

Interview with Anna Hollander
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Place: Beth Jacob Synagogue, Oakland, California
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Q: COULD YOU TELL US WHEN AND WHERE YOU WERE BORN?

A: I was born in Czechoslovakia, in 1929.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR NAME THEN?

A: My name was that time Hanna or, if you call it, Hana Markovitz.

Q: AND FROM WHICH TOWN WERE YOU?

A: I come from (Silts), which is not too far from (Oschwa), Mukachevo they call it, which is the Carpathian [Mountain].

Q: AND WHAT WAS YOUR FAMILY LIKE?

A: Our family like? We had a very big family home and in 1944 when they took us in the concentration camp, we were together, grandma, mother, father--I had another brother, and my mother was pregnant at that time. And grandma, and grandpa, and great-grandma and great-grandfather. So, we come from a long, long--quite a few uncles and aunts. We were a very huge family at home.

Q: YOU HAD ONE BROTHER?

A: I had one brother.

Q: AND WERE YOU AN OBSERVANT FAMILY IN YOUR TOWN?

A: Yes, we were quite religious--modern.

Q: HOW DO YOU MEAN?

A: Europe, most the Jews were very religious. They were observant--Shabbat and the holidays--and we grew up pretty religious.

Q: DID YOU GO TO A RELIGIOUS SCHOOL?

A: No, I used to have a tutor which I came home. In Europe, the boys only went to, they called it Cheder, in the morning, before school and after school, the boys. The girls, they were teaching home, the people who could afford it. And I come from a very wealthy family from home.

Q: SO, YOU HAD A TUTOR AT HOME?

A: I had a tutor at home.

Q: AND WHAT DID YOU STUDY?

A: We used to study davenen [prayer] and to pray, the holidays and whatever--Shabbat, when you go into a Temple. Then, you knew-- as far as religious, I saw--I grew up that way.

Q: DID YOU GO TO A PUBLIC SCHOOL?

A: Yes.

Q: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL?

A: As far as public school, it was pretty hard because I went--I wasn't quite 14 when I went to a concentration camp. So, most of the youngest survivors there are, there are not too many my age who remain alive.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER MUCH OF YOUR SCHOOL?

A: Yeah. I do remember. I remember, like, children used to play, used to pull hair, like all children, whatever, in school. We had good times, we had bad times. We used to have--we were a very small minority of Jews from where I come, very few. There was many times they used to call, "dirty Jew", and all that remarks but nothing special.

Q: DID YOU EVER FEEL THAT YOU WERE IN DANGER?

A: No, no. Not until 1939--'40, we were okay. The Jews had it very good in Czechoslovakia.

Q: WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOUR PARENTS DO?

A: My father was an architect and my grandfather used to, with him, build bridges. They still, in Europe, they have our name. All the big bridges are built my father and my grandfather did it.

Q: AND WHAT DID YOUR MOTHER DO?

A: She was a regular housewife.

Q: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER--WHAT'S YOUR FIRST MEMORY OF THAT THERE WAS SOME DANGER?

A: From where we come from, Czechoslovakia, they change hands maybe about four times since 1939. We had the 1939 the Ukraines. I don't know if you know that's a part of some of Russia, who took over our country. We had to change even schools. That's it. We had no more Czech schools. At the time they were learning Russian then they stayed about a year then the Hungarian came in.

Q: SO, YOU WERE CLOSE TO THE RUSSIAN BOARDER?

A: Not that close. But they took away our part of the country. Then the Hungarian came in and they chased out the Russian. So, I lived through, since 1939, wars.

Q: WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE HUNGARIANS CAME?

A: When the Hungarians came, we were a little bit more, the second time, the Jews were a little bit more skeptical. They kept us in the houses; they didn't let us so much out. They started--the Jews, we had not this--take away some stores. They couldn't, in business, not to be as free as they used to be by the Czechs. The Jews were watched.

Q: HOW OLD WERE YOU THEN?

A: I was that time about 12, I think so, 12. I was born 1929.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED WHEN GERMANY BEGAN THE WAR?

A: Yes, I do. I remember they took us one day; nobody knew about anything.

Q: DO YOU KNOW WHICH YEAR THIS WAS?

A: I think it was in 1943, in the beginning of '44. We knew before that something was going on. We knew especially because my father, my grandfather used to travel a lot on business and they wouldn't let them into Romania anymore and they wouldn't let them into a lot of places no more. So, we knew that something--but we really did no nothing about Germany.

Q: SO YOU WERE UNDER HUNGARY UNTIL--

A: We were, at that time, under Hungary but everything was kept secret. We didn't know anything that was going on in the world. We used to have news but after Hungary took over, or what, we never heard nothing.

Q: WAS YOUR FATHER STILL ABLE TO WORK?

A: Not as much. There was much less in just in the neighborhood.

Q: AND WERE YOU STILL ABLE TO GO TO SCHOOL?

A: Yes. We went to different schools. We went to Hungarian school and that's all what we had at that time. But the schooling wasn't anymore the same. The Jewish children had less privilege to learn than the other children.

Q: HOW DO YOU MEAN?

A: They kept us not quite in the same classes. They put us a little bit under. We were the second grade citizens; we weren't first grade citizens.

Q: WHAT DIFFERENCES WERE THERE?

A: I really don't know at that time. Today, I would think they had higher education than we did. That's what I think.

Q: WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE GERMANS CAME?

A: The Germans came in during the night.

Q: WHAT YEAR WAS THIS?

A: I think it's 1944 in the beginning or maybe '43, end of it, something like this.

The Germans came in and they gave us an hour to put things together, and whatever we can take, to take with us, to leave everything. They said we are just going for a short trip and we will be back and everything, the rest of the things, we're going to have the way we had it. Like we had the homes, some business, and we had to leave everything behind us. They just wanted what you can have on you, that's all, nothing else. Not even one little suitcase you couldn't bring. Just what you can wear on yourself.

At that time, they took us to, they called the little town, it's a city, (Oschwa), which was about maybe four kilometer from where I come and they took us to the big synagogue and as they tried from the whole neighborhood together, the Jews. We were there I think about four days or five days in that synagogue until they got all the Jews from the whole neighborhood from where I come.

At that time I think my family saw a little bit more than maybe any Jewish family because I remember I come from very tall parents and I was just as tall than I am now. I never grew anything. So, at that time, my mother and my grandma they said I should wear-- I come from a wealthy home, so, they wrapped me around with clothing with all kind of silk around everything just in case something--not to starve from hunger. So, I can sell it or buy myself something. So,

that's the way I went to Auschwitz which the Germans thought I'm much-- that I was very skinny. Tall and skinny.

Q: HOW DID THEY TAKE YOU?

A: We came off from the trains. We were in the wagons.

Q: FROM THE TOWN?

A: From the town they took us to (Oschwa) to shul [synagogue]. From there, they took us to Mukachevo. It's a big city where they used to make--let's see. They used to make--how you call? It was a factory from building. Used to make material for building. It was very huge. And there they took most from our side of the towns the people. We used to be the thousands there and we were there maybe a week or two or three 'till they got together from the whole Carpathian the Jews there. And from there they used to send us everyday in a different transport to Auschwitz. Which, at that time, we never knew where we going or what we doing.

Q: WHAT DID YOU SEE WHEN YOU ARRIVED?

A: We went through with wagons where they delivered cargos. It was all closed. We never saw nothing and the wagons, they opened them, we came out and it was music playing and at that time we didn't know even it was Auschwitz. We didn't know it was a place to us. And the Germans used to hit us, "go--go, fast--fast, lauf--lauf [run--run]." So, there were about five, six Germans and they used to have--we had Mengele, with the little boots with the little stick, with the boots. And he used to-- who will go to work and who will go to parish.

At that time, my mother came down. She was very young. My mother was born in 1910. That means today she would have been only-- let's see that's 89--79 today. She was, at that time, in the 30's and my father was just a few years older than she was. So, now my father

would maybe be 84, 85. So, at that time, they were both very young. And my mother carried my little brother on the hand so they pulled her right away on this side, and my father send her with me. And there was my grandma and my great-grandma, everybody they took on the other side. Just my father and me went on that side. At that time, we didn't know where we were going but as we were going, they used to hit us with the sticks, to run, and I was very young. I was 14 and I still have scars on my back. And my father grabbed me, to help me to run while they--and they pushed him away. And that's the last time I saw my father. [Mrs. Hollander begins to cry.] It's okay; I'm going to be all right.

Anyhow, we came to Auschwitz and we came and they put us in a big huge room. We used to--we had bunk beds and those bunk beds we slept like, six, eight on top and about eight on the bottom. Just like herring, you had no room, and slept whatever we slept. And I came to a "B" Lager [camp] which was condemned of killing. But, at that time, we didn't know but we had some. In the morning we used to get up, 5 o' clock, and we used to go--they used to call it "zell appel" [lineup], which they counted us. We used to get three in a row and they used to count every morning and after an hour, summer, winter, with no clothes, with nothing. Just one striped dress, that's all what it was. And at that time we had no shoes either.

And then they used to--before we went in, they used to give us little water, which was like spinach in it but there was the sand. It was never washed; you could feel it. And then they used to give us a stick--a slice of bread a day. That's all. That was our food. And in the evening, we used to get a cup of coffee, black. Nothing else. And we used to ask--there was a lot of, like a--they watched on us. There were

Jewish girls from Poland. And Poland they came before, to Auschwitz, before us and we used to ask those girls where are our parents. I used to cry a lot. I used to say, I knew, I was hoping that young people there, somewhere. So, the girls used to say, you see this chimney, that's where they are already a long time, burned.

But at that time, we couldn't comprehend anything because they put something in our food because we were just like, numb. If you called my name, or what, I couldn't-- I didn't know that's me. Except you came, you shook me. That's how I knew you want me or you told me. And we were just women, all we were. Never together in the same. And we were there in Auschwitz, let's see, about a month or so but we all knew that this camp is a condemned camp, that we are going (?) to be going to the chimneys. We were a condemned Just what happened to us.

After a while, they need work, the Germans, the Polands, whatever. So, they used to take us out if they had not enough. So, they took the best of them to work. They had what they thought the healthiest ones they took out to work. So, one day after Auschwitz, I was there maybe three, four months--two months, I have no knowledge of time. And they took us and we went out from Auschwitz and they took us to work, which I was included in it. We came to a little town in Poland which, at that time, they called Bydgoszcz, German it's Bromberg, in Polish they called it--and we were there for a while and we worked-- I worked everything there is. We used to get up, 5 o' clock in the morning, pulled carrots if the farmers needed it to take out something. Then we worked and we used to take off and put ammunition in the wagons. They used to take us in the morning and at night to take, if they needed us, to put in bombs and all kind of things.

Q: ON TRAINS?

A: On trains, right. I worked in everything there is, whatever. And I was very sick. I was very sick after I came to Bydgoszcz and I think that, at that time, I had typhus. I had very high temperature and they used to take us every morning out to count and then take us-- they used to give us the slice of bread and that same soup everyday, which was water with sand and from there, they used to take us to work, and I couldn't work. But we knew if we are not going up to work, to count us, then an hour later they shot us. So, we knew that. So, we used to--the girls used to one help each other, like when I was sick. I was in the front row and they kept me I should stay still until they count and then they used to help me to sneak, I should be in bed and I should get well. We did that for each other. We used to steal some potato peels in the kitchen or we used to go eat grass or we did eat like you get for cows, that in winter time we had. We were hungry, we had that straw to eat, we were pretty hungry. I think I was, at that time, 27 pounds, I came out from the concentration camp.

Q: POUNDS OR KILOS?

A: I would think maybe about 20 some kilos. I was like, let's say, a 10 year old kid or maybe less in the weight. But we were all very skinny.

We had problem I remember in Auschwitz, when we were there, a young lady with us. She was married at home and they took her to concentration camp and she was pregnant. And one night she had the baby and we knew that we had to help her or she was going to be killed. So, we tried very hard not to let that happen. You see, we tried to watch over each other. So, we helped her. The baby was born stillborn, dead. And there was a girl, we gave her for a month bread, our breads. Three

people gave her our slices of bread, she should give us a pair of boots and we stuck in that baby in the boot and we went once a day to the bathroom, that's all; we had no bathroom. And in the morning when they counted us, we went to the bathroom and we sneaked in that baby in the boot and that's how we flushed it down to the bathroom, that baby.

She's alive; she's living. She survived the concentration camp. But we helped each other.

Q: HOW LONG WERE YOU THERE?

A: In Poland? In Poland in 1940 by the end of '45, I think, they knew , the Germans, that something is going on. We never knew anything. I think it was by the end of '44. It was winter and they started to take us into Germany.

Q: FROM THIS WORK CAMP?

A: From this work camp, yeah. But we were in Poland. So, they were trying to get us in deeper into Germany but they were trying probably to kill us all. But we were marching day by day. We had no food, we had no boots. The snow was high in Poland and one night--and soon somebody stepped out from the line, they used to kill us. So, like once in two days they used to take us into a stable with the horses and with the cows and that's where we used to rest a few hours. So, after a week we were marching and our feet were frozen with no shoes--snow--no clothing, just one dress where it says Jew, "Jude", in the back and in the front. It says Jew which is meant Jude, and we knew that we are dead dogs. So, we figured that maybe we could, somehow escape or something to do here. So, in Europe they used to have hay for the winter put away for the horses and for the cows where they do in the summer. So, we pulled the whole night, we pulled a hole, we should be able, some of us, we did go in about 18 girls. We went into that hole.

Before we did, we knew we cannot all go in. We used to take like heads or tails, who will or who will not because that's the only choice we had. We couldn't say you're going to go and you're not. So, just heads and tails, whoever came , gone, stay and who is gone go. We never knew who is they tried or who is going to be killed, we or they. We never knew. So, what we did is pull that straw the whole night. Before they left they covered the rest of them who remained out covered that straw. And we had 18 girls remain alive and the other ones all of them were killed on the way to Germany in the middle of the snow, they killed them because they couldn't work anymore.

Q: HOW DID YOU LEARN THAT?

A: After liberation some other people knew, the non Jews in Poland, and they were telling them that they were killed.

Q: AND YOU WERE ONE OF THE 18 GIRLS?

A: Yeah. I was one of the 18 who remain alive and we didn't know what to do after we remained alive. How can we go out? We had no clothes, Jew, How could we go? Where? So, we decided every night, four of us will go out to the farmhouse just to steal clothes, pair of shoes to us.

Q: DID THE GERMANS LOOK FOR YOU IN THE MORNING?

A: No, no. Nobody looked, nobody knew who we were or what. But we went in.

Q: THE FIRST MORNING DID THEY--

A: We don't know. We don't know nothing what happened. If they count or whatever. We don't know. But they left. So, we didn't know how to get out there. So, we had to steal. None of us went 'till we stole for all of us, 18 clothing to go out.

So, every night we used to go to the farmers through the

window to steal just clothing, whatever, under our bag and pair of shoes, that's all. And we all accomplished that. After we went out ~~we stayed~~ at the farms, two at a place and we used to say that we are Czechs and our parents were running with the Germans and we don't know where they are. So, they felt sorry. We speak Czech so they felt sorry for us. So, what they did they gave us work and we knew the farm was the best place. So we used to sleep with the cows and the stable we used to get up 3, 4 o' clock to work, to milk the cows to feed the cows, everything to do. And we used to go in after we finished that we used to go in the house and clean and wash and cook. As a matter of fact, there was many times the German came to stay there and we had to shine there boots every morning. But they never knew we were Jews. So, that's how we did for four months.

Q: IN POLAND?

A: In Poland, yeah. We did for four months hide out as non Jews. But we did all the labor. And after a while, the Germans started to come. I was liberated very early because in Poland, the Russian came in much earlier than the American, came deep to Germany. About, I think, six, seven months earlier and the Russian liberated us. So, they all started running with the German, even the Polands. A lot of Polish people ran with the Germans but we didn't run around with the Germans. So, we remain in cross fire. We were right--they were shooting on both sides but none of us were killed. We were okay.

Q: THIS WAS ON THE FARM?

A: That was on the farm, right. We didn't run around with the people to the Germans. We were trying to run away from them.

As the Russian came in they took us in a camp and they said we are spies and they threw us again in jail--they put us in jail. And they

were saying, we are spies, we are German spies, Czech spies or whatever and we were trying to tell them, no, we are Jews. We told them "Schma Yisroel" that he should decide that we are Jews, and nothing happened. We were about a month or so in jail and one day they came in and they said we got seven years Siber. We have to go to Siber for seven years. They never took us on a trial or anything.

Q: SIBERIA?

A: Siberia, right. So, finally, we went on the trains, on the buses, walking. At that time nothing was quite done. The trains didn't run right because everything was bombed. The buses wasn't right. So, they all went with the trains.

So, this captain or whatever, Russian army, came with us to deliver us to Siberia. So, in Czechoslovakia he came and he said to us, he says, you know what, he says, I want you to run. Don't ever say by the Russian I'm a Jew. Nobody knows that. Don't stay here; just run wherever you can. And that's how I did.

Q: WAS THIS IN POLAND?

A: That was in Czechoslovakia this was done. And he let us go there and after we went it was--nobody was yet from the war out. This was still going on in Germany, the war. And then they started--I went home from where I come. I thought, maybe my father, maybe my mother, maybe I knew--my sister was too young. But I knew maybe somebody remain alive to see what's going on. So, I waited about six, seven weeks in Czechoslovakia and then they started to come from Israel, Shlechem they call them, you know, people who come to see if there is children through the war. They were looking in churches and everywhere because some people gave away their kids. So, they were looking for Jewish kids to be safe somewhere.

Q: WHAT DID YOU SEE WHEN YOU WENT TO YOUR HOME?

A: Nobody, nobody. The only one living--everything was taken away by the Russians. As a matter of fact, they were very mean to us when I came home. They used to say, if you not going to go out from here, we take you to Siberia. They didn't let us--we never could take anything from Russia, never.

Q: WHO SAID THAT?

A: The Russian. The Czech became Russian at that time. When I came back the Russian were there and we never could take anything back. As a matter of fact, we couldn't even stay too long there. So, that's how I wound up and they took us. I went to the Shlechem; they took us from my hometown, from (Silts) to Budapest. And they got together a few kids. The only kids I think you had to be. The oldest I think was about 15 and they took us to Austria and from Austria they took us into Italy with hay, you know, with the wagons.

Q: THIS WAS IN 1945?

A: That was end of '49--beginning of '45.

Q: END OF '44?

A: End of '45.

Q: AFTER THE WAR?

A: After the war but in Germany wasn't quite finished, the war. I mean it was just finishing off at that time. We knew--and when I was in Italy then we went out they took us to Israel. I think we were 70 some children. I came with the first boat, illegal, that went into Israel with children.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE BOAT?

A: No, it was a little fishing boat. It was a little--they caught us too, but they let us out.

Q: WHO CAUGHT YOU?

A: The British and--but we were just a few days and they let us out because we were just a very few kids and it was all 8, 9, 10, year old, very young that they picked up through Europe. They were looking in churches and all over for kids so they picked us up in Israel and what I did is from there we came into Israel and I went into school and I went there for two years, finishing off high school. And then I went into college, in Israel. And then I almost finished college when I saw my husband. I know my husband from home. We grew up together.

Q: IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA?

A: In Czechoslovakia. So, we met and we got married. Now, we have two children. Our daughter is 40 and our son is 36 and we have two grandchildren now. Our granddaughter is 21 and our grandson is going to be 18.

Q: HOW LONG DID YOU STAY IN ISRAEL?

A: I stayed in Israel seven and a half years, we stayed.

Q: AND THEN DID YOU COME HERE?

A: Yeah. We came here in 1951; we came here in this country.

Q: WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOU DO WHEN YOU CAME HERE?

A: What kind of work? We couldn't speak one word of English. So, it was pretty hard. I was a registered nurse but I couldn't get in in my profession because I had to take another test. I had to go back to school. But we came in with six-dollars in our pocket, so we had no money. We had--nobody never gave us anything. We were never on welfare or food stamps or anything. So, my husband went to work as a baker after, I don't remember, quite a few days and I found in a bakery, I washed pots and pans because I couldn't speak

English. So, at that time, we came in, our daughter was two years old, our son was born in this country but our daughter was born in Israel. She was two years old when we came but we both went to work. So, we both worked very hard in this country.

Q: HOW MUCH HAVE YOU TOLD YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE?

A: Our children know very well about it. Not in the beginning of the years because our daughter is a very curious one. She always wanted to know--she was very young she used to ask us three, four, or maybe five or so, she used to say, how come everybody has grandparents. Why don't I have grandparents? As a matter of fact, my husband had an aunt and she adopted that as grandparents and it was pretty hard to tell her. We told her something, not quite, but she used to feel very guilty. They were mean, or bad people, they were in jail, she couldn't comprehend what it means a concentration camp, at that time. She was very young. So, when sometimes we used to tell her--a lot of times when they were young, they didn't want to eat. I used to say, oh, if I would have had food in Germany I would have eaten. And my daughter, now she's old enough, she says, you know, mom, how many times our guilt was there that you had no food and we did. So, it's just like the second generation, the guilt is there.

Q: WERE YOU ALWAYS ABLE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE?

A: I'm a quiet type. I'm a shy quiet type of person. I have a husband who talks for both of us. And I like to stay in the background. I don't like too much volunteer of anything if I don't have to. I don't know why, but I don't. I never gave an interview. The only time I gave was in Washington, D.C., and even that time my husband begged me to do it.

Q: SO THIS IS THE FIRST TIME?

A: This is the second time. Right, the second time. But we do talk sometime with people if they would come in because there are so many horror stories which is pretty hard to say everything. But there is a lot of horror stories. It wasn't easy. So, I don't like to volunteer too much if I don't have to. And the only thing is, God Bless America. In a way it's pretty good we are free, we can do whatever, not the way I grew up because I grew up in wars. I never knew what it means to have a good day since the age of 10, maybe 8. Always shooting and killing and wars, in between wars. And sometime I even wonder how decent--I have no parents, age of 13, 13 and a half. No parents. And I always grew up so honest and decent way. A lot of time I think--I see the younger generation today, I think, my God, what happened, that I had nobody and grew up this way--decent. What happened. That's what I wonder a lot of times.

Q: THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

A: Thank you.