

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ADELE WERTHEIMER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer:	Unknown Interviewer
Date:	April 1985

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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AW - Adele Wertheimer¹ [interviewee]

XX - Interviewer unknown

Date: April 1985²

Tape one, side one:

XX: What I'd like you to do is tell me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your family.

AW: I was born in Bendzin [also spelled Bedzin]³, Poland. Bendzin was a 90 percent Jewish community, which is very rare in a Polish city. And it was a religious community. And lot of religious Jews. I come from a religious family too, from a family that, from four generations was born in the same city. And with wonderful parents. Eight children. I was the oldest of eight children, and the only one left after the war. My mother and the rest of the children gradual perished, were brought from bunkers, from ghettos into Auschwitz and they were gone just like the other people in the concentration camps into the ovens.

XX: Right. What was your, what did your father do?

AW: My father was a-- Bendzin was a city on the German border, and close to Katowice, if you heard. And my parents were business people.

XX: Right.

AW: Business into the German border cities. We really had a business...

XX: They were merchants or...

AW: He had business with these German and half-German people. Because in Poland they, it changed very quick, being a Polish city or a German city, on the border.

XX: So, did you know both languages? Did you know Polish and German already?

AW: I knew German, not fluent, but I knew German too because we were living on the border.

XX: And Polish you were completely fluent in?

AW: And Polish completely with finishing school and part of high school.

XX: What language did you use every day, Yiddish? Or...

AW: A lot of Yiddish. But mostly Polish.

XX: Okay.

AW: A lot of Yiddish, by the way. And the house language was Yiddish.

XX: Okay. And both your mother and your father were in the business together. Your mother did not stay home. She worked.

¹Nee Rozenel.

²Recorded at the 1985 American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Philadelphia, PA.

³Bedzin - Polish, Bendzin - German

AW: Yeah, both of them were in the business. A matter of fact that the last few years before the war, the antisemitism was so big that my father with the beard couldn't-- this was to go with the train to the places. And they threw him one day out of the train in the middle of the road, in the middle of the running train. And he-- my mother didn't let him go anymore. So we made kind of a little factory in the house that my father was...

XX: In charge of.

AW: Yeah, and was in charge of it. And my mother was the one to...

XX: What did they make?

AW: ...have the business. It's very for a stranger it's very hard to explain. We had this, I'll think a minute, for dresses, this a collar, flowers...

XX: Oh, I see.

AW: How you call it?

XX: I'm not too familiar with ladies dresses, but okay.

AW: A quilted special like, the, no, it's a special work for...

XX: Like sequins and things?

AW: Decorations.

XX: Right.

AW: Decorations for dresses. And my father was in charge of -- in the little factory in the house. And my mother brought it to the stores and, around Oberschlesian⁴ it was called.

XX: And what was life like? Tell me about life, when you were a child. Where did you go to school and...

AW: A beautiful life, with eight children. Unbelievable. Peaceful. We can't manage two children as nice as in that time. Our parents were able to raise beautifully eight children.

XX: You weren't hungry or...

AW: My hus-, my father, because he couldn't help so much in the business, he was such a good husband that when my mother came home in the late, late afternoon tired, none of the children had the right to approach her until she didn't drink up the milk he prepared for her. And he took off her coat and took away all her stuff that she brought. And when she was ready with the first milk and the first bite of something, then we were able to approach her, and to see what she brought for us too, from there. Because it was Katowice, it was a German place. And things that we didn't get in our city, my mother was able to bring, the first fruit, the first vegetable, or the first nice thing, nice clothes for a child. But as I said, nobody dared approach her before she wasn't rested a little bit, and ready for us. And this was my father's doing.

XX: Was politics a question that came up in the household? Did you have discussions about politics or...

⁴Upper Silesia

AW: Not too much. We were young children in that time. I belonged, I, I still went to school. And even later on my parents tried to give me something into life and I went to a private accounting school. And my brothers were very religious with *peyes* [Yiddish: earlocks] boys. But our house was not too fanatic. And my father and my mother cared very much that they have not only the Jewish upbringing but also the public.

XX: Okay. Very good.

AW: Polish.

XX: So were they members of a Jewish communal organization such as a *kehillah* or...

AW: My father was a religious man belonging to *Aradonski Husid*,⁵ let's put it this way. Are you Jewish, by the way?

XX: Mmm hmm.

AW: Yeah. He was a *Hasid*, belonging to a temple, to a synagogue. But we were not fanatics. A Jewish upbringing, observing, and especially my brothers. But we were still small chil-...

XX: Do you remember the name of this temple or synagogue that you belonged to?

AW: *Aradonski Shtibl* [Yiddish: Hasidic synagogue].

XX: Okay, okay, okay. What about any Zionist organizations? Was your family aware of Zionist movements?

AW: Not to, we were aware, yes, but we didn't belong. We knew it. We didn't criticize it, because like my aunts belonged to these organizations, also from a religious house. But the young girls already went their own ways...

XX: Right.

AW: Whether with the knowledge of their parents or not. I was belonging to a *Bet Yaakov*⁶ school, too, it's called, was called *B'nos*, which means young girls. After school, young girls' organization, just like the Zionist organization.

XX: Right.

AW: But only more religious.

XX: This is your school also.

AW: This was, yes, but this was already free, like a organization, in the evening...

XX: I see.

AW: Gathering girls, only girls.

XX: I see. Okay.

⁵Chassidic followers of Aradonski

⁶Bet Yaakov – also called Beys Yankev or Bais Yaakov, women's educational movement founded by Sarah Schenirer (1883-1953), http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Schenirer_SarahBaisYaakov.

AW: Yeah.

XX: And women staffed it or were there men, rabbis staffing it?

AW: No, no, just women.

XX: I see.

AW: Just women.

XX: Interesting. Okay, and what about your relation, I realize this was a primarily Jewish community but what were your relations like with non-Jews in the community? Were they good? Were they bad, or...

AW: In fact, we didn't have too much to do, especially in our town. Because it was, as I told you, a 90 percent Jewish town.

XX: Right.

AW: [unclear] it was freer, it was more elegant, because we didn't have, we, it was not such a big city, as those on a big scale.

XX: I see.

AW: Because it was mostly Jewish.

XX: I see.

AW: In fact that is, was, it was there close to 40,000 people.

XX: The whole town was 40,000.

AW: The whole town 40,000 there. This was in Poland not the smallest city.

XX: And about 36,000 were Jews.

AW: And about 36,000 were Jewish. And Shabbos...

XX: No stores were opened.

AW: Few, very few stores were opened. And none Jewish dared open a store in Shabbos.

XX: So were the relations...

AW: Especially in this city.

XX: ...good between the non-Jews and the Jews?

AW: We didn't have too much in common with them, except janitors or our land-lord...

XX: Right.

AW: ...was also not Jewish. We didn't have too much in common with them except businesslike.

XX: Right. Let me ask you, before the war, and the years leading up to it, were you aware that there was a Nazi movement going on in Germany, since you were...

AW: Yes. The last...

XX: ...so close to Germany.

AW: The last few years, like from 1936 or from 1935 on we knew, you know how it is, we knew what's go-, something, well especially because we were on the border, on the German border.

XX: Right.

AW: We knew, gradual, slowly, what's going on there. But who took it serious or who thought that it will come to Poland?

XX: Right.

AW: Not in that time yet.

XX: Right.

AW: But when it came 1939, and we heard that they begin to move, we began to be, a matter of fact that my father didn't go any more to the, to, in the business, because it was already antisemitism among the Polish too.

XX: I see.

AW: Especially among the students.

XX: And you say there was antisemitism amongst the Poles. What, how did that manifest itself? In what way were they antisemitic?

AW: In what way?

XX: Just in business, or did they do things?

AW: They stopped making business with Jewish people, and like, whenever like, you see...

XX: This is before Germany invaded Poland.

AW: Yeah. Yeah. Whenever they had a chance, but in Bendzin you didn't feel it much. Just because it was a clean Jewish-- and I was young. I didn't have the...

XX: You weren't aware of it.

AW: Opportunity.

XX: Right.

AW: But my parents knew already, because the business for...

XX: Was falling off.

AW: Stopped, slowly by slowly. A fact is that we couldn't realize because the German by itself, without the influence of Hitler, was the most real, reliable, the most honest businessman you can imagine.

XX: When did this start, this feeling of antisemitism that affected your business in...

AW: For us, in 1939. Anti-...

XX: ...in '39.

AW: ...semitism in Poland was always...

XX: Always.

AW: Was always. Anybody who had more contact with the Poland knew it. Fortunate, we had a little less, but, and I was still a young girl, as so close, with my head in the books, and in the company, and with my friends that I really was a little bit stupid on these things.

XX: Did they talk about it in school at all? Or no.

AW: No. School? No.
XX: Never, huh?
AW: But the fact, you can imagine how far the city was Jewish, that the public school was not mixed...
XX: I see.
AW: With the Polish, with the...
XX: Jewish children...
AW: Christian. It was just Jewish public school and just Christian public school.
XX: I see.
AW: You see, and...
XX: And in the Jewish public school, were there Jewish teachers, or non-Jewish teachers?
AW: It could have been not Jewish teachers too.
XX: Mixed.
AW: But most of them were Jewish. And also the principal was Jewish, yeah. But all of course finished, intelligent people. I mean you know, a school is a school.
XX: So if you were a religious family then you went to *shul* every Saturday and every Friday night, or...
AW: Not, we children less. I mean they...
XX: Just your father.
AW: As I told you, we weren't fanatic.
XX: Right.
AW: We were...
XX: But when you did go to *shul*, did the rabbi when he was giving a sermon...
AW: Oh my father was on...
XX: When the rabbi was giving a sermon did he mention anything about antisemitism?
AW: I, not that I can recall it, no.
XX: Okay.
AW: No.
XX: And then in 1939 you were on the border, so you were really the first area to be occupied...
AW: Exactly.
XX: ...by the Germans.
AW: We were the first that the German came in. In 1939, of course that we heard a lot of people are trying to get out from Poland. But it didn't, we didn't think of it. It wasn't, our family, we were a family of, in the same city, a few hundred people that were related to each other. Only in the same city. And the neighboring city, Sosnowiec.

We were so many of the same family. As I told you I was four generations born in the same city.

XX: Wow.

AW: But, and so we didn't think of running away right then. But when we heard that the German broke the border and they are coming in into Poland, we knew that our town will be one of the first. So, the first...

XX: How did you hear it? On the radio or on the street or...

AW: Yes. We had hidden radios. We had radios, we heard everything. We had radios in the house. You know, still these big kind of radios but...

XX: Right.

AW: We were a family that were partially intelligent. I mean, we knew what's going on in the world. And we heard that they are approaching and we knew we will be one of the first cities. So, the first impulse was to send away the men and the grown up boys, which was, later we found out, it was no use. Because they were quicker than...

XX: What do you, mean send them away?

AW: Send them east.

XX: Into Poland.

AW: Into Ru-, Pol-, east into Poland, on the Russian side.

XX: Right.

AW: A fact that a lot of people ran away to Russia in that time, right in the beginning of the war, this means in the middle of the year of 1939, beginning from July, August, and especially in September because the war broke out in Poland in September. And peop-...

XX: In September of '39.

AW: Right. And a lot of people went to Russia in that time. They packed...

XX: Well, were people aware...

AW: ...everything what's possible...

XX: Right.

AW: ...to take with you.

XX: Right.

AW: They left all their belongings behind.

XX: Right.

AW: And they left. This cousin of mine that is here with me, she got quickly married, and she went away to Russia, a young couple who left the parents, because the husband wanted to. And her first son which is now a physiker⁷ in Boston was born in Russia. And...

XX: Were people aware, for example, of the fact that Stalin had signed a treaty with Hitler in the earlier years, in '35, '36?

⁷Mrs. Wertheimer possible means physicist.

AW: Probably. I don't know how much. I was younger than my age...

XX: Right. Right.

AW: In that time. I was a big reader in our, and a big dreamer.

XX: Right.

AW: And as, I was the oldest but still a child. Until they brought the [unclear] I am blaming myself that I wasn't grown up for the age at that time.

XX: How old were you in 1939?

AW: I was, in 19-, I am in 1922.

XX: I see. Okay.

AW: So I was a big girl in that time. And the oldest from eight children.

XX: So you were a teenager.

AW: Any other way, I felt sure about myself because in these gatherings we talked about books, or we talked about literature or whatever. I was very good at it. I was one of the best students in school all the time. You see, and I managed to finish, I wanted to go to high school. High, to go to high school in that time was a big step.

XX: Sure.

AW: Like to go to college now.

XX: Mmm hmm.

AW: And I began high school, and for some reason, probably financial reasons, I had to, after a year, to go out. And I, I became sick because I wanted school so badly that I was for a few months sick. And the parents knew that this is the reason and they put me into an accounting school...

XX: Right.

AW: ...after that.

XX: I see.

AW: Just to, to you know, that I had...

XX: To give you something...

AW: To give me something, you know.

XX: Right. Were you aware, for example, the night that *Kristallnacht* happened in Germany?

AW: In that time, we heard a lot about Germany. We didn't know details exactly, because even a radio...

XX: It was sketchy.

AW: As soon the war broke out, a radio was forbidden.

XX: Right.

AW: And it was scarce.

XX: I see. Right.

AW: So, we couldn't notice much. But I believe that the grownups knew a lot more than I knew...

XX: Okay.

AW: In that time. The first impulse was to send away the men. So my father, my two brothers, still younger than me...

XX: Right.

AW: And many, many other men. They took whatever they could take to eat. It was a very unreasonable thing to do. But who thought?

XX: Right.

AW: We did what the impulse, what the first...

XX: So you thought that you've got to get the men away, because they're not going to do anything to...

AW: Because the men were the...

XX: ...the women and the children.

AW: ...were the first, you know, to get hurt.

XX: Right. Right.

AW: That's for sure.

XX: I see.

AW: Well the, we didn't think which way, whether they will taken them into...

XX: Was there ever...

AW: ...the army...

XX: Right.

AW: Or if they will beat them up.

XX: Was there ever any sentiment in the community that you lived in to come to the defense of Poland or defend Poland?

AW: Not in that time.

XX: No.

AW: No. Not in that time. Not yet, and not in that time. The Jew was defenseless.

XX: I see.

AW: And very poor in any thought to do something about it except to hide under the bed.

XX: I see.

AW: And that's what we did. We closed, we backed, because the...

XX: The men were gone.

AW: The Poland was scared too. So, the janitors closed the door of the house downstairs.

XX: Right.

AW: It was a four-story house. Children and, matter of fact, we lived in the nicest street in the city. We were some-- circumstantially, well to do.

XX: Very comfortable.

AW: Not so much well to do as we liked a nice living, a nice...

XX: Lifestyle.

AW: A nice lifestyle. And we lived in the same house as my grandmother, with my grandfather, on the same floor. And above us lived another relative, a aunt of my mother too, with four daughters. She didn't have her husband any more in that time. As we sent away these men and my grandmother's house were also, but my grandfather stayed because he was too old. But my two uncles, brothers of my mother, went also on the same way.

XX: So that was the first time you really, the war really affected you...

AW: Yes.

XX: ...was the men leaving.

AW: Right, the same, and we closed the doors downstairs. But it didn't help too much. And the men were away. We never knew where they went, whether we will see them again. But it was, who knew how it will come out? Soon enough there was knocking and banging on the door downstairs.

XX: Yeah?

AW: How you call, the door downstairs.

XX: The front door.

AW: Yeah, the front door. And the janitor had to open. And we were sitting, we hid the young girls under the beds as much as we could, because we were scared for something else, which was true. Because I was still a young girl and I could appear even younger than I was. But my two aunts, sisters of my mother, one was in the twenties and one was in the teenagers, or in the twenties. Two beautiful girls.

XX: So you were afraid they would be assaulted or...

AW: We were insulted of course. This was the first thought, that we might be insulted. That's what the mothers thought, and they hid us as much as possible.

XX: Right. So the banging...

AW: But it didn't happen.

XX: On the door came and then...

AW: And a fact that it was plain soldiers, maybe if it...

XX: Not in uniform?

AW: In uniform.

XX: Oh in uniform.

AW: Everything in uniform, everything with the...

XX: German soldiers.

AW: Arms, armed. Of course. And, maybe if it would be higher officers, they would take in consideration our begging and asking. Maybe yes and maybe not. But the plain soldier was the worst kind, because soon enough they took my youngest aunt, my mother's sister, a girl of 19, looking like a German blond, like a German girl, with these

blue eyes, the most beautiful girl you can imagine. They-- one of them took her on the dark steps, and he let-- my mother, in this time you didn't tell everything children, even grown up children. You don't, you didn't talk about it, as you talk now with your children. They, this much I knew, that they kept her for at least two hours. And when they let go of her, they, my mother and my grandmother took her in a separate room, into the, into a bathtub. And I just imagined what they did. But nothing was talked about it.

XX: So [unclear].

AW: This was the first approach. This was the first we knew about them. [tape off then on]

XX: Let me just check this.

AW: [unclear]

XX: I have an accent also.

AW: Yeah. My children, my both children made very well with the accents, very well.

XX: So this, your first encounter was this horrible, terrifying experience.

AW: This was just what I wanted to...

XX: And as a child...

AW: ...tell you, the first...

XX: ...you didn't know what was happening. You just knew something terrible was happening.

AW: Everything was so quick, and so rapid...

XX: Right.

AW: That we didn't think too much. We stayed in this apartment, yeah, soon enough that the men came back, which was a miracle they came back all together, because they came. And a few cities away to a bridge, that they killed by this bridge thousands of people. How our people came back, we don't know till now. It was on a bridge that they, the minute anybody stepped on the bridge they threw him into the water, with shooting him after that. And we, I knew a lot of people, that they...

XX: Do you remember the name of the bridge?

AW: ...that later. This bridge, it wasn't were the closest family-- it was a Buchshreiber [German: author] with two sons that got killed there. It was, I don't recall names. But I knew a lot, a lot of people that got killed.

XX: And this is very early?

AW: Right away, on this bridge. How my relatives and my father with my two brothers came back I didn't find out till now. But they came back into the house. We stayed in this-- I, soon enough we built kind of a hiding place in the basement. My aunt had in the same house a factory of quilts. And she kept the cotton to fill out the quilts in the basement of the house. And soon enough we made a hiding place in this basement. And, and it became already that we had to close the windows with black shades.

XX: Right.

AW: And with, how you call it, that you couldn't go out at night.

XX: Curfew.

AW: Excuse me?

XX: Curfew?

AW: With curfews.

XX: Right.

AW: Two days or three days later we had to put on the yellow...

XX: How did you find out about that?

AW: They made the rules. They were...

XX: They came to the house or...

AW: Right away there was...

XX: ...was it on the wall?

AW: There were right away big signs on the, on all the houses and all the fences and wherever it was possible, to come here and here and to take, get like a...

XX: A *Magen David*. [Hebrew: Star of David – six-pointed star].

AW: A card, no.

XX: Oh.

AW: A card with your name, who you are, and everything. And then a *Magen David*, a yellow, you get a *Magen David* with a *Jude*. And you were not allowed to go out without that. And you, we had to show it on every garment. And you, were not, we were not allowed to go out after 7:00, or after 8:00 at night. It became a shortage of food. And we had to go out in those few hours that were, it was possible. Business or whatever, forget about. Everything was closed.

XX: Right.

AW: Everything was taken away from the Jew. And still we found somehow places to go and to beg or to buy a piece of bread. And we young girls were safer going out. So the young children, the young, the, the children, the teenagers mostly, began their job. Because my father with the beard, still with the beard in that time, or my mother was more, she w-, it was a...

XX: Conspicuous or...

AW: Yeah she-- it was harder for her to go out.

XX: I see.

AW: It was more...

XX: And the soldiers were everywhere.

AW: More dangerous for her.

XX: The Germans were everywhere. They were...

AW: Everywhere, everywhere. And we didn't know which night they will come up again. We just, we didn't know on what corner we will be approached. In that time my

brother became very sick. And we still had these Polish girls. These were almost a rule, a maid in the house was no problem.

XX: Right.

AW: And a matter of fact, we were eight children. That's what I said. We lived somehow in style because we had most of the time two girls in the house for-- and one time we had two sisters, one for the children, and the other one especially. My parents were in business...

XX: Right.

AW: And the other one to clean the house. But I was very much in charge. I was a very good child, even more than my parents wanted from me, because my, my father-- the minute he came into the house he knew how badly I liked to be with my friends, so he told me to go out to the friends and he gave me off. And we-- it came into our mind to send out some of the children out of town in a village. All right, it's too much to...

XX: A small village?

AW: In a small village. It was a little safer.

XX: I see.

AW: Yeah.

XX: Because the Germans weren't interested in those...

AW: So we just divided the family. It was-- it never occurred to us that my mother could do that, but we did think that, we never talked about that, we were able to do, just to save the head, just to save one of the children, two of the children, or whatever.

XX: So, your family did have some money somehow. Did they, how did you buy things? You said you tried to buy food.

AW: We still had, we still had some money, and as soon they weren't able any more to go to the other towns, we began business with the people on the place. We still-

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

[Note: long unrecorded section at beginning of tape]

AW: ...the main street to the small street behind.

XX: I see.

AW: Slowly...

XX: So you were ghettoized.

AW: Yes, but gradual. From the main street to the, in the street, to the street behind that.

XX: Right.

AW: From there, out of town, until we came to the ghetto, we were in four places.

XX: Can you remember the names of the ghettos? Did they have names?

AW: Yeah, they sent us from Mahoskigo, from a main street, to Mojalowska, which was a poorer street. From there my grandmother had in that time a factory of suitcases, which became very big until the German took it over. Because people began to run places, and buy suitcases.

XX: Right, right.

AW: And she became in a short time rich. Legally, I mean, rich.

XX: Right.

AW: And we lived all, and my mother was the oldest of 10 daughters at my-- of 10 children at my grandmother's.

XX: Right.

AW: So, my mother was privileged more.

XX: I see.

AW: And whenever my grandmother got an apartment, when we moved, she always gave the money to the Jewish community which took a little bit. They made up a Jewish community. They couldn't help themselves all alone...

XX: I see, so there was a...

AW: The Germans.

XX: There was an informal...

AW: They made a Jewish community.

XX: [unclear]

AW: With Jewish militia, with Jewish police.

XX: Did they have weapons, these police, or...

AW: They say they didn't have weapons, but some of them were bad enough to help them. And few of them were good enough to help us. But you have to, you had to be lucky. Because they didn't want to do everything by themselves.

XX: So you had...

AW: They wanted to say that the Jewish do it, one to each other.

XX: I see. So a lot of these Jewish police or Jewish militia...

AW: Were, some of them...

XX: Were corrupt...

AW: Were not too good. And some of them...

XX: Did you know any of them?

AW: What they wanted-- no, I don't know names. Some of them, if they wanted to help their own people, they could, they had to harm other people, which was almost natural. And it's, well, even I don't defend this. You understand?

XX: I didn't mean, when I asked you before did you know them I didn't mean names, but did you know them in the community? Had you seen them before?

AW: Let's say my uncle, my mother's brother, and he was an accountant, a big accountant. I mean a, and he had friends that, at one time when they gived the people to send away to Auschwitz, and my mother kept me and a sister that we were hidden in another place, and my mother with six children were in a place that they gathered the whole town already, and 50 percent of the town was sent away in that time already to Auschwitz, or the young people to workshops, in Germany. She took out my mother with the six children. And with children to take out, it wasn't so simple.

XX: Right. And where were you?

AW: Because children were the first, big families with small children were the first target, or target, however you say.

XX: Let's back up a minute. You were moved from one street to the streets behind.

AW: From, to the other street.

XX: And you were still all together.

AW: So usually my grandmother, she had still children in the house, grown up that were, usually we moved in the same house.

XX: And everybody was together.

AW: If my grandmother got an apartment she always had an apartment for us in that same house.

XX: I see. And that was all the children.

AW: It began with a bigger apartment...

XX: Right.

AW: It got smaller and smaller.

XX: As you moved on. Okay.

AW: At one time we got an, a, still a nice apartment, but already one room for eight children and one room for my grandmother. And we already had to go through each other's room. But it was still a nice house.

XX: And where were your parents?

AW: With my...

XX: One was...

AW: With my parents.

XX: Oh, with your grandmother.

AW: Still with my parents, still with my parents. But in this apartment one of my, the, a brother that was one year younger than me died on tuberculosis. And I was right there when he died. But he was still, he had still a normal, I mean, a funeral that they...

XX: You did have...

AW: Covered the...

XX: You were allowed to...

AW: Covered with...

XX: Have a religious...

AW: Covered with earth. I mean...

XX: But did you, were you allowed to have a religious funeral with a rabbi or...

AW: Everything already superficial. All but, everything already in a different way. We had to find a rabbi, not the same as we would take usually.

XX: Right, right.

AW: You know, everything. And then they sent us still not in the ghetto, but out of town. They took the non-Jewish people and they sent them to our apartments in the city. And they sent us to take over their apartments behind the city. If you're interested, in this apartment I have a little story. I will try to be short. In this apartment we lived on the ground floor, and my grandmother lived on the upper floor. On the ground floor, one room, and in that time they sent already away my mother's aunt with a daughter with a son. And it was left two young girls that we took them in into our already seven children because my brother died before.

XX: Right.

AW: And we were one room as big like, as this area here. No, no, don't look so far.

XX: This.

AW: The, here. This area.

XX: Right.

AW: The room was beds, all beds, because we had those three girls with us. One day they said, "The German are going to come today." Again to make a kind of a-- to make less of us. Let's put it this way. We were still the seven children, my parents and those three girls. As we built shortly before something, when you went out of the door, it was a key where the steps to the higher flight, and then was a door, a wooden door into a small room with coal for the stove. We closed this door with a superficial wall, and

painted it the same color as the whole, as the house out, as the entrance of the house, as the steps, you know, around. And we closed it up. We opened a hole because this was ground floor.

XX: Right.

AW: We op-- and the room was all beds, except it, on one wall was standing a chest. Dirty wash was thrown into a special chest, with two doors to open in the front.

XX: Oh I see.

AW: With a table and a top. This, the back wall of the chest, we made on hinges, to pick up. We opened a wall, a hole in this wall, to crawl through the chest into this little room.

XX: I see.

AW: And the room was as big as this pillar here, maybe a little bigger. And we made holes in the bricks to let in a drop of air. We heard that they are coming. We left a little bit of dirty wash inside to cover up, and we put glasses and plates and everything on top, that they should see that this wasn't moved.

XX: I see.

AW: We crawled up through the hole. We opened this wall on the hinges up from the chest, and we crawled into this little room. But we knocked the four smaller children's heads that they should get unconscious.

XX: So they wouldn't make any noise.

AW: They shouldn't make any noise. And we were-- that place was very small, and the bigger people, the grown up people, were holding them on their hands because it wasn't place for them to put them on the floor. And we were inside two, seven, ten people were inside. Except the four children. When they...

XX: So who was left in the house to, when the soldiers came?

AW: And we left the house, we left the beds. They were, they moved every bed because they were looking for this cellar...

XX: Right.

AW: Trap doors, because it was trap doors in, to go into cellars in these places. They were looking for a trap door to go into a cellar to find us. So every bed was moved, except this chest. And we were not supposed to breathe, because they would hear, because this hole was open. Except that the chest was on the wall. It took two hours at least, if I recall. They were mov-- they moved every bed from place. They smashed everything in this room. And they didn't move the chest. After two hours we have to, we had to pour pails of water on the children to bring them back. And my mother got a hysterical attack, laughing and crying and it took us two hours to bring her back. [pause]

XX: Hmm. How can you, okay, once they've come and they searched...

AW: And this is not a story...

XX: Right.

AW: This is my eyes saw it. And I went it through.

XX: Do you want to stop for a minute?

AW: Yes.

XX: Okay.

AW: I'm sorry. [tape off then on]

XX: So when, when you were living in these apartments, these were still not the ghettos yet. These were not the official ghettos? Or they were just...

AW: Not yet. From this apartment, I think if I will go on you will not be -- otherwise it will take too much time. And, not my time, but you know. You have it open?

XX: Mmm hmm.

AW: After this, in this time they took away, let's say a third of the Jews that they were still left. They took away about a third.

XX: Did you have any idea, was there any rumors about where they were going or what? You didn't...

AW: In that time we still didn't know what. The fact that we did never heard from them, we figured that nobody is alive. It was a bit better than we thought, because when I came to Auschwitz, I saw a little, a few, some of the people are still alive.

XX: That had left earlier.

AW: In fact that I met some of my relatives, close relatives when I came to Auschwitz. But this is later. From there they took us from three towns together around, from three towns in a kind of a ghetto. Then they took us. But why didn't I have my mother anymore in the, yes, I still, yes. They took us in a ghetto. They took us in a ghetto and circumstantially again the same. My grandfather always asked for a apartment for us. But we were so used to being 10 in a room, 20 in a room, there was no anymore problem how many we are in a room.

XX: Right.

AW: Or we, we slept by each other or whatever. But, that time people began to build real bunkers. Because we were already in a small village. We were in a place where-- with coal mines.

XX: Do you remember the name of the village?

AW: Dabrowa⁸ was the coal mines.

XX: I see.

AW: And they had special villages for the coal miners, behind the city, with little gardens. They took the coal miners, because most of the coal miners were not Jewish.

XX: Right.

AW: And they put them in the city.

XX: I see.

⁸Dabrowa, Bedzin - Columbia Gazetteer of the World

AW: And they made us a ghetto in these coal miners' villages.

XX: I see.

AW: And these were small houses, with tin roofs, with little gardens in the front, with the cellars, with this basement, you know. And this time was a short time that my grandmother had already this apartment, this little house. And we didn't have it yet. So we had to divide the family in a few bunkers. Whenever we heard it's going to be very...

XX: Bad, yeah.

AW: How to say it? It's going to be something at night, we divided our family. Like, usually me and my sisters, my brother and me, went to, to one uncle's bunker, and my mother with three small boys went to another bunker and with my father. And that time it was on a Saturday evening. And I came, we still go to the playing with the girls. We tried to live partially a normal life, because you couldn't help it. And it was a Saturday evening, and I came home from my friend to my grandmother's house. My grandmother with her family was already out in the bunker because they heard it before that it's going to be something bad at night. And my mother took the small boys to another place where she stayed usually. And I came home and I laid down in my-- and I slept. And I heard like in sleep that my mother said, "Wake her up. Let her go to the place she has to go," with my brother and the two sisters. And my father said, "You know what, let her stay here. She is sleeping. I'll stay with her." Because there was a new bunker built in this house, brand new. The people finished it this week, that my grandmother and grandfather let it made. But they weren't sure. They didn't try it out. That's why they went away. And I stayed with my father, my aunt, the youngest aunt, and a few more people, another uncle and aunt with a child of two-and-a-half. They didn't have where to go, and they stayed. And in the last minute when we saw it's very, very bad and we heard already shooting all around, we went up in this new bunker. The worst thing about this bunker, I don't know what I thought, and this bunker, the worst thing about this bunker was that it wasn't equipped. We didn't put in no food, because usually the people equipped the bunkers.

XX: Right.

AW: This bunker wasn't equipped because it was new and not tried out yet. So we didn't have no food there and no water and nothing. But, we went up in the last minute to this tin roof. How this bunker looked, I will tell you. It was in the attic. And in these village houses, to the attic you have to go out on a ladder, you know, to walk up on a ladder with this...

XX: Like a trap door.

AW: A trap, to open. And this was built from special people. It was a big attic with this wall in the end from wooden boards, with this big wooden finishing on both sides. They made this trap door to go into this bunker behind such a...

XX: Oh I see.

AW: Pillar.

XX: I see.

AW: Such a pillars. You know, in the end.

XX: Right.

AW: That it will not show that it's a door.

XX: I see.

AW: And it was-- the wall was built, the same exact wall that it was before, that it originally was, but one-and-a-half meters, if you know what meters, one-and-a-half meters away from this door.

XX: I see.

AW: From this wall. So if and then we put up not big things that hide the wall that they should pull away and hear us or something. Only things, visible things, small things, that they don't have to look a lot of time to see that there is nothing, just the wall.

XX: I see. I see.

AW: We were inside and in the beginning were big shooting. And we heard for three or for four days that we have to close our ears. Somehow they didn't come up the first few days. They didn't realize, because they went up the ladder, they took a look, they saw it's nothing, and they went down. And whenever we heard somebody go up, because the voice goes up...

XX: Right.

AW: You can hear before somebody approaches the ladder...

XX: Right.

AW: We heard. And our...

XX: Your hearing was good.

AW: Not like now. You see what I'm wearing?

XX: Right.

AW: This is from a bang of a carbine, from a German.

XX: But in those days your hearing was...

AW: My hearing...

XX: You were, you learned...

AW: I lost my hearing, one ear in the concentration camp and the other one slowly deteriorated later. And we were there about 10 people inside, the first three days without nothing. Then, when it quieted down a little bit, we began slowly, single, to go down and to look in the house what is left from food. And this was villages where there, there wasn't in the house.

XX: Very much, right.

AW: Only with the wells in the backyard to let in...

XX: Water.

AW: Yeah, and this was, and the way we were scared, because they were still around and they could have heard us...

XX: Right.

AW: Taking water. So the [unclear], and this tin roof, and this was July.

XX: So it was hot.

AW: I was a 19-year-old girl, and I was with men, my father and I was already only with my father. Because as I told you, I was, I stayed with my father in this house.

XX: And the other children were...

AW: The others, two, three days later we found out nobody is left. Everybody is taken away. And we never heard about them anymore.

XX: So it was just...

AW: So I stayed with my father, and I stayed with my father another seven months. Why, how was it that I stayed with him? Two days later, or three days, when it quieted down a little bit, we didn't know, we couldn't find out nothing what happened to the rest. We had to stay in the place because we-- every few hours somebody was approaching the ladder and hearing, whether they hear something, or whether there is still left a bunker over.

XX: Right.

AW: Because this was already *Judenrein*. This was already the last...

XX: Roundup or...

AW: Roundup.

XX: Of the Jews.

AW: Yeah. We were in this, two or three days later we heard somebody coming up. We couldn't even breathe, because they could have heard us through the slats. It was, you know, not...

XX: Open.

AW: Not closed, one to each other. We saw them even through that. So we, and there was a two-and-a-half-year old girl, which in the first three days she cried. Later she got so smart, because it was less and less soldiers around. They were changing...

XX: Right.

AW: And it was, they know how Germany was, German was. And they, in the 10 seconds...

XX: Right.

AW: ...all the time, she got so skilled that she knew when the change of the soldiers is, when, they will pass by our house. And she used to tell us, "Quiet, the soldiers are changing right now." So skilled she became! She was two-and-a-half years old. The first three days she was crying. But in that time it was so loud and so noisy...

XX: That it didn't matter.

AW: ...from the shooting, and crying, and screaming of the people, that they

couldn't hear us anyway, and we, you know. But later we had to be very quiet.

XX: Why do you think there was so much shooting? Because people were resisting?

AW: They were shooting, People were, people, they didn't care anymore. They didn't, they knew where they are going.

XX: They were just shooting...

AW: They were fighting. They were fighting to stay with a child there. They were fighting the mother to be with the daughter. And they were tearing apart.

XX: And the Ger-...

AW: And their main role was to tearing apart, to taking away the child. They killed the mother later too, but first they hurt the mother by taking away the child. This is, this was their main role.

XX: Mmm. [pause] So it was...

AW: We stayed in this bunker two or three d-, three days later we heard somebody calling. We were very quiet until the person said, "Don't worry. I am the one that built the bunker, and I came to see whether..."

XX: This is a non-Jew?

AW: No, it was...

XX: All right, he was a Jew, okay.

AW: This was, this time was this, because later they sent Jewish people to say, "Go out. They are going to bombard the house anyway. You will, you better go out. You, you will stay. If you go out, we will not kill you." They went around with Jewish people, and they forced them to call up. And we, somehow we knew about, and we kept quiet. But these people were the real ones, and they were left. We were, we belonged later to the same group, when they took us out after six weeks. They left 200 people to clean up the riches and the jewelry and the whatever was left after the people they sent away. And to gather this and to give it to them. And they left 200 people. And you know, the-- to stay alive, you did everything. Because, we knew that everybody has to go anyway. But, as long you live you want to stay alive. And I was just with my father.

XX: Right.

AW: And it was this uncle with this aunt, with this child. And then was one of my aunts, the one that they raped. But she went down three or four days later. They were rich in that time and they had hidden away some diamonds or whatever. And it was quiet and she thought she will help herself with that. And they caught her in that time, when she went down in to that, into the room to look for that. But somehow we heard that they don't shoot her on the spot. In fact, when I came seven months later to Auschwitz, I still met her. She was very sick already with tuberculosis. She was very sick already, but I still met her. We stayed. This person helped us for a while. He brought up some, but he had to hide too. But he...

XX: Did he have family or...

AW: They were able to wander around the whole neighborhood, the whole place, because they were, they couldn't...

XX: The helpers.

AW: You know they were helping them to, to gather all this stuff and everything. And somehow he risked his life, and he brought up whatever he was able to, it was still a lot of food in these houses, which they didn't have a control over that.

XX: Right.

AW: You know. And he brought us up. We stayed, and in between us it was so open and so funny, such a warm relationship and such a heart relat-- my parents had with me. And it was made up that none of-- because we began already to take water from the well. But like my uncle and my aunt, my father and me, or another couple or whatever, none of us had to go for each other for the water. It was, they made the rule everybody has to go for himself. You imagine...

XX: I see.

AW: To what it came. But, mine father and me made up, when he went for the water, I was standing right downstairs in case they catch him...

XX: You'd go with him.

AW: I go with him, which happened.

XX: That's what happened.

AW: Which happened, because after six weeks my father was the one to race, to go for the water, and I was standing right by dressed up, and I went with him. But we wanted to save these people upstairs. So if they asked us if there is anybody else we said, "No." But soon enough these people went out too, because they got tired. And they went all of them. Some of them went out before already. And these few, like mine aunt with her-- this they heard that they caught us. They didn't want to stay and they came down by themselves. They were scared. Because as soon as they caught us here, they would do already something to catch the rest of the people, and they realized that. So we all went...

XX: So you were caught.

AW: We all went into this camp with these 200 people. I was lucky, because my...

XX: This is Auschwitz?

AW: ...lucky in that time, because my father wasn't anymore in a age not to send him right away to Auschwitz. My father was, this age they didn't care anymore.

XX: He must have been what, about 40 or...

AW: Forty, 45. But they didn't care for this age anymore.

XX: I see.

AW: If they kept, they kept young people, very young. But I had somebody among those people. People did everything to stay alive.

XX: This is a work camp or...

AW: A friend of mine that slept with the *Hauptman* [German: Captain] of the *Kommando*, there were about 50 or 60 German...

XX: Officers?

AW: Yes, with a separate kitchen to cook for them, and with a separate kitchen to cook for the 200 *Häftlinge* [German: prisoners], for the 200. And she slept with the *Hauptman*, and she worked it out that my father stayed among the working people.

XX: I see.

AW: And I, she took me right away into the kitchen to cook for the soldiers. So, food was already out of question. We, I had it. And I had enough every night to smuggle something for my father and for a friend of his in the camp.

XX: Now this was in Auschwitz or...

AW: Hmm?

XX: This is in Auschwitz or this was a camp?

AW: This was before Auschwitz.

XX: What was the name of this camp?

AW: We stayed, this was in Bedzin...

XX: Oh I see.

AW: The ghetto in Bedzin.

XX: I see. I see.

AW: We stayed there and I am going to make it short. I got sick there. I went through the typhus there. And they didn't let, they brought us three girls with the typhus, typhus you say?

XX: Mmm hmm.

AW: Into a cellar that all with that cellar was a coal...

XX: Bin?

AW: Shop. A coal garage. And between the ceiling was holes that the sand of the coal went on our heads. At one time I had so high fever that I was screaming, "I am still alive! Don't bury me yet!" And they didn't let my father come. I heard he was screaming. But they didn't let him, not to lead us to this place. And there were a few good people that without medicines they brought us out of that, three girls. The other two was, were...

XX: Were there any non-Jews in this...

AW: What?

XX: Were there any non-Jews in this camp?

AW: No. German.

XX: They were all Jews.

AW: German and Jews. No. German and Jews.

XX: It was German soldiers...

AW: Yeah.

XX: .. and Jewish prisoners?

AW: Yeah.

XX: Okay.

AW: After that, after six weeks they had it cleaned up. They put it, I was working in the kitchen and I got a little friendlier with some German. I couldn't help it. Not friendly, but like they wanted to save us, a few of them. You know, among them sometimes it happened that one of them thought a little different. Not that they were good but-- and they, he-- we were three girls working in the kitchen. And they wanted to let us out in the town among the *goys*, among the non-Jewish people, to save us, when the arrests...

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

[Note: long unrecorded section at beginning of tape]

AW: A good, a girlfriend of mine, that she lived through the whole war by *goyishe* [Yiddish: non-Jews] people, that she knew them from before.

XX: And they hid her?

AW: And she wanted me to go with her, but I stood, especially the men stood behind us. The women in the front and I stood in the last line of the women, with my father in the first line of the men, not to lose him. And she was pinching me, "Come, you have a chance to live!" And I said, "Oh no, not while my father is still alive and standing behind my back." And I didn't go. She lived through the war in the same town, and I went to Auschwitz with my father. I was with him in the, in this closed cattle train, sitting on his lap, and we were crying both, because we knew this is the end of us. We came to Auschwitz. I'm not going to tell you the whole way to Auschwitz. I'm not going to tell you that, but, when we came to Auschwitz, the only thing that I still show, because people in his age, they mostly was all gray already. Mostly they took them straight on this trailer or on this station wagon that takes them straight to the crematorium. That I, what I saw. Fortunate, I don't know how, they took him, that's what I still saw, that they took him among people to work for them. And I was looking very good. So they took me right away to work in Auschwitz. And this was the first time they don't kill everybody on the spot in Auschwitz.

XX: What kind of work did they have you do?

AW: People mostly worked nothing. When I came, I found a aunt of mine, which shortly after that day that she died. But when I came, if her own daughter would come, she wouldn't be so happy. And she was already seven months there. She was a good-- she finished a high school for trade too. High school, and she was a good dressmaker. So, they used her just that they had any power even among the Jews. Because you know how it was. A *Stuben Ältester*,⁹ one that was, took care of the room, one that took care of the work, one that took care, and they made it up among the Jewish girls. And mostly among the strong ones, the ones that could scream and hit, mostly among those. They needed somebody, except the German girls, to take care of the-- in Auschwitz was in that time still a few thousand gir-, women, and men on the men's field, that they worked for them. I, me, they took after two weeks of quarantine. You heard about it. Quarantine is a story for itself, because when we came in, like 3,000 girls, let's say, into the quarantine, from the quarantine, two weeks later, if it was left 1,500, it was good enough. Because the rest died, from this and from that. The rest of them.

XX: And because you had the typhus they put you there?

⁹Hut elder - chief of barracks, a person of responsibility

AW: We became typhus. They put us straight on past that bunks, with lice and so on. And they didn't give us to eat. And they, it was January. They let us work outside, doing nothing. Shoveling snow, and digging fields, holes in the-- for nothing. After this, I survived those two weeks. They put me in a ammunition factory, which it was called Union. By them, *Union*, but you know. And they put me, they needed ammunition in that time. And when they made the selection. No, I'm going to begin when they brought us to Auschwitz. They put us into saunas, and we were ordered to take off everything what we wear, and give away everything what we. We were checked inside and outside. What can I tell you? Whether we don't hide something where we had place to hide. And we were left naked on the sauna steps, wooden steps, sitting, for three days, naked, until they were sure we don't have nothing to give them. I don't remember whether they gave us any food. I don't remember. After three days they made us with numbers, with pins.

XX: And what is the mark under here? The...

AW: Jew. And then they brought us-- they showered, and they *entlaust* [deloused] us. And they gave us *entlaust* clothes, those striped, blue and white skirts with jackets. It was winter. With a shirt behind it, whatever. And the fact is that they needed us to make this ammunition. So, we were clean all the time we were in Auschwitz. But this was after the-- every, this was the beginning. And then we-- they brought us from Birkenau to Auschwitz. In Auschwitz we were marching...

XX: So this was Birkenau you went to first.

AW: What?

XX: You came to Auschwitz from where?

AW: From this ghetto.

XX: Oh I see, okay.

AW: With my father. But I didn't see my father anymore. This was the last time, on the station in Auschwitz, that I saw my father. And this was it, not anymore. And they brought us to Birkenau. When I came from Birkenau-- this was Birkenau and Auschwitz is the same...

XX: Oh, I see.

AW: Only it's here was the quarantine...

XX: Right.

AW: And here was already the *Arbeits* [German: work] field. When they brought me to Auschwitz, shortly I found out that I have still alive some relatives. My youngest aunt, which I was very close to, because we were close in age too, and we lived all the life together, and another aunt from another town with the daughter which is still alive, which is still alive. And then I found out one of my youngest uncles, my mother's brother with another one, two of them, that they are still alive in Forest Hills. One of them was here today. They are still around. Still, they are still alive. This one was a accountant, very, with a German, with a German language and everything. And he had

the power to come into the women's field. He was working as, in the office of a shoe factory. And he was able from time to time to see us, and to bring us shoe. And this aunt of mine didn't go out. This he settled for her that she didn't have to go out to work outside.

XX: I see.

AW: But, because she was sewing for them. And she took care of me right away. In a way I'm telling you the bad, and I'm telling you the good. She took care of me. I was right away dressed a little bit prop-, more properly than the others. And I was working. We were walking 4:00 in the morning by music, by, by at the door to the factory four kilometers forth and four kilometers back, to the ammunition factory. I didn't work very hard there. This must be something that I survived. Because I didn't work very hard there, but the whole, the life, and the laying on the-- and that food, the scarce food, and the lice, the laying six, six on a *Pritsche* [German: plank bed]. Three with the feet, three on one side and three in the other side with the feet among each other.

XX: Mmm, hmm.

AW: I had-- it helped me also some girls, maybe bigger girls, were hungry, very very hungry, all the time. Maybe that's why I survived. I wasn't this hungry as some of the girls. I was able to give away from mine, to give away some from mine. I had a little...

XX: What kind of food did you eat? Just bread or...

AW: They gave you a piece of bread. Because we were working in the ammunition factory and they needed us...

XX: Right. They needed your energy.

AW: And they needed our strength...

XX: Right.

AW: They gave us a piece of bread, a piece of horse meat salami, and a bowl of soup for the day.

XX: Okay.

AW: And it was-- we lived on that. And my uncle supplied me a little bit with food. But, I didn't eat alone. I am not telling you the story. My food was lunch time always on the table. I had all-- I wasn't this hungry. I, till now I don't understand why. Now I can't control myself. And, like I'm telling you, I was, I cou-, I was able to give away some of my food. And this was a sign that I didn't need so much.

XX: Since you were working, did you have any contact with the outside world at all? Did anybody...

AW: Forget about that. Nobody had. Not from Auschwitz.

XX: So you didn't know what was going on.

AW: I didn't know who is alive. I didn't know nothing. This aunt of mine, who was as close a contact with the home, that it could be, and this uncle of mine, a matter of

fact, the aunt died, but with this uncle, till today, he is now a wealthy man in New York as a real estate and insurance broker. And, but we are very close. I mean, I am not this wealthy and I'm-- but I am the only niece left from 10 sisters and brothers, about 30 or 40 nieces and nephews. And one lives in Israel, a niece from a brother, and I am special, precious for him, because I am his oldest sister's oldest daughter.

XX: So you had no idea what was going on. You didn't know whether America was involved in the war or...

AW: We knew, because we came to Auschwitz, we saw these ovens, and we felt the smell. And we heard a lot. And we saw it. We saw it. Because there were girls working for them that they, we met them, that they pushed into the oven, that they cleaned these people before they pushed them into the oven. There were people working for them.

XX: So these were Jews working for...

AW: I was lucky to, not to work in this-- all, I don't know whether I would be, be able to. I would probably not be able to. They put me to work in a ammunition factory, because they needed healthy people. And I was, after this kitchen in the-- I looked better than ever. Because, you know what you did: you ate. You didn't, somehow, I don't know till now how we lived, and we didn't think back. We thought back, but we couldn't do nothing. So we were like, like cattle. We were going on with life just to go through the day. We didn't have the opportunity to think about nothing.

XX: Okay. [pause]

AW: Now, there are times that I don't know how I, why I, but how did we live throughout that? Not the pain or the-- and then came the time when the Alien [she means Allied Forces] became to approach. And they made marches, but they made the people go out of Auschwitz. They wanted somehow some way they wanted to kill everything what they did...

XX: To hide it?

AW: What?

XX: To hide it?

AW: To arrange some way what they did. They began...

XX: So you knew the war was going on because they were bombing...

AW: They began, they made groups of 3,000. I don't, and from other camps too. Because when we came to other camps, the people from these camps were already farther on.

XX: I see.

AW: Instead to leave us alone, until the Allied comes, what do you have from us now? You have to run for your life. They didn't do that, because they still thought that, you know how German was. They had a *Befehl* [German: order]. They had a order to take these people and to march them to deep Germany. They knew they have to run for

their lives. I am not going to talk about other groups. Our group were 3,000 women. They put us as in the camps five in a row. That was always the marching, to the factories, wherever we went, five in a row. They put us five in a rows, and they opened the clothes shop, the clothes garages, whatever they put together clothes, you know. And they let everybody put. January, 1945. And they let us dress up whatever we want. They already knew that this is their end. Or this was the order that time...

XX: Could you hear the war? Could you hear bombers and airplanes and bombs?

AW: Yes, we saw already. It was at night. When we were walking, we saw like white butterflies in the skies.

XX: Those were the airplanes.

AW: These was the English, or the American planes. And every time it was bombarding they let us down. We were walking the first three, four days till January 19 in Poland, with 20 degree below zero here, or more. And the only thing that, I was very, with a very close friend together. We are close till today. I am-- a few years younger than me. And I had a pair of shoes that my aunt-- my aunt died a little before I left, but when I, when they took us from Birkenau, from Auschwitz, closer to the factory because they needed the strength of the people that we don't have to walk forth and back, they-- my aunt took off a pair of shoes that her brother brought a few days before, with [unclear] you know. And I was crying, "I will not take them. He might not be able to bring you any other ones." She gave me on both sides. "You put them on this minute." She was, she was like a mother, even more. And she knew she is going to die anyway. I didn't know so much.

XX: How did she know she was...

AW: She knew.

XX: ...going to die?

AW: She knew, because she had tuberculosis...

XX: Oh.

AW: And she had open wound from *Geschwür* [German: ulcer]. You know what this is? This what we got in there. I had it, I went it through too. We had, from a lack of calcium and a lack of other vitamins, when we got a wound...

XX: Oh, sure.

AW: It became a permanent wound.

XX: Like scurvy, right?

AW: With how you call it, with pus and whatever. You know what I mean.

XX: It became infected, right?

AW: Yeah. And she had this. And because she was tuberculosis, this didn't heal anymore. And she knew. She knew. Anyway, I had these shoes, because she forced them on me. Because shortly after that the Allied became, they began to close in. So they threw

us out from Auschwitz, but with the Germans, with the soldiers. Instead to let us go wherever we want to go, or to stay in place and they should run away, they put us together, not only us. Thousands of thousands of thousands. Because when we went on our march, the men went before. It was already hundreds of bodies on the way, thrown away, pushed away from the way. Because who could stand could stand and who couldn't, couldn't. And I wasn't just wearing these shoes all by myself. Because my friend, who was close me, and a few hours me, and a few hours her. And she was crying, "Don't do it, because at least one of us will live." And I said, "No, either both of us or none of us." And I have till now, I can't-- I have beautiful boots and I can't put them on. Because I have frozen toes here. And as soon I close the boot and no air comes...

XX: It starts...

AW: I, the pain, unbearable. And you can't do nothing about it. The doctors can't do nothing about it. And both, yeah, and as it approaches summer, as soon it becomes warm, I had it a little better. In the summer it's a little better because as soon I am in the mountain or wherever I take off my socks, and the air comes, it's already better. But boots, the most beautiful boot and I can't put them on. Because as soon I close them up ...

XX: Right. So, they're marching you...

AW: They were marching us, and they tried to put us deep Germany. Of course, if somebody bends down for a grass or for something to eat on the way, he was shot on the spot. Before me was someone shot. Behind me was someone shot. They wanted to put us in Gross-Rosen in a camp. It was already full. They didn't let us in. On the way we ate *Schav*, was some green leaves. Or we went to by a well, we drank the water. This was what we had on the way. And if it was an air raid, like they were bombing on the way, they let us into...

XX: A ditch or some...

AW: A ditch or something. And we were staying a while and then march again. Why they went with us...

XX: Were the soldiers frightened? Did you, could you tell?

AW: They had to go, no, they had to run away anyway.

XX: I see.

AW: They had to run away anyway. But why did they have this order to *schlepp* us?

XX: But there were no soldiers that said, "The hell with this. I'm gonna..."

AW: They were too, they were scared to leave. They thought they will be able to clean themselves if nobody will be left to tell on them.

XX: I see. I see.

AW: Such, anyway, until we came to Ravensbrück, we came to a camp called Ravensbrück. This was a camp that they didn't have these ovens, or these gasses or

what.¹⁰ There, as a matter of fact that we were the first Jews to let them into Ravensbrück. There they have Russian girls, Polish girls, all other kind, Gypsies. All other kind except Jews. We were the first, because it was already a disorder...

XX: Right.

AW: You know. And they let us in there, and they put us five-- 3,000 girls into a room like this, with closed windows, because there was no light what, you know.

XX: Oh, I see, right.

AW: They were scared for themselves too. The day after we *schlepped* out 100 dead, choked, because we were laying one on each other. The day after we were looking where we can, who was alive was alive. Unbelievable. I was still with my friend. And we were looking for something to eat. So whoever, and this was a old camp. And they were standing with old Russian *babushkas*, by kettles of food, for the old *Häftlinge* [German: prisoners], for these people that they were from before there. As I told you, the day after...

XX: Right.

AW: 100 or 200 were dead in this room. I was very brave. One of these, we were a group of seven or eight girls that we kept together. One of them had a canteen, you know? I took the canteen, and I said, "Let me try something." And my friends were, "If you go I kill you! Don't leave me alone! They might kill you." And I went over. I-- and this *babushka* was old and half asleep. It was 4:00 in the morning, with this stick in the hand. And I opened this thermos and I put in, I burned my hand. I put in, and I was beginning, I was running. She still managed to give me with the stick over the head. And I came over to these eight girls with this little soup. And everybody took a *Schluck* [German: gulp, swallow] you know what I mean, a sip. And then my friend who has that [unclear] that I remember, my friend said to me, "You are a cow. Why didn't you sit? Three times, four times before you came over here. You will never learn!" That's what my friend told me, because I had a long way to go until I came over.

XX: So you should have...

AW: And it was not touched. After that in Ravensbrück we had the first lice. Because in Auschwitz they kept us clean because they needed us.

XX: Right. Because you needed to work.

AW: So the first lice, they put us straight on beds, not beds, only those shelves, with lice. And then we got the first lice. And this was still maybe February. From there they kept us, not much, a few days. They sent us on. They sent us on in a place I think, no, in wagons, in trains, in closed trains, cattle trains, you know. They sent us on in a place in middle of Germany. This was, if you will know Germany you would know the

¹⁰"In early 1945, the SS constructed a gas chamber in Ravensbrück near the camp crematorium. The Germans gassed between 5,000 and 6,000 prisoners at Ravensbrück before Soviet troops liberated the camp in April 1945." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/ravensbrueck>

places. They sent us in a place called Malchow. This was a place they didn't give us, they didn't tell us to work. You know, they didn't tell us to work anymore, anyway.

XX: Right.

AW: But there was no food. They gave us a thin slice of bread and a glass of unboiled water, hot, unboiled water, with a few strings of vegetables, unboiled, for the day. And that place, my friend got the typhus. And this lice, and she was with another friend too, and I saw the other one eat her bread. And I pushed the other one away, and she got it from me. And I went out. I was a pusher. And I went out to just that, unloaded-- somehow to touch a big crowd of people, no matter how little food they gave us, you had to get a delivery of vegetables or something. I gathered a few slices of bread from her. She had the typhus with high fever in that time. And I didn't have how to help her. I didn't know what to do about it. So I went out with a few slices of bread to this German girl, and ask her that I will give her the few slices-- not the German, but among the Jewish also-- they were hungry too. And I will give her the bread that you should give me one of the vegetables. And I scraped it like a apple. And I pushed it into her mouth. And I did it for a few days, just a few pieces of this, you know, like a apple with a knife, that I be able to push it into her mouth a little bit of wetness, a little bit of, and after, I brought her back, after three or four days. Since then, she didn't let go of me anymore. Like a sister. We are close till the day of, till today.

XX: Is she here?

AW: She is, she lives in Canada in Toronto. And when she made a *Bar Mitzvah* to her son, she went on the stage suddenly and she said, I didn't know even, I didn't know who she means even. And she said, "Now I'm going to introduce my sister." And I didn't know till people later pushed me, "Stand up!" I didn't know even who she means. She introduced me as her sister. After many years we are close till today.

XX: So from Malchow...

AW: Well, Malchow we went again on a train to Leipzig, to Taucha. Taucha is a small place where it was again a concentration camp. They all, still sent us from, just, to Taucha. In, on the station, Leipzig was a good, a big city in Germany. And on this, on the station of this city were bombed, were, a lot of, Leipzig was very much bombed. And they let us, suddenly we saw that the soldiers and the women soldiers-- the women were worse than the men. The German women watching us were much worse than the men. They stepped down the train, and they go somewhere in the city, and we didn't know why. And we were, in that time, on open...

XX: Cars.

AW: Cars, train cars. Completely open at the top. When we went up on these trains the snow was on the train. It melted under us. And they left us for the night in these open trains. We didn't know why, and then suddenly the whole sky was full of planes. And the bombing was-- and every time that they bombed we hid our heads between the

knees, in between each other. Somehow we survived the night.

[Tape two, side one ended.]

Tape two, side two:

AW: There, a Jewish men's camp. And it was already a little different. They let already approach each other. They were in danger themselves. So it, everything was milder. The first farina with hot milk we got there in Taucha. I will never forget the taste of it...

XX: Right.

AW: Because it was the first food, the first possible food we got in Taucha because probably. And if we have survived the night, then we found out that we are the fifth transport, and the first to survive. Four of them got bombed. The girls, they stepped down specially from the train, and leave the train, a whole train of *Häftlinges*, of *Häftlinges*, you know what I mean, of concentration camp people. They leaved on the station to get bombed. But this time, but they go by, probably they go by order. If they didn't get bombed tonight, on with them. And we came into this camp and the men said, "You are the first ones. We are awaiting the fifth now. Four of them got bombed on this station." A matter of fact the *Platz* [German: square] it looked like Berlin after the war. And we got the first right food there. After a while they took us again on a march. We marched, in the beginning we marched 15 kilometer in the night and 30 in day. This was in the beginning, in January, so high in snow. Then they took us from Taucha, from Leipzig, on, on a march. They took us again in a deep Germany, close to Freiburg, Nossen, in a bombed camp, that there were no people there. But there were rests of the camp still, with a fence, a double fence, all around, and a wall there all around. The fence was not enough for them. A double fence, and a wall there all around. And inside were half bombed, or half, small houses where the people probably lived in this camp. There they didn't watch us too much anymore. A matter of fact...

XX: So this is February or March or...

AW: What?

XX: This is in February or March or...

AW: This was already April.

XX: April.

AW: This was already April. It was a little warmer. We slept on the floor, on the ground. And they kept us for a while there. And stupidly, from there, one night, and my friend didn't let me because she was scared that I don't come back any more, I went out to a neighboring village, to German, and I asked for some food. I was-- they didn't see me going out. But it was a small place already, and we were already maybe 200 all together left from all of it.

XX: From 3,000.

AW: From 3,000. Part of the people ran away on the way.

XX: Oh they did?

AW: It took everybody time to get the courage to do it. A small part ran away who were smarter, still closer to home, you know. I didn't get the courage until we went after this last camp. A funny thing that my friend didn't let me go, I say, "I will go out from here in a village, in a German village." We knew that the German are scared already, and that nobody could do us nothing anymore. Because if not they would kill us. They had already a order not to kill, only to push us as farther away to Germany that we shouldn't be the witnesses for what happened. How they imagined they can do it, I don't know. But the fact is that from there one night I went out to a German family and I asked for some food. And my coat was sewn the hem the how you call, you know, the under...

XX: The lining?

AW: The lining was sewn to the coat, and I opened the pockets and I threw in inside as much as I could. Because I intended to go back because I left my friend there. Otherwise I wasn't supposed to go back anymore. Because you were free already in that time. And I stupidly went back. And they still had this hate in them. Because I had the, even the fence was already torn. You could have gone...

XX: Through the fence.

AW: Through the fence. And I had to pick up the fence to go with this coat and with something in my hand. And as long as it took me to pick up the fence, they beat me with the other side of the rifles in my behind. I couldn't sleep the whole night later. I slept on my stomach, because my behind was...

XX: Sore.

AW: In pain. But I came back to my friend. And then they took us again to march. They took us again to march in a forest which was like a hill. And we laid at night there and I said to my friend, that bad. It was early in the morning, by 4:00 in the morning. I took my friend and I said, "Finish. From there we are going." And we began to crawl on the stomach first. As I told you, they didn't watch us so close anymore. We crawled on the stomach first until the road, and when we came to the road, we began to run into a village. The first night we came into a barn, among cows. It was still night, and we hid in a barn among cows. And the day after, in the morning, I said, "The worst happened, what could happen to us?" I was a pusher. I was a-- I had guts. I had guts. She was scared. I had guts. And I say she was a few years younger than me, we were in the, you know, in the late teens in that time, or 20, 21. Already in that time, maybe 21, 22. Anyway, I took, I, we went up to the owner. And she gave us this black bread that was the best in the world, with milk. We ate, and we began to walk on. We walked into a village where we saw already the German running. They themselves were running out of the village because it was heard the Russians are coming in this village. We went into a house that we saw people. We found out that this is the richest house in the village and the owners ran away. But the sick people, or mothers with small children, were let in into this house because it was safer to stay on, German people, to stay on. We talked a little

bit German, both of us.

XX: Right.

AW: And we went into this house as German girls. They let us in. They gave us some food. It was steak. A half an hour later came in a German [tape machine off, then on – different voice], they called it the *Totenkopf* [German: death head], whatever, they had this skulls, this big skulls on their arms.

XX: So it was not an SS. It was a...

AW: Some, yes, an SS, either an SS or SA or something like that. Because only those had the skulls.

XX: Right. Right.

AW: A young guy. He saw us. He saw the others, they, he's [unclear] the owner was supposed to be a relative of his. And he came to see whether to, whatever. And he saw us two young girls. A matter of fact we were dressed up a little bit already. We took already some clothes from German houses, they gave us. And he said, "You young girls-- the Russian are coming-- are going to stay here?" And we were scared to death. And he says, "You know, my *Kommando*, my whole army *Kommando*, whatever is staying a few kilometer from here. And I was able to contact to see whether my relatives are here. And I am going to see when we're beginning to go on, and I'll come for you back, to take us with us, to the army. We are running deep Germany. And we are going to take us with us. The Russians will kill you." As soon as he went out, we were looking for a place to hide. Because...

XX: You didn't...

AW: Of course we didn't want to go with him. And we stayed in this house over night. Early in the morning the Russian came. The fact is, when the Russian came, it came, you know, they came, one group came into this house, the other one into this house. And...

XX: And what were the Russians like? Were they...

AW: We were able to talk to them, because we are Polish.

XX: So...

AW: A little bit broken, but it was, the group that came into this house was three, four higher ranks officers and two *ordinaces*. Am I...

XX: Privates.

AW: Making clear?

XX: Mmm hmm.

AW: Two privates. When they came, we said, "We are Jewish," to one of them. Soon enough this one called us aside and he says, "Look, I am a Jew, not a real Jew. My grandfather, whatever, was a Jew. You better don't go around saying you are Jewish. The Russians don't like too much the Jew." This was right away. But we were stupid enough to say, because they said they're going on from here to Katowice, and this is very close to

my town where I lived, to Bendzin. And the first instinct was to go and to look whether somebody is alive, whether somebody is left. And we told them already that we want to go with them to Katowice. And he told us right away, "Don't be too smart." And we had some problems with them on the way. I wouldn't want to talk about it.

XX: So you got to...

AW: But it was, I got to, I was lucky. I was so lucky. I was lucky. I don't know. In many ways, I don't know that I am so smart that I with my mouth, with my *pisk* [Yiddish: big mouth] I could-- I managed a lot. Even with these Russian people.

XX: Okay.¹¹ [tape off; other talk non-related to this interview on the end of this tape]

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

¹¹Mrs. Wertheimer's personal history sheet indicates that she emigrated to Israel post-war and then eventually to the United States in 1958.