

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HANNA SILVER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Natalie Packel
Dates: April 25, 1995 and
May 9, 1995

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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HS - Hanna Silver¹ [interviewee]

NP - Natalie Packel [interviewer]

Date: April 25, 1995 and May 9, 1995

Tape one, side one:

NP: Good morning, Hanna. This is Natalie Packel, Tuesday, April the 25th, talking with Hanna Silver. Hanna has brought many pictures² from Berlin, Germany, and she will be giving me an account; she will be giving the Archive a historic account of Old Berlin as well as personal experiences. And we begin. Good morning, Hanna.

HS: Good morning, Natalie.

NP: Hanna, could you tell me a little bit about your beginnings, where you were born, something about your family?

HS: Both of my parents were born in Sudeten, which at that time was a part of Austria bordering on Germany. They left there and they went to live in Berlin. After 1918 this area became part of Czechoslovakia. Then after Hitler came to power, it became part of Germany again. Then after World War II it became Czechoslovakia again. I was born in Berlin in this apartment house in center city.³ It was a very solid building. Most of the people in there were government employees, teachers, and some were retired people.

NP: Was there a name for the section?

HS: Yeah. They called it Louisenstadt.

NP: How do you spell that, Hanna?

HS: L-O-U-I-S-, Louis, Louisenstadt.

NP: E-N-, L-O-U-I-S-E-N-...

HS: And it was very, very stable. Nobody ever moved out. Everybody knew the other tenants and a few girls went to school with me. So it was a very close knit neighborhood. Most of them, I would say all of them, were middle class, and there came a time when nobody had anything. This was right after the--nobody had any money after the inflation. Here are some photographs I brought you.

NP: I see.

¹née Bornowski.

²Mrs. Silver was interviewed as she referred to specific personal photos which are referred to by number. The photos were taken by Mrs. Silver in Berlin after the Allied Bombing during World War II, primarily in November of 1945. The following collateral materials are available through the Gratz College Tuttleman Library: the aforementioned photos; four additional photos of Mrs. Silver which were taken at the same time—and one family photo; An audiotape of Hanna Silver speaking to students in their classroom-1978; an audio taped interview of Hanna Silver, done in 1983 by Ellen Rofman, for a research paper pertaining to Righteous Christians helping Jews; a description of the death of Hanna Silver's mother from *The Berliners: Their Saga and Their City* by Walter Henry Nelson, David McKay Co., Inc., NY 1969; A song entitled, *An Allem Sind Die Juden Schule*, to the tune of "Carmen."; an audiotape of a broadcast by KYW radio station pertaining to an exhibit of needlework created by Hanna Silver; a post war memoir written by Hanna Silver at an unspecified time.

³Hanna Silver was born February 14, 1910.

HS: And they were taken about five months after the end of the war. But these pictures are exactly the way they looked at the end of the war. Number one, two, and three is a picture of Spittelmarkt, a center city important traffic point. There was a subway station, and it was the end of Leipziger Strasse, a main artery lined with major department stores like Wertheim, Herman Tietz. There were fine specialty shops, boutiques, and such.

NP: Excuse me, Hanna. Spittelmarkt...

HS: Yes?

NP: Is that the name of the area?

HS: No.

NP: No.

HS: This is the name of one place.

NP: The shopping...

HS: Like you say Greenwood Place. The name, this was called, this is a subway station...

NP: Okay.

HS: And there is a--this is here the place here. You can see this was...

NP: Yes.

HS: Called Spittelmarkt.

NP: Okay.

HS: So the trolley stopped there and it was called Spittelmarkt. The subway stopped there.

NP: And this is photo number one.

HS: Yes.

NP: Okay.

HS: Now in that area, between Spittelmarkt and Doenhofplatz were many, many offices. And the whole textile industry which was significant was located in that area.

NP: I see, okay.

HS: One, two, and three. One, two, and three.

NP: The entire area it looked like was...

HS: Was this, it's one large place...

NP: Was completely devastated.

HS: That you changed trolley cars and subway and all that. But there were, it was a lot of traffic at that point.

NP: All right, and so you would say this is immediately after the war?

HS: Yah, this is what actually happened before the war ended. These pictures and the destruction of these buildings happened on February 3rd. On that day most of the center city was destroyed, in a few hours.

NP: Did you know anybody who had businesses in this area?

HS: Yes, of course, yes.

NP: Okay.

HS: So now we come to picture four, five, six, and seven.

NP: All right.

HS: This is, I call them historic Old Berlin. The city of Berlin is 500 years old, but many original buildings--churches mostly--are much older than that. So 700 years ago was already the city of Berlin. Now here is a picture of the burned-out castle. And this is located on the river Spree. And here you see the iron work on the bridge across the river.

NP: Beautiful, beautiful.

HS: Yes.

NP: Iron work and beautiful architecture.

HS: Yeah, well, it's...

NP: I see it's still there.

HS: Yes. And there were several buildings. One was a dome, one was a castle. They were all, in one day they were all destroyed. Number five--this is here an old neighborhood, along, that is the canal, along this canal. And here you can see what the last days of the war produced. In order to keep the Russian tanks from just rolling into the city there were so-called tank traps. So, in a ridiculous way with the most primitive sources, because...

NP: They were barriers for the tanks.

HS: Barriers. They took vans, moving vans, and filled them with a few rocks and put them in the middle of the street.

NP: I see.

HS: So what the tanks, the Russian tanks did, they by-passed them and razed the houses, the buildings to the left and to the right. So it didn't deter them for more than five minutes.

NP: Were these private dwellings that I see on...

HS: All, all of it is private dwellings. Now here...

NP: That's picture number five.

HS: Yes. Now here you have number six. You see the canal I mentioned before. On both sides the old buildings, and here again you see this very beautiful wrought iron work. And here is a historic bridge in the background which I don't have a picture of.

NP: Hanna, where did these pictures come from?

HS: I took them.

NP: You took them personally.

HS: I took them, yes.

NP: I see. You went all through Berlin?

HS: No, just my...

NP: Just your immediate area.

HS: My immediate, yes.

NP: Right.

HS: There were for the longest time there was no traffic whatsoever. There was no trolley car. The subway was, and people were bombed out. They didn't know where to go. So they went down to the subway tracks and Goebbels opened the floodgates. And for months at a time, bodies were floating in the, on the tracks and the tunnels...

NP: Of the subways.

HS: Of the subways. Now here is number seven. You see one of the oldest churches, I think it's Nikolai Church, with very tall, very slender steeple. It's also com-...

NP: Spires up, yeah.

HS: Spire, yeah. And it's also completely destroyed and all the houses around there. Now not far is our neighborhood. The apartment houses are much newer. Maybe they were 30 years old, 25 years old.

NP: Is that in Louisenstadt?

HS: Yes...

NP: That's your neighborhood.

HS: Right, yeah. This is not Louisenstadt, my neighborhood, but it's adjoining. So our house was very, very solidly built and had tile floors in the hallway, stained glass in the upstairs stairways. Woodworks, banisters were all in carved woodwork. And it was, as I said before, very solid...

NP: Truly a work...

HS: With...

NP: Oh, with such, a work of art, such emphasis on detail.

HS: But it was not elegant in any way. It was just solid citizen, middle class citizen, everything. And as I said the, some people they lived there already since day one. And nobody moved. And then people, it wasn't common to move around like people now move. So people usually lived there, I would be still living there. Nobody moved. Now we come to number eight.

NP: Yes.

HS: Across the street from our apartment house was a church. It was called Louisenstadt Church. And that was about seven, I think it was 700 years old. And it had a very tall spire which disappeared. It was hit by a mine and by fire bombs and all that. And here you see in picture number nine, you look through the burned out church. And here in picture number ten you see our apartment--the windows of our apartment through the inside. This is the inside of the church. So this is the amazing thing. When you looked at the street it looked as if everything was okay. But it was only the front of the building that was standing. The insides--I'll show you in the next one--the inside, here is the bell that fell down.

NP: From the church.

HS: From the church, and was lying there on the steps.

NP: I see. So we're looking through archways actually.

HS: No, these are...

NP: Or are...

HS: The windows.

NP: The windows in the church.

HS: Yeah.

NP: Of course they...

HS: And they're blown out. Here, this is the inside of the church.

NP: And the in-...

HS: And the, all these windows were blown out so you look through the burnt out windows.

NP: Where were you living at the time? Where were you?

HS: Here, in this apartment we were living, right here.

NP: Okay, okay.

HS: Here is the church.

NP: Actually I meant...

HS: And...

NP: After it was bombed.

HS: I'll come to that a little later, yeah.

NP: We'll come to that, very good. Okay.

HS: Yeah. Now, number eleven is our apartment house. It was what you called a double house. There were, the number was 37-38. And this here, that last mark, this is our apartment. And this here is the ground floor. I have here just the ground floor.

NP: Oh I see.

HS: And what you see here, this little pile is the ashes of five stories of building--all the floors, all the furniture, the beds, the tables, the chairs. Everything was just this little pile here. And here is a little marker. This is the place where I found my mother lying here.

NP: It's so sad. Mmm. Such devastation.

HS: Yes.

NP: Hanna, what does this say here? Do you...

HS: Well it said butter. There used to be, in the next building used to be a store, a little store, a Papa/Mama store. And they sold butter. And this is still there.

NP: The sign. It said butter.

HS: Now we have number thirteen, where you see part of our building. And adjoining is the neighboring apartment house. There was nothing left whatsoever. And here is number fourteen. This is our corner. This is called Alte Jacob Street. And this is here it's Sebastian Street. It's just our street here.

NP: Alte Jacob.

HS: Yeah, it's marked there, yeah.

NP: Alte. It's all marked there.

HS: Yes, yes, yes. We come to number fifteen. And I mentioned to you before the primitive tank traps.

NP: Yes.

HS: And here you can see, here is the danger in how the tanks bypass the trap.

NP: They went around.

HS: Yeah, they went around there. Yet it took them a long time to take Berlin. It took them weeks. We used to say the biggest city of the world is Berlin. It took the Russians six weeks to go just through the suburbs. And we have here number sixteen, the remnant of a neighboring street. And it shows you here the total destruction. So where there was a street there were holes and where there were houses they were just pieces of, chunks of houses. And the same is here, number seventeen, and number eighteen. So there is practically nothing left, neither houses nor street.

NP: And there was, it was winter.

HS: Yes.

NP: There was snow on the ground.

HS: Well it happened on February 3rd, on that one day. Now here, this is six months later. Here is a picture of a GI taking pictures of all this devastation.

NP: I see. He's here with his camera.

HS: Yes. Now here, this is number twenty. This picture was taken in November of '45 after we had already a quadripartite government, that is, Berlin was divided into four sectors--United States, Russia, France, and Great Britain. And each sector had a separate government but together they were united and had their monthly meetings.

NP: I see.

HS: And...

NP: Do I see the word Eisenhower?

HS: Yes, Eisenhower was in charge of that, and I met all his GIs, his honor guard. And they, well, I'll come to that later. They asked me to become the photographer for the American Red Cross. With...

NP: Is that so?

HS: Yeah, and the 82nd Airborne was there, the first ones to come. And I worked there as long as they were there. Now I have...

NP: That was quite a job you had. Wow.

HS: I was a very...

NP: A good photographer.

HS: No, but I spoke English so well everybody was so happy that they could talk to me. And I made friends with some of them. I still am in touch.

NP: Where did you learn English?

HS: In school.

NP: You were taught English?

HS: Yeah. Now here is a picture of myself, which was taken in the darkest days, when it got really bad.

NP: During the war, Hanna?

HS: That was during the war.

NP: You were so stylish and...

HS: No I was, this is a...

NP: Oh.

HS: A beret and after the war--I have a picture here--after the war I wore a beret that I made from an old half-burned plush of a sofa.

NP: You made the beret?

HS: And it, beret, and everybody...

NP: From the fabric on the sofa!

HS: Yeah, and everybody in the building who wanted to have a red beret got the beret from the plush of the sofa.

NP: You were wonderful with a needle and thread at that time, too.

HS: I was born with a needle and thread.

NP: Oh! Hanna, where were you living at the time that this was taken--summer of 1944--in the building?

HS: Well, I, let me say here I want, I went to the *Victoria Lyceum*, which is the equivalent for girls what a *Gymnasium* is for boys. And I got a very fine education. I spoke German, English and French fluently, conversation, grammar and everything. However, my cousins, who all were younger than I were, went to school under Hitler and had to stop schooling at 14. They were not permitted to go any longer to any school...

NP: As Jewi-...

HS: Young? 14, yeah.

NP: As Jewish children...

HS: Yeah.

NP: Were prohibited.

HS: Yeah. And then I wanted to mention, on February 3rd came the...

NP: 1945.

HS: Then, right, 1945, the biggest air raid. I had left for work and this, because our office was burned out a few months earlier, completely destroyed, so we had to go to a suburb where our warehouse was. And so I wanted to take the day off and I wasn't given permission so I had to go to work. And my mother stayed home. So here I have an eye-witness report. I'll give you this.

NP: All right.

HS: This is from a book written by Nelson. And...

NP: This is an account that was in a book...

HS: Yeah.

NP: By this, what is his first name?

HS: Nelson. I'll give it to you here.

NP: Okay.

HS: And the report said that they heard screams for help from a woman inside the burning window. She was aflame. They found her later on the pavement, naked with clothes burned, a shriveled, black corpse. The policemen later, this report says, wrote down, *batch* of seven. They said that about 40,000 people lost their lives on that one day but there is no exact number possible because so many old people, especially they sat in their basements and didn't want to leave even when they were nudged by others. They said, "Where shall we go?" Because there was no place to go. And the Nazis were afraid of epidemics and they sealed entire blocks off. And only years and years later when they wanted to reconstruct or when they wanted to build there or dig up ground they found many, many basements with people still sitting intact on their chairs the way they were.

NP: And this bombing was done by...

HS: By the Allied. By day it was the Americans, by night the British. I think it was like that. Now between February 3rd, and the end of the war, which was May 8th, 1945, I was bombed out several more times and I had a collection of keys without doors to open. Now the reason that I took a place, a furnished room, because I didn't want to give up the right to a place of my own. If you did not, then you never had, were entitled to rent anything. So I just maintained it. So when I come to the new house and look, I think, *Gee, that was a house? I see it isn't there anymore.* So I ended up with a key and no more house. Of course there were from then on day and night raids. And every time a certain amount of houses were destroyed. So...

NP: I see.

HS: Then what we saw, the last, especially the last weeks, "traitors" (in quotation marks) were strung up on lamp posts and were dangling there. And when you walked you had to watch out that you didn't run into a dangling corpse. Because this was a warning to everybody, "Do not open your mouth," and they called it defeatism. "Do not say anything bad or you will hang up there too," which shuts up people pretty good.

NP: They were supposed to be an example.

HS: Yes, yes. [tape off then on]

NP: Yes, Hanna, we continue with picture number...

HS: Twenty-two...

NP: Twenty-two.

HS: Which was taken in November, 1945...

NP: Yes.

HS: At the American Red Cross in Berlin. And here I met hundreds and hundreds of GIs who were very happy to be able to talk English to me and...

NP: I'll bet.

HS: I became good friends with many of them. And this picture was taken in the American Red Cross.

NP: Oh this is beautiful. This is the one where I say you look like Celeste Holmes.

HS: I don't know.

NP: Blonde and lovely, and blue eyes.

HS: And then I...

NP: And lithe.

HS: Have picture number twenty-three, which was taken at the British Red Cross, on top of the radio tower in Berlin where I, upon request I started another photo studio.

NP: You had a studio?

HS: Well I, they invited me to make a photo studio. And there was no room so they took a piece of hallway and overnight transformed it into a photo studio. And we took thousands of pictures of GIs and they sent them home to grandparents and parents and girlfriends and all. So we were very, very busy. I worked about...

NP: And the "we" that you're describing, you worked for...

HS: I worked, we were individual...

NP: Photographers?

HS: No, I just was...

NP: Oh.

HS: The only one hired.

NP: For the Red Cross.

HS: The Red Cross. And I...

NP: For the American Red Cross.

HS: And we ran the business with taking pictures and ordering pictures and it was a whole production.

NP: Okay, so the pictures that you took in the beginning were of the devastation of the war. You took...

HS: Well this was one thing and then this was a bread and butter issue.

NP: Right.

HS: Because there was nothing to eat. And when you worked for the American [Red] Cross you were entitled to all the donuts you could eat. And after a while you couldn't, didn't like the sight of donuts anymore. But it was, and you were not permitted to take any out. Some people lost their job for taking out a couple of donuts--their own donuts--for their children. So I smuggled out every night two donuts which I gave to my cousin and my aunt and this helped them to survive. Because they were made in a factory in the building and they produced 150,000 donuts per day...

NP: Oh my!

HS: Which were delivered to all the Red Cross clubs all over. So we could eat all we wanted.

NP: Wow. In those times it meant a lot, yes.

HS: People stood in the street and sniffed the smell of Crisco. They were baked in Crisco. And they were good.

NP: I'll bet.

HS: Yes.

NP: After doing without for so long.

HS: Yes. And the only food we got were beans, bean soup. I never did like beans so the only food was beans. Because the American MP who was to guard the building, in cahoots with some German kitchen workers, sold the food on the black market. And we got only the beans. But it was better than nothing. It helped us to survive. I still don't like beans.

NP: I don't blame you.

HS: So here is another...

NP: Oh yes, here...

HS: Twenty-three. This is also from that...

NP: This is number twenty-three.

HS: Yes.

NP: After the war in 1945 then.

HS: Yeah.

NP: You continued to be a photographer for the American Red Cross.

HS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: And the...

HS: Then here is number twenty-four.

NP: Beautiful, beautiful pictures. Did you have a dog?

HS: Yes. We had a dog.

NP: Here's a beautiful photo of yourself, number twenty-four, after the war.

HS: Yes, yes.

NP: And this was your own dog.

HS: Yes. And I lived with my aunt who didn't want dogs. This was my first problem. But I took him to work and the MP agreed to have the dog in. And here is a picture--I hope I get a copy for you--these are the survivors. These are an uncle and three, one, two uncles, and three aunts and two cousins who survived in England.

NP: When did they leave Berlin?

HS: '38.

NP: In 1938.

HS: Yes, and these three cousins joined the British Army. He was an officer. He was a sergeant. And the third cousin was killed in Dunkirk. He was, he volunteered to be a parachuter. He was killed in Dunkirk.

NP: Did some, so some of the family stayed behind and some went to England.

HS: Yeah. And one aunt was taken to Theresienstadt and see, she survived, because I had promised her she will survive and her daughter will get married, and she will

have grandchildren and great grandchildren. Believe it or not, she came back from Theresienstadt because she was in a hospital with a broken arm so she wasn't shot.

NP: Oh that saved her.

HS: So she survived, and she came back. Her daughter got married, and has a son. And he got married to a British girl and they have two children. So she said, "Always believe Hanna. She knew it. She kept me going. Her words were in my ear. I held out because she had told me. And she was so right." So...

NP: You were an inspiration to her.

HS: Well that's right.

NP: Hanna, at this time, when your aunt was in Theresienstadt, where were you?

HS: I was still in Berlin.

NP: Living in your same house.

HS: In the same house, with the same neighbors.

NP: All through the war?

HS: All through the war.

NP: Oh my.

HS: And here is an old picture. This is I think from 1906. This is my mother...

NP: Beautiful!

HS: Here's two sisters.

NP: Oh!

HS: She was killed in Riga.

NP: In...

HS: And she...

NP: Was she in a camp?

HS: Yes. She was deported from Berlin in '42. I went with her to the, to the place where they, it was a burned-out synagogue where they assembled. And she was there for a week. And somebody went back and forth with little notes and little whatever she asked for, and some food. He went back and forth from us to her. And then they took them away. They assembled them until they had enough. And then we learned from this person that she was on the transport to Riga. And she is also mentioned in our *Gedenkbuch* [Memorial Book].

NP: I see.

HS: So this one is this aunt who immigrated to England. And this one was killed. And my mother was killed in an air raid.

NP: Beautiful women, just beautiful. And these...

HS: So this is number twenty-five.

NP: Number twenty-five. And these two gentlemen in number twen-...

HS: Well this is her husband.

NP: I see.

HS: And this is her husband.

NP: Did he survive?
HS: He died of TB after World War I.
NP: Oh, oh, oh. Then you did not ha-, after this cousin...
HS: This is my...
NP: That'd be the...
HS: Aunt.
NP: Aunt, your mother's sister.
HS: We were very close.
NP: When your...
HS: Very close, yeah. Because--oh, I didn't bring the picture--she had a daughter exactly my age. And we grew up like twins. We were very, and she was killed in Auschwitz. So I have in my papers the last note where she says, "Tonight I will go away." They never said, "I will be deported." "I will go away." And she sent us a postal card with the last...
NP: It's so heartbreaking.
HS: And she is also in the *Gedenkbuch*.
NP: It's heartbreaking. Hanna, did you feel, did you...
HS: So in number twenty-five...
NP: Number twenty-five.
HS: Yes.
NP: When this aunt was deported and her daughter and so forth, did you feel that you had to go into hiding at that time?
HS: No, because-

Tape one, side two:

NP: This is side B, Natalie Packel and Hanna Silver talking about her war time experiences with many pictures before us showing Hanna's family and showing the devastation of the war--bombed out buildings and so forth. And I was just asking Hanna if after her dear aunt and cousin were deported to the camps did she feel that she had to go into hiding?

HS: And the answer was no, because people who were hiding didn't know where to hide. And I was in touch with three ladies who were in hiding. And one of them was the, I knew only one of them, the others I didn't know. And I, that's another story, she came from a very, very rich family, actually the family of my boss. And I urged her to take some money and put it aside because Jews were permitted only to take out 300 *Mark* from their accounts. And she says, "I don't need money. I know what I'll do. I have my *Veronal*," which is the sleeping pills. And most...

NP: How do you spell that?

HS: *Veronal*. Most people who intended to commit suicide had their *Veronal*. Ten, fifteen pills would do, and I had gone to our family doctor and had told him about the possibility of deportation. And people were deported separately, not together. And he gave me a prescription for ten *Veronal*, which cost about \$1, to have it. And he, I remember when I told him, he sat for about five minutes, because his career, his life, his family, everything was on the line, and after that he said, "Yes. I will do it. Ten will do." And he gave me the prescription. And I got for \$1 them, and I made a little side pocket in my mother's dresses to put the pills in in case ever it comes to a surprise pick-up, that she could take it. And I had promised her to give them to her mixed with raspberry syrup that they were not too bitter. Fortunately I didn't have to do it. But I know somebody who did it with his father and he never can sleep since, because he said he might have survived in the camp. These were all problems you had to solve with just yourself. You couldn't ask anybody. "Is it right to kill my mother? Is it not right?" What is better? So for my mother it was in a way the best that she did not have to be separated from me, did not have to be deported, didn't have to live in misery and lose all her dignity. Of course she would have chosen what she had, but it is beyond description. So you can imagine I don't like fire places.

NP: No.

HS: And the worst of it was that there is no place where I can go, because they just scooped up the dead people and threw them in mass graves. I don't even know in which mass grave she is. Somewhere. So I mentioned to you about the people in our building, though I don't think anybody was especially politically active. But most of them belonged politically, to the center. When they was to vote they would vote Social Democrat or maybe the Zentrum, which was Catholic. We had very few Catholics, hardly any. Most people were Lutheran.

NP: I see.

HS: And there were some Catholics, about the same few as Jews. It was in percentage almost--from what I know; it's not an official figure. And in the back of our building, in the back wing, were the offices of the Social Democratic Party. And most of the people were either registered Social Democrats or leaned towards it. So there was not one Nazi. And when Hitler came to power you see the big front, we have. And there was not one Swastika flag out. So they rang the doorbells and said, "How is it you don't have flags hanging out?" So we said, "Well, we don't have one." So they said, "We'll bring you one." And then they wanted to hang one from the roof and we said, "Oh, this would collapse," and all. So we never had one, and to stand out, two big buildings without a single flag, why when you came to a young community with young people, from each window was a flag with a Swastika on it.

NP: Swastika.

HS: And this, in this building where we lived and in this whole neighborhood, people knew everybody and liked everybody. When I was a child they called me, "Our little sunshine." So some knew; some didn't. We didn't ask people what they knew. But they told me after the war that they had regularly questionnaires, "Are there any Jews left?" And they said, "No, no, no." So, whether it was ignorance or purpose, we never knew, and they didn't tell us. And we thought nobody knows. And we didn't feel safe. But we did not feel as insecure if you go into a neighborhood where you have no idea and also, where could you go? Nobody would have taken you. An old woman and a young girl? Who would take us? And I have now learned enough here with my work with the Archive the difficulty people had. It wasn't only the shelter; you had to eat too.

NP: Yes.

HS: And the danger from, and there was just no question. You didn't know where to go. So you stayed. And as it proved it was not a good thing to do but it wasn't the worst kind.

NP: Right.

HS: Now, most people were, as I said, middle of the road people. There was no extreme. There were no Communists and there were no Nazis. So, I would say most people were apolitical. They were not anti-Semites. They were not pro and anti. They lived their quiet lives and...

NP: Feel as comfortable with each other.

HS: And I felt comfortable and my mother did. The basic thing was that we felt loved by everybody. Rightly or wrongly, but it proved to be the true thing because they really did like us. And nobody ever opened his mouth to anybody or to the authorities. And we did. Number one is we had no idea what to do and where to go. At that point, in the beginning we thought, *How long can he last? He can't last so we'll survive him.*

NP: Hitler, yes.

HS: Yes. And by the time it was bad you had no way of going out. And we didn't know where to go so you stay. So it was not a matter of choice. There was no way of choosing what to do. So the simple thing was to hang on.

NP: And since you had a feeling of acceptance...

HS: Very much so.

NP: Of...

HS: Yes.

NP: From the people that you lived with all these years.

HS: Well everybody, yes, yes.

NP: Yes, this seemed a comfortable thing to do.

HS: Yes. And as they're not dead yet I'm still in touch with everybody. So there was such an outpouring of, oh, I don't want to go into the details...

NP: No, that's okay, we...

HS: But during...

NP: Have time.

HS: During an air raid the mothers with children went to bunkers. These were very, very heavily secured, with tons of cement. Well you know what bunkers look like. And that's where all mothers with children went every night and slept there, and never heard a sound. Now we went into the regular basement, which was not even totally underground. So part of it was above ground, so you heard the bombs. And the worst noise was when the windows were broken and they fell down. This was a tremendous--so, sometimes you had problems and you cannot run upstairs. And you sat there. And the way people were nice and helped to cover you up that you could do what you couldn't do upstairs. So there was really so much affection and all that. So we had no way of going anywhere and we felt not too secure but, best possible. So we stayed.

NP: To be surrounded by those that you knew and...

HS: We knew and they knew us, we felt that they really cared for us, and wouldn't, as they didn't, give us away. And...

NP: That is very fortunate...

HS: They were...

NP: To be loved.

HS: One was a house warden. One was a block warden. And they told us about the questionnaires and that they always said, "No, no, no." There was another Jewish family and of course nobody knew what happened. One day you said, "Gee, I haven't seen them for so long." You didn't know what happened to them. So they protected them too. And yet one day they were gone.

NP: Hanna, one day we were talking and you had said, "You think the Nazis were bad, when the Russians came the hell began all over again."

HS: Well, entirely different, in different ways. With the Nazi, of course I'm not talking about myself. I talk about average people. If you kept your mouth shut, you never

said anything, you never did anything, you didn't have to worry. And the Russians had the attitude if you killed a thousand, one of them is for sure a guilty one. Well the "liberation" was something that nobody could have imagined. Looking at the other side you say, "Look what the Germans did to the Russians." Also, the Russian soldier never got paid, and never got furloughs. They were told, "Wait until you get to Berlin. That's your prize. And then Berlin is yours." So they were entitled, and it was Goebbels who declared the total war. However, we didn't declare the total war. And we, not I fortunately, but there were so many suicides you cannot imagine, immediately after the liberation, because, and the rapes. It wasn't that one soldier raped one person. Twenty or thirty raped a girl until she was...

NP: These were the Russians soldiers.

HS: Dead. Yes. And there were excesses. And then when the Americans came they looked like, they smelled from soap and water and clean and their uniforms pressed and all that. And they never touched a girl. The girls were after them. They had to run from the girls. But the contrast was so--but after the, immediately after the liberation there came an order. The Russians ordered, "Remove the rubble or else you get shot." So people formed lines and hungry and all did this hard work removing the rubble from the street by the, with their bare hands. They ordered us to hang out American flags. I was lucky to be in the American sector. And I had to make up a flag. And I didn't know exactly what an American flag looked like. I knew the stars. I didn't know how many. And I knew there were stripes. I didn't know how many. And we didn't have all the coloring. But with a torn sheet and something else I produced an American flag. And when they came in we waved and they accepted that.

NP: Incredible, what one can do, with so little to do so much.

HS: Well this was something they had, a lot of experience. Because when I was a little girl it started out where there was inflation. And our after school activity, was that mother gave us a little money and a shopping bag and we had to stand in line for potatoes and for bread. And many times just in front of us it was sold out, so you go home without potatoes and bread and money was only printed on one side. It didn't pay to print them, so we used the clean side on the back for scratch paper in school. So we lived through inflation. And after the inflation nobody but nobody, at least in our circles, had any money. So you were not poor. Money just did not exist for us.

NP: What year was this about?

HS: Well the inflation was 1922 I think when it was over. So we were in school and we didn't have, nobody had anything. Originally the school, this *Lyceum*, had to be paid for. But after the war nobody had money so we, they made it for free. So I got my beautiful education for free. In the beginning it was \$10 a month. So then nobody had money. But when you all are in the same boat, nobody had money, there wasn't one who was rich and one, nobody, we didn't know money. We didn't know pocket money. We didn't know allowance. And you learned to do things, I learned, to do things from nothing, with a little paper, with a little aluminum foil and toys or whatever. So you learned to make

something from nothing. And even today it comes in very handy. Now here is such an abundance of everything. People don't dream to make a Halloween costume or to do anything. Or curtains, you buy. I make all my curtains. I make for dozens of children Halloween costumes and all that. I made so many things, because everything is here and you can do it.

NP: Where do you get all this motivation and strength and I guess...?

HS: I don't know. Either you have it or you don't have it. I don't think you can learn it. But some people envy me for all the rough times and say, "You wouldn't be the person, if you wouldn't have lived through that," and I assure everybody I would be a very nice person if I would not have had to live through it. But the...

NP: But necessity was the mother of invention I guess.

HS: Yeah, but the good part is that while you are in it, you don't think. You just put one foot in front of the other. You don't think of consequences or what; for instance the day with the fire with my mother I looked for her and couldn't find her. I didn't, I ran through the flames and all that and I still had no idea. And people, I saw ran away from me. Nobody wanted to tell me what really had happened. So I sat down on the stoop and people said, "Get going! Get going! You're gonna die!" Because they were right, later on things collapsed and I didn't care. I was not suicidal; I just didn't care. I thought something is gonna get me, either Hitler or the bombs or something else. And then after that came a lot of hunger...

NP: Well...

HS: After the war.

NP: Could you connect at that point with any family? Did you know where anybody was?

HS: No, there was no mail whatsoever. Until the war you could, here I want to tell you how things happened. The family was in England. And we had devised, my cousin and I, when we write, what things, certain things means. So when we said, "Very, we are doing very well," that meant we are not doing well. When we said, "We are doing well," we were doing well. And then of course everybody wrote about grandfather, which was Hitler. And we wished God would take him. He has lived long enough. So we said, and so then we had to go to the post office with the letter open. And you had to show your passport if you had one. And they noted the date in your passport. And they accepted your letter, stamped and opened. Then they gave it to a censor. They censored, and when you received a letter it was properly sealed and no sign that anybody had read it.

NP: Incredible. Incredibly efficient.

HS: Yes.

NP: This is...

HS: I had a friend, she worked for the censor. She was as anti-Hitler as can be, and they let, they had to mark off everything. And they let go through a lot of it. So there

was a little form of resistance which helped people by receiving the message that was meant...

NP: You developed your own code...

HS: Meant to, yeah.

NP: Within the family.

HS: Yeah.

NP: Hanna did synagogue life play any part of your childhood?

HS: No, no.

NP: With the family?

HS: And as I said, we were not members of a synagogue, which helped us, because my aunt, my two aunts were and the first thing they filled out the yellow questionnaires. And they just took the questionnaires and picked them out from that. We were not. And that helped a lot, because they used the membership lists for the deportations.

NP: Sure, yes.

HS: Double checking with the police, so we had also good relations to the police. Now you have never in your life anything to do with the police. We had to write a; when you wanted to go away for more than three days you had to sign where you go and where you, how long you stay and then when you come back you sign in again. And there were forms. And so the guy in the police knew you for years when you come and go and how was your vacation? I, so then finally my mother nudged me, "We have to go and get finger printed. They said the Jews have to." I said, "I have not registered. I don't do it." And, and the aunts, the two aunts, they nudged her so she forced me to go with her to the police. And the guy said, "What do you want? I know from nothing. Go back." So, me being smart, I go back. And she kept on nudging so we go back. And then he said, "I told you to go home. What do you want? Don't bother me!" And so I said, "Mother, [unclear]" He said, "Okay, she's foolish enough. Here I give you a card. I make you, the young girl, the head of the household with a nice clean card. And on the back let her sign her name. Nobody looks at the back." And she got that big J on there. So I was a clean card. And when they came to find J's, my card wasn't there. Nobody looked there. So this guy at the police, there were so many little things and I don't even know all of them, that contributed. So I can not tell which one was the most significant and which one was not. The end is that I am sitting here...

NP: Yes, thank goodness.

HS: And I...

NP: Thank goodness.

HS: I do not know why. That's why I'm always very, very hesitant. I don't want to say anything wrong and I do not know the whole truth. So somebody in the beginning when I was here, "Oh!"

NP: What do you mean by truth?

HS: No, I don't know who did what and who didn't.

NP: Oh, that affected your safety.

HS: And some people...

NP: That, or removed the "J" or...

HS: Well, all together...

NP: The card...

HS: Saved me. All together. But it wasn't any one person doing any one thing. It was probably a combination. And that's why I'm hesitant. I don't want to make up a story and I do not know what really happened in so and so many places. The fact is that I am sitting here.

NP: And we are very fortunate.

HS: And so somebody said to me when, in the early days, "So nothing happened to you. How come? My relatives are all dead. How come you sit here?" I said, "Forgive me. I don't know why." And when you start, some people say they don't believe it because, and have, some have very foolish reasons. They say how all Jews were deported in '33. I say, "Don't you know? So tell about '37." Things went gradually, very gradually. And you could somehow go on if you lived the way I--then another thing, I had a job working for a Jewish firm. And I was just the only employee in the office. And we had a warehouse with workers. And I was safe there. And the man lived till '38. So, he died in '38 but till '38 I was working for a Jewish man. And if you had under ten you didn't have to belong to the Nazi Labor front. So...

NP: Under ten?

HS: Under ten employees.

NP: Employees.

HS: Yes. So that was another thing. And then he died and this was taken over and I was hired by one of the biggest steel wholesale places. And the director was as anti-Nazi as you can imagine. So they wanted to hire me because I was an expert through my fifteen years working for this. And the men who knew about metal and sheet metal, they were all in the war. So they hired me.

NP: That was the firm that you worked for.

HS: Yes, yes.

NP: They manufactured sheet metal?

HS: No they didn't manufacture but they bought from, they had their own steel mills and they got big government orders.

NP: Contracts.

HS: And so I was able to sidetrack and put them in steel mills that they are overloaded and they had to give new numbers and all that. I wouldn't call it sabotage but it delayed things. So, after the director hired me he said, "All right. Everything is settled. Fourteen salaries and every, this, and..." And I wanted to have Saturdays off. He said, "Well let's agree, if we, whenever possible you'll take the Saturday off." So then he said, "Well there is just one," I call the chief of personnel, you have to sign the Aryan proof or

whatever. And I said, "I'm sorry. I cannot provide that." He looked at me and I looked like you see, and he said, "Why not?" Very, well, I said, "I just don't have Aryans in my background." He says, "Oh I don't believe in that anyhow. You're hired." And he calls the chief in. He says, "I hired her and she does not bring the proof of Aryan whatever." And I was hired and it was more than two years which were the most important, the most dangerous years. But I had bet with myself, I put all on one card, if I tell him--and I knew he was not a Nazi--if I tell him the truth and he hires me, I am safe. Because a firm that had, and they had many employees, a firm that had fired all Jews in '33 already, if somebody in '42 hires you, you're safe. And I thought, if I lose out, I'll see. But if I am taken, I'm safe. And that's what happened. But you have to with...

NP: So all the while you were almost one step ahead...

HS: So again...

NP: Thinking and planning.

HS: If you had a job, you didn't have to go to the labor department and ask for a job and they would have sent you out on the roads to do or God knows where. So I was safe here. Again, it was a combination of things. So, and a director hires me in '42 after they fired all Jews in '33, who would believe it?

NP: Incredible.

HS: So this is why so many people say...

NP: It's incredible.

HS: "I don't believe," I had a friend she says, "I trust you with everything, but I just don't believe you." So, people cannot because they have all their preconceived idea and this doesn't fit in any mold. So that's why I was always hesitant to talk. So one, our dear friend took a tape with me and she writes, "A postman saved her life," which is absolutely wrong. It wasn't a postman. It was a policeman. That was the number one most significant. But the neighbors were second significant. And the job was important because the moment you had a job you had a right for a living space and for food stamps and rations.

NP: So all...

HS: And you got your money.

NP: All of these factors...

HS: Yeah.

NP: The in with the police and...

HS: Yeah.

NP: You know, living with these people who...

HS: And these were all...

NP: Were accepting.

HS: Tiny little things. They didn't take more than five minutes.

NP: But it all added up.

HS: And you didn't, yes, but you never knew what added with what.

NP: Of course.

HS: The, you just see the end result. And of course if I would have not gone to work I would have been where my mother is today, in some mass grave. And we all had a little suitcase, which you never left behind. You took it wherever you went, because many times all that somebody had left was that little suitcase.

NP: Yeah.

HS: So when people went to the basement in air raids, they had the suitcase and the knapsack and whatever else. And many times they ended up with just that. So I had always; we had to go to work and the trolley cars were overfilled with people and all. So that day my mother said, "Oh today you work only half a day; leave it home. I'll take it down." She did take it down, and I didn't even have this one towel, a cake of soap, and toothpaste, a toothbrush. I didn't even have that. So I had nothing. So other people kept on lugging everything to the basement. And I was the perfect lady. I had nothing but a little clutch bag, with nothing but a comb and a handkerchief in there. That's all I brought. And this went on for weeks and weeks. So I saved a lot of *schlepping*. And then, you know when, I never minded because I felt without burden. But then when the war was over and people, those who were saved, and they pulled out and had everything; so a friend shared her coat with me. And I had to give it back to her when she needed it. But she let me have it. And somebody gave me a gift, a plate with a set of fork and a spoon, and the knife and said, "Somebody has to have that." And somebody gave me a feather bed, because I was very shaky. I shook for weeks, I was shaking.

NP: The shock of...

HS: It must have been shock, yeah.

NP: The shock from your mother's death.

HS: Of course there was, the mother was gone and the home was gone. And every--everything you could; you don't know what nothing means. Nothing means absolutely nothing. What you had on you and nothing else. And I got coupons, a bunch of coupons. There was no store where you could get anything.

NP: Hanna you mentioned when the GIs came in they smelled of soap and they had their nicely pressed uniforms.

HS: Yes.

NP: Do I understand that you married one of these wonderful GIs?

HS: Well he bought a, I didn't meet him in the Red Cross. He was a First Lieutenant with Military Government in the manpower division. And he was of course, all of the GIs were nineteen, twenty. And he was thirty. And he had a, he was requested to come to Berlin as [tape off then on]

NP: This is the end of the conversation between Hanna Silver and Natalie Packel on Tuesday, April 25, 1995.

Tape two, side one:

NP: Today, this is Natalie Packel, continuing the interview with Hanna Silver, on Tuesday May the 9th, 1995, at Gratz College. Hanna, where did we leave off?

HS: Well, after I had shown you the photographs of the total destruction of my neighborhood, which happened to be the center of Berlin, you asked me, "Where did you live? How did you live? I don't see any buildings standing." So, I want to answer this question. Immediately after the air raid people could not go back to their homes or basements. It took days for the houses to burn out completely, and then many collapsed; at least all the floors and roofs collapsed. The basements had been storage areas. Many people had stored coal in there, so this caught fire. And the basements were smoldering for weeks. There was no water. There was no electricity. So, what people did, they went to a nearby subway station. Being underground it provided at least a roof, if nothing else. So many thousands were sitting on the platforms with their suitcase--the one I described before, the one they always...

NP: The one that you constantly had packed in case you had...

HS: You had with you wherever you went, because it might be that this was all you have. And now it turned out that this suitcase had become the only possession that people had. The subway didn't run for months and months.

NP: Excuse me, Hanna, but you did not have a suitcase, did you?

HS: No, I...

NP: Because you...

HS: Had only a tiny little clutch pocketbook.

NP: As you returned home from work...

HS: Yeah.

NP: You found the building...

HS: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Had been burned.

HS: I had nothing and my mother had taken my little tote bag down to the basement and take it up. And as you read in that one page I gave you from the Nelson book...

NP: Yes.

HS: It describes how she jumped from the window. So she certainly didn't take anything with her. So people were sitting by the thousands on the platforms of the subways. And I learned later that Goebbels had given orders to flood the subways. I don't know when it was done but there were people floating in the water. Because next to the subway was a canal, or maybe it was a river. And when they opened the flood gates, and people were floating--months later there were still people floating in there. So I do not know exactly what happened because I was not there. So I just kept on walking. And so when I realized that there was no transportation possible--the streets were full of craters from the

holes, tank obstacles and fallen debris--so you just kept on walking and walking. And everything was so far away. So I walked to my Aunt Resl, which was my mother's sister. She had moved with her family years ago to a new section at the edge of Berlin, a young community, very young families. And after 1933 as I mentioned to you before, it turned out that many of the young ones were at least Nazi sympathizers if not active Nazis. From each window, whenever there was a celebration, hung a Nazi flag, in contrast to our building. There was not a single one. And one day, a huge *Magen David*...

NP: *Magen David* being the Jewish Star.

HS: The Jewish Star, was painted on the sidewalk, with red paint, real big. And my uncle got a letter which said that they could not expect Germans to live under one roof with the Jewish and would they please move out. And so they found an apartment in the western part of the city, a not-so-new house, but very solid, and mostly middle-aged neighbors who were not active Nazis at all and where their sympathies were lying we don't know. You couldn't look into people's minds. So in 1942 the husband died. Oh, I forgot to mention that her husband had not been Jewish, and there were two children, my two cousins. So her husband died which made her a full Jewess. And they, actually it was not a bomb that hit the house. It was a motor that fell from an airplane, an American plane...

NP: American...

HS: Was shot down and the engine went through the whole house and destroyed all the apartments there. So my aunt with my cousins are standing in the street and didn't know what to do, where to go. So a middle-aged couple came over to her and then said, "Oh, Mrs. Wagner, you know we have our den; we really don't need it so badly. If you would want to stay with us until you find something else you would be welcome."

NP: Wagner was the name?

HS: Yeah.

NP: W-A-G-N-E-R.

HS: -N-E-R. So, and a Mr. Seidel, S-E-I-D-E-L, he offered them to move in. And they stayed just a couple of weeks or so. But at the moment the difference between standing in the street--and it was November--and having one room, it was a big difference.

NP: It was a blessing, yes.

HS: Yes. So then a woman, we thought of her as a Nazi woman, she was a warden who was in charge of distributing ration cards. She had been bringing the ration cards to my aunt's family--full, regular, normal ration cards, though she knew my aunt was Jewish. She had them been bringing. So now it was only my aunt and my cousins, and she came to her and said, "I have an apartment across the street which takes you out of my district. I could get you that apartment. It is damaged. The woman who owns it is a teacher and is in Bavaria somewhere and she doesn't come back. It doesn't have walls on the inside. They're blown out from the bombs. But I could give it to you." And of course my aunt grabbed it. It was shelter and it had a front door. So she had an apartment and the living room and the bedroom and the kitchen was all one large room, but still it was a place.

NP: And when you went to look for her, Hanna, was she there?

HS: Yes.

NP: Well then you did find her.

HS: Yeah. Well that's where I was heading. It took an hour, an hour-and-a-half.

It was...

NP: On foot?

HS: Well there was nothing else. Feet was all you had. And...

NP: And did you have shoes that...

HS: Well they were all one big hole because from walking in the hot ashes and embers. They, the soles were eaten up and...

NP: It burnt them...

HS: Of course the...

NP: Bottom of your soles.

HS: Yeah, yeah, but they were uppers. And there was little there. So to finish the story of my aunt, this woman, whom everybody thought she was a good Nazi, kept on bringing my aunt and cousin full, regular ration cards, without the "J," and that meant she could shop at all times, that she got vegetables and things that--some meat, that the Jews were denied. So this woman of whom everyone thought she was such a good Nazi, kept on keeping my aunt and my cousin and gave them shelter and gave them food. So I set out towards my aunt. And after I got there she wouldn't let me go. She says, "You stay here. I am now your mother and I'll take care of you." So, together--this was now February--until May, we lived together and we held together and we gave each other strength and hope and all. We did not know how close the end really was. And when it was there we didn't know what to make of it. So, this was the story of the friendly Nazi woman who kept them alive.

NP: Her name was?

HS: Ludtke, L-U-D-T-K-E, Mrs. Ludtke. So I moved in with my aunt and cousins. So the nights we spent in the basement, in her basement, and the days I was at work. And then came the...

NP: You were still able to go to work? The work continued...

HS: Well...

NP: The manufacturing was...

HS: The moment you wouldn't go to work you would not get paid and you would not get ration cards and you wouldn't, so everybody tried. We didn't do much work because every little while there was an air raid. But you had to show up and it was quite a distance so you came late and you left early, and you didn't do much, but you could say you were working. And I was glad that I had a job to go to. So then came April 20, which happened to be the Führer's...

NP: 19-...

HS: The Führer's...

NP: '4-...

HS: '45.

NP: Five.

HS: Which happened to be the Führer's birthday. And on that day there were always big parades and a lot to do. And the flags were out. And here, this was the day where all normal life the way we knew it, stopped. Everybody stayed where he happened to be--mostly in their basements. But mothers with children were entitled to go to a fortified bunker. They went there every night and they went home in the morning. So they didn't even hear bombs or--so we go to the basement. Nobody went anywhere. You couldn't go to work and there were no shops open. It was just nothing. This nothingness is impossible to describe to somebody who has no idea.

NP: Total devastation.

HS: So we sat, and we waited. The light bombing that came from the Russians had stopped before we had the heavy bombing which was by the Allies, the American and the English, one by night and one by day. And the Russians had small bombs and they didn't do much damage. But they were falling. You heard it. And so all of a sudden the bombing stopped and it was quiet, so quiet, not one sound, nothing. It was eerie after all the noise that was before. You heard in the distance a few shots, but just here and there. And you sit and you wait, and you don't know for what you wait. Nobody had ever experienced to be a civilian in the middle of a war. And waiting for liberation or revenge or for what? So I was so numb. I couldn't think because I didn't know what to think. So you sit and wait and don't know for what you wait. And nobody knew what was going on a block or two or three away. And you couldn't contact anybody. The people next door, they sent word of mouth but this was the only communication.

NP: And your food supply?

HS: Well so don't call it a supply. So a friend of mine, who worked around the corner where a school had been transformed into a hospital, and he was a salesman for Johnson and Johnson and made himself into a medic; he didn't want to go into the war so he became a medic and worked there in that hospital. He appointed himself. And he came the day before and he had brought us a small bag about a pound of rice. And this was very good. So how do you transform rice into a meal? So this friend of the family said to me, "Hanna, would you want to go with me upstairs? We have a stove where you can put things in and burn. All the other people had modern appliances, electric stove, gas stove, and this was one where you could put coal and whatever in. And I did have courage, and we went up to the second floor to the neighbor's apartment. And this old style stove was our lifesaver. So we looked for a chair.

NP: There was one.

HS: But, he said, "It is a beautiful chair, isn't it?" I said, "Yes, it is. But a bowl of rice would be even more beautiful." So he broke up the chair into small pieces and then we looked for books. And here I said, "Choose the one you like the least." So he took a

couple of books and we burned the chair with the books. And eventually the water came to a boil and we combined the boiling water with the rice and we had a meal.

NP: There still was running water?

HS: No. It wasn't running but he happened to have a tea kettle full with water standing there. And so we had, and we took it down to the basement and this neighbor and my aunt and cousin and I, we had a very nice meal. So if you ask me, "How did we live?" I just don't know. We survived. That's a fact. But how, it's hard to say. Now, we had no water. About a five minute walk away was this hospital I mentioned before and they had a very, very old-fashioned pump. You know the ones where you...

NP: With the handle and...

HS: With the handle.

NP: You push down, mmm hmm.

HS: The trouble was you had to prime it with a half a pail of water. And then you could have water for hours. So somebody had to bring a half a pail of water and then there was a long line formed and everybody got a pail of water or two. Trouble was by the time you come home half of it you had spilled already. Because to carry a heavy pail of water and walk on not-so-even surfaces--. But we did have some water and that was our lifesaver. And then, yes?

NP: Did you meet anybody else that you knew in the area, anybody from your neighborhood? Anybody?

HS: Oh no. This was [tape off then on] so far away.

NP: Okay.

HS: Well, you have to imagine, Berlin was a city with four million inhabitants. And the distances were enormous. And there was no public transportation, and there was no other transportation, at least for a while. And everything was on foot. So I don't, to this day, I don't know what happened to all my neighbors. And see, this was the situation. You lost everything where you had lived all your life, your home and your things. And then all the neighbors whom you knew all your life, they were not there. They didn't live there. And so everything that was familiar to you wasn't there anymore.

NP: No pictures, nothing.

HS: This was the worst. When my life started in '45, there was not one single picture, a baby picture or family picture, not one photograph. So, later on I found a few from other family members.

NP: Good, good.

HS: But I do not have what everyone else has, an album with the first half of your life. But you can do without everything, and this is one thing you learn. With all the things you had, you don't really need. And this comes out of it.

NP: In order to survive and to go on.

HS: Yes. So now came word from neighboring houses came through that the war was over, that Hitler was gone. So you asked yourself, *How is it when the war is over*,

from one moment to the next? First there is war and there is Hitler and there are the Russians and there are the bombs. And all of a sudden there is no more Hitler and no more war. So what is? So you sit on the chair and you wait. And you don't know for what you wait. Your enemy Hitler is gone, but that was good. And we were there, and that was good too. So my cousin pinched me and said, "Hanna, it's over and we live." And then I said to myself, "Well that in itself is good enough for me." And another thing is, we had no more air raids and our dream was to have one night of uninterrupted sleep. You don't know what a beautiful thing a night's sleep is unless you never have it. So for weeks we never had a night's sleep. So we had sleep. We had no Hitler. We were not happy yet because we didn't quite know where, what was going to be next. So keep on waiting and you don't show, because the next news from neighboring houses came, "Don't show. Don't go up. There is terribly raping going on." So we felt that there is security in numbers, which it wasn't, but we felt that way.

NP: Raping by the Russians?

HS: By the Russian soldiers, with guns, with a rifle, and with a knife. Many had the knife in their mouth while they raped. And so we didn't show up. We were sitting and kept on sitting. And nobody dared to go up to apartments because they were afraid if it's a one-on-one that we will lose out. So we survived that, too. And then is something that took away my fear. Somehow, we don't know why, was in front of the house a big red fire engine. And they didn't have sirens in those days. They had big brass bells which while they were on the way were ringing. So we heard the ringing of the bells and we didn't know there was a fire engine. So very carefully we peeked. There we see this big fire engine full with Russian soldiers, crawling all over, playing with the bells and with all the other ladders and all that. So I felt a little better and I thought, *anybody who can play with a fire engine couldn't be all bad*. So I don't want to get in too many details but again, it was good luck that there was a family who owned a store on the ground floor and had a basement of their own. And they invited me to come in and sit with them. And the man had been a Russian PW during World War I and knew a little Russian. And when two Russians came with the machine gun, walking through, he greeted them and said, "Zdravstvuyte!" [Traditional greeting, hello] Slapped his shoulder, and he sat down. So the man said, "Matka," [Mother] and so we were all...

NP: What does that mean? Their...

HS: Mother, father, sister. We were all one...

NP: And *Tovara*? *Tovarish*?

HS: *Tovarish* means "comrade".

NP: Okay. You said a word before *tovara*.

HS: *Zdravstvuyte*. That means hello.

NP: All right. We'll have to spell that out.

HS: No I cannot spell it.

NP: All right.

HS: But I learned it from him.

NP: Hello. Okay.

HS: So this man who owned the store, he introduced everybody as his blood relative: brother, father, mother, sister. So he talked to them a little bit and then they went away and they took everybody's watch. In Berlin after the war nobody had a watch, so some people had these old fashioned alarm clocks, these real big ones and they put a piece of string and they walked around with...

NP: With the alarm clock!

HS: These alarm clocks. Well, you had to know what time it is!

NP: Around their...

HS: Yeah.

NP: Neck?

HS: And they have a sense of humor too. So you had an alarm clock and you knew what time it was. So...

NP: Hanna, excuse me, if I may. Did you hear of Displaced Persons Camps at that point?

HS: No.

NP: Where people were regrouping...

HS: No, no. A Displaced Person was not for residents of the civilian residents of the city. Displaced Persons were started sometimes in concentration camps. My cousin was in the concentration camp Mauthausen.

NP: And then went to a Displaced...

HS: And they were kind of collection points where there was food delivered and other things, and where they were preparing for emigration and waiting. My cousin waited a whole year for emigration.

NP: While in a Displaced Persons Camp.

HS: Yes, yes.

NP: Okay, excuse me for interrupting.

HS: No, yeah, immediately, well first of all the Displaced Persons were people who had come from other countries and couldn't go back...

NP: Yes.

HS: Or didn't want to go back.

NP: All right.

HS: And here we talk about the civilian population of Berlin.

NP: Right, and their rehabilitation, once the Russians came. What happened next?

HS: Well, so to speak, nothing, absolutely nothing. The first thing that happened and it was the biggest event, the bakery opened. And they made bread and people stood in line for a long time. But everybody got four slices per day. And the smell of that fresh bread, you can never forget how wonderful that was. So we got our four slices. So

everybody developed a theory of his own. So somebody sat down and ate all four slices at once and said, "At least once a day I have the feeling of being satisfied." And I was the other kind. I, first of all I found out if you toasted it fills you much more than if it's mushy. And then I made little pieces. And whenever I felt like eating, I ate just a tiny little piece, so I was eating all day a little from it at a time.

NP: Were you still with your aunt...

HS: Oh yes.

NP: And your cousins at that time?

HS: Oh yes, yes. So then the rumors came in about the...

NP: The rumors.

HS: Yes, about the raping. And they didn't mind. They went to the bunkers. And then there's another story I'll need to tell you later.

NP: Hanna, did you tell me that one of your cousins, was it your cousin that was raped?

HS: Yes, yes, yes. So, I didn't believe it because I thought this was still continued Nazi propaganda. Because the Nazis said, "If the Russians come they will burn and they will rape and they will kill," and all that. Unfortunately it was not Nazi propaganda. It turned out to be true. So we had no contact with other people. Next door maybe one came over, sneaked over. But the advice given was, "Don't show." So we kept on sitting in the basement because you felt not safe but you felt somewhat safer. So you didn't know what was around the corner or at the other end of the city, whether they are, it turned out that in our neighborhood there were still a handful of Nazis, and some Russians had arrived and they were throwing hand grenades at each other. And we don't know what happened. So who wants to confront the Russian Army? So you keep sitting. And I don't know how long we sat because there was no communication from one house to the other. And there was none with the Russians. So when they saw anybody they said, "*Uri uri*." That means, *Ur* is a German word, so they said, "*Uri*." So that means, "Give me your watch."

NP: Oh.

HS: And most people did not put up a fight. They gave them. So when they came to our basement there was the only Nazi in the building he was sitting in a wheelchair. And the people put him there, because he spoke Russian. And he was not permitted to move from there. So whenever some Russians came down the steps, he said, he greeted them and, "*Zdravstvuyte tovarish*," and they talked to him. And, "How are you?" and all that. So right away they were not enemies. They were talking to somebody in their language. And this was the reason why we were left alone. So they gave him a wonderful big golden watch with a golden chain which they had taken from somebody else. And we awarded him for talking to them. So we were very lucky.

NP: Yes, indeed.

HS: And also the house was destroyed and there was a big pile of rubble in front of the house. So many thought that the house wasn't inhabited, and they didn't know. But some came. But we were spared, thanks to the Russian interpreter! Nobody had a radio. Nobody knew. And you cannot imagine that you sit completely isolated, don't know, the only thing is you know you sit in a basement. But nothing else you know. You don't know who's up in the street, if it's still the Nazis or other Russians already. They are shooting if--it turned out that the Germans ran away. But some were pockets, where just a couple of, sometimes even Hitler Youth, threw panther grenades, hand grenades, at tanks, which didn't make a dent in the tank but the tank got angry and rolled over and put fire to more houses. At the end where those few houses meant so much to everyone.

NP: And bathroom facilities? What facilities? There weren't any.

HS: Well, you wouldn't call it facilities. Some-

Tape two, side two:

NP: This is side B, continuing interviewing. This is Natalie Packel continuing to interview Hanna Silver. Hanna, you were saying?

HS: I wanted to say that little by little the semblance of normal life returned, but only semblances. It took a long time--months--until it was half way normal. And it took a long time until it got real normal. So we got ration cards and you kept on getting four slices of bread. And then you got one herring per week. The herring was a meat ration. So it was September, and I remember I had met George, my future husband, when we got our first ration of fat. That was one tablespoon of oil per person.

NP: He was in the American Army?

HS: Yes, he was. He had come; he was with the fighting army and had come to Berlin upon the request of the Labor Department. And he was stationed with the military government at the Labor Division. And he stayed on for three years. So...

NP: He was part of the resettling forces?

HS: No.

NP: No.

HS: No, no. It was occupation and government.

NP: Okay, occupying troops, yeah, [unclear].

HS: So anyway we had a basic, but many people had hunger edema. So when you saw somebody...

NP: Hunger what?

HS: Edema.

NP: Oh edema.

HS: Yes.

NP: Yes.

HS: So you said, "Oh! You look..."

NP: Terribly swollen, yes.

HS: Yeah. "You look good!" Then people used to take their finger and poke in their cheek and the hole that the finger made remained. It didn't go back. That meant that they were not so good looking after all. But we had a night's sleep. Every night was a night's sleep and that was precious. And we had four pieces, slices of bread. That was precious. And now came for me the time to realize what my situation really was, under normal circumstances--nothing! The work wasn't working any more. The Russians had taken away everything everywhere. There was no business going on. There were no goods to be sold. I had a handful of coupons which were given to me the first time I was bombed out, but there were no stores. So then the swapping started. If somebody had an apron he gave this to the baker and the baker's wife gave you a half a bread for it. And so people, everything went by swapping. Of course you didn't have stores, you know. And I don't really remember how long this went. The money was without value. I even saw some

money swirling around in the wind in the streets. People didn't even bother picking it up. A little later it turned out that a lot of valueless money is better than no money. So if you had enough of it you still could buy something. And then the black market started and the Russians, they didn't have anything to sell on the black market. It started actually after the Americans arrived. They had cigarettes. And that was a currency, we called it Old Gold currency.

NP: We continue.

HS: So I had one coat, which wasn't so good any more from the fire and the ashes and all that. So my cousin, my aunt and I, we all had arrived at the same weight. We all weighed 100 pounds each. My aunt was short and very chubby. She lost, my cousin was tall and slender. She lost, and I was, we were all three hundred. So we had a coat. So whoever went out got the coat. With shoes it was a little more difficult, but somehow, you know, you manage. You walk with holes in your shoes. So on May 8th, 1945 the war was over. The Russians took over Berlin, and in August the Americans arrived in Berlin. The Russians had occupied the whole city. And when the Allies arrived they took half of the city, while the three Allies together had to divide the other half. And so instead of having one city governed by all four occupation powers together, each one gradually developed a sector of his own. There was a Russian sector, 50% of the city. There was the other half of the city, divided into French sector, British sector, and American sector. And I was lucky to be in the American sector. And I knew my English and could communicate. And I became the official photographer for the American Red Cross Club. And I worked there and I met hundreds and hundreds of GIs and they were very happy to have somebody who could talk to them in English.

NP: Yes I can imagine.

HS: And I worked very, very hard but it was the most wonderful time of my life. So, after the four occupation powers had taken over the whole city, they met under Eisenhower; just around the corner they had their headquarters. And so I had a photo shop and all the Americans came in and brought their films to develop. At, in the Red Cross Club I had the photo studio and took pictures of hundreds and hundreds of American GIs. So I had so many friends and with some, believe it or not, I still correspond and we visited. Because it was such a crazy time. Everything that was normal wasn't valid any more. The poor GI was all of a sudden so rich because he sold his cigarettes on the black market for...

NP: On the black market.

HS: Fifteen hundred *Marks*. And they could buy anything they wanted that was available, you know. It was, the Mayor of Berlin was Reuter, Ernst Reuter, and he said he was...

NP: R-O-I-T-E-R?

HS: R-E-U-, R-E-U...

NP: Oh.

HS: T-E-R. And he was elected but the Russians didn't permit him to be acting Mayor. And he said, he was a close friend of ours, and he said, "Years later when all this will be forgotten, you will say these days where we are now, they are worth being lived like no other time." That's what he said.

NP: Hanna, you went through so much and showed such bravery and such resourcefulness and always trying to be as upbeat as possible. How has this dreadful experience changed your life, or had it changed your life?

HS: Well, I wouldn't say change. You are a kind of a person. But there are certain things that come to the surface more than others. I was through circumstances brought up in a very, very modest lifestyle and I didn't ask for anything much. And money, it really--what happened to me happened to most of the people--the inflation had wiped out everybody's money--so nobody had money. So you didn't need money for anything because you didn't get it. You didn't have it. So whenever there was something to be made I made it out of nothing, which today is recognized as something wonderful. We had to do things ourselves because we couldn't go and buy things. So...

NP: It was through necessity.

HS: Necessity. So...

NP: To instill this great...

HS: I was, I'm still...

NP: Inventiveness.

HS: I'm still very modest, and I was born with a wonderful sense of humor, which never left me. And I think that saw me through the worst of situations. Also I'm very optimistic and where there is life there is hope. And the day the war was over we found out that we were alive. So that was good news for us. And a lot of self-control, which I developed. So my cousin for instance, her mother was deported and she and I, we went to the ladies room and cried and cried. And we went out, washed our face, and went in public and smiled at everybody. And nobody had an idea that minutes ago we had cried bitterly. And also I value friendship. I had so many friends who stood by me and who helped. And to this day I value friendship so much and I am a good friend. And I have, I'm blessed, I have so many real dear friends. And I am so easily content. I don't need much. And I am happy. And a nice talk, a nice phone call. I don't ask for too much and I get much more than I expect. And that makes me a happy person. Also we learned to help. Because I'll never forget, I have a very good memory, forget how many people helped me. I don't forget that. And so wherever I can, little things that are important, because life is not all big things. You have three big things or four maybe, but, every day are some little things and if you can help somebody across the street or carry a bundle or something. And then when we came to Philadelphia in 1948, I had a chance, we moved into Strawberry Mansion which then was a hundred percent...

NP: Jewish.

HS: Jewish neighborhood. And within a very short time it turned into 99 percent black neighborhood. And there were so many little children and I had no experience. And, but somebody talked me into doing something with recreation and it ended up that I took 650 children twice a week to the Fairmount Park. There was a Smith playground. It cost nobody a penny and nobody got paid.

NP: Wow.

HS: And we got a yellow bus, a school bus, which was idle during the summer. And each block had one mother and as many children as they wanted and the bus shuttled back and forth within fifteen minutes. So I made up a schedule. So I took for ten years 650 children twice a week to the park during the months of July and August.

NP: Oh, that's extraordinary!

HS: This is my way of paying back for all the good things I have received here in America, all these good friends and good friendships and all that. And I have, since I am here I always have done one kind of volunteer work or another. And I...

NP: Did you ever, excuse me, did you ever return to Germany since the war?

HS: Yes, yes, because my two aunts came back and my cousin...

NP: Came back from?

HS: From the concentration camp. My aunt survived and lived to 91 years and lived to see...

NP: What is her name?

HS: Two great grand-, this was Aunt Paula, P-A-U-L-A.

NP: And her last name?

HS: Paula B-U-D-N-I-K, Budnik.

NP: N-I-K.

HS: Yeah.

NP: Budnik.

HS: And her daughter is married and has a son who just visited me. He is already 43 years old.

NP: And they still live in Germany?

HS: They still live in Germany and my aunt together with her sister are buried at the Jewish cemetery. And it's a beaut-...

NP: What is the name of the Jewish cemetery? Do you remember? Or where is it?

HS: It's called, they don't, they have only one on Heer Strasse. And the old one was in Weissensee which was the Russian sector. As you know there was a wall and nobody would go from west to east...

NP: Yes, yes.

HS: Until it got a little easier to go. But then...

NP: Perhaps we'll write down how to spell those two cemeteries.

HS: Yes, yes. Well now they call it the Jewish Cemetery...

NP: The Jewish Cemetery.
HS: Because there is only one. And it's a very big one in a beautiful location near the lake with some woods around it. And...
NP: Other than family did you, were there any friends?
HS: Yes.
NP: People, friends that you knew from...
HS: Yes, yes, yes.
NP: The war years...
HS: From the, yeah...
NP: From your life before?
HS: They were very supportive and were not afraid to be friends with me and help me.
NP: These were Christians.
HS: Yes.
NP: As well as Jews.
HS: Some were atheists and some were Christians. Nobody was very reli-, I grew up at a time where nobody was religious. I went to school with twenty girls who didn't know, about five were Jewish and the rest was Lutheran, and one or two Catholic. But nobody would come and say, "Who are you? What is your, what do you believe?" It was so democratic that, there were a lot of atheists around. Because after World War I a lot of people lost their faith and became non-religious.
NP: So you were well-integrated into the group?
HS: Yes.
NP: Accepted?
HS: Yes. Oh yes. And also with neighbors. Nobody ever made a fuss over religion or whatever. And it was a, at the time of the Weimar Republic where you could find the most democracy in Germany. And then after Hitler, after the war, people started to work at it and with some exceptions.
NP: Herta Beese...
HS: Yeah? This is the...
NP: When did you meet?
HS: Well I met her immediately after the war. She was an atheist and she was not Jewish. And she has done so much for so many and put them up while they were on the escape route to Switzerland. And she put them up in an apartment next to her which was vacant. So at 10:00 at night people came knocked at the door, and she put them up overnight. She even took a job in a grocery store so that she had access to goods that were sold without coupons that she could have something to eat for the people while they were on their escape route.
NP: How wonderful. But she, if I remember correctly, was a Social Democrat?

HS: She was a leading Social Democrat in Berlin and she was a genuine Berliner and she did a lot of good for youth and for juvenile delinquents to help them to get back into normal life. And she...

NP: Her--and how you spelled her name H-E-R-T-A?

HS: That's her first name, and her last name is B-E-E-S-E.

NP: All right, thank you.

HS: And she died.

NP: She did die.

HS: Yeah. All the people who did so many good things, they all don't live any more.

NP: That's sad in itself.

HS: Yeah.

NP: And you plug on. I see that every...

HS: Plug on and...

NP: Every week.

HS: I had one cousin and she was exactly my age. We were just four weeks apart. And we were very, very close. And I just looked at her. She wrote a card and she said, "I am on my way for going away." Nobody ever said, "I am being deported." They said, "I am going away." And so she writes a postal card, "I'm going away in an hour. And I wish you all good luck and I hope we see each other again," which we didn't. So she is dead and I am...

NP: Where was she?

HS: We were both in Berlin. And [unclear]...

NP: And she was deported to...

HS: We don't know but she is listed in the *Gedenkbuch* and it says, "Auschwitz." And so she is dead. One aunt is dead and one uncle lives, and cousins, one is dead and one: So three cousins of mine managed to get to England immediately before the war. And they enlisted in the British Army. And one was a parachutist and died in Dunkirk. And the two others were, one was an officer in Africa and in Italy. And the other one, because he was of German descent, was an interpreter in, for the English, British Army. They don't live any more either. So it's all gone.

NP: It's all gone.

HS: So now the conclusion is never ever give up hope, and always hope for the best. And you're sure the best will not happen but the worst will not happen either, so if you fall somewhere between the best and the worst, you are in good shape.

NP: Thank you, Hanna.

HS: Thank you, Natalie.

NP: Thank you, Hanna.

HS: I am so happy that I had a chance to talk to you, and of course when you start then you get the whole package. There is so many more items that I didn't mention

but there is just not enough tape to tell it all. But I hope that my remarks give you a picture...

NP: Indeed they do.

HS: Of the end...

NP: Invaluable.

HS: Of the war, and the beginning of new life. As hard as it was, it was a new life. And everybody was willing to take sacrifices because they were alive.

NP: [unclear].

HS: For that you have to pay a price, and you don't have a steak or anything; you have just bread. But you had enough to just survive. And that's what matters. Bread and water--it's very good for survival.

NP: Thanks, Hanna. You're beautiful, a beautiful lady.

HS: Thank you.