HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HANNA MARX

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Vivienne Korman
Date: April 22, 1985

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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HM - Hanna Marx [interviewee]
VK - Vivienne Korman [interviewer]
Date: April 22, 1985[1]

Tape one, side one:

VK: ...orman. I am taping oral histories for the survivors of the Holocaust. Today is April the 22nd, 1985. And my name is Vivienne Korman. Okay.

HM: I am Hanna Marx. I live in San Diego, California. I was born in Germany, Hamm in Westfalen. I was born on September 19, 1928.

VK: You had brothers? Sisters?

HM: I had two brothers, two older brothers. One was born in 1921 and one was born in 1927. We had a very happy and a very lovely family. I had my grandmother and grandparents from my mother's side. Nobody is alive today any more.

VK: Your parents' names?

HM: My father's name was Felix Simons, and my mother's name was Johanna Simons. Her maiden name was Johanna Schulhaus. She lived in a, in Eschwege before she got married. My parents moved to Hamm after they were married. My father came from Burgsteinfurt, which is in Westfalen also. He had one brother. My mother had five brothers and sisters. They were all married and they all had children.

VK: What did your father do in that town?

HM: We had a beautiful home and my father had a store, like a little depart- what they would call a little department store here. We had a car. We were -- I had a very wonderful, short childhood, from what I remember. I was very young. We had a car. My father had a motorcycle. They took us on a lot of outings, that I remember. I don't-- I did not feel persecuted until I was in later years in school. My brothers-- they didn't have public schools in Germany.[2] They had parochial schools. They didn't have a Jewish school in this home, in our hometown, so I went to a Catholic school. And my brothers went to a Protestant school. We were very much liked. I had a lot of friends, until about '35, '36, when it really started getting bad. I had one very good friend. She was a Catholic. In fact when I came out of the camp she still had my picture on the night stand.

VK: Right.

HM: My brothers in the Protestant school had it worse than I had, I did. I don't know why. I guess I was too small to realize. But after '35, '36, things were getting worse for my parents, too. The business was probably getting slower, I don't know. And they took the maids away. I don't know what year this was, but we had a maid and we could not

[1]Recorded at the 1985 American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Philadelphia, PA.
[2]Public schools were the usual educational system in Germany. Parochial schools were few and attended by choice.

have hired help, Christian help.

VK: Sure.

HM: It was very hard to get Jewish help, because I don't think there were as many Jews in our town. We had a very lovely synagogue. I used to belong to the choir and I sang in the choir since I was a very little girl. And when I started school, I started Hebrew school three days a week, in the afternoons. My parents brought me to the temple and where we-- there was a little school house. And we had Hebrew school. And I still read a beautiful Hebrew.

VK: Sure.

HM: And I still read a lot of songs, even though I was 12 years old when I went into camp.

VK: Right.

HM: So...

VK: What led up, what were the circumstances that you remember that led up to your going into camp?

HM: Well, first, in '37 and '38 it really, as I remember, it got bad for my brothers. They were beaten up in school many a times, from kids. They called them names and on the 9th of November, at 10:00 in the morning, my teacher, who was a very beautiful lady, which I will always remember as a wonderful person, she came to me and she said I had to leave the school and that I would have to go home. This was before the Crystal Night. And I didn't understand. And I came home to my mother and she didn't understand why they had sent me home. And then my brothers also came home. And we had a very nice neighbor. He was a German policeman, and he told my mother that something terrible is going to happen, and we should hide my father. So, we went to our friends' house. They had a big home someplace fur-, away from our house. Because we had a store right next to our home.

VK: Right.

HM: And they-- we stayed there overnight, and then we heard already that the synagogues, in the morning, the synagogues were burning downtown. We had one little *shul* and one nice synagogue, which, they were both downtown. One was on the east side, and one was in the middle of town. And they destroyed both the synagogues. And all the stores in downtown and in the areas, they were all broken into and the glasses were broken and merchandise was taken out. But in our street, our house, and our store was not touched. I-- why I don't know. Maybe because-- down the street about a block-and-a-half away there was a grocery store and they destroyed that. But we, our store was not touched. And my father went, he had a cousin who was married to a Gentile. And he left, after the synagogue was burned he left and went to this cousin and they were hiding him. And three days afterwards he called and we went back to our home, to our own home. And he called if everything was quiet. So he said in order for them not to catch him we should go back to our friends' house.

VK: Right.

HM: And he would come home. So he came home, and I don't know, they were looking for the men where we were hiding. And they caught my father. So he went into the concentration camp.

VK: Do you know which one?

HM: Ehhh....

VK: Do you know where he was sent?

HM: I think he was in Buchenwald...

VK: Right.

HM: At the time.

VK: Right.

HM: But this was only for a few weeks. They arrested my, my brother, but my, the oldest brother. In fact my oldest brother was already in Cologne. He was a fine mechanic.

VK: Right.

HM: In a school for fine mechanics.

VK: Right.

HM: It was a Jewish school. And he came home the next morning after the Crystal Night and they arrested him with my father. But they did not send him to a concentration camp. They sent him back home. And one night-- I remember as it happened right now-- I hear, I woke up in the middle of the night and I hear a whistle, like my father's whistle. And I woke up my mother. And I said, "This is Daddy's whistling." And she says I am imagining, that he was in a concentration camp. But then she heard it, too. And she opened the window and there he was.

VK: He escaped?

HM: No, no, they only...

VK: They sent him back?

HM: Yeah, they only kept all these German Jews for about three, four weeks. And then they sent them back home. So, my parents tried to get out of Germany. My father always said-- it was very hard, you know; we had, he had the three kids, we should never separate.

VK: Right.

HM: In fact, then we mov-, where we lived, we had a store. And we tried to emigrate to Chile, South America.

VK: Yeah.

HM: So, my uncle and my father, they both applied, and then my parents, my uncle, had a little store, but he wrote down that he was a *Viehhändler* [German: cattle dealer], in English it's with cattle, you know, that he was a farmer.

VK: Right, sure. Right, right.

HM: In plain English it's like a farmer that, he applied that he was a farmer. And

my father wrote that he was a businessman. So, they gave my uncle the papers right away. And my father not. So in order to, for us to get these papers, they said we should move to my uncle's hometown. He lived in Burgsteinfurt, my father's hometown. And then they would give us the papers and he should write down that he is a farmer also.

VK: Sure.

HM: And my parents did this. They went to Hamburg, and there we registered.

VK: Right.

HM: And we moved in with my uncle. My grandmother was alive at the time. And after the Crystal Night, my grandmother was very upset. She had a, like a duplex here.

VK: Right.

HM: On one side my uncle with his family lived...

VK: Right.

HM: And my grandmother, she was a widow, so she stayed in the other side. And what they did, after the Crystal Night, they locked the back yard. They boarded it up. She could not go into the back yard...

VK: Right.

HM: …any more. They claimed that it belonged to the-- like a kingdom. They had the first, in Burgsteinfurt, they had a beautiful castle there. And all the property in back and that they claimed and they gave it to the neighbor who was a big Nazi. But we moved there, and my grandmother died on Rosh Hashanah night, because, she couldn't take that, you know, that she could not go in her own back yard.

VK: Sure.

HM: That really killed her. And that my uncle was emigrating. And she was supposed to go with us, but she passed away in the meantime. She fell asleep. She woke up Rosh Hashanah night and said she wasn't feeling good, and midnight we found her dead in bed. So, and we had, we were in a strange town. For me it was a strange, it was not a strange town because my grandparents lived there, my grandmother lived there and my uncle. So we went to visit there. But, my friends were still in Hamm, which was in '39. I believe it was '39 that we moved there. I can't really recollect the exact dates of this. And, we went to a Jewish school. There was no more schools for us. So it mu-, it was after '39. It must have been '40 that we moved. And I had to go to Münster to a Jewish school where they temporarily made quarters there. And they pushed all the kids together, like the first, second and third grades. We didn't really learn much anymore. And then we got the notice that we should pack our-- that was in December of '41. Oh, then my, my uncle left for Chile and my father went and bought, he got permission to go to Luxemburg. Because they left, from Luxemburg they went to Chile. And we had family by the name of Wolff and they were very well-to-do. They lived in Luxemburg. And quite a few got permission to bring their families there. And most of the men did not come back. My father did. He did not want to leave. They went to America. And my father came back home. He would not leave us, my mother and the children. He would never leave us there.

VK: You went to Luxemburg with your father?

HM: No, no, no.

VK: Oh, you did not go.

HM: My father went to Lux-...

VK: Only your father.

HM: Only my father could go and...

VK: Right, right.

HM: Bring them there.

VK: Right.

HM: And we stayed home.

VK: Right.

HM: But he came back.

VK: Right.

HM: So, and we were, this was in November, and my-- we had papers to leave in January of 27 to go to Chile also. But my uncle went on the last boat. They stuffed the boat, so we did, could not get away. And another uncle wanted to take us to China. At the time they, a lot of them went.

VK: Yeah, sure.

HM: And but my father, that was in the middle of the night, my uncle came and he said they are, on the black market they were, they're going, and that we should come along. And he did not want to, to Shanghai or whatever, to Shan-...

VK: Shanghai, yeah.

HM: Yeah, to Shanghai. My father didn't. They didn't have any children. They went. And my father, with us three children, he didn't want to take that chance in the middle of the night. So he wouldn't go. He always said, "You know, Hitler can't last that long." He didn't really last that long, but he lasted too long for us.

VK: Too long, sure. All right, were you, what...

HM: And then they...

VK: What town was it that you were living in at that time?

HM: Burgsteinfurt.

VK: Burgsteinfurt. Okay. All right.

HM: But we only lived...

VK: But you were not hiding, you weren't hiding then.

HM: No, no. We were...

VK: You were just living there as Jews.

HM: No, we were living there as Jews.

VK: That's right.

HM: Right. And then we got the notice that we could take, I don't remember the exact...

VK: All right, all right, whatever.

HM: Quotation what we could take, because, to us, to me it didn't mean anything. I was a child.

VK: Right.

HM: That we had to report, and that they are going to bring us to a labor camp, or to a ghetto rather. They didn't say labor camp. That they would deport us from our home town, from the town, and they would make a, Jewish ghettos. And my parents packed and we went from Burgsteinfurt. They sent us, they brought us to Münster. And from Münster, which was a, the gathering halls, like here the convention halls, they had people coming from all over, the small towns, and gathered us there together, with all the luggage. We stayed there overnight and without any beds. We were waiting for the train to arrive. And then they did, they did not send us in cattle cars.

VK: No?

HM: No.

VK: How did you go?

HM: They had regular...

VK: Regular trains?

HM: Regular trains.

VK: Okay.

HM: They made it very, very authentical that it was just that we are really going to a beautiful place, with beautiful trains. They put the luggage in wagons. They had special wagons in the back and put the luggage in there. And all the Germans really, I think, thought that we are really just going into some place. I mean they disguised everything. And, so we were sent to Riga. They even, they told us we should take baskets of food so we would have for a couple of days food. And they warned us. Yeah, they told us. And they even in the towns where we stopped, in bigger towns while we were in Germany, they brought food and drinks to the trains.

VK: Amazing.

HM: Right. And then finally we got to Riga. It was very cold. The snow was very high. We were not used to that. In Germany you didn't have these cold winters. And when we got out of the train they had the, they had, that was the first time we saw SS. We only had in Münster we had civilians, officials, or maybe SS disguised in civilian clothes. And the first time in Riga is when we saw the SS uniforms. And a lot of Latvian SS. They had a special *Kommando* with their SS signature on the Latvian uniform. And they were mainly our guides. There were just a few SS, the higher officials, and we got out of the train and they told us it would be, I don't remember, how many kilometers at the time we would have to walk. And if children and older people were not able to walk, they could get into the trucks and they would bring us into the ghetto. My father-- we came together and we stayed together. That was always his motto. Don't separate. So, we marched because my parents were too young not to march. And he made us march. He carried my luggage. Whatever, we only had like what we had on our train, all the luggage was in a bag. So, we

never saw it again. So we came into the ghetto. They marched us into the ghetto, and surprisingly, the people in the trucks who c-, went with the trucks, we were very innocent. We didn't think of anything. My father always said we stay together. But they were in the ghetto waiting for us. We were the second transport. Kassel, no, the third transport. Kassel and Düsseldorf, the transport from Germany that, the big city Düsseldorf...

VK: Sure, sure.

HM: Was already in the ghetto. And Kassel was already in the ghetto. And we were the third. They called it Dortmund, the transport. When we got into the ghetto, we got so panicky. I'll never forget it. And I was 12 years old. We walk into the ghetto, and the snow was maybe a foot or higher. And it was red from blood.

VK: Mmm.

HM: What they had done, this was the Latvian Jewish ghetto. They put the Latvian people, they made a ghetto, because the Latvian people were very free and very educated and very well-to-do people. They put the, took the people and put them in the ghettos, made wires around the ghettos, and they shot them cold-blooded, in the ghettos. And then they removed the bodies before we came. So the snow was full of blood. We couldn't figure out why it was red...

VK: Yeah.

HM: Until later on, until the Latvian Jews told us about it. So, and then they told us, because there were little houses and a few big houses, that we should find ourself a, because there were so few officials there, that they told us, "This part is for the Dortmunder group." Because all, the ghetto was later on separated, Dortmunder group, Kassel group, Leipzig group. You know...

VK: Sure.

HM: All they, wherever the mains town that...

VK: Sure.

HM: They made maybe a block.

VK: Yeah.

HM: What they...

VK: Where you could live.

HM: Where we could live.

VK: Right.

HM: Where we should find quarters. So, we were five people by ourselves, and my father saw a very tiny house, that had three different entrances. And we walked in and it was just a, a corner like a kitchen and then there was a big room. And that's where we went in. They had pots and pans, everything there from these Latvian Jews. And around the side there were two entrances they went upstairs. There were a few rooms upstairs on each, in each door. But we took the one downstairs. It was right next to the fence. But that's where we went in. And we got a few beds. There were, I think, about three beds. And my father got a couple of more beds. I don't remember where he got it from. But we

made it livable.

VK: Sure. You were together.

HM: And we were very lucky, because later on when we saw the big high rises, like if you only were two people with a child, four people, the two different families had to get together.

VK: Sure.

HM: So we were lucky that we found this one room with a little kitchen with five people. And people didn't come into our quarters. So we lived, we were there...

VK: For how long?

HM: This was quite a while. I don't know the exact time.

VK: Years?

HM: Yes, it might be a year or two. I really don't remember. But anyway, what they did when we were in the ghetto, there was absolutely no order whatsoever. They didn't have-- later on our Jews when there were more transports, in fact, our transport was the third, third or fourth one. We got there, and then the other transports where they told the children and the old people, they never got into the ghetto anymore. Ours was the last one where they brought the whole families together. And there was no working conditions at first. We stayed there about a couple of weeks. No food. But the Latvian Jews, like, we found food in the cupboards and in a, in the room, what they had brought in. So we-- there was some people had nothing, and some people had some. So, some people shared and how, later on they had big kettles. When they-- on their, in the courtyards they were cooking soups. There was a big, about two houses down from our little house there was a big complex which was fenced off. And this was the *Kommando* where the SS was liv-, not living, but they had their headquarters there. The ghetto was surrounded only by Latvian SS. We had, besides the officials, we never saw a German SS or German soldiers or anything. These Latvians were horrible. At night, they looked where beautiful girls were. They came into the homes. They took the girls out. They raped them, and shot them right, they brought them back to the house and right in front of your [unclear] was that, they would shoot them. They were drunk at night most of the time. It was really horrible. I was very young, but I was tall and I was big and my parents always were very much afraid. They put, you know, they protected me as much as they could. And thank God, I never was molested. But a lot of our girls, the older ones, were. And a lot of them lost their lives that way. Then they started organizing groups to go to work from the ghetto. I was 12 years old. My parents' education, they were school teachers. They were, they, in basements they set up schools so I could go to school. I went to school about two or three days. The people who stayed in the ghettos did not get any food. They would get a bowl of soup with one slice of bread. The people who went outside to work would take something and they would exchange things and they would get some more food. And I went to school for maybe a week or so and it was cold. They didn't have, it was, you know, it was winter time. So I told to my parents, "I am not going back to school. I don't learn anything there,

and I am cold. I don't want to, I want to go to work so I get some food." So I applied and there was the *Kommandos* where the ghetto what was not occupied. We had to clean out the-- from the Latvian Jews. We had to clean out the ghettos, clean out the homes. The clothes we had to sort, and the Germans took that out of there. And there they said, "If you find food you can eat." So, we, I had food. And many a times I hid some food. I brought it to my parents. And that was the beginning.

My brother, the little one, was a year older than I was. And the older one was a fine mechanic. And I don't know how he got-- oh, and then they, they had to come, you know they would put us in rows and they would ask what kind of occupations you had. And my brother said that he was a mechanic. And my father was very handy. He said he was an electrician. So they hired my, they took my brother. The SS took my brother. And they took him downtown. They picked him for their own fine mechanic. He would make rings and he was, he made cigarette lighters so that, figurines. He was very handy. So the SS took him downtown where they had, where they lived. And they had a big hall next to their living quarters where all our luggage had gone. And he found some of our belongings, our pictures. But he couldn't take anything with him. They would pick him up in the morning and bring him back at night. And on cer-, and then we had *Kommamndos* already. My father stayed in the ghetto. He was an electrician so there wouldn't be no fires breaking out. And my other brother went to work, and I went to work. And we were lucky. We stayed together. A lot of them they picked and sent right away some place to work where it was horrible. And for one reason, or we were lucky. I worked for the *Arbeiten*, which means for the army's-- clothing.

VK: They made clothes.

HM: Clothing, no, we didn't make the clothes. We...

VK: You gave it out? The...

HM: We assorted them. They sent the coats and the uniforms when they were fighting and they came back broken and bloody. There was one department where they were only cleaning it. And then one department, in different parts of town, they would sew it and they would send it back. It was a chain...

VK: Right.

HM: Reaction. And this was in Riga, in the city. In fact, some of our people, my brother, worked on a boat, where they would send it in and bring it back out.

VK: Excuse me one minute.

HM: Yeah.

VK: On, did you notice what. Continue for me.

HM: Okay. Then I went to work and we were working under German soldiers. Not under the SS. They picked us up early in the morning and brought us back late at night. I had a few friends. We were together all through the years. So, this went on f-, I, time recollection I do not have. But this went on for quite a while, until they started, they sent-- are you done already?

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

[Several seconds lead-in on tape before speaking begins.]

VK: This is side two of Hanna Marx's story of what happened during the Holocaust to her.

HM: My brother was-- this I'd like to bring in. My brother was working for this SS and every time like on, they had a program that on Thursdays and Fridays they would either hang a lot of people or shoot them. In the ghetto they had a cemetery in the middle. And they always found some people who came from the work and had some food with them. So they would pick certain people and they would hang them. And every *Kommando* going into the ghetto had to watch how they were hung, that we had to go by the gallow in the middle of town. And they would open up the gate to the cemetery and see how the people were shot on the wall. And before this happened my brother knew this because at night, the night before, they would shoot in their apartments, the SS, all the lightbulbs, and figurines and stuff. They used targets at night. And he was telling us. He said, "Tomorrow will be another hanging or another." So that was his experience and he knew about this. Well anyway, after the time we were in ghetto they dissolved the ghetto. They took us out in the morning. We went marching. We went to work and at night when we came home, and usually our parents or whoever was there, they greeted us on the fence. There was nobody there. And we came back and the ghetto was empty. All the people who were in the ghetto during the day were completely brought away to the, and they shot them in the Kaiserwald they called it, Kaiserwald, where they dug the graves and they were shot in the, in a ditch what our people dug. The next-- my parents hid. They were still alive. They hid in our apartment. Under the staircase they had a cabinet. So when we came home, I came, was the first one I came home. And I, we, everybody was screaming. And after my brothers came back home, they called that we should open up the h-. So they were alive. The next morning, everybody who was in the ghetto, they took to the labor camp. Like I was working for the *Arbeiten* and they made labor camps. Where, at the place of work they provided big things. We had to go through Kaiserwald, which was a small concentration camp in Riga they opened up, with striped clothes. They would take all our clothes away and everything. They gave us one set of clothing, and since we were working for the army, and since we had to work downtown, they did not put us in striped clothes, because they did not want them to know what we were the prisoners. But we were working there, and my father did not come with us. They, he was left behind. My mother came with me, and he stayed there in Kaiserwald. And my brothers came with us, but they were, the men were separated then and the women were separated. That was the first separations we had.

VK: Right.

HM: And we had a *Lagerleiter* in the ghetto who had the same name that we had and he was not very well-liked. And they thought when they saw the name that it was my

father, who was the *Lagerleiter*, and who he was, and that's why he was left behind.

VK: What's a *Lagerleiter*?

HM: *Lagerleiter* means he was an official in the camp.

VK: Oh.

HM: In a ghetto.

VK: Right.

HM: And he was ordered, he, they needed 10 people to hang. And he was responsible that they would find people...

VK: Okay.

HM: …who had some kind of, so but my father was not. But he was left behind. Later on they were going to release him, but he was dead. So anyway, then we were, went to work there and they needed so many people, they said, in Lithuania to work. And in the morning we were marching, going to our different departments. And they picked a couple of hundred people without any warning. They took us, and they said, "You come out and you come out." My mother and I. And even my brothers were at the same place. And they must have picked the people with-- see, the soldiers, they tried to be nice. So they probably gave names who they wanted, and they-- we stayed together, we still stayed together even though we were separated in barracks, but we could talk to each other and we would see each other. And they picked us, maybe 200, 300. I don't know exactly the number, but a very small group. They took us to cattle trains and we without food, without clothing, and we thought this was the end. Because we knew if they ship you without any clothing, this is it. But then the soldiers always said on the train, "You are going to a work camp. Nothing is going to happen. Don't be panicky. Nothing is going to happen." And we were on the train for about two or three days. And they did bring us to Lithuania. They had another work force there, and the same soldiers, in fact the first, of the-- he was a, an officer in the army, not in the SS. And he knew me, and he was so happy to see the three girls who were always working together. And we were kind of their favorites.

VK: Sure.

HM: I think that's why we are alive today. They gave us...

VK: Like a...

HM: A little extra food or so on. And after this work was done, after these soldiers came, you know, the war was getting back again back to Germany. They already were defeated, which we didn't know why we were sent. Then they brought us to Stutthof.

VK: Right. Okay.

HM: In other cattle cars. And the soldiers said we will be in Stutthof for a while, but they are still going to make another working camp there that we are going to stay there, because they want us back to work. And this is exactly what happened. They sent us to Stutthof, which is a really bad concentration camp. There, we were in barracks with three people in one bed, three up; so we were nine people in one. The lice were terrible. The typhoid broke out something awful. Really unbearable. But, I was lucky again. The soldiers

who started building took a few of us girls and requested us to work. But this was after a month or two that we would even go out to work for their families. So we would, they were there already stationed while they were working for the camp to open up that we could work again. Out of Stutthof, you know, in the morning...

VK: Yeah.

HM: They would bring us in and bring us back. That's, they made us clean their barracks and their living quarters. And we had to cook for them. There were maybe five or ten people all together who came, and they requested our names. So, my mother had it really bad. She couldn't get out. But sometimes I smuggled something in in order to keep her alive. We didn't care, so we both would die, that was all right. So, and then after, my brothers, it was so bad there, and my brothers volunteered to get out of there because they couldn't take it anymore. So I, but I don't know where they went to. They were shipped away to Germany to another work camp, and where they perished, we have no idea. My father was in a *Kommando* in Stutthof. He was picked to dig the graves, and after the digging, after they covered the bodies, he was shot. Somebody who was in that *Kommando* and was alive told us that afterwards. They came to Stutthof, and that's where we found out that my father was officially dead.

VK: But your brothers may still be alive?

HM: No.

VK: No?

HM: Well...

VK: Oh, you know that they're dead?

HM: I don't know.

VK: You don't know.

HM: No, I don't know.

VK: You don't know.

HM: I don't know. In fact, I broke down in Washington. That was really the first time. I was really hoping [weeping] that they would still be alive. [Tape turned off because interviewee is overcome with emotion.] So-- and we, and then the work force was ready, and they took us, they brought us in the morning to the work force, and at night they brought us back into the concentration camp. And it was about a week or two, the typhoid in the concentration camp was so bad that they picked the healthy people. And I met my cousin, one of my cousins, in Stutthof. And we got her somehow into our barrack. And we, they took us the next morning. They had a *Kommando*. They said, "We are going to stay in the barracks at the work force. We are not going back into the concentration camp, because of the typhoid." And anybody who would get sick in our camp would have to be sent back. We knew this, whoever is like, they, we had a c-. So in the morning they took the people out. And this barrack leader knew what was happening. We didn't. They locked our barrack where we did, and they took all their friends and put them in a *Kommando*. My mother was outside. I was inside. So, my mother, and then the soldiers came and counted the people

how many they needed, and my mother went to the soldier because I was working outside already. And he said, "You know, Hanna and the other two girls are still inside." So he told the barrack leader to open up that they called our names and we were out. So that's one, another miracle I was saved. They marched us. The soldiers had to go out after they took the count. They had to leave outside in front of the fence. And the SS took over and marched us. They marched us to the crematorium.

VK: Mmm!

HM: We got hysterical. A lot of people said their *Shema Yisrael*. We were still, we never really stopped believing somehow or other. A lot of them, a lot of us got very panicky, because we knew the crematorium, and we knew this was the end. We knew, because we knew they were gassed. They didn't have ovens to burn the bodies. Our people had to dig outside the fence and every night with kerosene we saw the fire. Every night and every night. So, after an hour, he says, "Now you guys go and turn around. You're going to march out of the concentration camp. You're going to work." So, one of us, I don't know who it was, said, "Why were we standing here?" So he says, "We wanted you to know, and we wanted you to know and feel how it is for other people who are going in. And we wanted you to believe that you were next." So we marched out, and we went to work. There was no beds, but they supplied us straw. In the morning and at night, they used to bring food into like a no-man's land.

VK: Right.

HM: They would not get, the food there was left in the middle and then our people would pick it up so we wouldn't pick up extra typhoid out of the camp. It was that bad. They were just dying, without the cremation. They...

VK: Sure.

HM: They were just dying. So, my mother was with me. My cousin was with me. She went to the work place with us and she came down with typhoid. And I never forget, she holds her hand, she says, I saw it the first time here, in Washington too, you know, they had a picture where they, "Help me." And that, it came back to me. This is, she knew where she was going, but there was no way with high temperature we could, anybody could save anybody. So, and after the Russians came very close, they had to, they joined us again with the survivors yet who were in the concentration camp. And they start to march us towards Danzig.

VK: Danzig.

HM: Towards Danzig, yeah. I think we marched for about three or four weeks, in the snow, no food whatsoever. They didn't supply us with any kind of food. What kept us alive was the snow on the ground.

VK: You ate the snow.

HM: We ate the snow.

VK: Sure.

HM: It was water. When we saw some, or they put for animals under the straw,

they used to have like kohlrabies. They stored that, and our people when we saw, in the fields, we would run to try to get kohlrabies. We didn't care if we were shot. We were hungry.

VK: Sure.

HM: So, a lot of them were shot while they were running. As soon as you run out of the line, some of them made it back, some of them didn't. They couldn't shoot as many as they were running. So, sometimes we would have something to eat that way. And, the worst thing, and I never believed it was true until I saw the picture, I always said to my husband, "Our people were so starved, when they were shot on the ground, we took their clothes off, which, they were dead, we were alive, we wanted to save ourselves." But, some of the people were so hungry, and they ate the warm bodies. And I always said, "This cannot, I cannot, that, I must have made this up. I can't believe this is really what did happen. Because, how can you be that low? And, you cannot eat human bodies." So, he said, he didn't know because he did not go through as like I did. So he says, "Maybe yes, maybe no. You never know." So he, I saw it-- we were sitting one evening, my daughter, and my daughter was sitting next to me. And we watched a movie where the plane went down? They had this movie where they, and there were, two children were saved?

VK: Yes.

HM: And they ate the humans...

VK: Yes.

HM: Their own parents'...

VK: Yes, right.

HM: Blood? And I said to her, "Susie, I always thought I was dreaming about it, or I was hallucinating, because I didn't think that human beings would steep [sic] that low." Because now I was a normal human being again.

VK: Right.

HM: That, I'm not hallucinating this. I, this did happen. She's the only one who ever knew about it, because she was sitting, and I had to leave. I couldn't watch that...

VK: Right.

HM: Picture any further. I said, "Now I know it is true. If those people, who were normal, and only were there for a few weeks, I know our people who went through all this and came out of the concentration camp and they were hungry, they must have done it too."

VK: Sure.

HM: I was not hallucinating it. And...

VK: So, as you, you were marching to Danzig?

HM: Yeah, and we were in Putzig at the time. And the Russian, we heard gun powder. And we never were brought inside of any place. We were always, very little cover. If they would find some farm houses where they had just cover they would lay us down over night and in the morning we would start marching again. So on this one day they

brought us into hangars. There was a small airport in Putzig and there were hangars. And in the hangars, they brought us in there, and it was warm, the most comfortable we ever had it for so many months. And my mother said, "I can't understand. Why would they bring us here?" And we were, but we were happy. And I was very weak already. And I said to her, I said, "I cannot march anymore tomorrow. I'm not going on. Let them shoot me, but I'm better off dead than, I cannot go anymore." So, in the middle of the night, three boys walk in with hand grenades. And, soldiers, German soldiers. They were not more than 16 years old. So they walk in there, and my mother said, because we spoke a very good, spoke a good German. My mother said to him, "What are you doing here?" So, the soldier says, "What are you asking me? I'm asking you what are you doing here?" So she says, "We are Jews. We are," so he says, "You cannot be Jews, because you speak such a good German, and you don't look like a Jew." So my mother said, "How are we supposed to look? And how are we supposed to speak?" So he says, "In the *Stürmer* [weekly German tabloid newspaper] we read that you have big noses and big ears." He had never, this is the first time that he ever got in contact with a Jewish person. So, and then my girlfriends, they were all from Germ-, most of them were Hungarian people and Polish people, but there were maybe 10 or 12 German Jews left. And my mother said, "Well, we are Germ-, we were deported from Germany. And we were in Riga." And she was telling him. So he says, "Well, why, you have to get out of here, because we are supposed to blow up the airport." So my mother says, "There is a few hundred people here. We cannot walk out of here. They will shoot us. And you cannot blow it up. Otherwise you'll kill us." So he says, "I cannot have this on my, I cannot use the hand grenades. I cannot have this on my conscience. The Russians will be here in the morning." He says, "I cannot have that I killed that many people." So, they went out. They did not use the hand grenades. Where they went, and who they were, we don't know, because I really would thank them, because he saved a few hundred Jews.

VK: Sure.

HM: Those three boys.

VK: Yes.

HM: So, and the next morning, the Russians were there, and they freed us. And, it was horrible, because a lot of our people died. They overate. You know, we just ran into, there were, must have been a lot of German officials because of the airport or what. I don't know. But the apartments were empty and they, the Russian soldiers said, "Take anything and go wherever you want to go. This is yours." They were very good. And the next day I was delivered into the hospital.

VK: When was that?

HM: That was in February of, when was it, the, when was the war over? In...

VK: '45.

HM: '45. That was in '45, in February or March. I really don't know. Because they were still fighting.

VK: Continue, continue.

HM: So, I was delivered into the hospital. My mother was working. In fact later on she, while she was waiting for me to get better, she was working for the officers. She cooked for them.

VK: The Russian officers.

HM: The Russian officers. And I was very delirious. And a friend of mine where I was in camp with, she took care of me. You know, they had the gir-, the girls and boys take care of their own people. They didn't have enough, because...

VK: Sure.

HM: They were fighting. A lot of people got killed from the splinters, what came into the hospital.

VK: Sure.

HM: A lot of them died from the typhoid. And, in fact my girlfriend who took care of me, she died and I am alive. And I was so delirious. And I always was crying for my mother. I, and I always said that, "They killed my mother! They killed my mother!" And, this girl got in touch with the officer. And they rolled the, she rolled a bed or whatever to the window. And this, that's the first thing I remember. And they said, "Your mom is alive." And she was outside the window, where, I don't remember. And that's when I got better.

VK: And then what happened after that? Where did you go?

HM: The Russians could not keep us in Putzig because they were still fighting and they didn't know what was going on. So they sent us into Poland, into Warsaw. There was a small committee with people. They placed us in a real huge hall. And when I was, I mean we went on our own, really, but they told us how to go and where to go. The soldiers and non-soldiers, even some of our girls were raped by the Russian soldiers.

VK: I'm sure.

HM: So, my mother, you know, I was shaved. My mother dressed me as a boy. So, they all thought I was a boy. I, after she saw, probably after the liberation what was going on...

VK: Sure.

HM: I was in the hospital, and when I came out I was shaved. I was everything. And, they, she said, "No more dress. You're going to wear boy's clothes." She got the boys' clothes. And then we went to Warsaw. And there was a Jewish family there who must have lived in Warsaw before. And they gave them a beautiful apartment, or even a house. And they had two boys with them. Their name was Max and Moritz Schuldenfai [phonetic]. They came from Belgium. They were deported from Belgium to Auschwitz. And they were with, they were in Auschwitz with these people from Poland. And they kind of guided us and they were, in my estimation today they were already, because they had a beautiful apartment already, to us it was a castle. To me it was a castle.

VK: Sure.

HM: The way they lived. And I helped them cook and do things with my mother and a couple of other girls. And until it was safe enough to go to, back to Germany, we were looking for our family. So, then we went to, by train. We hitchhiked by train. They didn't have no organization there. And we went to Berlin. And in Berlin they had a big quarter for Jews.

VK: Right, right.

HM: They selected us, and it took us a long time till the Russians let us out to the, over the border, into the American or English Zone, whatever it was.

VK: Right.

HM: In fact, we went twice by, they took truckloads of people. And they sent us back and the third time, we got through the border.

VK: Right.

HM: And we went back and first we went to Dortmund. There was another gathering…

VK: Right.

HM: To, which was close to my hometown.

VK: Right.

HM: And we met a, some more German Jews who were looking for the same thing, going back home. And there, we met the officer, a German officer, who guided us, who was, we were working for. And they had him marked as an SS. And they had arrested him. And these girls, we were separated, and they came to me. They said, "Would you testify that he only was a German soldier rather than an SS and that he really helped us?" And he did. Like I was 12 years old when I was working in Riga...

VK: Right.

HM: And when we had very heavy work, by, we went at 6:00 in the morning...

VK: Right.

HM: So, by 11:00, 12:00 we were just falling asleep.

VK: Right.

HM: So, he would say to the-- we had a Jewish *Kolonnenführer* [chief of a working party or work detail] and he said, "You let the young girls sleep. You older ones can do the work." And he cooked, had special food cooked for us. He helped us.

VK: Now, what happened after you got back to your hometown of Hamm. Hamm?

HM: After we got, when I went to Hamm, first we went to Hamm.

VK: Right.

HM: There was nobody left. My, in fact my, one of my aunt was married to a Gentile, they were sent to Warsaw, with the children. I have one cousin left, in Israel.

VK: How did you come to America?

HM: Oh, as...

VK: Who helped you to do that?

HM: Well, we went to our hometown. There was nobody there. Our house was bombed. They set us up in a nice apartment. And then we went to my, to Burgsteinfurt to my grandparents' hometown. And they gave us the house to live in. And we wanted to get out. That's where I met my husband. He was trying to go to, to Holland. Because he had some aunts and uncles still in Holland. They survived. They were hidden. And that's how I met him. So, and then we wanted to go. And he could not, they would not let us out of Germany. So they would not let him go to Holland. So, for a year or so we were-- when was the war over?-- We went...

VK: '45.

HM: '45. So he went in February of '47. And then, from the English Zone we could not leave to America. So I, my mother had a-- my, from my father's second cousin was alive. And she was in Riga also. And she lived in Korbach, which was American Zone. So she registered us that we were living with her.

VK: Right.

HM: And that's how we got papers that we were in the American Zone.

VK: Yes.

HM: And then we went to Frankfurt, to a DP camp.

VK: Right.

HM: But we had, our papers were ready that we would be coming into America. We were just, my husband and I were just friends.

VK: Right?

HM: He went to Hartford, Connecticut.

VK: Right.

HM: And I went to Chicago.

VK: Right?

HM: So, and we...

VK: So did he come...

HM: He was, he came to, in February or March, and we came from Germany in August or September.

VK: Right.

HM: And we went to Chicago and he went to Connecticut. But we stayed in correspondence and...

VK: And how long after that did you get married?

HM: In 1950.

VK: Very good.

HM: Yeah, so. We have five lovely children.

VK: Five. Beautiful.

HM: Yes, yes. We have two grandchildren now. And we never really talk much about the Holocaust. In fact what I'm telling you, my children don't know.

VK: They'll know now.

HM: Yeah.

VK: All right. I think what you've done is really very important.

HM: I hope so. That's why I'm doing it.

VK: Yeah, right.

HM: I've never talked about it. I never revealed any of this, to my family or to anybody.

VK: Your husband knows what you went through.

HM: Oh yes, yes.

VK: Yeah.

HM: Yes. We talk about it. And our friends who were in Riga, I met in Chicago. I met friends, they knew my brothers well. They didn't know me because I was so much younger yet. So, and most of the time we do have Holocaust survivor as friends.

VK: Sure.

HM: In fact, my children, many times questioned, even in San Diego, today, I'm the president of the club.

VK: Right.

HM: And I have mostly friends only as survivors. I know a lot of American people, but we have so many things in common that...

VK: That's right.

HM: This keeps the bond together.

VK: More important.

HM: I had our two...

VK: I'm going to turn it off now.

HM: Okay.

VK: Okay.

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