

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

SALLY ABRAMS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer:	Josey G. Fisher
Date:	October 13, 1981

© 2000
Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

This page left intentionally blank.

SA - Sally Abrams¹ [interviewee]

JF - Josey G. Fisher [interviewer]

Date: October 13, 1981

Tape one, side one:

JF: Mrs. Abrams, could you tell me where and when you were born and a little about yourself?

SA: I was born in Poland.

JF: In what city?

SA: Lodz, 1916². I was the only child born to my parents after 11 years they were married, and fortunate, my parents were very wealthy, and very well known. My maiden name is Kaplan, and I was raised, fortunately, I was raised very well, surrounded with a lot of love, over protected, having all of the things, whatever I want to have; I don't even have to ask twice, having mates in government, but I still had the time to finish my school. I have college education. I was married.

JF: Before we get into that period of your life, could you tell me about your parents—what did your father do?

SA: Well, my father was a manufacturer of clothing, and we have a lot of properties and we have our own manufacture place, and we have a big wholesale place.

JF: What kind of community did you live in?

SA: Strictly Jewish—as a matter of fact, the only gentile person that I know was the person which takes care of the property where I lived—how would you call this, say, janitor, yeh? They usually have in Poland, a family, that wasn't Jewish people, usually gentile people, and they took care of everything, like, clean the street, and Jewish people didn't do this, as far as I know in my experience. That was only contact with a gentile person.

JF: The community that you lived in, was this a fairly wealthy community?

SA: Yes, yes, yes.

JF: And what about your family's social life?

SA: My mother was very active. She was the vice president from ORT. We have this organization, the same, and my parents were very active in—they call this *tzedakah*—helping people, poor people, like my father used to borrow a lot of money to needed people, but there was difference than here. You were never allowed to mention who did it for you. The name, they didn't publish this, they just do it because they feel

¹née Kaplan.

²Mrs. Abrams indicated her birthday as March 26, 1916 on her personal history form.

that it's better to do, God gave them wealth, and they want to share with people they needed.

JF: This was not through a Jewish community organization?

SA: No, it was not. It was just private, and my father was active in the Jewish committee life—they had all kinds of names. If they need something, or if they had projects they wanted to build a *mikvah*, so, my father helped them out a lot. And all kinds of other things which the Jewish community tried to help their own people, the best way they can, in our place. That means that they have all kinds of institutions: where somebody was sick, and didn't have help, there were people volunteers, to help them out, to stay with them, take care of them, because the Polish government never did nothing for a Jewish family. The only thing they did is taking taxes.

JF: So the highly organized part of the Jewish community...

SA: Yes, yes, definite, yes in our place, yes. It's called *Bikkur Cholim*, that means helping the sick people.

JF: What about the synagogue experience in your family?

SA: My parents were very religious, so they don't have Conservative. I don't know if they have Conservative synagogues in my hometown. I only know that they have a very beautiful synagogue—a temple, like—which the women were separated from the men, but my father, he went to a place what they call a *shtibl*, that means the Hasidic people, the really Orthodox people, they pray in a separate place. I mean, the synagogue was like more Reform for them. They come together and they studied the Talmud and my father was a scholar, and we have *Shas*³. I don't know how you would call this. It's not an encyclopedia, it's more—24 big Bible books, very big; then we have two sets like this in our library, and my father was a scholar all the time. When I remember my father if he had a minute of time, he was always sitting by the Bible and studying. When his friends come, they always talk about all kinds of rules and all kind of misunderstanding and they was very much involved in studying the Bible.

JF: So he did not go to the Lodz synagogue...

SA: No...

JF: He went to the *shtibl*.

SA: Right. Right.

JF: What did this mean as far as your Jewish training was concerned? How did that happen?

SA: My Jewish training? Because I went to a school which had special Jewish training; it was like they have here, Gratz College. Well, we have the special—we call this a *Gymnasium*, that was a private school, that was not a public school. Like parochial schools here, that was a private school.

JF: Now in your early years, you went to what kind of school?

³Meaning, the "six orders" in which the *Mishnah* is divided.

SA: I went to kindergarten when I was seven, from five to seven...

JF: A Polish school or a Jewish school?

SA: No, no, Jewish school...

JF: A Jewish school?

SA: Yes, I never went to school with Polish children. All my life I went to school with Jewish children. I didn't even know that this existed, Jewish and gentile children together. I don't think so.

JF: Your associations, your friends were Jewish?

SA: Yes...

JF: From this school?

SA: yes, yes.

JF: And most of your Jewish knowledge, academic knowledge, was from the school that you attended?

SA: The school and my home—I used to sit, I was free to ask my parents any question. And, I was never afraid that if I am going to ask something which is not right, because my father and my mother teach me if you have some difficulties then come to me, and I was always told the best way. They can explain to me. I told you before if something was very difficult, so I was told that a Jewish person believe in God, and God give us so much knowledge, and we cross the order our knowledge we don't understand, so our belief in God, we must be satisfied with this answer that we have believed that whatever happened, God did it, and did it for a purpose. I was shocked when I found out later in my teens there are so many poor people. I didn't even have the chance to know poor people when I was—until I was a teenager. When I became a teenager, I have just faced a lot of things which I didn't know before, and I asked my parents why somebody is so well and have everything, and it's not fair that other people have nothing. And I always want as a child, I remember I always want to know why people are poor and I would like to help them, and I did it in my teens.

JF: How did this happen in your teens?

SA: I was introduced to a committee, there was students, a little older than I was. And they had a place, like they rent a hall, and the very poor children came over 5:00. They received food because there was a lot of families that the children were hungry. There was a lot of families that couldn't give the heat in wintertime, and the children were frozen, their hands, and they couldn't make their homework. So this committee, which was from young men and women, they take care of them. They fed them, they make their homework there, if they have some difficult with homework, they help them, and how did we know this—it was by interviewing. If a family wants to help their child, they just come over or call us, and then we have the committee.

JF: Who sponsored this committee?

SA: We, young women, young teenagers, and students, what they we sponsor this with money what was made every Sunday at dance, and the money what we took in for the dance, we support the children.

JF: So this was not affiliated with the *kehillah* in any way?

SA: No, not the *kehillah*. No, that was only the need from our people to help the poor. And that is what I was faced with the first time with poor people, and my mother don't even know that I went there, because I don't think she would allow me to face this. I was very over protected, that her child was not allowed to see nothing bad. But the first time when I find out we go to check the circumstances, I was just shocked. People don't have electricity, they don't have not even enough bread. And that was the first time I met, how should I say, wealth, the opposite of wealth, that is poor?

JF: During these growing up years, did you have any occasion to experience any antisemitism?

SA: Yes. They didn't allow students when they finish *Gymnasium*, then you have to go to college. If you was Jewish, they give you all kind excuses, but they don't take you. My husband I meet him in this place—what we were to poor children, because he was there a—what should I say, a director. Coming back from Italy, he went to medical school in Italy, because they didn't take him in Poland because he was Jewish, and they didn't even take you to the army if you were high education then, I don't know how the rule is here, then you couldn't be a plain soldier, you had to have some higher degree when you go to the army. Because he was too well educated, they just postponed. They didn't take him to the army.

JF: This is your husband you're talking about?

SA: My husband. Yes...

JF: Was anybody...

SA: My first husband.

JF: Your first husband?

SA: Yes.

JF: Was anybody else in your family in the army—your father, or anybody else that you know?

SA: No. I know my uncle which was the only uncle he supposed to go to the army and they did everything possible, they gave away everything, a lot of money, he shouldn't go because they know if he would go in the army, he would not come back. The Jewish people know that if they would go to the army, whatever they going go they would come in contact with the gentile people, they would be treated terrible, and they would never come back home, anyplace, so that's what the Jewish people did everything possible, not to go to the army. They even cut fingers that they should have an excuse, or take out all their teeth, or whatever, because they was afraid that would be the end of them.

JF: You, then, had applied to a college and were rejected after the *Gymnasium*?

SA: No, I wasn't rejected, because I went, in our town we had a college which you wouldn't be able to make doctor degree, but you would have your college education which was private and paid a lot of money—only the very wealthy kids be able to attend this. If I would like to have a profession like a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer or anything, that wasn't so popular for a woman took a profession. A woman has to be educated, but usually the woman is not the breadwinner. That was like this, maybe today's it's the same thing like here. So that with mine, college was no problem.

JF: So you did attend college?

SA: Yes, I did.

JF: Were you ever in a program where you were trained for anything in particular or studied anything in particular for your future work?

SA: Not a profession. I like very much to became a doctor, because I had something in me, or a nurse, but I wanted to become a doctor and surgeon. I have something in me with I said always, I probably was in my other life a doctor, a surgeon, because I just feel anything that has to do with medicine is just come to me like—I am here, it's me, but there was *no way* my parents would say, "What, you would go away from the house? There was *no way*, and a woman, a doctor? What did you need it for?" Well, this is the dream came true after the war. I was in Sweden and then I be able to make my nurse's degree. So that's what I accomplished, a little thing from my dream.

JF: What happened after your college years in Lodz?

SA: I was very sheltered from a lot of things so that I didn't really have the experience, to face myself, like, antisemitism, but it was in my experience before the war, was a lot of things they just want to do against the Jews, anything possible, like, if you have a property, if you were a Gentile, there was no pressure, but my father has a few properties so they pressed him to do things what was impossible, to do it, like, we don't have the bricks on the property, we had colors [perhaps she is indicating painted wood siding]. So special to Jewish people, they had to put the grey color on, and they have to put and this in this time—which they don't have the people to do it because, all the people was taken, the painter. You don't even a painter to do your house and if you don't do it in this time, they gave you a very big and *ankara*, how do you say this in English, penalty, and you have to pay a lot of money because your house is not paint grey the way the governments want to do it. To this in this time. And then it was painted grey, they came with some other thing. The paint is watery and you had to paint with oil paint. There were no kind of things what was unbelievable hard to do even to people if they had the money, and now the professions like you was a—that's the reason Jewish [people] never went to work because they didn't give them a chance to go in—if you were Jewish, forget it.

JF: Could you explain that a little bit more?

SA: Yes. Suppose you want to be a carpenter, or you want to go and have a trade. No, because you are Jewish you don't belong here. They maybe don't tell you exactly you're Jewish, but they ask you nationality, they know. You put Jews, they say we gonna call you. They never call. That's the reason they ask a lot of questions why everybody in Poland, why people don't have trades like a carpenter or engineer; engineer is college—so not everybody could afford to go to college to another country. And that's the reason Jewish people were very limited. There wasn't too many—was very wealthy people because they don't need professions, they went like businessmen, they sell, they buy, but, uh, if somebody like to work for anything, there was no way, because you were a Jew.

JF: Was your father's factory affected by these laws?

SA: I tell you the truth. My father, I didn't know that he had some difficulties; he probably has but he was fortunate enough to have the money to pay. There was things what didn't go right because, they are like always, they don't like the Jews, but if you showered them with money or something else, that was kosher so they don't look too much in it.

JF: When did you first start hearing of what was happening in Germany?

SA: Oh, '39 I think. The '36, 1936 or 1937. I really, between this time. They sent the German people to a border. The border was Zbaszyn. In the beginning, they send, not the very rich people, they sent; they would just come to the house in middle of the night and they say, "Go out in a nightgown; not allowed to take nothing with you." "Where are we going?" "You will see." And then we have the message, "There are so many thousands of people stay in (I just said the word and I forgot) the border Zbaszyn, and the *kehillah*, the Jewish *kehillah* went there and there was terrible. People was at nightgowns and pajamas, hungry, cold and they say, "Well, here is the people and take care of them." So I remember in my time, the Jewish *kehillah*...I was there between them, my parents was there. We brought over clothes—there was like the Red Cross. The Jewish *kehillah* right away find volunteers and we went to people what they donated clothes and they donated food and we came there. And when I was there, all of the people, if they have somebody to sponsor them, like a family, they let them out. So everybody took...I remember in my house was two families, because we had a big house and there was two families, one older couple from Germany, and a young couple, which he was a bookkeeper, and my father right away give him work as a bookkeeper, so they be able to start their life again. And then we build the same thing like all the German people if they didn't have their home and they didn't have anybody to sponsor them, so they came to this place and they have food. We feed them and I work very hard there in the kitchen, feed them, my mother, all my mother's friends, and they was sponsored by the Jewish *kehillah* and was sponsored by people where they have the money to put it in.

JF: Was this your first exposure?

SA: Yes.

JF: And what did these people tell you about what was happening?

SA: They were shocked. Because they say that they were thinking that Germany is their country. That they belong to Germany. Some people was even—I met people were the third generation, Jews. They didn't even know that they were Jews. But they found out later when Hitler came to them and said, "We are not Jews, we are German people, this is our fatherland." And they show to them your great-great-grandfather or something—he was a Jew, so you was a Jew. I had a lot of friends like this. They don't even know no thing about Judaism because they wasn't a Jew, they count themselves that they not Jews, they Gentiles.

JF: What feeling did you have about what was happening in Germany in terms of whether it would affect you in Poland?

SA: We didn't believe it would affect us. We was just afraid of the war, but we didn't believe—see, that was the whole thing—that we didn't take too serious about what happened in Germany—because we have a chance to go away from Poland, if we would believe that the time would come the same thing like what happened in Germany—to us, a lot of people would be left [i.e., survived], my family too.

JF: Did you know any people who left?

SA: Yes. They even came to my parents and they said, "We going to leave it and if you want to go with us." And my father said, "What do you mean I'm going to go with you? Where am I going to leave all my things, my factory, my property, what are you talking? Where should I go now? And that was the wrong thing because they don't believe that the time would come that Hitler would do things. Knowing what he was doing in his country, they were really very naive. If they went to the third generation Jewish people, but we don't believe that he would come to Poland, that he would be so strong. We believed that the war would start in Poland, Poland would go to war and they would not come over. You couldn't believe it sometime; you see reality, but it is very hard to believe that. I, myself, was in Auschwitz and I saw crematoriums; they told me they burned your people and I said, "It's not true. How in the world can people burn people in the Twentieth Century? How is it possible; there was when the people were wild, God knows how many thousand years ago, they didn't do even this, too?" And they say, "Look, the steam is out;" I say, "Maybe they have a factory or something, and maybe they just want to scare you to death." That what I was feeling.

JF: You mentioned before that you had been married previously...

SA: Yes.

JF: When was that?

SA: I was married in 1926.

JF: And your husband you said had been trained as a doctor?

SA: Yes.

JF: In Italy?

SA: Yes.

JF: Was he able to practice medicine in...

SA: No, he didn't finish...

JF: He didn't finish?

SA: No, he didn't. There was a year he missed because we was married and my parents took him to their business and he didn't finish.

JF: So he worked in your father's business?

SA: Yes.

JF: Were you living with your parents then at that time or had you established your own home after you were married?

SA: I had my own condominium, how you call this here, because in the same property on where my parents lived, so I have my own place, but we was with our parents because I was the only child and my parents just feel that the only happiness they could have in life is, to be together.

JF: Did you have any children?

SA: I had a son, yes.

JF: Is he alive?

SA: No, no, he is not...

JF: What year was he born?

SA: The year after my 193-, in the beginning of '38 and I will remember him.

JF: When did things start changing for you?

SA: The things start changing for me when they come. Well, first of all, we had a ghetto [unclear].

JF: You mentioned the ghetto. Could you back up a minute and talk about the time preceding the invasion? Did you have any idea that this would happen?

SA: No, we don't, but later on, that was like 1939, they came over, that was a Friday night, we was told to close the windows with black at night not the lights because that was a time of war and we hear a lot of bombs, airplanes coming down and they came over Friday night [September 1, 1939]. I don't think that the army didn't fight with them too long—because they were too strong and I think we have a lot...

Tape one, side two:

JF: This is tape one, side two of an interview with Mrs. Sally Abrams, October 13, 1981, with Josey Fisher. You were mentioning the spies?

SA: Yes, the Polish army must have a lot of spies because if the soldier want to put on the shoes, the shoes were two left shoes. The bullets didn't fit to the guns and everything was so mixed up they don't even have a chance to fight them back, so they came over—and on the streets, people were showering them with flowers, the German army...

JF: The Jews?

SA: I don't know. I didn't do it but I saw it. Probably Jews, too, as my mother said, "Look, they are not so bad," she says, "I went through a war with the German people in 1914, and they are not so bad as we think." So we allowed to have the lights, they took the curtains away right from the windows and everything was fine.

JF: So both Jews and non-Jews welcomed the Germans...

SA: Yes, they were all [unclear] with flowers. A few days later, we was sitting in our house with our uncle and aunt, all our family which they came from a small place because they were told that they would murder all the Jews, so they left their wealth and everything and came over to us, because in a big town, they felt they more safe. And all of a sudden, we [heard a] knock on the door and two Germans from the Gestapo came over with guns, and I run to them and I was begging them, "Please don't take my husband!" And they said, "Are you the owner of this property?" I says, "Yes." "So give me all the money what you have and all the things what you have, if not,"—my child was sleeping in another room. They walked to another room and they put the gun right to his head. If not, he would be dead in a minute. I started to cry so. "I give you everything in the world, but please let them live!" And whatever I have in the house, jewelry, diamonds, a watch, money, whatever I have I went to the drawers and my husband was just numb. We usually we know if they come they just take away the man and that's what we figured would happened to the Gestapo.

JF: Where did they take the men? What was your knowledge of this?

SA: We really didn't know where, but we was afraid, everybody was afraid, as a matter of fact. The second day that was like...must be a propaganda too, because they said all the men should leave; if they would find men, they would murder them.

JF: Where were they supposed to go?

SA: They don't know, they were supposed to leave town, but they say if they find men, they murder them. So everybody run away, and they say to Zizing there was a small town near our place, Lodz, and the men started to walk there. All the men, like armies, and the minute they came into this open place, there must be from them [the Germans] that they did it, the Germans, because they shot them down right away, with bombs, with machine guns, on the way that must be made up, that the whole rumor, that

they did it because they wanted to kill them. It was easier to kill them if they walked than to come to every house and kill them.

JF: How many men do you think were in that...

SA: Hundreds of hundreds of thousands. My own husband started to walk away, but he came back and he said, "No, I can't do it, whatever happens to me I want to be together with my family." But all the people what they walk away, they were killed.

JF: These were all men from Lodz?

SA: Yes, yes, they went to Zizing, that was a small town, when they were told one talked to the other and nobody really knows how the rumor start.

JF: How did they decide to go to that specific town?

SA: Because one talked to another and say, "When we stay here we are going to be killed." How this rumor start, I don't know, but I am suspicious that the Germans, they do this, because they were prepared there, and the same way when they were walking they were prepared with bombs and gun machine. They just shot them out.

JF: How did you find out about what happened?

SA: Some of them came back, what they tried to survive, and they told us.

JF: And how many days was this after the invasion?

SA: A few days. A few days.

JF: What happened then when the Germans were in your home? Would you describe...your husband, this was after this period of time?

SA: Yes.

JF: After this massacre?

SA: Yes, after this massacre they were talking that we going to have a ghetto.

JF: The Germans left your home. You were...to backup just a minute. When the German men were in your home...

SA: Yeah, when they have the money and they have the jewelry, they left.

JF: They left?

SA: Right.

JF: And no one was hurt?

SA: No, no one was hurt.

JF: And it was after this point that they talked about the ghetto?

SA: Right. How did I know they talk about the ghetto, I find out—and we had a man which was a roofer, a Gentile, and he was doing our roof. He used to come to our house for just to get work, and to be paid. One day, I opened the door. I was, still had the maid there. A man came over with a uniform and I look at him and I says, "Mr. Berger," and he started to talk to me German. And I said, "Did I make a mistake, are you Mr. Berger which fix our roof?" And he says in German, "Yes, I am a *Volksdeutsche*⁴." We didn't know this he is, maybe he wasn't; I don't know. I know that he was Gentile. And

⁴*Volksdeutsche* - ethnic Germans living outside of Germany.

he said, “I am sent from the government to be your *Treuhänder*.”⁵ *Treuhänder* means in German, he’s going to take all the properties and all the things what we have—under his—he’s going to take care of them—because we are Jewish people, not allowed to have nothing—and he started and then we started to talk pretty friendly and I said, “Well, who sent you?” And he said, “The Government. I am a *Volksdeutsche* and this is mine. What you have here now that everything is mine.”

JF: So all of your family properties were given to this man?

SA: Yes, yes. He said but unfortunate, he don’t know how to write and how to read, so he depends on us, but my husband has to take all the books and do it for him. He came every day and things what he has to do—like, go to an office or something—my husband has to go, and do for him. So he had a special tickets he went that this and this Jew goes with this and this man for business, so my husband was allowed to go out from the ghetto, with him, to put the money in the bank or other things, and came back after an hour or two. But when he was in my house, I don’t know, maybe something a little conscious in him, I don’t know what, but he was looking at my son and he didn’t have children, and he said, “We going to close, going to be a ghetto. You going to be taken to concentration camps. They going to shave your heads. They going to torture you. Please give me your son, he will survive. I don’t have children,” he said, “and I will take care him as my own child.” And I was looking at him and I laughed so terribly. I says, “You must be crazy. What are you talking...what are you talking? How do you know?” He says, “If you live long enough, you will see that everything that I told you will be the truth.” And my house where we lived was in the corner, and my house was supposed to be not in the ghetto—but my house would be in the ghetto. I would be able to stay there, and he said to me, “You are unfortunate because your child could still remain here,” he said, “with me—as your *Treuhänder* because other people has to just leave the house and go out, and go where the ghetto is, where they make wires and in this and this quarters all the Jews has to come together if they have place or not.”

JF: So your home was the edge...

SA: Yes, that supposed to be. So all my friends and all my families they brought together whatever they need to stay with me because we have a pretty big house, and the last minute he came over to me and he said, “You have to leave the house. This house is too pretty and too big to give them this for you. That’s what they decided,” he said. He even do me a favor, he said, “You know what? I’ll want you to take out things what you feel that are very necessary for you and I’m going to turn my head and pretend that I don’t see it, and you have to leave the house.” And I was so naive and so dumb that I said to my husband, “You know what? I’m going to take the keys and they not going to go in.” Some of friends, even my husband, said, “Let’s demolish everything, the mirrors, the crystals, the everything.” I said, “Please, don’t be so, well, what are you going to do?”

⁵Trustee.

We going to come back, again.” Then I took the keys from everything, and I left with nothing.

JF: You took nothing with you?

SA: No, nothing. Just a few, but he, himself, the *Treuhänder*, Mr. Berger was his name, he said, “You going to walk out with nothing. I told you—you could take something, whatever you needed.” I was so shocked I was so—that was unbelievable to me that people could do this, something like this, so I took out a few things, a few clothes and that was the end of it. Everything was left there. As a matter of fact, all of the wealth from other people was brought to this house, and this house was—they demolished it later on, I was told, and made a beautiful public park from the place after the war. And we was taken to small quarter of our town, wired around with electric wire and surrounded by German soldiers and we have to live in this quarters. Some people lived with a few families in one room.

JF: How did you find a place to live?

SA: Fortunate, my husband’s parents was living in—like, a condominium in this place where they have the ghetto, so in the beginning, we were living together, for a long time, a year, and then my husband found a little room on the third floor, which we moved there...

JF: Another building?

SA: To another building, yes, not too far from my husband’s parents.

JF: So that just you and your husband and your baby were taken?

SA: And my mother.

JF: And your mother?

SA: Yes, I lost my father a few months before the war; he died naturally. He was operated and he died. So he was fortunate not to face the war. And I live with my mother, my husband and my son in the ghetto, and everybody has to go to work. And we were five years in this ghetto facing that every day.

JF: What kind of work were you doing?

SA: I was fortunate, too, because I have a lot of friends and they know me so I work in a drugstore.

JF: A drugstore inside the ghetto?

SA: Yes, yes.

JF: What were you doing?

SA: I was in the laboratory and preparing all kinds of syrup and we had...They sent very little medication for the Jews. Sometimes we were with nothing, and some days they sent a little, so we have to make from the little tablets; we have to make medication and we tried to survive and to give the people the best care we can so there was a lot of work. There was—they sent sometimes sugar; we’d be able to make syrup, but sometimes for months we would have nothing, we just have to...people were dying on the street.

JF: Were you paid?

SA: Yes.

JF: By whom?

SA: By the Jewish *kehillah*. You know, we had the top of the *kehillah*, was a man, his name was Rumkowski, and they make him the top—like from the—he's supposed to be running the ghetto. And the Jewish *kehillah*, the few people what they were left, we have a lot of people what they were very brave and some of them went out from the ghetto—dangered their life. They could be shot. But some of them was fortunate to come back and bring food for sick people and they supply us with the minimum it's possible to survive, because a lot of people, every day, you could see dead people on the street, swollen from hunger. They were laying down, there was...terrible, the children. And every day was another selection, you faced that almost every day.

JF: Your food was rationed.

SA: Yes.

JF: About how much food were you...

SA: Very little food, sometime we could survive for a week without bread, and if they give you bread, there was rationing so little that you really don't know what to do with it. Then the Jewish *kehillah*, they start to make like, kitchens in every quarter to...There was cheaper to cook soup and everybody came to with their own pot and they ask how many people you have in the family and they give you so much which wasn't really food. Maybe people what they work that they have a little more.

JF: In other words, instead of distributing all of the food, they cooked it and then distributed...

SA: Yes, they cooked it...

JF: And distributed it...

SA: Distribute cooked.

JF: Could you buy any food with your own private money?

SA: No, no. You could only buy—you have ration, your food. There is so much today. You go to this and this store and so much ration would be, if you show your identification. But we didn't have stores to buy food. Only thing we can buy with our money, there was a very little, like, medicine or to pay a doctor, but not food.

JF: What kind of work was your husband doing?

SA: My husband was in hospital—I forget the name of the hospital, my God, and almost have the function as a doctor, because they were very short in help.

JF: This hospital was within the walls of the ghetto?

SA: Yes.

JF: Staffed by Jewish people?

SA: Yes. Everybody in the ghetto was Jewish. There was no other people, no gentile people.

JF: Was your mother also working?

SA: Yes, she has to work or if she wouldn't work, she would be taken away.

JF: And what about your son?

SA: My son was small. My son was, we still supply our children. We do the best we can. Like, he went to kindergarten. We had a few volunteers, which we put together for the children to be occupied. So we had like a kindergarten for the children and any day you take your child and you put them in this room, and you don't know if you going to find them back, or if you'll be back. Then, you say good-bye in the morning. Everybody went to their own work. You didn't know what's going to happen to you, because they used to come and they used to come to places and just they say, "Today the children will go," and they took all the children in a place and they say, "We take the children away." And if you going to say, "Oi," or if you going to protest or something, "Remember, we going to kill you together with your children." That's what they did. Because a mother, she couldn't be—just stay quiet when she see that somebody is hurting her, so automatically she has to scream or something, so she was killed and the children was killed. So every day was another selection. One day was old people, the second day was young people, the third day was children, and then the fourth day was sick people. So you never knew.

JF: You say that volunteers took care of the children in these nursery schools...

SA: Yes, they really wasn't paid.

JF: They were able to do this work as opposed to doing another work...

SA: No, that was all right. If they say they work with the children, they was tolerated for a while. But later on we don't, there was very little children left so this was, just out.

JF: Was there any kind of education for the children going on in the ghetto?

SA: As much as you can just do like private, not professional people like teachers. We just tried to survive. We even have theater, we have concerts. We have some few musicians. We have a library. This only thing to pretend that our life would go on. Just to survive.

JF: Were these schools or the teaching that you referred to before, was it organized in one place, or was it done individually by people in their homes?

SA: No, it wasn't organized in one place, like, my son was in kindergarten—that was used to be a school there, so we brought the children there, but later on, they took care of a lot children, they just took them in buses—out—and they say that they going to keep them for a while. They going to bring us back the children. Just not to panic.

JF: Did anybody believe them?

SA: In the beginning they believe, but later on, we just stopped to believe.

JF: Was there any kind of religious ceremony going on in...

SA: In the ghetto, yeah.

JF: Regular services?

SA: As much as possible. No, there wasn't, no. We don't have special places—private, in the house if you feel it's a holiday today, so you private, but people was so absorbed with surviving, and food, that every day, if you survive, that was like a miracle. There was only—like you just want to live this day, you don't think what's going to happen tomorrow, because you know—that you have no way of knowing what's going to happen tomorrow. So much thing happen in one day. And there was all kind of things. They took people, young people, and they say they going to take them to a special place, they going to work, and they going to pay the families, but then, and some families received some money, like, their sons—they work in the concentration camps. That's what they say in another place, and they received the money for their son, for a short time, some survived and some died. They gave them awfully hard work to do in the ammunition factory...

JF: The Germans paid the families...

SA: Yes.

JF: For their son's working?

SA: Yes.

JF: And this continued throughout the war?

SA: For a short time. No, very short time. Later they stopped because this person wasn't here anymore. And they pay us not with their money, with our money, the ghetto money...

JF: They used the ghetto money?

SA: Of course, we don't have the money. They used to get it from...

JF: Did you have any knowledge of where these people were going, what was happening in the concentration camps?

SA: Yes.

JF: In the ghetto.

SA: Yes, I have cousins, they survived. They were sent out—to very hard work. Very hard labor. In an ammunition factory, in a factory for chemicals what they became sick, their lungs [unclear], I don't know the name of it. It was a very danger chemical which you get red hair and your skin get yellow, and sooner or later, you couldn't survive on it.

JF: Now, did you hear from this family when you were still in the ghetto, were you able to get any news?

SA: No, none, no, no. Nobody knows. When they go out, we didn't know where they are. Because nobody came back.

JF: You have no idea, then of the extermination camps...

SA: No...

JF: While you were in the ghetto in Lodz?

SA: They were talking about—but we really don't believe it. Maybe we try to consciously not believe it, like, a self-defense, but, yeah, they start to talk, some people say when they take them out, they torture them and they die, and some people say different. As a matter of fact, when they took us out, there was a chief of the German army which took all the people from the street and talked to them. He said, "I promise you a hair wouldn't fall down from your head. You go to a beautiful place which you going to be together with your families, with your children, and this is a place which you going to have a light work, you going to be paid good, you going to have food, and don't worry about nothing. I promise you," he said, "in the name of my wife and my children." Rebofe was his name, now I remember.

JF: What was his name?

SA: Rebofe, yes. And they [the Germans] were happy, too, and they have the ghetto, they don't have to go out to the front to get shot. They don't have to fight. That's the reason they tried to keep it as long as possible, that their life should be saved.

JF: There were German soldiers patrolling...

SA: Yes...

JF: The inside of the ghetto?

SA: The inside was Jewish police. They have Jewish police. They have Jewish hospitals. Everything in the ghetto was Jewish.

JF: Can you tell me a little about the Jewish police?

SA: Well, the Jewish police really kept, as much as they could, people from crimes—like we didn't have nothing to heat our room. So some people went to places and they just took out the wood, demolished, and bring home and use it. And that was a crime, because the Jewish police was controlled by the German police, and if they patrol and they saw something like this, they just killed the person. So the Jewish police tried to protect as much as possible the person he shouldn't steal, he shouldn't be killed. And they have a lot of things that are—like people start to dig from the ground and try to plant vegetables that the family should survive if they will have enough vegetables. So one person try to steal from the other—like this was my neighbor, and I didn't have it so he went to the place. This is what the police was protecting, too. As much as they could.

JF: You feel that they were helpful, then, to the Jewish community?

SA: I think so, yeah; if they wouldn't be then there would be just, people get wild. They had to be controlled. Yes. Yes.

JF: What kind of treatment did you receive from the German guards who were involved in the ghetto?

SA: Treatment? Shot. If you went too close and they say, "Go away," if you didn't go away so fast—we have curfew: to this and this time you can't be on the street. If you were five minutes later on the street, you get shot. Terrible, terrible. You was just afraid to look on them.

JF: Were they inside the ghetto patrolling or only around the perimeter?

SA: They was patrolling around, but some of them was inside, too, some places. What they feel that—maybe people would go in and survive because they would be able to take something from—so they patrol inside, too.

JF: Were you aware of anybody who was able to get in and out of the ghetto with any kind of safety?

SA: I, yes. I know a person who did it; I think he is alive today in Israel. He went—like he play—that he is together with the Gestapo. The Gestapo was like—he bring them—Jewish people. Like I said, he know this and this family. They still have some jewelry, or if they still have something valuable—so he went to the Gestapo and told them this and this family is wealthy. So they called the people to the Gestapo.

Tape two, side one:

JF: This is tape two, side one, of an interview with Mrs. Sally Abrams, on October 13, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

SA: So he was playing like he would be on their side, but actually he was a very good person. He make a lot of friends.

JF: He told them that certain families [unclear]—were these actual families or was he...

SA: No, that was the truth. Some of them still was able to smuggle in before they went to the ghetto, their diamonds, gold, furs...

JF: So he turned these families over to the Gestapo?

SA: Yeah, right. And the Gestapo took from them anything they have, and they trust him, like, he was one from them, right, because they didn't know the Jewish people, they need Jewish people to tell them about us, right? But, he was so friendly with them that he was able to get a uniform as a German soldier, and he went out from the ghetto. If they would catch him, he would be killed. And he knows a lot of the places where he can buy food, so he went there and he bought food, and bring over to the ghetto and save a lot of people...lives.

JF: He did this several times?

SA: Yes, as much as he would be able to do it. Yes.

JF: And he was able to do this successfully?

SA: Yes, but the Jewish people hated him because they didn't know the truth because they say, my God, he is a Gestopovich, he's going—he's a big traitor, he's goes to them and tells...

JF: An informer?

SA: Yes. But later on he realized what he did.

JF: And this man is still alive in Israel?

SA: I think so. He's in Israel. I forgot his name. I will come to it.

JF: Was anybody able to escape?

SA: Gertner was his name. Gertner.

JF: Gertner?

SA: Yes. Escape from the ghetto?

JF: mmm hmm [affirmative].

SA: Well, they were shot, they tried. I don't think they was left alive. Anybody which tries was shot.

JF: You heard that they were shot?

SA: Yes. Later, not when I was in the ghetto. Yes.

JF: Can you describe any other aspects of the ghetto to us? What it was like on the streets—what...

SA: Terrible. Terrible. Terrible.

JF: What it was like to live.

SA: Terrible. Terrible. You have to be very strong and you have to be really a super person to stay in the ghetto, and live, because you see on the streets people begging for food, children swollen, dirty. Very hungry, wild. You see, on the streets people dead, what they was laying down waiting if the wagon would pick them up. You was afraid every minute you faced any little thing, any little knock on the door, any little thing what somebody was talking loudly, you think, oh, the Gestapo is here, they going to take me, they going to take me and my child. You didn't know one minute from the other what was going to happen. There was a nightmare, it was terrible.

JF: People were brought into the ghetto from other towns outside of Lodz?

SA: Right.

JF: What was the interaction between the natives and the newcomers?

SA: Some of the newcomers find work, but they were young people, but a lot of people what they brought in, like, they brought in the, Gypsies, they put them in one quarter of special houses, a few of them, overnight. In the morning, you found, you go in to the house and you found that they were be in middle of supper. You found a little food on the table, a spoon on the table, and the walls were spread with blood. The floor was with blood. I don't know—we didn't know if they took them out and they shot some of them, they shot some inside. There were terrible screams, but nobody was allowed to go there. They just disappear. But you see in the house what happened—a massacre.

JF: One large group of Gypsies were brought in...

SA: Yes, right, yes.

JF: And how many people do you think?

SA: Few hundred. I don't know. I don't know. We was not allowed even to go near.

JF: Was this the only time that a group of Gypsies was brought in like this?

SA: No, there was from Czechoslovakia, people brought in. Some of them gentile, they didn't have—like a husband was Jewish and the wife was gentile, or other people, like some of them couldn't take it, the hard life, and they die very soon. Very, very soon. They couldn't find work and they was taken out, because if you don't look good, if you was sick, they look at you, they just take you out and kill you.

JF: Were there any public executions?

SA: There must be, but I didn't see. I heard of it, but I didn't see. Like they say, "You going to end like he end." And they didn't like—they took a group of people—I didn't see personal, but I heard of it that they took a group of people and they just kill or hang somebody and they say, "If you not going to follow our instructions, you going to wind up like he or her."

JF: How did you feel about Rumkowski and the rest of the Jewish Council?

SA: I know Rumkowski before the war. He used to come to my father. Always for money, because he was, he didn't have children of his own, but he was, he has

orphans and orphanage homes. He always came to this children, if you need clothes or something. I remember that he came to our house and said, "I need so much clothes, winter is coming for the children." My father used to give it to him.

JF: He was soliciting contributions for his orphanage?

SA: Yes, but, uh...

JF: What was he like?

SA: In the ghetto? No, before the ghetto?

JF: Mmm...

SA: Normal, normal, but in the ghetto, he was terrible, wild, terrible.

JF: Can you describe him to me?

SA: He was thinking, maybe in his own way, he didn't want to do nothing bad, but it came out like—he, himself, sent people to death. Maybe thinking that if he sends so many people, maybe the people in the ghetto would survive. I think this way that he wants. Like we have in Warsaw was the capital from Poland. They had somebody which they want to make him the same as Rumkowski was in the ghetto. He commit suicide, because he said, "Who I am to give people away or do things," and he couldn't take it, but he took it a long time because he has his own guard...

JF: You're talking about Rumkowski?

SA: Yes, yes, he has his own guard, he has his own favorite people, and he used to put in writing that if somebody is his favorite, he should go to this and this place where they give the ration, he should have double. He used to do favors to his friends, but people hate him. They were thinking clearly that he shouldn't do it. For who is he to give out people to die? But I myself think that he would think, "All right, if I give so many people to the Gestapo, maybe I can save the other people." That was my only way of thinking.

JF: Do you think that the Jewish council was able to help your people in Lodz during those years?

SA: They help as much as they could. No, they wouldn't be able to do nothing more because they were told if they didn't do the things what the Germans told them, they just killed them. They wouldn't be able to do nothing more, no.

JF: During those years in the ghetto, did you feel the same way towards Rumkowski as you do now—at the time that it was happening?

SA: I, I didn't hate him because I know him before that he wasn't a person like this, that he would really be happy to kill people. People don't know him from before, but I personally felt that if he wouldn't do it, somebody else would do it.

JF: You had mentioned before that he became wild.

SA: Yes, he became wild, like, doing things that he not supposed to do, but if he wouldn't do it for the other side, he would be killed and the other—he said to himself, because, I had a friend who was his secretary. She used to be mine—I used to go with her to school—I used to talk about him a lot with her and she said to me, "He has favorite

people, what he give them, the *talents*”—they call it talent is permission for more food. But he said in the meantime, he is saving a lot of people. If they would come to him and they would say, “Look, I need 200 people today,” and he wouldn’t give them the 200 people, then they would take anybody; they wouldn’t take 200, they would take 1,000. So he in his own mind was thinking, “All right, I’m going to do whatever they say. Maybe, I’ll be able to save them.” But the majority was very mad on him, because they were thinking that he shouldn’t do it. But if he wouldn’t do it, they would do it anyway. I know, when I was in concentration camp, they brought him there: him, and he was married in the ghetto, his wife and his brother, I think.

JF: Did you get to talk to him when [unclear] concentration camp?

SA: No, no, no. They just kill him right away. No, they just brought him and they show it to him. “You see where your people are? They are here.” And they said to the people in concentration camp, “You can do with him anything you want; if you want to kill him, kill him.”

JF: You saw this?

SA: I was told. I just saw when he came.

JF: You saw when he was...

SA: Yeah, I wasn’t able—I was, yes, taken from the train and came because it was far away and they say, “See now they got Rumkowski; that means nobody is in the ghetto anymore; the ghetto is clean, because he was till the last minute.” I was pretty lucky because I was taken out to Bergen-Belsen in 1944.

JF: So you heard from other people that he was shown to the group...

SA: Right.

JF: And that they were told that they could do whatever they wished [unclear] with him.

SA: Right. Yes.

JF: Do you know what happened? Did you hear what happened?

SA: They kill him. They kill him, I was told.

JF: The Germans?

SA: The Germans, yeah.

JF: Did you hear what happened as far as the Polish people’s response...

SA: To him?

JF: To him.

SA: They were very mad on him. They were very mad on him. They say, this what I was told. They say, this what I was told, that they want to kill him, but they didn’t.

JF: They didn’t?

SA: They didn’t, no. The Germans killed him.

JF: Now, you were in the ghetto until 1944.

SA: Right.

JF: Was your family still with you?

SA: Yes.

JF: All the family that had started out together was still together?

SA: Yes, yes.

JF: Can you tell me what happened then in 1944?

SA: A small amount of people was left in 1944, like, doctors, nurses, and police, and they was just put in to a few small quarters, and we live a few days there. I had my mother with me, and I know, I was aware of it, that if they would see my mother, which was not old at all, but she was looking older, that they would kill her, maybe us, too. So I was told to leave my mother, and the place where we live before, and I should go with my husband and my children to other quarters where we was allowed to stay, not knowing what's going to happen to us. I told my mother that I am going to leave her for a few hours, at night, because daytime, she couldn't walk out—because if they would see her daytime, they would kill her. So I begged my mother, and I say, “Mom, stay here till night, if it's going to get dark, then I'm going to try to bring you where we are now.” Thank God, I succeeded. We are, me with my husband. Our life was very bad, in danger, big risks, but we did it, and we smuggled my mother into the place where we was stationed for a few days. And then the way I told you before: Rebofe was his name, he was the commander of the ghetto. He has a big speech to all of us and he say, “Tomorrow, you take the more necessary things with you. Don't take bad things; good clothes, whatever you have the best, take with you. You going to be sent to *arbeitslager*, that means a place where you be able to work, you would remain with your families together, and I swear on my wife and my children that the hair wouldn't fall down from your head. You'll be safe.”

JF: Did you believe him?

SA: No. I didn't know what to believe. Just to think that we have to go, and we didn't know where, that was terrible, as the whole life there—but this was like the end of it, that you didn't have enough strength just to take this anymore. But we was put in the train, not in a normal train, in a train that had no windows that they bring all the merchandise, not for people, and we was so packed in like sardines—and no food, no water, nothing. A lot of people died there, in the trains. They were very weak and hungry, and they just died. Some people have small children and the children died.

JF: You were still together?

SA: Yes, we were still together, my mother, my husband and my child, yes. There was a very small window which only one eye could look out, and one of the people there—saw walking people, their heads were shaved...

JF: How long were you on this train?

SA: A few hours. And they have stripes on the floor, blue and grey. And on every opening from the train which you can open and close was a German soldier with a gun. And this person asks the soldier, “What's here,” and he says, “Don't pay attention,

just these people are crazy. It's a mental place." Well, this was the place where we was bound—Bergen-Belsen.

JF: You were only on the train a few hours?

SA: I was a few hours on the train which the conditions were terrible. Some people have diarrhea, some people—was terrible. And they opened the door and that's all I remember was screaming and hitting. "*Los, los, los!*" [quick, quick, quick] If somebody couldn't go quick down, they was pushed on the floor and hit and that's all I know. My husband was taken away; I was left with my mother and my child—and people were screaming, crying, and two men which was working there—Jewish men—came over to my mother and they say to her—I was walking with her—"Is she your daughter?" She says, "Yes." "Whose child is this?" I says, "Mine." Two men said to my mother, "Take him and let her go by herself." And I looked at him and I said, "Who are you to say what I should do?" And we came to the point where German soldiers started in the front of us and they took all the women and the children. "*Los, los!*" to like there was a place here, like, an opening from another place, and I was staying with my mother, and my mother grabbed my child and she started to walk, and I said, "Where are you walking?" I said, "Wait!" And the soldier just put, "*Los down,*" and my mother left with my son and I started to scream. I said, "What are you doing? This is my child, this is my mother, this is not her child." And he look at me and say, "*Los, you are crazy,*" and somebody came to me and said, "Don't holler, he's going to shoot you." I started to holler. I don't care what he's going to do. So another soldier came to me. He look at my [me?] nice, and he says, "Look, be quiet, I'm going to tell you something. Your mother goes to a special place, to an old age home; your child will go to a special place for children now. They going to treat them very nice; going to be able to see them for the weekend. Please don't holler. Your life is in big danger. You see him? He's going to shoot you right away."

JF: This was the German guard who told you this?

SA: Yes. Right. A German guard. And I was left, and ten minutes later, they told me, I don't believe it. There was a terrible smell, and there was a whiff not that far away, how do you call if you to burn something and...

JF: Smoke?

SA: Smoke, and some people say, "You see, this is the smoke from our people; what just took them on the other side." And I fight with them, "Please don't talk like this. That's not true. They promise me I will see my child, I will see my mother"—and that was the end. And then I was left by myself; didn't have any power to live. I didn't do nothing to survive. As a matter of fact, I wanted to go a few times to the gate; the gate was electrocuted. I wanted to go a few times and finish my life because I was left alone completely.

JF: What stopped you from doing this?

SA: Sometime when I walk there, a German soldier said, "Halt; don't go too close." And a few days later when I was there, I found a relative, was my cousin—she

was ten years younger than I am, and when she saw me, we stayed together, and anytime I want to go out and I said, "I can't take it anymore." Something came to my head and say, "Look, if you going to do something, you could help her to survive—she is such a young child. You have nobody else from the family," and then I guess God want me to live because he put in my head, maybe, when the war would finish, you would find your family together, not believing that they were not anymore, that they are burned in crematorium. Probably there was like a self preserve myself, I don't know, but it happened because anytime I was tortured, and I look up to the sky and I saw the sky and the stars and I say, I pray to the stars and say, "Please, if I'm to survive, please let my family survive. I should be able to meet them," and then I said something strong was in me, like, I said to myself, "They could torture you, they could not give you to eat physically, but what I have here, inside, they are not allowed to touch and they would never touch. They could do so much physically with you, but they would mentally they could not disturb you. You going to remain you." And I guess that this helps me to survive because other people—they do something maybe for their survival, maybe they—I don't know, maybe some people was able to get some more food one way or the other. I don't know. But I didn't do nothing to survive. As a matter of fact, I was sent twice to the gas chambers and I didn't do nothing to survive.

JF: Can you describe those times for me?

SA: Yes. We had selections, they called it⁶. Mengele, Dr. Mengele. You heard about him. He put everybody out because we had like a long, they called a barrack, a long, like, a factory made from bricks which the people what they came before us they build themselves—they make the people build this barracks and there was very primitive—there was no quarters, nothing. Just was, just like to shelter from the rain. So he took everybody out from the barracks with very big reflectors, very big lights, naked, completely naked and you have to hold your hands up. That means, you couldn't have nothing hide, and with very big lamps, look over you and he had a left side and a right side and we never know, which is the good side—the left side or the right side. They say, people say, between them that when the selection some people what they took it out, they going to go to the crematorium. So my little cousin, she was operated in the ghetto. She had gallbladder operation in the ghetto, and she had an open wound. The scar wasn't completely healed. Well, when she was naked, I was afraid they would see this, they would send her to the gas chamber. So, I didn't know what to do with myself. Put her in front of me, then she would be sent to the gas chamber. So I put her in back of me and I wanted to hide her side. So I was just probably making a back turn, and he look at me and

⁶Mrs. Abrams may be referring at this point to her experience in Auschwitz. There may be some overlay of her recounting events in Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz since these experiences were so close together and subsequently she was moved to additional camps, all within a period of months. See pages 41-42 where the interviewee relates emotional breakdowns she has and her experience seeing photographs when she and her family go back to see the memorial site after the war.

he said, "On left," and I went to the left. And my little cousin, he said, "On right." He didn't see the scar. I don't know what happened. And when I was walking on the left, somebody, a German woman, I don't know who she was, I never saw her in my life—she went through to him and she said, "Are you crazy? Look on her, what did you put her on this side? Look, she is so young, so beautiful." So he was very angry. I remember one thing—he took me here with his fist and he push at me so far that I couldn't stop running until I fell.

JF: He pushed you at the back of your neck?

SA: Yes. He pushed me in the front. I should run. Like he said, "Run." And I start to run and I couldn't stop until I stop and I fell down. And I found myself, by myself, and I look around and I say, "Where I am, who, who?" Then I saw the people walking, with the right side. So I went to them and they say, "My God, how are you doing here? You come to us, they will thinking that you want to run away." And they saw what happened to me. That was one time.

JF: Before you leave this incident, you say that your cousin had received surgery in the...

SA: In the ghetto, yeah.

JF: This was still in Lodz?

SA: Yeah.

JF: And her wound was open?

SA: The scar wasn't completely healed and if they see on your body, any little thing, they send you right to the gas chamber—because they were selected only the young and the people that they still could survive.

JF: Was this soon after that you got to the new concentration camp?

SA: A few months, yeah, soon, because I wasn't too long in Bergen-Belsen. I was sent to another place, but the second time I survived in Bergen-Belsen it was—I probably had a lot of fever and pneumonia, whatever happened. I don't know. I faint and I was laying on the floor.

Tape two, side two:

JF: This is tape two, side two of an interview with Mrs. Sally Abrams, October 13, 1981 with Josey Fisher.

SA: So, I was on the floor, and they cover me with a *shmata* [an old rag] and I'm dead; and that happened in the same barrack with me was a doctor, Ginsburg was her name, and she was a close friend of mine. So usually the doctor always said, "Who is this?" And they say, "This is Sally Bebber." Bebber was my name from my husband. And they say, "Sally Bebber died," and she take off the *shmata* and listen to my heart, and she says, "She not dead, she's alive." So we have this what called like a *Krankenstube*, the sick people was taken. So I don't remember what happened, but I remember one thing—that my body was pulled and on the stones. They put me probably in the *shmata* and they pull me to this *Krankenstube*, this place where the sick people are.

JF: This, say the word again—*kanken*—.

SA: *Krankenstube*, that means, not a hospital, but there was a place where sick people, they attend sick people.

JF: But you received no treatment there?

SA: No, no. That's all I remember is I was left, and a bucket of ice water was poured all over my body, and I remember like—shivering from cold, that's all I remember. I must be unconscious for a long time. But one day, Mengele came over and I open my eyes, and he sit in one place and he said to me, "You have pain in your throat." I couldn't talk. I just sat with my head like this, and he said to the person which was taking care, the nurse, "Make her inhalations or something," that she should give me steam or something because he used to do this. He used to come to sick people and make them well, and then make experiments on them. And then killed them. Well, I don't remember nothing what happened, but one thing I remember, I open my eyes. It was very dark, and I saw a light, two candles. And I said to myself, "This is you die already." And then you see the two candles. Who is there, and I was looking around and I see a girl in the white uniform. And I was thinking, "You are dead, that's the way you die. That's not bad." And probably my tears was running, but I didn't feel nothing. And this girl come over to me and she said, "What are you crying?" I says, "I don't know that I'm crying." But I said, "Are you dead, too?" She says, "What do you mean, am I dead? I talk to you." I said, "I'm dead, no? I see two candles." She says, "You see two candles because it's Friday night. I just light the candles." I said, "Oh, my God. I didn't see the candles so long till I walk out from my house." And probably I fell back unconscious. Then I felt, I don't know how long this took, somebody is pushing me and stroking and and saying, "*Steh auf, steh auf*. Wake up, wake up." And I open my eyes and I saw the same girl, and she said, "Come down with me. I'm going to take you someplace." And I couldn't move. I said, "What do you want from me? I can't even move." She says, "I'm going to help you." And she practically carried me down and she opened the door and there was a lot

of clothes and she was looking at dresses and she took a dress—a very big dress—very white, black velvet, and put on me. She said, “That’s going to keep you warm. Come with me.” And I said to her, “What are you talking?” There was a curfew and you was not allowed to go out from the barracks; if you go out, you was killed. And she says, “Come, come with me. It’s okay,” she said, “I’m going to take you.”

JF: Where were these clothes from?

SA: I don’t know. That was like a room, probably from people that are dead, I don’t know.

JF: And the candles—was that permitted in the barracks?

SA: No, I don’t know nothing—there was no barrack, there was like a *Krankenstube*, it was sick people. I don’t know. I have no idea what is permitted or not. Of course, not in our barrack, there was nothing permitted. And she practically dragged me like she hold me with both hands, and we was the only one—dark, and she, the door opened and she pushed me to my barrack. My barrack was the Number 31. And people was looking at me and he said, “Who in the world brought you here? They didn’t kill you?” And I told them the story. I says, “I don’t know if I’m alive or dead.” That happened to me. And the same night, 5:00, they took out all the people that was there together with her, to the gas chamber.

JF: Including the woman who had gone [unclear]...

SA: Yes, everybody, everybody. Then I figured out later on that she probably wants what she did. She wants to save me. And I never saw this woman before.

JF: She was a German woman?

SA: No.

JF: A Jewish woman?

SA: Jewish woman.

JF: Was she working in the *Krankenstube*?

SA: Yes, as a nurse.

JF: As a nurse?

SA: Yes, yes, yes.

JF: But they took her also with...

SA: Yes, everybody, everybody. No, they don’t even make a selection, who was good, who was sick, and who was healthy. Everybody put in a big truck, and went to the gas chamber with them, and that was the second time I was saved from the gas chamber.

JF: What happened after you were on the truck?

SA: I wasn’t on the truck. I was in the barrack. She was—they took the people from the *Krankenstube* on the truck...

JF: Oh, I see, I see.

SA: I was in my barrack.

JF: It was the *Krankenstube* that was taken...

SA: Yes, right, right. I was there a few weeks—then I was sent to different kind of places and I always have my little cousin with me.

JF: Before we leave Bergen-Belsen, can you tell me what conditions were like there in terms of your living conditions...

SA: Terrible.

JF: What the barracks were like?

SA: Terrible, terrible. It couldn't be worse. I don't think that animals would survive now. Not in this kind of conditions because it was terrible. We don't even have a place, a place to sit. I remember I was standing and sleeping. You not allowed to go out even you have to go through your normal human functions. You have a time when you have to go out, good or bad. If you be able to take care, it's okay. If not, you just made wherever you stay, and the conditions was terrible.

JF: There were no bunks in your barracks?

SA: No, no, you sleep—there wasn't even a floor in my barracks. In my barracks was only not cement, but was mud. There was only put bricks together. And we was not even—I don't even have a place to stay, not to sleep. And there was terrible—one time happened to me they took us—all of us—they took us to a place and they say we are going to have—we going to get washed. And then we know if they tell you that you going to have a shower, you know they going to gas you. That was we know it, already. And we was all prepared for this and I bless it. I said, "Thank God, everything would end." And I look on the showers that the gas should come out and I see water is coming out. We was naked. All the dresses was out. How can you believe it? We talk to each other, we say, please touch me, "Are you have water?" "Yeah, we are wet." And we wait for the gas and the gas didn't come—water. And they bring us soap and we was washing ourselves. And after a while, German Gestapo—who knows as says—they came with, from rubber...

JF: Whips?

SA: Whips, and they start to whip. "*Schnell, schnell, schnell! Aus! Aus! Aus!*" Winter, 40 degree, wet, everybody grab a dress and when it came to me, I didn't have a dress. Everything was taken. There were ten girls left naked. They probably grabbed two dresses. No, they say grab—some people wanted to survive. I was left naked with ten other girls. Then they start to whip us. We have to run to the barrack naked. When I came to my barrack naked, we was standing and shivering—no clothes. Okay. Then the *stubabba* [perhaps she means *Stubenältester*⁷] is the girl what she is supposed to take care of the barracks, the *eldest* they call her. So she had a little more food for her work. So she came over and she brought all ten of us a quilt to cover. So we don't know what to do. Should we laid down on the mud or cover ourselves, or should we put it on the mud, the blanket, and lay naked? They always used to take me in the middle, because I don't

⁷*Stubenältester* - "Oldest in Barrack", the inmate in charge of a chamber.

know why. I must have looked terrible, I must be very thin or something because they always say you going to freeze to death. So I was in the middle. I remember one, few minutes or hours, I don't know, they put the cover on ourselves. I feel on the top I feel nice and on the bottom, I feel I was in mud. I was cold. They probably felt the same thing so they do another way. We put the quilt on the mud. I, we was staying five days like this. Naked completely.

JF: All ten of you were like this?

SA: All ten of us, yes. Then they brought us some *shmata*, I don't remember what, but they brought us some *shmata*. I always say they give us shoes from wood so I always was lucky to have a small—I couldn't put my feet in. So I was holding the shoes in my hand running barefoot. That was very cold so I put my feet in and I couldn't walk. I don't know how I survive, really, it's unbelievable. First of all, they put chemical in your food. What this is very important that you stop to have feelings. You don't know, if you are woman, first of all the girls, the first minute, everybody lost the period [menstrual] from the shock. I didn't have, didn't menstruate for as long as I was in concentration camp and when I came to Sweden, it took a few months until I came back to my normal. But, you don't have a feeling. You was like a robot. Whatever they tell you to do, you do.

JF: There was a chemical that was put into your food?

SA: Yes, definite. Because the doctors in Sweden ask me: they say, "If you would only know how it looks [the chemicals] you could tell us a lot, that we would give you needles, we would give you medicine to bring you back," because when I came to Sweden, I was 60 pound.

JF: How did you know they were giving you a chemical?

SA: Because, later on, when we came to Sweden, when they examine our bodies, they found out a lot of things what happened to our blood we don't know. I only know one thing: that your head wasn't working completely and you have nothing, I wouldn't say energy because energy you couldn't have anyway because if a person is cold and so hungry, there is no way of having energy, but we don't have in our heads something to say, "They going to kill you anyway, do something to survive." You was like a robot. They tell people to dig graves. They know the graves is for them. They did it. If you know you're going to die, you dig your grave. At least you could hit somebody. At least you could do something, spit in his face, what you want to do. We don't have nothing which was working in our brains.

JF: So you saw no resistance?

SA: No resistance whatsoever. I was told that there was a few people that they brought them there. There was one girl, she was in the show business from French, and they tell her to take off the clothes, naked. So she took the gun from the German soldier and she killed him. But she was bright, fresh. She wasn't fed [i.e., fed]; there was just happened to her. But the minute they feed you, they give you, they have coffee, funny

taste of coffee, black, and the soup what they give it to you. They put a chemical in, that they should have no resistance, no, whatever they say to do, you doing. Like you have a robot, and you tell the machine, "Do it," they do it. But there was, yeah, there was a few very—like in the gas chamber. They put a few soldiers instead of Jewish people, they put the soldiers in the gas. They were killed, too. But they did it. They had a chance.

JF: They put German soldiers?

SA: Yes, a few of them: that was almost like the end, I was told. I didn't see this. That they know the war was to the end. There was a few Jewish boys that they work there, because they need the Jewish people to help them out. They didn't do it.

JF: What did the Jewish men do?

SA: I don't know. I was—probably whatever he was told he has to do.

JF: They were working in the gas chambers?

SA: Yes, yes.

JF: You said there were also German soldiers who were in the gas chambers?

SA: Well, yes, because they had to watch the people to do things what they want them to do, of course—but it happened. I heard a few times that instead of putting, they took off, they grab a gun from the soldier and a few soldiers which was there, they make them take off the clothes and they put them in the gas chamber.

JF: The Jews would make the soldiers go into the gas chamber?

SA: Yeah, right.

JF: How many times did this happen?

SA: I think once or two. That's all. That's all. But the Jews was very brave, they was in the ghetto fighting, in the Warsaw Ghetto. They know that they not going to win, but they fight, they killed a lot of Germans, and they bomb a lot of German places. They did whatever they can to give them back.

JF: In the Lodz Ghetto, were you aware of any resistance groups or contact with the underground?

SA: No. No. There was an underground. I was never contact with the underground. I find out later there was an underground and they smuggle people from the ghetto, but I was never in position to meet these people.

JF: Do you think the Polish underground was involved in any way, or was it a totally Jewish operation?

SA: No, totally a Jewish operation. I think that the Poles helped the Germans. No. Maybe. Maybe there was a few people that we don't know, but I know a few families, Polish families, what they hide Jewish people, risking their own lives.

JF: You knew the Polish families or you know the Jews who hid...

SA: I know the Jews, yes, some of the children was taken to a *monastare* [monastery]; I had a friend which he have daughter's child was taken to a *monastare* and after the war, she know where she is and she came to take her, and she said, "You not

going to take me. I'm not Jewish. I hate Jews," she said. "They told me to hate Jews. I'm not going to go out." She had a very hard time to get her out.

JF: How long were you in Bergen-Belsen?

SA: Bergen-Belsen, a few weeks. And then I was taken to Auschwitz, Unteritz—was a wood. We came to a wood. No electricity, no water. We was sleeping in the woods for a few months.

JF: This was before Auschwitz?

SA: No. After.

JF: How long were you in Auschwitz, and what happened there?

SA: I was a month or six weeks in Auschwitz. To me, nothing happened. That happened that I was tortured every day, but I didn't go to work. They didn't have work any more for us.

JF: What do you mean, you were tortured every day?

SA: You stay in this barrack, closed. You have no food, no water, no place to sit. I remember I was standing and sleeping or walking and sleeping. And you was just an animal. You didn't, if you would feel you were person, I think you wouldn't be able to survive. The one thing that was in you head was that you were hungry. And I said, "Oh, my God, if I can only eat as much as I want, I would settle to die just to be one time not hungry." And everybody was the same and people, they just start to talk on food. They cook, they talk on food, just to—even from talking from food was—you get satisfaction, anything—you used to eat grass. Anything. They was sending us to Unterlitz on trucks that was coals in and this truck, coals, what they heat—and there was leaves from cabbage—together with the coals, that must be probably, they deliver the cabbage and they put the coals. And we ate these leaves with the coals together, and I said, "My God, I didn't know that this is so tasty. Why we didn't eat this before the war." Anything, they used to go, later on when we was in the woods, we was working in the woods, they used to go to the garbage cans, but, like here, the German there was private family lived there, not near, but used to go and dig and if they found a bone, they make a big soup from it. Take water, wood, and make up a soup. The soup was so delicious! There was a lot of fats in it, you say one little "aye," and I don't know, something happened to you that you feel even water is delicious if you have it.

JF: Before you left Bergen-Belsen, did you have any idea of what happened to your husband?

SA: I was told that they took them to the same barracks where men was, and we wasn't together with men and women. Women was separate, men was separate, but I was told, too, through the Red Cross later on that he died two months before the war end.

JF: He was at Bergen-Belsen all that time?

SA: Yes, I don't know if he was in Bergen-Belsen all that time, but he survived till two months before the war ends.

JF: Now, you were saying that you were transferred from Auschwitz again...

SA: Yes.

JF: Why were you moved again?

SA: I don't know. They pick out a few, maybe 20 girls what they was told that they were strong enough to survive, or take the trip because a lot of the girls was laying down, not even be able to get up. So I was between the group what they took us out and took us on the trucks, what I saw the coal and the cabbage together. Took us to Unterlitz, which was only woods. We was there almost to the end.

JF: Now, how do you spell that?

SA: Unterlitz?

JF: Approximately.

SA: I'm going to write it for you.

JF: Okay.

SA: The best way I can.

JF: So, that's "Unterlitz."

SA: Yeah, yeah.

JF: This was a wood?

SA: Yeah.

JF: A wooded area?

SA: Wooded area.

JF: And why were they taking you there?

SA: I don't know. I don't...

JF: These were 20, supposedly healthy women?

SA: Yes. Women, yeah. And we was—they probably took us, because they want to survive, from the army. A few German—I don't know if they have higher ranks or not, German soldiers. They probably, if you have a group of people, you have to take care of them, then they don't send you to the front to get killed.

JF: So you think that the men...

SA: [unclear]

JF: With you were trying to survive.

SA: Right.

JF: How many men were there? How many guards?

SA: They have their own house, must be about five, and they change 'cause their time, they was very well fed, very well dressed, and we have nothing.

JF: They were in a house?

SA: Yes.

JF: And you were outside?

SA: In the woods, right.

JF: And what month was this?

SA: Fortunate, it was not too cold, but later on, I guess they start to build for us, because the winter was coming down. They start to build like tents. We was sleeping

in the tents, but we feel very rich that we have a roof on our heads because we don't, we would sleeping under the woods and if it rains, you go under a tree and you hide as much as you can, but you were wet; so fortunately, built tents for us, and then they allow us to take the trees [wood for a floor?] and put them on the earth, you know, that we shouldn't—then after a while, they brought us bags, sleeping bags from paper. And then we felt that we are treated like queens.

JF: Were you working when you were there?

SA: They took us every day, 5:00 in the morning, out—and we was shivering. It was so cold. Some girls they found when you work with woods—the things would fall down from the woods...

JF: The shavings?

SA: Yes, the shavings. The girls put them in their heads, in their shoes. They found paper and they put around them, and later on, we from 5:00 in the morning, you stay till 8:00, 9:00, like this, then they bring you some coffee, and then they say, "March," and we was going with them. Wherever they took us. The people that they live near there, they complain, and they say what this people walk, our children get scared to death. Don't walk close to a living quarters because this is something what not just shocking, I don't have even the right word. So we was taking to water. The stones—take the stone from this side and put on the other side. But there was nothing to do, they just want to keep the group together—that they should be saved.

JF: There was no other work camp?

SA: No.

JF: That you were involved with?

SA: No.

JF: You were totally separate?

SA: Yes.

JF: From any other kind of group?

SA: Yeah, right, right.

JF: How were you fed?

SA: Terrible. Terrible. A lot of people was dying very, very quick. Terrible.

JF: How many of you lasted through that period of time, out of the 20?

SA: Not too many. No—then we have more people coming from another site. We was 20 just from Bergen-Belsen. They brought people from another site, too. We was more, yes, probably we was more than 20 there together. Probably half of the people died, couldn't survive.

JF: How long were you in Unterlitz?

SA: A few months. Yes.

JF: Over the winter?

SA: Yeah.

JF: This was the winter of '44, '45?

SA: No, not '45, no, no. '44. '45 I was liberated.

JF: The fall of '44 into the winter.

SA: Then from this camp we was taken to an ammunition factory. Taken out the strongest girls, too. And when we came to this ammunition factory, the girls what was there before, they look at us and they say, "You look like you would be out from a hotel, the way they look."

JF: Where was this ammunition factory?

SA: I don't remember.

JF: You don't remember the name of it?

SA: The place, no. Because when we came there, all the girls were yellow, looked like dead, like skeletons, and the hair was red. There was a chemical—*sharka*, they call this in Polish. I don't know how they call this in English, which eats you up.

JF: How do you spell that?

SA: *Sharka* in Polish, S-I-A-R-K⁸, ah, yeah.

JF: What was this chemical supposed to do?

SA: This chemical? I don't know if this chemical has some good way of doing it. I don't know. I think that this was just to kill them—slowly because the lungs was even [unclear], the skin, the flesh yellow, and the hair red, and they die very quickly.

JF: They knew they were getting this chemical?

SA: Yes, yes. And they say, "My God, you was sent here to die," and then we was sent and we was supposed to go next day out for work.

⁸English: sulphur.

Tape three, side one:

JF: This is tape three, side one, of an interview with Mrs. Sally Abrams, October 13, 1981, with Josey Fisher.

SA: Then we was taken out from this, yeah, we went to the factory from ammunition. I was there a few weeks...

JF: Wait, I thought you said that this factory was closed down.

SA: Yes, but we was kept there.

JF: You were kept there.

SA: Yes, closed, we didn't go to work, but we was kept there in the barracks. They have special barracks, too. We was there about a month, and to the end, they start to march with us. They took us out from there and they was—they called the dead march. They started to march with us to Gross-Rosen, Maidanek, I don't remember. Just march, and on the way, a lot of people fell dead, but they still want to keep us to protect themselves. That they shouldn't go to the war. So they kept us as long as possible. I remember on this march, walking and sleeping, and I only survive because of my little cousin, and she survive because of me. Sometimes she said to me, "Please, let me sit here. I want to be dead. I couldn't go on anymore. I don't have the strength." I start to beg her, "Come, I going to help you out. You going to see, we have to come to a place. We couldn't be all the time marching." And then she—we start to walk again. Then was the opposite way with me. I said to her, "You know what, I'm going to stay here. You are young. I can't take it anymore." So she started to cry and said, "You just said this to me I shouldn't do it, and don't leave me." So this is the way we was walking. And a funny thing happened. It's unbelievable that this is true, you know? I really don't—I can see everything with my eyes, but I don't believe it that I was there. We was so down, and so hungry, and even the guard, who was marching—for I don't know for how many days. He found a farmer, he went to the farmer's house and said, if he has a place to let us stay overnight.

JF: About how many of you were there?

SA: We were marching, there was a lot, but there was later on, about half. I don't remember—100 people or something. We was left maybe 50 or even not this. Well, anyway, he opened his, how do you call this where they have the cows and the, uh...

JF: The barns?

SA: The barns, *didolas* [unclear] in Polish, and they had the wheat there for what they make bread.

JF: Storehouse.

SA: Storehouse. And then he said to him if he had something to eat, he ask him. So he said he just make food for the pigs, but the pigs wouldn't eat it because it's spoiled, it's sour. He can give us this food. He said, "Sure, you give it to them, they going to eat." We didn't have nothing, not a platter, we took, some people took in their hands,

and some people took in their *shmata* what they have. That was so good, we said, “My God, how can the pigs resist this kind of food, was so delicious?” We was there overnight and I was laying down and I said, I felt that I was going to die. My God, nobody would know where we are. I don’t, we don’t know ourself. In a dark place, they probably will dig a hole and put us all together but I said, “Well, it’s going to be better than living.” And I hold my hands like this and I said, “Would it happen a miracle that I would find something to eat.” And I dig with my hands and what did I find? The wheat! There was inside, the, what they make flour from it, was still inside what you can eat. The little thing what you make flour...

JF: The kernel?

SA: The kernel, yes. And I found the things, what I opened it and I said, “Oh, my God.” I ate this and I gave all the rest of it to all the people. And I said, “You just dig in with your hands, you will find this.” And everybody ate this and we felt so strong. Then we was...

JF: This was straw or the wheat that you were laying on?

SA: The straw and together with the wheat. Together. Then we went again, marching, and there was again, we couldn’t take it anymore.

JF: This was around what month?

SA: I don’t know.

JF: Was it in the winter?

SA: Snow, yes. Must be in the winter. Snow, sure, cold. Then we was taken to Gross-Rosen. Gross-Rosen was the dead camp. Nobody went out from Gross-Rosen alive. We was taken to a factory for ammunition again. The factory was closed but we was storage there, to stay there.

JF: In Gross-Rosen?

SA: Yes. I became sick and I have a terrible diarrhea. I just couldn’t stop—like water was just running, and I was laying down and all of a sudden, I open my eyes and I see a sign in German. The water is poison and it’s very rusty. There was a sign in German and don’t open the crown [water spigot?] because you going to die, it’s poison. I said, “Well, God sent it to some at the right time.” I opened the spigot—rusty water came out, like brown, and I was drinking, drinking, and I fell asleep. And I said, “Well, this is it.”

JF: You did this on purpose?

SA: Yeah, and what happen? I wake up, and I had no diarrhea anymore. Would you believe it? This looks really like not true. I wake up and I felt refreshed. I slept, I dranked the water, and no diarrhea. Then they start again. I don’t know how long we was there, they start again with the whips to chase you out, out, out. And we came to another camp. I don’t remember, when we walk out from Gross-Rosen. Nobody want to believe that we are not killed because there is a—nobody walked out from this place

alive. Where was I taken? To Bergen-Belsen? No. There was another place where we was there a few weeks.

JF: You mentioned Maidanek earlier.

SA: Maidanek. No, was before, I think. Yes, I was there not too long. Yeah, was before. And from this place from Gross-Rosen, and we was sent to a—I don't remember where—it was not far I think from Bergen-Belsen, because being there, there was talks that the German people are losing the war.

JF: The talk was where? In Gross-Rosen?

SA: No. In the other camp—I don't remember the name. And they were talking that the German people were losing the war—which we don't want to believe. But one day, we look out from the barracks—we was not allowed to go out—because it seems that I see now that it was the end of the war, close to the end. We saw big trucks coming in and somebody said, “You know what? They all left us—all the German soldiers are not here anymore. We are left by ourselves.” And we start to walk out and was true. There was no soldiers. The house that they live was empty.

JF: This was the camp...

SA: After Gross-Rosen.

JF: After Gross-Rosen.

SA: Yeah. And the big trucks came in with civil people and they say that they going to take us to Bergen-Belsen. We start to talk about the war, and they say, “Yeah, it's almost the end.” On the way, we saw soldiers with white...

JF: Arm bands?

SA: Arm bands. My cousin said, “What this means white?” I say, “Before the war, I know it. The soldiers had the white flag, or white—that they are giving in. That is like I'm not going to fight anymore. I'm giving in. They was, I said what I know—what I don't know what this means here.” But we was taken to Bergen-Belsen. Bergen-Belsen was almost empty. The old people what they went there died. There was a big epidemic of typhus, diarrhea, and we was there a few days, and my cousin, that was summer, that was not winter anymore, it must be '45, because I was taken in May, I think, no, before, later, June, July, but it was summertime. My cousin became very ill with very high fever. She couldn't lay in the barrack anymore—so there was tents outside. I put her in the tent and I was near her. She couldn't even eat what they give it to her. And I felt that I was going to get sick very bad. So I take the bread what we have what we couldn't eat and I gave to one girl and I said, “Show me where I can get help. They should take her a hospital, a room, anything.” And she told me, she says, “Go straight here.” I gave her all the bread what I have, “and you going to find somebody there what they will take her to the hospital.” I came there, and I must be very sick with high fever. I remember one thing. Ask for help and then I remember, like two soldiers took me by my arms, and bring me over to a room what must be a doctor there, because he was dressed in white and he said to me, “Stick out your tongue.” And he said, “She is *kaput*, she is done.” That's all I

remember. I wake up and I was in the *Krankenhaus* again. Not able to move, and I look at my skin and all the skin was like I would be burned, bubbles, and the bubbles open and the water was running down—and this water must be poison because I was had all my body was full of wounds, and I couldn't move. And I was laying and there was a German girl—Autie was her name—she bring me food and water and I wake up one day and I said, “Why did you sit on my leg?” And they say, “Nobody is sitting on your leg.” They open the cover and my leg was like this. I have thrombosis, blood clot. So one leg was like this...

JF: Swollen.

SA: Swollen. I don't think there were doctors, but must be helped—private, but anyway, I was listening, how they say that they have to cut off the leg. Why they didn't do it, I don't know. I was there...I don't know how long I was there, and I was always asking where my cousin is. I says, “I left her and she don't even know where I am.” I had no answer for it, nobody cares. But one day when I was there, I guess, I was operated with open wound because it was very painful and I couldn't lay down. I have to lay on my stomach. Somebody came, I should sign papers. We going to go to Sweden. I don't even know, don't remember; I probably signed the papers and they took me out...

JF: Were you ever informed as to what this other infection or whatever was on your skin?

SA: Yes.

JF: The sores and the...

SA: Yeah, they told me. My blood turned and my blood was infected. I have no blood in my body and the body was like poisoned, and when I was in this stage, I weighed 60 pounds. I have no eyelashes, I lost my whole eyelashes, my whole eyebrows, and I lost my hair. I must look like a ghost. I never look in the mirror.

JF: You were still in Bergen-Belsen.

SA: I was in Bergen-Belsen, and I was...

JF: And who was treating you? Do you have any idea?

SA: I don't know. Probably not doctors. Yes, I wasn't even—I was so sick and I was not allowed to drink. I probably must have a lot of liquid in my body. I don't know if they were doctors or nurses. Some people, I was truly more unconscious than conscious because I had typhus, and had typhus and stomach typhus together and I was not in a coma, but I was delirious, talking from the fever.

JF: Had the war actually ended at this point?

SA: No. The war was ended, but when they took me to Sweden, that was in Sweden was Chrabia Bernadotte [Count Folke Bernadotte]. He was the head of the Red Cross.

JF: This was in what month you went to Sweden?

SA: That was summertime—I remember the flowers. It was May. Is May flowers?

JF: Summer of '45?

SA: Flowers—yes, flowers already—yes. May, it must be. And this Chrabia Bernadotte went to Germany and make a change. He gave them so much food or trucks, whatever, that he should be able to take out 200, the sickest, people and take them to his country and save them. And I was between the 200. We went to Lübeck—Lübeck is Germany, already, but I was two weeks in Lübeck because I had developed a sickness—yellow joint...

JF: Jaundice?

SA: Jaundice, yellow, you're yellow in you. I was not allowed to move. So I was two weeks there, treated, and then they took us with Red Cross army ships to Sweden. There was with the army—so means they steal us. But they change, they take a next change, 200 and they took us to Kalmar: Stockholm is the capital, Kalmar is the second. Took us to the hospital and again, I was thinking I'm dead. I wake up. I was in a real bed with white sheets. I look around. I had a night table and there was like silver, a cup for your tea, a cup to drink water, and there was from the Red Cross army—no, from the Red Cross was a little box was a lipstick, little powder, it was toothpaste, there was a brush, and all of a sudden, I hear music, and I say, "Oh, my God! It's so good to be dead. You stay in a bed and it's so clean. And it's so nice, it's real beautiful room, and I hear music," and look with my head and I saw the Salvation Army, so dressed in uniforms and they play music, and all of a sudden a man came over to me, tall, not young, put flowers on my bed, give me a kiss on my forehead and talk to me in Swedish, and I was just looking. I didn't understand nothing, but I look at him and I saw a tear from his cheek. And then I must fall asleep and then the nurse came to me. She was talking Polish and I said to her, "Are you dead? And tell me, it's so good to be dead. It's so beautiful here." She said to me, "You're not dead." I says, "What do you mean? I was in Bergen-Belsen and this is not Bergen-Belsen." And she says, "No, you are in Sweden," and she said to me. I says, "Well, and the music?" She says, "The Salvation Army playing for you and you going to have the best care as possible. We all promise to take care of you." And I look at her and I say, "You just want to make me feel good, but this is not true." I says, "I remember a man came to me and give me flowers. Who would give me flowers and kiss me? I had nobody." She says, "You know who the man was?" I says, "No." She says, "That was King Gustav. That was the king from Sweden. He said he came to greet you." And—I was there three months. So I was in Sweden, I was three months there and we was treated wonderful. They gave us clothes, cosmetics, anything we need. It was a wonderful country. There was a lot of people from ours [Poland?] and they take care of everybody real good. And, uh, later on after the three months, I felt that I had to do something—to show myself that I can take care of myself and I was still with my little cousin. She was coincidentally sent to Sweden—and I found her on the paper, her name, and she was in another place, and yeah, I forgot to tell you, that before we took sick—that was in Bergen-Belsen, we heard voices from planes. "You were liberated, you are

free, we are here from England and the United States. We have plenty of food for you and we have everything for you. But don't touch the food what's left in Bergen-Belsen—because everything is poisoned. And we couldn't tell you the reason that we couldn't come right up, down, to you, but we will as soon as possible.” And...

JF: You heard this before you left?

SA: Yes. Before I, yes, before I left. Yes. In Bergen-Belsen, before I took sick. And after two hours, they came down and they looked exactly like the spacemen; they have white uniforms covered completely their body, gloves on the head, only you can see the eyes. Everything was covered because there was a big epidemic there, and the only mistake they made was they brought a lot of food and people start to eat and they die right away.

JF: You were there when this happened?

SA: Yeah, I was, then I was sick already. I was too weak to eat, because I couldn't even eat what they give it to me. The bread I told you. That's when I gave my bread away, and then when I went to look for help for my little cousin, what I told you already. And now I come back to Sweden. When I, three months I was there, and I felt that I want to go to work—so they ask me what I want to do. So I said I would like to go to the hospital to work. Whatever I will be able to do. So they told me that I could work and could take my schooling there if I wanted to become a nurse. But I told them I'm not going to go by myself because I have a little girl here which is always with me. And they accepted. So we went—what they got—which was talking beautiful Swedish and German. There was a Swedish man—he took us on a train. They gave us a few sandwiches, and a few clothes, that we was able to manage, and we came to Utran. Utran was a suburb from Stockholm and there was a sanatorium. And we have a beautiful room there and we learn the language very quick, and I went a few hours at night. I had school and in the daytime I was working in the hospital, and we was there a few months. I find out that was a tuberculosis place. I wasn't afraid of [for] myself, but I was afraid of [for] my cousin. I says, “She so young and she could catch the disease.” And I start to go to Stockholm, there was a *mizize* [?] like a Jewish *kehillah*, in Stockholm and I told them the story and I say, “I would like to take her out from this place to give her [unclear].” They say they couldn't do it because they short of people. I says I would pay Sweden back with me. I'm not afraid. I lost everything. I can get sick, but I don't want it this child to get sick because she's too young for it. So they say they couldn't do nothing. So I had to find another way to get out. I was there a year. I was very happy there.

JF: In this...

SA: In this sanatorium, yeah; we had a beautiful room, we was treated very nice and the work was not hard and I had my schooling. And then, I find another way to come to Stockholm, and I went to a place where you could be taught to be a nurse, to Stockholm, and I took it out, my cousin, and we went together in Stockholm, because they didn't work in Stockholm. They didn't work in—not a citizen. They call it *nedengad*

[unclear] in Swedish, but you have to show if you have a school to go or if you have something to accomplish, then they let you live in Stockholm. So I came there and we have our, she went, I took her out from Utran and she became a special nurse for children when she was finished, and I was there—and in Stockholm I met my husband. He came from Poland. I didn't remember everything, no, I didn't. If I would tell everything, I don't know, probably it must be something in a person that God do it to you that you should be able to get things what they so terrible that you couldn't even live with this, to survive, I guess.

JF: You met your husband in Stockholm, and you married in Stockholm.

SA: Yes.

JF: When?

SA: In 1946.

JF: And did you live there with him for a while?

SA: Yes. I was five years in Stockholm with my husband, and my son was three years old when we brought him here. We came here in 1951, in January.

JF: So your son was born in 1948, your first...

SA: '47.

JF: In 1947, and your second son was born in the United States.

SA: Yes, in 1953.

JF: Have you suffered from any of the illnesses that plagued you at the end of the war since you got here?

SA: Oh, yeah. I suffered a lot. I had a few times a nervous breakdown because I have terrible nightmares. That they take away my children and the soldiers came and the soldiers was after me with guns and I was screaming. Wake up in the middle of the night, and I couldn't live with myself. I was few times very sick and I have a few times woke up and my leg because my leg was healed by nature and they didn't do nothing to it. And I have very bad veins.

JF: Were you hospitalized for these breakdowns?

SA: Yes. Yes.

Tape three, side two:

JF: This is tape three, side two, of an interview with Mrs. Sally Abrams.

SA: I would like to share to all of you, not just to you, together my feelings that we are here left for a purpose. That we should make the world that this shouldn't happen again. That our children shouldn't have this experience what we have. [Mrs. Abrams is crying during this statement.] That they should do anything in their power, Jew or not Jew, to tell the world the truth because they didn't tell the truth to the world. It was too terrible to tell. And I guess now the truth came out, and I feel that we very fortunate that people taking their time and they want to put it in writing or in records that thing what happened. That the world should know, and now I'm going to tell you my feelings when I came back to Germany after many years.

My children, my son and his wife was sent to Germany from the government and they have to stay two years in Germany and maybe more if they like it. My son supposed to open in Hamburg, a German consul, and my grandson was born in Germany. I would never in my life to go to Germany if they would offer me a million dollars, because I always said I couldn't put my foot on a place where so many blood was shed, but when I heard my grandson was born, and we was not young, I said to my husband, "I don't know what's going to happen to us, but I only wish I have, I would like to go and see my grandson." And we went.

We have a lot of *nachas* and happiness from our children, but we want to be there and go to places where we was before. And I insist my children to take me to Bergen-Belsen, and they took me to Lübeck. When I walk in, there was a museum in front and all the horrible pictures, what they was very well known, and when I walk into the place, what before was gas chambers and such terrible things happen—I think this was in Lübeck not in Bergen-Belsen because in Bergen-Belsen they still have the barracks. The place was gorgeous—looks like a beautiful park, surrounded with flowers. And I walk over to one place and I say, "10,000 people is buried here in big grave around flowers, beautiful kept, grass, was a nice monument..." And all of a sudden, I heard voices from all the places; they tell me, "How came you alive, how came we so long dead and you came to us to visit us? What makes you survive?" And I felt so guilty; I felt so terrible, and probably, by the way I look and maybe I talk loud to myself, I don't know, my children came over and pushed a little carriage for my grandson, and they say, "Mother, maybe we going to go out," and I saw my husband, and all of a sudden, I said, "Now I know why I was left. Probably God wants to bring my children to the world and I came to you to show you my children. And now I have a grandson. Probably it was His will." And I just heard all the voices quiet down and I just look at my children. And I by myself for first time I realized, I said, "Well, this must be the part because they probably has to be brought to this world to do good things," and all the voices kept quiet. I had a very hard time being in Germany—on the streets, because everything and everybody reminds

me of something else, but when I was together in the house with my children, I felt that I had done the right things to go and see them, not knowing when they would be back.

JF: Is there anything else?

SA: There is so many thing else—there are so many things what I would like to share but right now, I don't think that I am able to.

JF: Thank you very much, Mrs. Abrams.