one thing I remember, I had very long braids. My mother always loved them. I wanted to cut them and she wouldn't let me. All the way down, and one day my mother said, "Well, I can't keep it clean here. You have to cut them." We went to the river. There was a Hungarian soldier and he looked at my mother—and here now, there was one in a million—and he said to my mother, "How can you cut such hair?" She says, "I have no choice. I have to cut it." She cut me like that because she couldn't wash such hair and that was it. We were there until about...

RH: Did your family stay pretty much together?

FA: Yes, we had to. One time, I'll never forget my brother was maybe five minutes late curfew. He didn't get a chance to get in. That's when they were watching and they caught a few guys and tortured them and that was a very bad heartbreak for all of us. We heard the screaming and they tortured them and it was raining and it was horrible. In the morning, my mother took the clothes to the river and I helped her wash them there. It wasn't far and it was full of mud and all kinds of [unclear]. It was a horrible experience. Then they took us to the train in May.

RH: In May of '44?

FA: '44, I would say eight days before *Shavuot*. They took us. We arrived in Auschwitz eight days before *Shavuot*.

RH: And what happened there?

FA: What happened there is also, I was very, very lucky. The trains, I don't have to tell you, you heard the horrible things. We couldn't go to the bathroom. We couldn't wash, we had just little bowls and we spilled it out through the windows. Sometimes, it went back and one interesting thing, I was so young and I never saw a sunrise. You know, as young as we were, the *tsores* made us more mature. I look out of the window and I see beautiful sunrise, beautiful and I says, "Oh my God, I never saw

such a beautiful thing. It's so gorgeous but why is our heart so heavy?" To me, I never said it to nobody else. When we came to Auschwitz, and the men had to go first, left to right, you know, and for the life of me, until a few years ago, I couldn't figure out what happened.

RH: Mengele, right?

FA: Mengele, of course. For the life of me, I have a younger brother, two years younger than me and that brother went with the father and then he came back and says, "Ma, they sent me back to you." Do you know it took me until two years ago to figure out? My father went to the gas chamber. Why did they send him back to mother, what's the difference? I figured out that the kids had to go with the mother. It's just I couldn't think that if my father was picked for the gas chamber because he was a veteran in the war and he had a bullet in his leg so they took him to the gas chamber. He was about 55. And why he came back yelling, "Ma, they sent me back to you," I couldn't figure it out until two years ago. I decided, I said, now I think I saw *The Holocaust* film and it dawned on me that the mothers have to go with the children and he wasn't picked for labor. My other three brothers I saw after, but when I heard, when I came down, the women came down the train and they said, "Left, right, left, right." And one man, a Jewish man from the Polish people—they always did that, bless them—they went by, they couldn't talk to us, they had to just walk. As he is walking, he says, "Children who are young, tell them you're older. Older women, tell them you're younger," and that rings in my ears today. "Whoever has children, give them to the older people." Now, when you come down, you're so confused. And my mother says to me, "You know what he said? Did you hear what he said?" I said, "Eh, Ma." It didn't take five minutes and Mengele calls me over. He says to me, "How old are you? *Wie alt bist du?*" And I says to him—and I remembered what this guy said—I said, "*Achtzehn Jahre*." I was 14 going on 15. I said, "*Achtzehn*."

RH: Which means 18?

FA: 18. He says, "*Willst du arbeiten*? Do you want to work?" I said, "Yeah." He took me and he told me to go. On the way, I saw three of my brothers that were picked out. We didn't know what was going to happen. We couldn't look back. They wouldn't allow, they were chasing us so that we couldn't look back where our parents went. We came to the barracks for two days. They asked us to eat garbage and I couldn't eat. And there was a girl from Czechoslovakia and she said, "You see those chimneys?" They were bitter because they were much later, earlier there, they were there since 1942, '41. She said, "See those chimneys? That's your parents. And if you're not going to eat, then you're going to be there, too, and I don't care. By two days, you'll lick out the bowl." There was a bowl, one bowl, for five people, without spoons, without nothing. You know, like animals or like cattle. Everybody took a sip. I couldn't sip. For eight days, I couldn't sip and I started to eat that garbage. I got, my whole mouth was blistery, full of blisters. I don't know how it healed up without nothing. I just kept watering it with

my tongue. I started to eat the many times that Mengele came, like *Appell* every morning, we went out for hours and hours. I don't know if it was 5:00 or 4:30 in the morning, for hours standing and standing and standing. One time, I saw across from me another line and that girl was fainting. As I watched her faint, I sat down and I fainted, but it was older people like was in their twenties, 25, they knew what to do. They had a little bread with water and they gave it to me and I came through. Then, we just sat around and sat around and talked about home and talked about—that's when I'm about 16 or 17.

RH: So, you didn't really do work?

FA: No, we didn't do any work but every time it was the *Appell* or selection for the gas chamber. I came once to the gas chamber, very close, but that was only once, the only time. They took us for showers and we didn't know whether it will be the gas or the showers, the water. I stood there like everybody, naked, and Mengele came over and he said to me, "Come over." I went over and he said, "You stay here." I said, "What the heck." We didn't know to be afraid, we didn't care. Without parents, it's not a life. So, I stood there for the whole *Appell*. Everybody went in. Finally he said to me, "Go, go ahead." So, I knew I was saved. I had many, many close calls. They always looked me over because I was young, you know. I was pretty mature, you know, for my age. I had to be. So, we were there about six weeks and then, they took us to labor camps, to Germany.

RH: Where was that?

FA: Gelsenkirchen, the first one. And we worked there also a few weeks, [unclear] with bricks, building, you know, the sand, the dirt. You had to unload and load.

RH: The Germans needed the labor now?

FA: Yes, and we worked on those [unclear], you know, the bricks and we had to throw bricks to each other and pile them. Many times they fell on my feet, but I was young and I always liked to work. Somehow, I kept busy, busy.

RH: Did you have the strength? Did you have better food?

FA: It was a little better because they needed the work. When we came there, they started the bombs already. Day and night, you heard bombs and we were under tents. We lived under tents. They needed the work; they had to feed us a little better. Like I say, I was young, but my sister, she gave up. She was 12 years older and I had so much trouble because she gave up.

RH: She couldn't do it?

FA: She couldn't do it.

RH: What did they do with her?

FA: Well, you see, I was so good at work that they looked at me and every time I started to shelter her, they looked away because they knew that I did more than my share. I did her work and I did my work. So, I went over to the *Lager Ältester*, leader and I told him, "Look, the work is done. I did it for her." So, he was fair at times and at times, he used to beat her and beat me, both of us. Anyway, when it came to selection, we were there six weeks working like dogs and the bombing was terrible, day and night.

RH: Where is Gelsenkirchen?

FA: I have no idea, must be...

RH: Coming from Southern Germany?

FA: I have no idea. It wasn't Germany, definitely. From there, they took us a few days—I forgot to say something. Then, there came a selection. There came very distinguished civilians. I'll never forget that. My sisters says, "Oh, they're taking people. Let's go run. I want to hide. I don't want to go no place. I want to hide. I want to die here. I don't want to go." And I said, "Look, people are running, running, I believe in the *beshert.*" I swear to you, I don't know where it came from. I said I believe to this day, I believe it. I don't want to run. If they'll take me, fine. If they don't take me, fine. At least I cannot say that I volunteered for something and it won't turn out good. I said, "Whatever will be, *beshert* with me, I'll stay here. If they take me, it's all right. If they don't take me, it's all right too." I never ran away from nothing. So, finally, she had no choice, she came with me. There was five other girls from my group there and we were five in a line and we stood steady, all the five girls, constantly from our area. The others of my *Landsleute* [countrymen]— I went the first morning in Auschwitz, I went with my sister to the bathroom. They dressed us and they sent us—just dresses—I don't have an under, and they took us to another camp and I was divided from all my family and friends that we grew up from my village. So I had to choose new friends. So in that camp, we met five girls from our vicinity and we stuck together. So, I came to the [unclear] in the line. And this distinguished man, I don't know if it was Herr Krupps [unclear] mixes and things like that but it was himself but I must say that he was very [unclear], I don't know because he needed us for work. He picked me out and I got out and I started to cry. He says, "*Warum weinst Du*? Why are you crying?" I said, "I have here a sister and I don't want to be separated." See, that's when they used to especially separate, and he didn't. That's why I say he was humane. I called her out and he said to me, "Now, *Kind*, are you satisfied now?" I said, "Yes." They took us to Essen. I don't know where that was in deep Germany.

RH: That's in The Ruhr, I believe. When you say they took you, how were you transported?

FA: By train. I don't know how many days. We came to Essen. It was a gorgeous town—I never saw, all my life, I came from a village—it was so beautiful. And the Germans, whoever says they didn't know about it, they are lying because everyone stood outside and watched us march from the trains to the town. The city, I imagine, it must have been a big city. We came there and we went to army barracks. And the army barracks, they settled us there, and the first night was hell because we had also a lot of bombing and shelling and we ran. That must have been sometime in June or July. We ran every night to the bunkers, maybe sometimes twice, three times a night. But we saw they take the picture of their lives. I don't know whether it was the British or the Americans, we were happy. So, we were there and the first night, we couldn't sleep. We had bed

bugs. Do you know what that is? It eats you alive. We had such blisters, I'm telling you, it was horrible. We couldn't sleep. There was one night the same thing happened. The second time you can't complain, you can't say nothing.

Tape one, side two:

FA: So, the first night—I'll start there in case I missed something—the first night was hell because of the bed bugs and the bombing. The second night, the same thing. You couldn't complain to nobody. What could we say? They were eating us alive. We had to have the lights on, then they wouldn't bite. But the bombs were coming down. We had to have dark; we had to have the lights out. So, we were full of blisters. The third morning, the same guy walks in. I don't know if it was Herr Krupps or a manager or a big shot with his delegation and they come in and [unclear] and find right away, I was by the door in my bed, the bunk, and he found me again. He says, "*Vas is dass*?" And I told him plainly, "The *Vantzen*." And he says, "What?" I said, "Bed bugs." I said, "They're eating us up." That's when the Germans were quiet and they're afraid of them because I guess, it was their factories and they brought us there. So, when they came, we didn't have it so bad because I guess they must have told them not to mistreat us; they needed our labor. The third day they brought in those, I don't know how you call those talc- the TNT [possibly DDT], they sprayed all the mattresses. We never had the bed bugs after that and we worked in a *Feder Werkstatt* for them.

RH: How long were you there?

FA: Well, we were there just about, let's say four weeks before liberation. You know, it was strange what happened. Whenever we were in the camps, they bombed the factory. Whenever we were in the factory, they bombed the camp. It came to this that we were always running to shelter, a bunker. One day, we wanted to run to—the Germans told us, the Nazis, that we should run into a civilian shelter. The bombs were falling all around us, that shrapnel. We saw them falling around us so they chased us in a German bunker, in a civilian bunker, and they said, "Get out, you dirty Jews! Out of here! We don't want you here." So, we went across. There was already a bombed shack without a roof or anything. We were hiding there until it was over. The S.S. came in, one guy from our part. He was a Hungarian, but from our area, a *shoop* [possibly a dialectal term for Schwabian]. They used to call it *Schwab*. He was the only one who gave us good information. And he came back and says, "Girls, from now on, I stick to you. You're so lucky. You know what happened in that bunker?" I said, "What happened?" "One hundred and fifty were killed." I said, "Good, they should have been all killed there because they wouldn't let us in."

RH: The bomb hit them?

FA: A bomb hit them. Then we saw how they took them out on stretchers. Oh, we were hysterical, we were hysterical, happy, you know, and they took them out. By the time, you know, we finished in Essen—let's say April, I was liberated the 15 of April, I would say in March, the beginning of March—it was flattened to the ground. We were living a few weeks in the bunkers. But they had nothing to do with us. We heard already the shooting in the bunker and we knew that soon—but who knew what they were going

to do with us next—maybe they'll shoot us before anything. The women were much worse than the men in the S.S. They were terrible. Four girls escaped at that time.

RH: They just ran away?

FA: Yes, because they had connections with a foreman from the Germans and he told them, "We are very close; you come and I'll hide you." So, he took them and that day, they took us on *Appell* and we were all mistreated. We didn't get no food, no drink, no nothing.

RH: That must have been very [unclear].

FA: Very, but that was nothing comparing when they saw the [unclear], I mean, the front is getting nearby so they decided to take us. They had orders to take us to Bergen-Belsen. On the way we met some men in Buchenwald. Buchenwald and Dachau, one of those camps, wasn't much further; we were marching to the trains. We had to walk for hours and hours to the trains. So, we came to the trains and we went nine days to Bergen-Belsen without nothing—a piece of this thin bread—and I want to tell you how my sister was mentally sick that she stole even that thin bread from me, my own sister. I had nothing, only a friend of mine from the five girls gave me a bite. She says, "Rosie, how can you take away from your sister at night the bread?" I said, "What?" She says, "She stole your bread during the night." I says, "I couldn't believe," but they taught us respect for the eldest and I just cried. I looked out that little window and I just cried and cried. I said, "What has happened here?" I didn't say nothing to her. I didn't want to make her feel worse and she didn't give me the bread. And we came to Bergen-Belsen.

RH: But you didn't say that on here?

FA: Yes, it says Bergen-Belsen some place.

RH: So you came from Essen to Bergen-Belsen?

FA: I came to Bergen-Belsen and before we got to—yes, the bombing was carrying on on the way terrible. I thought any minute the train will be blown up. I came to Bergen-Belsen and I hear my brother yelling, "Malka! Ruchel! Malka! Ruchel!" From 500 girls, only one died all along. So, it was as bad where I was because they had to have our work. We worked for tanks. You know, the springs of tanks.

RH: In Bergen-Belsen?

FA: No, in Essen.

RH: What did you do there?

FA: So, we weren't that bad, you know, until we came to Bergen-Belsen and I heard my brother and he recognized us between 500 girls. He was yelling, "Malka! Ruchel! Ruchel! Malka!" And I look over and I waved to him and I ran around and he says, "Watch, they're going to shoot." I was so happy I had my brothers here. We heard that we might be liberated soon, soon, soon, soon. We were living with hope. As crazy as he was when he used to get drunk, the leader, the *Lagerführer* from the camp, as crazy as he was, he used to get drunk and he used to beat us all. But when he was sober, he wasn't too bad. Like I say, he must have been, the bosses from the factory gave him orders not to

mistreat us because they need the work. So he kept saying no. You know, when the *Lagerführer*, I heard already my brothers are here, I saw my other brother; I had two brothers here. I saw them.

RH: You heard your brother?

FA: This one yelled out and I saw from far away three of my brothers, the ones picked for labor, and I'm so happy and thrilled. "*Efsher, Efsher*, maybe we'll be liberated, maybe we'll be free and we have our brothers." When we came to the gate, that *Lagerführer*, like I say...

RH: Did he come with you from the first factory?

FA: Yes, from the camps where we were.

RH: He was always with you?

FA: He was with us and all the other guys that were there.

RH: They sent all the leaders.

FA: Yes, the same guys, they had to give us over to the other group. They took care of us all along, the same people. This guy says, "*Kinder*," the *Lagerführer*, you know, the man, I guess he saw the end of it. He says, "*Kinder, bis yetzt hust du nicht gevust as du hast geven Häftlinge*, till now you didn't know you were a prisoner—Jews," you know, *Häftlinge*—they used to call us, like prisoners—"but from now on, you'll know what it means to be a *Häftlinge*." Those three weeks, another two, three days and none of us would be surviving. None of us. They just couldn't give us nothing. A little tiny bread and a sip of water but the lice were biting us, so many lice. People were dying like flies. Here, they're putting the people on piles and piles and piles. Now, I hear that in another few days they would have blown up the whole camp. There was no ovens so they couldn't—they buried them in piles and then—they couldn't bury anymore. They put them on top and on top and on top. Then, so, there it was horrible. People were dying and dying and dying. And one morning, 1945, April 15, a day before I got beaten by a Jewish [unclear]. Two girls from our own areas. They were really, they didn't have to be as mean as they were. They had their reasons. If they wouldn't do it, then the Germans would do it so they had to show them, I guess, that they were very rough even when they didn't look. I understand when they looked, they had to be maybe, but not when they didn't look. They were such a tyrant case [unclear]. They walked around, they slept with them, they did everything with them. Beautiful girls, nice, good looking. They picked those girls. But the day before, she beat me because I didn't stay straight. The second day, the 15 of April, you know, every morning, they used to wake up very early to get out of the barracks for *Appell*. They had to count the people, how many died or how many lived. So, all of a sudden I wake up about 4:00 or 4:30, the time we used to get up and it's light. It's already light and still nobody is around. What had happened? Usually, it's dark and the place was up. Now, it's already bright and light and nobody is here; nobody is calling us. So, I said, "Something is up." So, the older women, older than we, went out [unclear]. She says, "I think they left us, they disappeared, the Germans, but everybody

should stay in their place because they gave the guns to the Hungarians. They have prison camps for them and they let them go and they gave them the guns and they were real vicious. They were worse than the Nazis. Stay inside." I had so much sense, I said to myself, I don't want to eat and I'm not running to look for something. If I survived till now, I had my brothers here, I want to live. So, I didn't go out for days and that's when the British came and announced it—they couldn't even announce it, the British—that the main guy—I don't know what it's called, a captain or a sergeant—they took the main guy from the Germans and he had to announce that we are free and that's how we started.

RH: What date was that exactly?

FA: The date was April 15, 1945.

RH: That was the date?

FA: We were liberated, yes. They liberated us and I stayed in the barracks. After a couple of days I sneaked out, how should I say, a warehouse, where they kept all the clothes, those striped clothes.

RH: Were you in prisoner's clothes the whole time?

FA: Yes, mostly whatever we could find here and there. I found that with my girlfriend. We were sneaky like nobody should see us and they had all the clothes, my sister and I and my girlfriend, we left all the clothes outside because we were full of lice. They were just eating us apart and we were skin and bones. I said now, till now I was sitting like with my feet behind. Now I could stretch out, when I sleep, I don't care about a thing and that's exactly what I did. My sister went sneaking out to find something. She wouldn't give me, this is how sick she was. Only for herself, only for me. She says, "You want, you go out and go get it." I said, "No, I'll wait until the time comes." The British started to give us food. I had sense enough not to eat too much.

RH: A lot of people got sick from eating too much?

FA: A lot of people died. I would say 60 percent of the people died.

RH: Of the ones who survived?

FA: Of the ones who survived, I read yesterday, also from Bergen-Belsen, 60 percent maybe or 50 percent died from eating. They didn't have nothing with them. All they had was rice—the soldiers—the big cans of rice with meat, with fat. And I knew somehow, I had sense enough, I said, "Kids, don't eat that. Our stomachs shrunk to nothing. Eat a little at a time." And this is what we did. But people were dying like flies from the survivors. They already survived. I went running after my brothers. I was so thrilled, I ran, I ran when I saw my brothers. Another sign. They told me, eight days before, they took a transport outside because they were healthy. They said that they were working in the kitchens. They helped a lot of our boys and they were working in the kitchens and they were pretty good. They were busy with food so they weren't that bad. They didn't—one brother, I must tell you this, every time we had to *schlep* a dead person, I couldn't do it. I did anything else but to *schlep* a dead person, to pile him on the wagons. Somehow, I snuck out and I just tried everything to avoid that. I couldn't do it.

But the people who *schlepped* those people to put on the wagons, on the piles right there not far from where I was, I always saw one of my brothers before me, a dead brother. I always saw that face before me. And do you know, people told me he really died in Bergen-Belsen. After I found out, but two survived. I just put it in the computer. They didn't know whatever happened.

RH: You never heard from them again?

FA: No.

RH: You know that they survived?

FA: Some people told me they were almost at the last minute with them. So, what happened to them, either they shot them in the last minute or they got bombed on the train that they took them.

RH: They took...

FA: He had all of us, I have also, my sister was very bad and I was the stronger one. It's amazing. You know, yesterday I read an article from a liberator, the diary of a liberator. He was in the army corps, in the British Army Corps. You know, it's so strange and I think it was me. He was going by and he saw me and skeleton as I was, he handed me a piece of chocolate. What did I do, I ran to give it to my sister because she had typhus. I had it also but not as bad as she. I took that piece of chocolate and I gave it to her. Yesterday, I read that he saw a girl and he handed to her sweets and she looked at him with those eyes and so skinny and just bones, just the eyes he saw and I said to my husband, "I think it was me he handed it to."

RH: You ought to write to him.

FA: Yes, maybe I will. So, this is what happened there. There was such a, another few days and none of us because they were planning to burn to the ground and threw us all out and finish with us because Eichmann gave the orders, you heard, to get rid of us at the last minute. But somehow they just didn't have the time to do it and that's when the British came in.

RH: So where did you go from there?

FA: From there I went to Bergen. They had a camp there that the soldiers and the officers, the big officers, lived there. They took us there. He was there, too, I didn't know him, that Shapiro, that he wrote that, that he was a non-Jew among British soldiers. They took the sick.

RH: Shapiro is a Jewish name.

FA: It is. Maybe he is Jewish but he didn't say he was Jewish.

RH: So where did you go?

FA: To Bergen. That's where the Gestapo lived and there they put up tents. Not tents, it was barracks.

RH: Like camps?

FA: It was barracks, too. I can't remember.

RH: Bunks?

FA: Not bunks, just plain camp beds and they put one and one and they put us—my sister was very sick—they took us to the Red Cross and we were there quite a while. Then we went to Zele. We were feeling already a little better.

RH: Zele?

FA: Zele.

RH: Could you spell it?

FA: Z-E-L-E or something like that. We were there also...

RH: With the Red Cross?

FA: Yes, all sick people. My sister was sick. Every time I put her in the hospital in one door, she ran out of the other door. Mentally...she couldn't take the shock; she was completely shell shocked. She was shivering all the time to this day. We were there until they fed us and we came to a little bit and they gave us some clothes. They wanted to take us to Sweden and I said, "No. I heard some of my brothers are alive." I heard already from soldiers that two of my brothers or three are alive, older brothers. I'm not talking about those, they were in the labor camps in Russia. I heard that they came home. I said, "First thing, I want to go home and see who is alive. That's how we went home. They took us by the Red Cross train all the way to Pilsen. In Pilsen, we took trains to Prague and that's how we got home. And that's how one of my brothers...

RH: To Klocsonova.

FA: To Klocsonova, to Munkács actually, the main town. That time, I didn't want to go home to my own town. I couldn't face it. So my brothers lived by then in Munkács.

RH: How many older brothers survived?

FA: Three. One died already at 43 in this country, also from the labor camp. He was sick and never came out. I came home and one of my younger brothers, one of those brothers heard that we are alive. And every day for weeks, he went to the train station.

RH: He lived in Munkács?

FA: Yes. No, he came to the train station to wait for us every day.

RH: After he was liberated?

FA: He was liberated much before us. He came home in September sometime because he was sick and my sister was so sick. So, he came every day for weeks. He came every day to the train station. "Maybe they're all right. Maybe they'll come, maybe." One day I saw him, and I jumped over a big, big fence and he was waiting there with a carriage, you know, a horse and buggy. And I tell you, that was some sight. So, you know, they fed me good. They already had money. They had a business already by that time. You know, Jewish people, they traveled back and forth and they opened up a little store and they helped the other girls who came home.

RH: Was it Czechoslovakia after the war?

FA: No, it was Russian.

RH: It was Russian by then?

FA: That's another thing. So we came home and they fed us good. They had already. And all the girls came home. Some of them, my brother, lived with a Gentile at first because he came so early. They were sending him to Germany at the end and he saw he didn't want to go to Germany. He already found out what was happening because we had to write to them that we are in a ho—and how should I say, in a place where we get well, a sanitarium. So, they thought at first this is true but then later, he found out that nobody is alive so he started to tie his shoe. He remained by a Gentile in the shed until a few days later. They guy who knew him found him in the shed between the horses and the cows. And he was afraid there's only one Jew alive. But he helped him. And then the Russians a few days later came in and he lived by one of our Ukrainian women and he lived with her until he found out. The girls started to come home and they told him, "Dov, you get away from there. Your sisters probably are alive." And right away he left, because they all said to him, "When are you going to leave? They're all dead. Nobody is alive." They already knew also that they took us and they'll never come back. They were very disappointed we came back after, actually. After that, they became antisemitic because they took everything away and he took me once to my home town. I didn't recognize in the sight. I couldn't look at the house my parents lived. It was a wedding day for one of my friends and I says, "I never want to go back there again." You know, that *shegetz* [non-Jewish male], that sheriff's boy that wanted to hide me? He came to see me and he was running after me and he says, "Malka, now your parents are not alive no more. Today is Russia," he says. "Today it doesn't matter Jew or Gentile. Now we could get married." I said, excuse me, "Go to hell." I told him. "I can't even stomach you anymore." It wasn't his fault but I wouldn't go with him. He tried to save us but I was so damn bitter that I couldn't face him. That's how we came home. I was there three weeks and my brother, my older brother who died in 1943, not in 1943, 19*53*, at *age* 43, he kept pushing us. I said on the trains, "God should help me, I should once get home. I never want to travel again. I had enough of traveling." And I leave my sister to my brothers because I can't take it anymore from her. It was already too much. Till now, I brought her home; I saved her; I carried her on my back many times. Many times, we lost our shoes. Many times, one of the guys liked me from the S.S. and he took his knife and cut, took off the ice from my shoes. You had to be lucky for that. The wooden shoes always stuck the ice on them. Then, he helped me. I thought he is going to shoot me but he didn't because you couldn't leave behind. You had to follow the rest of the gang. And my sister gave me a lot of trouble but I saved her and I carried her and I respected her. To this day, I visit her as often as I can. She is in Williamsburgh in Chaim Eschel in a nursing home, a real Jewish kosher place. And I go to see her as often as I can. She has three children. She managed to marry and had three children and then, she was never good, never good. Her husband died; he couldn't take it anymore. And then they put her in. There was no choice. She had a stroke and she was mentally sick. Her brain went and I came home, I

thought, *I'll leave you to my brothers. I mean, my God, I'm a young kid, I didn't live. I don't know what life is*. But no, my oldest brother chased us from Russia because they were no good. They chased us back to Czechoslovakia to Prague. One of my brothers was in the army, in the Czech Army. He was an officer there. He was a Russian camp—a Russian prisoner and then, he heard that he could register for the Czech Army to fight the Germans. So he did. He was near Prague, deep Czech[oslovakia]. We went to him and we were there for a while.

RH: Until you came here?

FA: In 1946, May, we went to Germany back. We went to the borders. We were in a Displaced Camp three years. Oh I forgot to tell you, I don't know if you have time.

RH: I'm going to run out, I'm sorry.

FA: I got married in Germany to a fine survivor; he had nobody. We came back. Over there we got married. We got engaged in Czech[oslovakia]. We came to the Displaced Persons' Camp.

Tape two, side one:

RH: This is tape two of the interview of Frieda M. Appel, Appel sorry by Renee Ruth Hartz. Side one.

FA: So, I came to Germany and I got married in Germany to a fine man who was from Chust, also a survivor. He had only one sister and he had nobody. We got married, you know, we were all alone but we really fell in love. He was, I was 17 and he was—[I was] not even 17—and he was 20. We got married. He didn't want to go to Israel. He wanted to go to the United States. And I had two brothers by then in Israel. They came from Czechoslovakia to Israel. And I had a brother and my older sister managed to get married and she went to America and my older brother who died, him and his wife, and a child came to this country. I am the youngest. So my brothers from Israel wrote to me, "Listen, if you have a chance, go to the United States. It will be much easier. You had enough. It's very hard in Israel at this point. You could always come to Israel later on, but go to the United States." So, he stayed until we worked out our papers and it took us three years and at this place, [unclear] in Germany. We were there three years. I had twins there. So, I lost one of the children there. He was seven weeks. They both had pneumonia, and the oldest one survived. So, in 1949, September 22, we arrived to the United States with a baby. He was eight or nine months. We went to the Jewish Family Service. I had only my uncle, and my uncle was very rich, but he didn't care. He would take you in for a day or two and that's it. So my brother says, "Don't make the mistake. Go to the Family Service,"—because he was also a refugee and he couldn't help me—"and they'll help you," and they did. I'm so grateful; every time I have a few dollars I sent it do them. I'll never forget the money. I came in this country, my dear, and I had another child in 1952, another boy. My husband was working in a factory here. It was not too much, but we were doing nicely. He was working around some cigarette lighters. He came one day. It was moving to Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, and he didn't want to move. He built himself up; he was almost like a supervisor. He had nothing, no schooling, no English, no nothing, but he was so smart. And he didn't want to move and I didn't want to move. I had my brother in New Jersey.

RH: Weren't you in New York?

FA: We came to New York but then we came to New Jersey because my brother lived here. Then, so what happened is, we opened a little grocery store. With the two children, I lived on top and I worked with him for 16 years. In 1970, he decides he wants to go to Israel. There's a wedding and he says, "I don't care, I live, I curse, the hell with everything, I'm going to Israel. I have a brother there, you have two brothers there, we're going." We closed the store, and we went to Israel for two weeks. Well, I was very happy in Israel. We came to Israel, we had a wonderful time. His family was more religious than mine and knew all about certain things, the Bible. He went to visit and he gave money to everybody. He was so thrilled. On the way home, he says to me, "Malka,

this is the best time of my life except when we got married." We were 25 years married. It was supposed to be our anniversary, you know. What happened is, we came back, so my sister-in-laws says, "So what, don't wait until August. November is the wedding. I'll have your anniversary party in November, so what." So, that's what we did. We came home. Three weeks later, in the grocery store, I'm on the phone with him every morning. I called him early. I made *Shabbas* Friday, and he says, "Malka,"—he called me Malka, you know—he says, "Malka, I'm kind of busy; you want to hold on the phone?" You know, our section where it happened is half colored and white. And there was a lot of [unclear] people and everybody loved us there. We were young when we started in 1955, 16 years we were there, the greatest respect. He says, "You want to hold on or you want to hang up?" Because lunch time, I brought his meal and I stayed there the rest of the day. I'm waiting and waiting. I hear a commotion; he doesn't come to the phone. This is [unclear]. He doesn't come to the phone, and my younger son was home. He was dropping out from school and he was 18 and he was afraid to go to Newark because he almost got attacked there. And he says, "Ma, what's the matter?" And running from half a block away from the store to the window, "if I see anything,"—then, I heard a bang on the phone. I thought that was the door. The kids used to fool around and they slammed the door always; you know, the spring made noise. I ran—in 1970, December 18, 1970, I ran—almost barefoot. It was cold, and my son was getting dressed. He was in pajamas watching television. Ten o'clock in the morning. I came there; I saw a colored fellow, a customer, and he says, "Are you the owner?" He knew me but he didn't know who owns it. He thought maybe I'm just working there. I said, "Of course." He said, "I don't know, your husband, is he sick or something? I didn't hear." I said, "No, no, no, something happened here. I heard commotion." I heard him say, "Get out." They must have said, "Give me the money," and he thought it was a joke because we never had a hold-up. He just turned 45 three weeks ago in Israel. He just turned 45. I ran to the store. I found him unconscious, a bullet in the head. That's all right; I hope you could take all this. And do you know, what do I know about the American language, such a big language? Sitting there with my son and my sister-in-law came running to the hospital. The detectives questioned me what happened, "Is he sick? Did he have high blood pressure?" I said, "No, something happened. I think he got shot. I heard something." Finally, the detective [unclear] the nurse said, "If she said something happened, then something happened; listen to her." She was very upset. He comes out and he says, "Tell me, did you hear a gun go off?" I said, "I heard something but I thought it was the door, but it must have been the gun." He said, "Yes, your husband has a small bullet in his brain." And what I want to bring out, we are sitting there waiting for results and I wanted to run after him and they pushed me away. They took him for surgery and after 20 minutes, a Chinese, a Oriental man comes out and he says to me—Mrs. Hersh was my name at that time, "Mrs. Hersh, your husband, you know" I said, How is he? How is he?" What did he use for 'die'? Expired. "Your husband just expired." I said, "What is that?" I never heard that

word. I know death and that's it. He didn't know how to bring it out. But life went on because my boys were big already. One was a psychologist and he says, "Ma, you had 25 years that people don't have in a lifetime—happiness." We were very happy. Poor but happy. I asked for two dresses; God gave me a closet. [unclear] To this day, I remember those dresses. I want to say that I don't have what to wear I bite my tongue. I had plenty, I said. So we were very happy and this took a toll on my kids. My younger boy lives in Massachusetts. He never wanted to live in New Jersey. It affected him very much. He's a good boy but you could see that emotionally something isn't right, also very educated. He did work for, what you call, emotionally disturbed people. I said [unclear] and this and that. He says, "Ma, it's a rewarding job; somebody has to do it." He's helping people [unclear]. So they are good kids. One is married. I have a grandson. There's another one on the way. Thank God, oh yeah, I remarried with a friend of mine.

RH: So you have a new name, yes.

FA: I remarried to—almost two years. He wanted me to get married [unclear] a year because he knew me. He knew me; he knew my husband and I knew him. And what had happened, he was a bachelor. A year-and-a-half later, he wants to get married. I said, "Are you crazy?" I says, "People are going to talk." We were so happy. I was so happy. All of a sudden, I should get married so fast. I'm embarrassed. But a year-and-a-half or two years alone for me was like, I would say, ten years. I couldn't take it alone. My kids were old. They were away. And one says, "You stay one..." They had a life to live. I didn't want to lean on them. "You stay one night with your mother, mother, and I'll stay the other night with mother." And my daughter-in-law already says, "Listen." I said, "Why don't you get married and I'll come live with you?" Because I wanted to get out of that street so badly because the store wasn't going. So, she says, "Oh good, Simon," to my son, "I'll have a built-in maid." I says, "Forget it. I would rather get married." And I was the luckiest woman that thank God, I have a man for my own, places. We have a lot in common. He went through the same thing in a different way. Everybody has a different story. And thank God, things are working out. We're married now 13 years. Thank God, for everything and he should only be well.

RH: Right.

FA: I just wanted to write a book. I don't know how to spell too well.

RH: That's okay. There are people to help you.

FA: I wanted to hire somebody. To my kids, I don't talk too much about it. I couldn't talk to them. Now, I told them. Hi there. I have a long story.

RH: They can read it.

FA: Yes, they'll read it. And this is the man I married and I'm very, very happy. Such a doll. That's the story as far as I could tell you.

RH: Thank you so much.

FA: It's my pleasure.