

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ANNA SULTANIK

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Marian Salkin

Date: June 20, 1996

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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AS - Anna Sultanik¹ [interviewee]

MS - Marian Salkin [interviewer]

Date: June 20, 1996

Tape one, side one:

[Technical problems resulted in some unclear passages.]

MS: ...Of Lansdale, Pennsylvania, who will be relating her experiences as a child and a young adult in Poland and in the various concentration camps. Dult. [sic] [tape off then on] Ann, would you please tell me where you were born, and when, and a little about your family?

AS: I was born May 20, 1929 in Krakow. Krakow, which was in Galicia.

MS: Southern Poland.

AS: Southern Poland, yes.

MS: All right. And tell me a little about your family.

AS: O.K. My father was a physician. He was married to, year, I think, 1927, to my mother. And we had, I had a small brother by the name of Theodor. And he was five years younger than I was. Which then he was about four-and-a-half years old. And...

MS: Well, Ann, what was your mother's maiden name?

AS: My mother's maiden name was Meth. M-E-T-H. Sara Meth.

MS: And do you know whether she had a profession when she married your father?

AS: No, she was 19 years old when she married my father, and very shortly after, I was born. And...

MS: Do you, did you have grandparents in your home? Or...

AS: Yeah, not in our home. In our town we had grandparents. And my mother came from a family of five. She has four brothers, and she was the only daughter. And they lived in the same town.

MS: Your father was also from Krakow?

AS: No, my father was from Sanok.

MS: Which is where in relationship to your community?

AS: Well, this is, I think, oh my, I have written down, and I never...

MS: Well, within the same?

AS: It is, no, it's entirely different.

MS: Is it northern Poland?

AS: It's in northern Poland, yeah.

MS: I see. I see. And as a child, did you, did the families, your relatives come together frequently...

¹née Tiger.

AS: Yes. We were constantly, especially my mother's side of the family. They lived in Krakow. And we were constantly together.

MS: So then you were raised with your brother and cousins...

AS: With your brother and my family. And, you see, my father's mother passed away before the war. And I didn't have a chance to know her very well, because I was young then.

MS: But you did know your maternal grandparents well.

AS: Yes. Yes.

MS: What was your life like before the war, or before your life was changed by the Nazi victories in Europe?

AS: Before the war it was happy. Fulfilled life, like every other young child has. During the war everything changed completely. In a matter of two weeks we were deprived as Jewish children attend school. In, my parents, which, my father then, no, this I need to erase, because I, what it was, eh, I didn't state my father escaped.

MS: All right. Before we get into that, Ann...

AS: Yes.

MS: Let me just ask you. When war was first declared...

AS: Right.

MS: And Germany invaded...

AS: Poland.

MS: Poland, which was on September 1...

AS: Correct.

MS: 1939.

AS: Right.

MS: Did you feel that immediately, I mean, was it, were you conscious of the war almost from the very first?

AS: Yes I was, because my father was, being a doctor, he was in charge preparing everybody in the building in case of there will be gas war. He prepared us how to wear gas masks, and what to do, and how to prevent, how to stay alive. Then we, we as children, we realized that something is different, and we are preparing and storing food, and putting them in special containers that, things like that, yes. We were aware that something was wrong. But it didn't take too long. It took only two days, and Germany invaded Poland.

MS: Were they in Krakow within two days time?

AS: Within two days, they marched it into Krakow. [tape off then on]

MS: Within two days you said they had moved into Poland. All right.

AS: Correct, yes.

MS: What happened as soon as the Germans came into your town? Were you ordered to stay in your homes, or were you ordered to leave your homes? Do you remember, Ann?

AS: If I can recall, for about four weeks we stayed in our house. And then they started to form a ghetto, which luckily, where we used to live, this was part of the ghetto. Because we used to live, the house where I used to live...

MS: Your...

AS: They declared part of the ghetto.

MS: Your original home that you were in...

AS: Yes.

MS: At the time.

AS: Right.

MS: I see.

AS: And, but the changes were that we lived in six-bedroom apartment. We, in six-bedroom apartment, we had six families which moved in with us. Each one was entitled to have one room. Six families moved into our apartment.

MS: Were these families that...

AS: Jewish families.

MS: That you knew? Or were they complete strangers.

AS: No, complete strangers. Except my grandparents. We took to our place.

MS: Well, and, this, you were ordered to do this by what, a German authority of some sort, or...

AS: It must have been. Must have been. I don't know. I don't remember. I suddenly found that there were six families, each one placed in one bedroom.

MS: And, of course, they used, everyone used the same kitchen facilities?

AS: Oh sure.

MS: Same bathroom facilities.

AS: Yes.

MS: And at this time you were how old, did you say?

AS: In 1939 I was nine. But this was close to 1940. Then I was close to ten years old.

MS: Almost ten years old. Did your family experience antisemitism before the Hitler period, and, do you have any recollection of any particular antisemitic feelings in your community?

AS: The only thing I remember, the reason, this was the reason why I went to Hebrew school, primary to escape. I was more sheltered, because I knew that children in the public school, many of them suffered a lot being Jewish. That's all I know. And that's what I heard from my parents.

MS: Were...

AS: I personally didn't experience before, too much, eh. Later on I did.

MS: And you don't remember your parents speaking about any antisemitic moods, eh...

AS: No.

MS: In the area?

AS: No. The only thing I remember, and this is going back. I was just about six, seven years old. It must have been in 1933, because I was born in 1920. I mean 1929, about five years old, when people were escaping from Germany. And they, we opened doors, and they moved with us. Quite a few families moved to our place...

MS: Into your own home?

AS: Into our own home. We took them in. And they stayed for quite a while. And then, after this they went to United States. I know that.

MS: That's interesting, Ann.

AS: Yes. We, matter of fact, the person, after the war, helped me to come there. He's the one who sponsored me to come to United States.

MS: One of the families that stayed in your home...

AS: Was with, in our home, what we helped them when they were escaping from Germany and then he helped me.

MS: Did your family belong to any Jewish organizations or to a synagogue before the Nazi period?

AS: Of course, to a synagogue. This I know.

MS: Did any men in your family serve in any national army? [pause] You mentioned your father.

AS: Father. I am sure I see the uniform, but I can't quote, because I don't know.

MS: Mmm hmm. So he must have served, then.

AS: He must have served, 'cause I see his picture in uniform, but I don't know.

MS: O.K. About how many Jews lived in your town or city, if you could estimate that, of course. I don't know. Was it a highly-organized Jewish community?

AS: Oh definitely. Definitely. I don't know how many. My husband would be able to tell you, if he comes in. I would say that at least 100,000² Jews must have lived in Krakow. But if it's wrong, I think Sol will be able to correct you. Cause Sol, you see, Sol was eight years older, and he remembers this much better than I do. The pre-war...

MS: Period.

AS: And he was active in various organizations.

MS: Do you remember a *kehillah* organization, or a Jewish, like a Jewish council that might have been active?

AS: I know there were organizations, like *Hashomer Hatzair*. They were saying because of...

MS: Well, that was the Zionist group, wasn't it?

AS: Zionist group, yes.

MS: Yes.

AS: Those I remember, but...I don't know if I blocked the memories but I don't remember.

²In 1939 there were 60,000 Jews in Krakow, according to the Encyclopaedia Judaica.

MS: Ann, what happened to you and your family during the weeks following the German invasion?

AS: This was very, very hard. Because the first few weeks we experienced a lot. Number one, because we were well-to-do family, then, we owned this building, and the superintendent from the building was the first one to point to Germans, "Go over there to this apartment. Here are the rich Jews." And the first week, when they walked in into our town, they came to our apartment. And the first thing they stripped, it is, eh, they took our piano, which, this was for me the hardest part to part, because I played piano. And, took our Persian carpeting, and crystal chandeliers. This was the first week. This was right away removed. And, they removed radios. We didn't have televisions then. Radios, and silver. This was, this happened the first week.

MS: Do you remember them coming into the apartment and removing these things?

AS: Oh, very, very clearly. This I remember very clearly cause, and with it too, they, when they came to pick up the piano, they picked me up too, and they decided that I didn't look Jewish at all, that I should be in their, they called this experiments, what they were doing. And they took me in and took blood test, and I was AB positive blood type. Because of this AB positive blood type, they claim it's very unknown in European Jews to have this blood type, and it's prominent they called it in Anglo-Saxon religion to be this blood type. And they put me for all those tests, testing, like a guinea pig, which took about six weeks. My mother wanted to commit suicide, she was so upset with it. And she did not know.

MS: Well let me, you say that they removed you from your home?

AS: From my home.

MS: And they kept you elsewhere?

AS: They kept me during the day, and during the night I came back home. I was undergoing all kinds of unknown tests and injections.

MS: And this was before you were ghettoized?

AS: No, this was in the ghetto. This was already the first, first week when I moved in into ghetto; this started already. And it, we were about ten girls which were selected from the ghetto to undergo this experiment.

MS: Well now, Ann, I'm not clear. At first you said the apartment that you were living in initially became a part of the ghetto.

AS: Part of the ghetto, yes.

MS: Then were you moved to another quarter?

AS: No.

MS: You...

AS: No. They took in like a section. I'll give you an example where I live at the present time. They came in, and they said, "Up to here the second house will be the ghetto." O.K.? A few weeks later they came and they took the whole street, and they said, "This

is going to be the ghetto." They put fence around it, and that's where they crowded into the, all the Jews which they live in various parts of Krakow—in this small area. This was the ghetto. They put wiring. They made gates. And that's where we lived for two years.

MS: You stayed within this framework.

AS: This framework, in two years. Yes.

MS: Were you allowed free access in and out of the ghetto?

AS: No. No.

MS: Not at all.

AS: Not at all. Unless you went to the labor camp, which you were too, you were, you can't go by yourself. You, the Germans came in. They took you to work. They brought you back to the gate, and then you went home.

MS: And you were not involved in the labor camp then.

AS: Later on.

MS: But...

AS: Not right away.

MS: What about your parents? Were...

AS: My moth-, I lost my mother in a matter of nine months after we moved in to ghetto. They had, the Germans came in, and they started to look for elderly, and children. For anybody who is not capable to work. And the first thing they took my grandparents, who lived with us, because my grandparents were not capable of work. And then they took my brother. And my brother was not barely six years old. Then my mother didn't want him to go, that she volunteered to go with him.

MS: They, they physically removed them.

AS: Yes.

MS: And did you ever know where they sent them? You never knew. And your mother chose to go with your brother. [pause] You were saying, Ann, that your mother left with your brother at that time. What was her, eh, what was she saying to you at that time?

AS: That you go, and, you mu-, you go, and you must work. You must survive. And, she pushed me away to the side, and then she left with my brother.

MS: And your father was still with you at that time?

AS: No. My father by then was, my father escaped first week. The first week when war was declared. Not even the first. Because the war was declared, and my mother said to my father, "You go. Nothing will happen to women with two small children." Knowing what happened in Germany the first things they were taking intellectuals, doctors. She says, "You go. I stay home." And this was the last what we heard from my father. I did not know what happened to him. This was the end. And I stayed with my mother and my brother at home.

MS: All right, then, after your mother left...

AS: Right.

MS: Then with your brother. Eh, were there any relatives?

AS: No.

MS: You, you were at that time, you were on your, on your own literally.

AS: Right. Right.

MS: Well what happened to you in the ghetto after, from that time on, Ann?

AS: From that time, from that time on, I was appointed to work in place, they called this Plaszow. I don't know if you heard about it. It was org-, they were organized a Jewish concentration camp. It used to be a Jewish cemetery. And they converted a Jewish cemetery into a labor camp. And all the Jewish people who were in the ghetto, who were able to work, they put them in this camp, in Plaszow.

MS: A labor camp.

AS: Labor camp.

MS: And in what community was it? Plaszow?

AS: Plaszow, yes. It was Krakow. It was Jewish cemetery. It was, you could see the Jewish tombstones. Out of Jewish tombstones they made walks, things like that. And that's where...

MS: You went to work.

AS: I landed. Yes. To, I was working over there in a stone quarry. And one evening I was walking. Very hungry. Very cold. Wearing the wooden shoes. Winter time. Pulling the carts with the, how you call it, with stone quarry, you know?

MS: The, you were actually digging out, or working...

AS: No, pulling them

MS: Oh, pulling...

AS: Pulling the stones in the wagon, carts...

MS: Oh, in carts, yes.

AS: Yeah.

MS: And you had to do that...

AS: At night. And suddenly somebody looks at me and started to cry. And I, and he come to me. He says, "Oh my God." He says, "I can't believe it. This is Dr. Tiger's daughter. What are you doing, child, here?" I said, "I am working." He said, in the meantime I found out, this man was a tailor, and he used to do the uniforms for the man who was in charge of camp. His name was Goeth, he was, Goeth. He was sentenced after the war. And, he says, "I must get you out. I can't see what's happening to you." O.K.? This, this Eichanholtz. His name was Eichanholtz. [phonetic]

MS: Excuse me, Ann. Was this man who addressed you...

AS: He was...

MS: He was a Pole?

AS: A Jew.

MS: A Jew.

AS: A Jew who was working for, for the Germans, making their uniforms.

MS: I see.

AS: And he was well-liked by this German, because he was making all the uniforms. And...

MS: So he was a person with some influence.

AS: Influence. And he says, "I will try to get you out as fast as possible." O.K., in meantime, I was very, very run down. I couldn't take any more. I went to, I went to, to work. And I couldn't. And I dropped the stones. And they caught me. And I was supposed to be sentenced, sentenced to die. Then, when they were doing, they took me, they was on top of the mountains over there. They were making fire, and music was playing, and you needed to go, and dig your own grave. Undress yourself. [pause] And, dig the grave, and lay down. In meantime, I heard the shooting. There was this, and suddenly, everybody is running away. In meantime was a blackout.

MS: Oh, you, you don't know where the shooting was coming from?

AS: No, but it was a blackout. The Russians must have been invading this part of Poland and the Germans left everything and run out. I crawled out, out of the hole, and the last thing I remember, I found myself in a dispensary, and somebody was standing over me and crying. And, I opened my eyes, and I recognized this person. This person was, it, but my, like I was just saying, my whole story just is I am very lucky that I am alive. Because this person looked at me and he says—and my Polish name was Hannetchkah [phonetic]—It's Annka. It comes from Ann. He says, "I don't believe it, my child. You are here." And he says, "You must get out from here, because by tomorrow we supposed, everybody in this dispensary supposed to be gone, supposed to die. Nobody will be left." Then he bandaged my legs. He took me to my barracks, and they, they had opening in the barracks like on top of the ceiling which slides down. They pushed me there. They closed this, and this man who did it was a doctor. He was my father's best friend, a Jewish doctor. And the woman, the nurse, who was helping out in the dispensary, she was a very good friend of my mother. And they recognized me. Then they put me over there, and they say, "See, you stay over there." And, if they wouldn't have helped me, I wouldn't be here today. Because the same evening, they took anybody who was not able to work, perform; everybody died. They executed the same evening everybody else. Then, I was very lucky. I stayed over there for about 24 hours. I [unclear] came down, and the rest of the people who survived this terrible thing, they came back, and they nursed me, and I became for a while, better. In meantime, this, these friends of ours, Dr. Eichanholtz, one day came into my barracks. He says, "Child, I am taking you out from here. You are going to work for me." Then he took me out, and I was working in his place—which, I never knew how to sew—but he taught me how to sew, and I was doing the buttons for the uniforms and the buttonholes for the uniforms. And that's where I stayed. And that's how I stayed till 1943, until they evacuated this camp.

MS: What was the name, do you know the name of the camp that this all...

AS: Yeah, this is Plaszow. This was P-L-A-S-H-O-[pause]W, it will be in English probably.

MS: And this was the original labor camp...

AS: Yeah.

MS: That made...

AS: Put in.

MS: That they put you into.

AS: Yes. And from then, from then, what happened, the Russians were approaching this, this camp, were very close to Krakow. They needed suddenly, Germans needed to wipe out all the evidence of camps. And what happened, then we needed to dig out, which was so much dirt between the bodies. Because what they were doing, they were burying people on top of the other, because they were executing them every day. Then we needed to burn all these bodies not to leave any trace when the Russians will come in. And the smell was just unbelievable. Because they had small layer of dirt on top of them. And from then, we started to go on foot through whole Poland on to Auschwitz. We didn't have trains, because every, everything was occupied and we were walking. And...

MS: You were being, you were, eh...

AS: Transferred. Transferred by foot.

MS: By foot, under German, eh...

AS: Yeah.

MS: Eh, control.

AS: Control. But the funny part, like I was just saying, not long ago, how, we didn't have confidence in Polish people that they will help us at all, because there were two German officers, and who knows how many thousands of us from concentration camp. I was passing my own house, and nobody tried to even fled, and to, because we knew nobody will help us. Then *nobody* even tried to escape. And we were walking, and walking, and falling, and dying. And nobody just ran out to anybody to be helped. Because we knew that they, they wouldn't help us. And then we ended in Auschwitz.

MS: Well, then, you walked then you say from your labor camp to Auschwitz.

AS: Auschwitz.

MS: Which...

AS: On foot, yeah.

MS: How long, how long a march was that [unclear]?

AS: Oh it was a long, I, I, we lost completely concept of days or nights or... I really truly don't know, until we landed in Auschwitz. And in Auschwitz I stay only for a week, because they were liquidating Auschwitz too. I just came the time...

MS: You remember the year, Ann, that this was?

AS: It must have been 1944, either, yeah, 1944 must have been, yes, because from there I went to Bergen-Belsen.

MS: Well then, in other words, from the time that you went into the labor camp which was early in 1940, you stayed in that same labor camp...

AS: Yes.

MS: For four years.

AS: For, almost four years, yes.

MS: I see. Until '44.

AS: '44.

MS: According to the map, Krakow and Auschwitz were only about 35 miles apart.

AS: Right. Yeah.

MS: And then, can you tell us a little about your experience in Auschwitz?

AS: In Auschwitz itself, we stayed only one week, because it happened the same thing. It was overloaded. They did not know what to do with all the Jewish people, and they were sending them to different various camps. And in 1944 again the Russian were approaching the area. And, from then, I don't, I can't remember too much from Auschwitz, and I didn't, the funny part, nobody, at least I did not know about gas chambers. I know they were there. I did not realize what was going on, maybe because I was tired. I did not know. And one day we woke up, and they told us we were leaving that Auschwitz. And we're going somewhere else. And this was the worst part. They put us in the cattle trains. I don't know how many, how many hundreds of people, and it was wintertime. And we were who knows how many in open trains. Gave us only one eighth of bread. And we were traveling for few weeks. And none of the camps wanted to open door for us, because they didn't have enough room. And it was, this was one of the hardest time I ever I think had; it was terrible, because the cold, the hunger, and until finally we arrived in Bergen-Belsen. And when we arrived in Bergen-Belsen, they opened the door, we were sure that this is the end. Because there were about 50 or 100 Germans with big German shepherds, next to them with guns. We thought this is it. This is the end. They'll probably shoot us, and... They let us into this camp, a camp which, nobody worked, practically. They didn't give you food. They just left you to decay. It was, we didn't, we had a litt-, I lived in a barrack with, I don't know how many hundreds were in this place. We had one barrack, and one, two, three, five people squeeze in to get just a laying position.

MS: In one berth.

AS: In the, yeah. And there was no water. They gave us water only for a very short time a day which everybody was running to get sip of water to drink, to wash yourself. And that's when the whole epidemic started—lice, and with typhoid fever, and, and, it was terri-, it was, this was maybe, because the working was hard, but at least you got out. You were human, you did something. But here it was just, it was terrible, it was unreal.

MS: Ann, the time that you were in Auschwitz, you were not aware that it was a death camp, you're saying? You weren't conscious...

AS: Yes. I was conscious that you're supposed, you needed to work—if not, they will kill you. But, we knew that we're going to take showers, and we never knew what's going to happen. But, really, truly, I did not believe that they would do such, I don't think I would be alive probably if I would have thought differently. But I could not believe that anybody would do such thing.

MS: There were no rumors? You heard nothing...

AS: Yes, there were a lot of rumors that, yes, that people are killed, and I have seen killing. Then you know, I, the same way that I was ordering to undress yourself, undress yourself if you didn't do it, but I couldn't believe that they would go and do it, to have gas chamber, and kill you by hundreds at the same time. I could not believe it.

MS: When you were in the labor camp, and, and then, on your walk to Auschwitz...

AS: Yes.

MS: During all those years and during that time, did you, was there anybody there that you became friendly with, or someone, because you were alone in the world...

AS: Yes.

MS: And there were no relatives then of any sort.

AS: Nobody. But I had very good friend, which in, she is my mother's friend, and her, her, her husband was, I think not in throat specialist, in Poland. And she spotted me in Auschwitz and she helped me a lot too. She helped me morally, and tried to, to help me. There was nothing to help otherwise, because foodwise...

MS: No. There were just...

AS: There was nothing but just morally, psychologically...

Tape one, side two:

MS: You were saying, Ann, that this person, this woman that you met, helped you morally and psychologically. And, do you know how long she'd been in Auschwitz before she met you there?

AS: I don't know. I don't know.

MS: Well, did she, did she leave with you after that short stay with...

AS: She leaved with me to Bergen-Belsen.

MS: She went with you to Bergen-Belsen.

AS: Yes. Mmm hmm. And we were in Bergen-Belsen 'til 1945 together.

MS: That was what, almost a period of...

AS: That's where we were liberated, yeah.

MS: But you were in Bergen-Belsen for how, do you have any idea how long? Was it almost a year?

AS: Close to it. I was till April 15, 1945 I was there.

MS: In Bergen-Belsen. And the American armies?

AS: No.

MS: No.

AS: English.

MS: The English armies liberated.

AS: Yes. I wish the American would have liberated us, because I think that because, meaning well, I think English people, not realizing what was happening to us, they fed us, they brought pork, and they brought containers of food, like, I give you stew, and we were opening the cans, and we were eating this cold food. And half of the people got seriously sick. A lot of them died because of that. Not eating for all these years, and suddenly getting hold of this food. It was disastrous. Which, on American side was much, I heard it was much better.

MS: Simply because they knew how to take care of these people from a physical point of view?

AS: Probably. Probably.

MS: More so than the English.

AS: Probably. They meant well, because they wanted to give us right away everything to eat, but people who didn't eat for so many years, and we were so run down, suddenly opening can of fat, it was, people were consuming whatever they can get hold of. And that's when they got extremely sick. A lot of them died because of that too. [pause; tape off for a long pause then on].

MS: Ann, you were saying that the hospital that you, or the camp, rather, that you went to, the Displaced Person Camp, was in an area called Zeilsheim?

AS: Correct.

MS: And you said this was near Frankfurt.

AS: Near Frankfurt-Am-Main.

MS: What, what processes did you go through in the Displaced Person Camp? And how long did you stay there?

AS: I stayed from 1945 till 1947, for two years. We were provided with living quarters, and everybody was supposed to work in one way or the other. Like some people were working in the kitchen, some in the office.

MS: What type of work did you do?

AS: And I was working in post office, as a post office clerk. And, and I think food and everything was provided by the, by HIAS I think.

MS: Mmm hmm. And during this time you were trying to find a place for yourself to resettle?

AS: To resettle, exactly.

MS: Mmm hmm. And you never, you never went back to your home in Krakow?

AS: No. I never had the possibility, number one. Money was involved, which none of us had money. And, the only way it was to, to seek and look through Red Cross, which I was trying.

MS: And you were trying to make contacts...

AS: Contacts, yes.

MS: With...

AS: Primary locating my father. I knew that it's imposs-, it was impossible for my mother to survive. It was impossible for my brother to survive, because of his age. I knew that my grandfather passed away in concentration camp, because I was, I have seen it. But I...

MS: Well what do you mean...

AS: I was present when they executed my grandmother and my grandfather and my unc-, my one uncle and his wife. Then I knew that they can't survive. Then, the only one which was my hope it was my father. But I, I have written many letters through Red Cross without any luck.

MS: Because at that point you did not know where he was.

AS: Where he was, and what happened, and, then I almost gave up. [pause]

MS: Well, what was, what was the final outcome of your leaving the Displaced Person Camp? Where did you go from there?

AS: The outcome, it was the 1948. I don't know exactly why, but they closed the whole Displaced Person Camp. This was [unclear] everybody needed to leave and then I landed in Frankfurt-Am-Main, and started going part-time to school, and part-time working.

MS: What was the attitude of the German population to the few Jews that came in, back into their community? Were they helpful to you?

AS: No. Not at all. Not at all.

MS: Well, where did you find a place to live? And how did...

AS: I finally rented in a small room in an apartment house and in this, I stayed over there for about four weeks, and after this, about four different Jewish families decided to take one apartment and share each one a room, because nobody could afford an apartment. And that's how we lived for *quite* a while. For quite a while. And then after this I was, I met Sol, and we got married in Germany.

MS: Oh, I see. I see. Then Sol too had come from a concentration camp?

AS: Yes.

MS: And, was trying to relocate as well?

AS: Yes.

MS: Then, as a married couple, how did you go about leaving Germany, or finding, you didn't, obviously you had no intention of staying on in Germany.

AS: No. No. No. It was very hard. Number one, we applied, we went to HIAS. We left our name that we would love to go to United States. But, it was a long wait. They said we can find a sponsor who would be willing to sponsor you, it would be able to go much faster. In meantime, I mentioned to you that we used to help people emigrate from...

MS: Yes...

AS: Germany.

MS: People that you helped.

AS: All the time when the war ended, they were hunting and looking for anybody if anybody survived from our family and they located me.

MS: Through the Red Cross?

AS: Through the Red Cross, and they are the one who sponsored me and Sol to come to United States.

MS: And how long a process did that take?

AS: It was a long process. We came in 1951. It was a long process, but we were lucky.

MS: So you spent almost three years in, in Germany?

AS: Yes. Yeah.

MS: And Sol was able to find work there at that time?

AS: It was very hard. It was very hard, but being, well, after we went through everything seemed just great. We could only function. This was the main thing. And that's how we came to United States.

MS: Where in, where, what cities did you come to?

AS: New York City.

MS: And you lived there for...

AS: For quite a while, yes. And we went on our own, and I worked and Sol worked. We went to night school. And we found very lovely American family who were extremely nice to us, and felt that they would love to sponsor us, not financially, but just to help us to find ourself, to find something, to accomplish something. And they really did. They were just very helpful.

MS: Ann, tell me, you were never, I'd like to hear about how you finally located your father, but, was Sol also able to find any relatives...

AS: Sol found his cousin Kalman Sultanik, and his two brothers, Jacob Sultanik, and Sam Sultanik.

MS: Not, not Sol's brothers, but Sol's cousin's...

AS: Cousin's.

MS: All, all the three...

AS: Yeah. This is the whole family. Nobody else survived. Just four of them.

MS: All right, would you tell us a little bit about how you finally [noise!], how you finally located your father?

AS: This was years, years after. I don't know how many years after. But I know it was 35 years after the war. I was in New York at somebody's house, and somebody asked me what is my maiden name. And I told them, and they said, "Wow. You know what? I have a doctor in Israel by this name!" I said, "Do you? Where does he live?" And he gave me the address, and I wrote a letter, and it was my father.

MS: Did you, eh, did you have any idea that this same person could have been your father?

AS: I don't, I still till today, I live, I can't believe it, and I cannot say many times, which is my, my, my sickness, that my family really is perished, that, any time I come across similar name, or anything like this, I become just so excited, because I think, it could be! It, maybe it's possible my brother survived. Maybe it's possible my father survived. And that's how I went and wrote my father a letter, and it was my father! Then I went and took Jeff, and immediately...

MS: Jeff was your son.

AS: Jeff is my son, yes. And, who was then nine years old. And we went to Israel. When we landed in, on the airport, I stood with Jeff for two-and-a-half hours. We couldn't locate my father. Finally somebody approached me. He says, "Are you waiting for somebody?" I said, "Yes. And I'm expecting my father and I can't locate him." Then he asked me my name. He says, "Do you know he's my family doctor? And look, he's over there in this corner, over there in the other corner." And that's how we met. And it was very strange meeting. It was very emotional meeting. And, a lot of, how shall I say it, my father was remarried. He married very lovely person. She never had children of her own. And, my father never told me that my mother's brother is in Israel, because my mother's brother never wanted to forget my father that he never put too much effort to look up if anybody survived from his family. And they stopped talking to him.

MS: Do you, Ann, do you, um, did your father ever relate to you what his experience was? How he...

AS: Surv-...

MS: Well, no, after he left the family, and what countries he went to?

AS: Yes.

MS: Was he in a concentration camp? Do you know what...

AS: I know all about it, yes.

MS: Would you care to tell us what his experience was?

AS: Sure. In, when my father fled from home, he landed eventually in Romania. Romania, part of Romania which the name was Cryova. Over there, in Cryova, most of the Jewish people who stayed over there, they survived. The king, I don't remember it was King Michael³ then, or whoever was then in power, was extremely good to Jewish people and immigrants. He placed them like in a ghetto, but not in a ghetto what you were restricted or anything. He gave them food. He gave them certain amount of money. And they lived very, very comfortable over there. And my father landed over there in Cryova, and who else landed over there is my mother's two brothers. They all lived, they were all in Brazil, I mean, in Romania. And that's how they survived.

MS: And they were able to live there...

AS: To live there all during the war, and then in 1945 it was, my father was, eh, coming from a doctor, he's practicing medicine, private medicine, and the Russian occupied then Romania, and then...

MS: Ann, do, excuse me, during his internment in the, eh, ghetto, he was able, he continued to practice medicine?

AS: Yes. Yes. It was entirely different ghetto. It was not like under the German. They were just concen-, eh, congregating all the immigrants in this certain section, but it was not that they were restricted to get out or things like that. It was not. He was practicing medicine. He was doing work, and they decided to go to Israel, the whole family. And then that's how they landed in Israel.

MS: That, that was your uncles and your father.

AS: Father, yeah. And they all settled in Israel.

MS: And that was shortly after they were liberated.

AS: Mmm hmm. Yes.

MS: After he was liberated. I see. And then your father remained in Israel until his death, which was in what year?

AS: Yes. It was 1967.

MS: Did you see him again, Ann, or just the one time?

AS: I saw he was supposed to go, and I left, I knew he [unclear] he told me. But he told me, as long as he won't touch in particular [unclear] he had, he had problem with his eyes, it was affecting his vision, he says, it won't happen. That's why he doesn't want to undergo surgery. In meantime, the minute I left, he went undergone surgery, and from then on he went down the hill. By the same day, they notified me, the change in time, he was already buried in Israel.

MS: So then, in effect, you only saw him...

AS: Once.

³Possible King Carol II who was forced to abdicate.

MS: One time.

AS: Yeah. Mmm hmm.

MS: Ann, are, is, em, is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your ex-, your war experiences that you felt were very outstanding in your mind?

AS: There are so many. They are so many, and hard work to...

MS: Relate to...

AS: To relate to, yes. It's extremely hard to...

MS: Talk about it.

AS: Yes.

MS: Well, Ann. I want to thank you very much for...

AS: Yeah, but if you have any questions, then, it's easier for me to answer the questions than to relate...

MS: All right, well let me just check through a minute. We can look at that.

AS: Or you put on tape...

MS: Eh, Ann, when you, eh, going back a little bit in your story, when you were in the labor camp, in Poland, were you aware of any underground resistance groups that were trying to operate within the camp to help the inmates, the Jews?

AS: It must have been. Yes. I did not know, but I am sure they did.

MS: You were saying if anyone would escape from the camp...

AS: Right.

MS: What was the procedure then...

AS: The procedure it was after everybody who stayed in camp, this, then they were executing so and so many people. Like, if one Jewish person would flee, how do you say it, escape, they could take instead 100 and 250 people and execute them for this one person which escaped. And, it was terrible. Sometimes we were standing outside in the winter for hours, and we were watching, we needed to ex-, we were watching the execution. They made us see the whole execution. They were hanging people, and the music was playing, and you needed to stand and look at it. And they were going and coming, one, two, three, four, five. If you were the fifth one, out you go. And that's how they were choosing. It was a pot luck.

MS: It, did they...

AS: And, you never knew when you come out if you will come back.

MS: Well were, there must have been a very tight system of roll call if they knew that one person escaped.

AS: They must have. They have it. They must have, because otherwise they knew right away if somebody escaped.

MS: At any time that you were in the labor camp, did the thought of trying to get out of it ever occur to you?

AS: No. No. I was, I was so resigned. Sure, everybody had in mind we would love to escape, but it seemed almost impossible. It was impossible, and maybe because I

was so young. To me it seemed that this is it, and there is no way we will survive, or no way we will be able to escape, and you have seen so many soldiers and so many executions each day that, it, I felt it was not [unclear], and what would I do even if I escape? Where will I go? Who will hide me? Who will help me? And what's the use even to escape where you don't have where to go?

MS: Right.

AS: O.K. I was passing by my own house, and I didn't even ask them to go in, because I knew what will I do there? The minute I walk in, the people will come out, the tenants or the superintendent, he says, "Here is a Jewish person. Take them." And there was no way to hide.

MS: So therefore, the entire time that you were incarcerated, you had no contact with any member of your family...

AS: No.

MS: Or even friends.

AS: The only thing what I knew almost, I was sure that my mother died, because I told you, I was working in a, they called this *Massschneider*, [custom tailor] like in a tailoring thing for a while, and I found my mother's coat over there, which was... We were assorting old clothes, which was brought back now we know from the, from the gas chambers, to be fixed, and then they were all cleaned, and then they were, I don't know what they did with them. Either they sent them to their wife or what, I don't know. We were repairing them, and I came across my mother coat. And I know, that I knew right away this is it. There is no other way she could have survived. But, [unclear].

MS: Do you remember when you first heard that Jews were being murdered in mass numbers, or being gassed, and did you believe these reports?

AS: No, I didn't want to believe it. I didn't want to believe it.

MS: Of course, the realization did come to you certainly.

AS: There is no question, there, in the end, at the end none of us thought we will even pull through, and we truthfully, I don't think we cared any more. I really truly mean by the time we were, the last few weeks before liberation, I don't think that there was one person who could say that they wanted to live. I don't, I don't think we had the will. We didn't have the strength. Most of us were sick. We, we didn't have, we couldn't work. We were, we were finished. And, then even when we were liberated, we still didn't believe, for weeks we did not believe that we are liberated. I was carrying a piece of potato, a raw potato, in my pocket four weeks after we were liberated. I was afraid to part with it, because this was, this, this is the way I could survive—a piece of tom-, potato. And I, then we were hiding. We were afraid to, to pass. And I was relating this with my husband, and he says, "Do you know, I had the same thing. I had diarrhea from the fears." For four weeks, he kept this, he was afraid to part after he was liberated. The hunger is so great, and believe it or not, there were mothers which, and, which, they had this piece of bread, they didn't

even want to share it with their own brothers or sisters. It became so that, it was, it was sad but that's what happened.

MS: An experience like this was enough to make...

AS: Yes.

MS: People so different.

AS: Yes.

MS: Were you involved in any selections in the death camps at any time?

AS: If I was selected too?

MS: Yeah, were you, were, eh, can you relate any selections that may have taken place in Bergen-Belsen, or, but not in Auschwitz, because you stayed there only a short time.

AS: No, it was in Plaszow, this was the only way what I experienced the, the, being sentenced to die. This was my, my experience.

MS: And that was your closest...

AS: The closest one, because I was already was wounded, and if not, it was like, if not the blackout, I would have been dead. Because I had to, that's why I couldn't work. My husband too. But, this was my closest to being dead. And there were a few close ones which I didn't realize. I was in Auschwitz in that, taking the bath, the shower, but before us, the group was all gassed, and we went out from the other hall, and we were out because they couldn't gas all at the same time. And after this following day, we went to Bergen-Belsen. But if we, it was just a matter of minutes I would have been gassed too. But we didn't know all those things till later.

MS: They were taking you into the...

AS: Into showers.

MS: Into the showers, yes.

AS: But you never know if they will put gas on, or what.

MS: Water.

AS: Because what they do, one got water, one got gas. They couldn't operate on the same circuits. Then we were, the same group what I went in, people got, they were on the one side, we were one side. I got shower. I got out. However, my friends, I came out, they were gone. And that following morning we went to Bergen-Belsen, because they were liquidated. And it, it was like I was just saying, it was just matter of luck. If they say, "How do you survive?" It's ridiculous to say it, "I survived this or this way." It was just plain luck. Plain luck.

MS: Really amazing. Ann, when we were discussing the fact that you would be willing to talk to us about your Holocaust experience, you said something quite interesting, that up until the time of the filming and showing of the television film, *The Holocaust*, that you were not able to speak or come to terms about your experience. Could you tell us about, about it yourself a little bit?

AS: Yes, it's true. Then the evening when they were supposed to show this movie, my son called me from college, and he says, "Mom, I don't want you to watch it. It will be too hard for you to go back and it, and look at it again." I said, "O.K." But I did. I decided, let me, I need, I need to, I know that I have completely, I blocked myself from the past. I need to, I need to watch it. I turn on the television, and I started to watch the movie. My husband was, I decided I was in one room watching, and my husband in the other room. I watched this movie and the, for the first time in all these years, I just completely broke down. I, for two days I, I just was wearing dark glasses, and I just could not go out, and just, I, I was total mess. Number one, it, it just brought all my memories. The name of the girl in this movie was Ann. My name was Ann. Her father was a doctor. My father was a doctor. My father got a medical degree exactly in the same place as this doctor got in Berlin. Number two, I was as a child very much involved and introduced to art and, and music, classical music. They were, they were the children in the movie. The whole thing, it was just like reliving the whole thing over again. After this, exactly the same way, she was undergoing the testing. Like, I don't know...

MS: Medical testing.

AS: Medical testing. I was in the same program. I was identical in the same program what, as this girl was, except I was younger than she was. O.K.? Then, it was just like, I was in this camp too, which we needed to completely be nude, and that's how I was sentenced the first time to die, to undress myself, dig my own grave, and then they were shooting. When I saw, I have seen all those men marching in nude, and being sentenced, this broke me up completely. I could not for two days sleep, because it brought my whole memories back. And after this I could slowly talk about it. I don't know why, but I can, now I can relate more to it. I never talked about it before at all. Whenever my son asked me about my past, I said, "Jeff, I can't talk about it." I would give him whole book, but I could never relate one-to-one basis to express my feelings. But this helped me, *The Holocaust*.

MS: Well, it's interesting that you made this comment, Ann, because there had, there had been a feeling that, a great amount of good has come from that particular episode, the filming of *The Holocaust*. And, and of course there was always, there had been the reverse...

AS: Side, yeah, I had...

MS: And, side too.

AS: Reverse side too.

MS: But, in general it was able to help many people, and obviously in, in some way it was able to help...

AS: It helped me.

MS: It helped you.

AS: I know it helped me. I wish it would help some other people, because I heard remarks that it was too gruesome, and people didn't want to watch, because it felt

that it was too gruesome, too authentic, and they didn't believe that things like this happened. And, but, in my case, I know that it really, it was *really* so close to a, to be authentic that I relived being, cattle train, if you have seen it, I was in the same cattle train going to Auschwitz. Identical, the same thing. When I saw those trains passing by, that's when I was in it, going into the [unclear] to take a walk, to take a shower, not knowing about it but I was there too. It, it is just, the everything, the march, when you were marching in your uniforms with, the blue and white in those wooden shoes, and, it really brought me out. But now I understand myself better. I understand why it, suddenly now I hate to sew. Everything now stems from that.

MS: Mmm hmm.

AS: Sitting in the factory constantly...

MS: Mmm hmm.

AS: Producing all those uniforms. All the things now I am intelligent enough to realize this, but I can talk at least now. I can realize *why* I am the way I am...

MS: Mmm hmm.

AS: Because of the, of, yeah...

MS: Of this...

AS: Just, eh...

MS: Of this movie bringing it out, and clearing...

AS: Yes.

MS: And clearing your mind and your heart...

AS: Yes.

MS: And your conscience.

AS: I felt that really, the people who survived the war, after the war they *all* should have been undergoing either psychological treatment or something I think. This was what it was done wrong. Because many of these people are bearing this so deep, and they carry this fear for so long. For many years when I was raising Jeffrey, I was jumping, now middle of the night, not knowing, running to his room to see if he's still in the bed. I was afraid they will take him away. And, there is not one night, I was just saying this, that I could sleep with a pleasant dream.

MS: Mmm hmm. [pause] A horrendous experience, horrendous. [pause] Ann, say that again what you just said about, again you can't hate.

AS: You can't hate. I don't believe in hating. [pause]

MS: Are you saying then that in your heart you feel that, em, well, I don't want to-

Tape two, side one:

MS: We'll go back and ask you a little bit about the children that might have been in the camps, in the labor camps, when you first were placed in them in Poland. And you of course were saying that there were, you, at, yourself were only ten years of age, and how were you able to remain in the camp at that, at that young age?

AS: Number one, physically I was well-developed. I was tall for my age. Plus, my mother, it's terrible to say, but she forged my papers. She made my papers that I was twelve years of age. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to obtain the Jewish star. When you received the band Jewish star, it meant you are able and strong enough to work. She couldn't do it for my brother, because he was only six, and that's, this is the reason why he died—and she volunteered to go with him. He was not the work material yet. But because I was that, that's why my mother said, you can recall, “You go and work.” And that's how I survived, because I got the Jewish star.

MS: So then, you could have been one of the youngest...

AS: Yes. I was, I am actually one of the youngest survivors right now. Whoever survived in my age group who is right now 53 years of age, it's considered the youngest who went to, and survived the concentration camp. They are not, not younger than I am. This I can guarantee. Because if you are not, you were not able to work, or you were physically not developed, you went right away you were sentenced to die. And that's what it is. It didn't mean not only mentally, physically. We all at the age of 10, 9 or 10, a young lady start, I was menstruating. I, they give us so many medications, I didn't menstruate till I was 19 years of age. They completely poisoned my whole system. I don't know what I was injected with. But, they told me I will never be able to bear children. That's why they call, we call this Jeff our miracle child, because they told me I will never be able to carry, with all these injection what they were injecting, never be able to bear children.

MS: You, did you remember any of the people that policed the labor camp?

AS: Yes.

MS: Were they Poles, or were they Germans?

AS: Germans.

MS: All Germans.

AS: I think they were all Germans, but in some instance I know there were Poles too. But mostly, in my camp, where I was, they were also, they were speaking fluently German. They were worse than men in our camp, German women. They were, they were terrible. They were just cruel, mean [pause]

MS: Some of the other interviews that I had, strangely enough, once or twice someone will relate that actually there was some humanity amongst some of the Nazi or German guards or on their death march, as they were going through the countries, someone, a German just handed him quickly a piece of bread in his hand. And that seems so amazing

to me, but there was never an episode of any kindness that you remember, or anything that was ever...

AS: I, I had been, I had been, when I was in the labor camp, I had few instances, being young, I was protected by many other women in other, not protected, what can you protect, but they tried to help me. But, unfortunately, the kindness what you received, many women received in camp. And not that I am downgrading anybody, because I feel that if it's your life at stake, that you are, you do anything to, how should I say it, to sustain your life.

MS: Mmm hmm.

AS: But we had a lot of Jewish girls, and young womans, which they gave themselves to German to obtain some food, and hoping that they would, they would help them to survive the war or if they would aid them to escape. At the end, it didn't help so. But they, they led better life, and they were helped in some way by German. But only in many ways you, how shall I say it...

MS: Were willing to submit to them?

AS: To submit to them, or, they had [unclear] matter of time they were [unclear] few of the women which they were with me in the same camp, they were saying, I was young, but somehow I could never, didn't know what was right and wrong. Still my mother must have told me something wrong, because I would never sell myself for a piece of bread.

MS: Mmm hmm.

AS: And, but many did, and they led better life. How long, at the end didn't matter, but they did.

MS: Do you remember how they, how they were treated by the other prisoners if this was obvious?

AS: They, it was very obvious to all of us. Yes.

MS: And...

AS: Who was helped and who was not helped, and, but, I would say that the girls when they received something, they shared with the rest of the mates in the, like food, they rescued some other people. They didn't do it out of pleasure, out of, many of them did out of hunger, out of hope to survive, because very easy people say, "Why did you do it?" But I felt it was, very easy to say and hard to do. When they put gun next to your head, your life seems so precious, that many people would do anything to survive. And I don't blame them. Because I have seen very lovely, lovely girls, they went to bed with those Germans, the *kapos*, whatever they were, just to obtain better food, better living quarters, and they were hoping to escape.

MS: That's interesting, Ann. Ann, any time during your internment in the labor camp, primarily because this is where you spent most of your time, and maybe in Bergen-Belsen...

AS: Yes.

MS: Was there any religious feelings or services or anything of any Jewish content that went on that you were aware of?

AS: No there was not at all. Oh no.

MS: And what about in the Polish work camp?

AS: Not at all. Not at all. There was no time even for religious things. They kept us on the job going to work. You came home. You barely had to eat. Sometimes you got an hour of sleep, and then they were calling us outside. They were counting you, like this, every night at a certain time, you were standing over there for four, five hours in the cold. You get back and you could get an hour or two hour of sleep you regarded, you were the happiest one. It was never, matter of fact, it was somebody [unclear] religious home. I always will be a Jew, and, but, it's very hard for me to pray. It's extremely hard. When I go to synagogue, I go primary out of tradition. I am going because I wanted to bring up my ch-, my son in Jewish, in Jewish environment. But, I am completely empty when I pray. I hope I eventually will change, but it's very hard. Either, people what I know, they survived the war, either they became very religious, or they lost, completely lost their faith in God.

MS: Now, that's interesting that you s-, because we know ourselves, amongst our own community we have a family that had been in a concentration camp, and they have maintained their religion *very, very* strongly.

AS: Strongly.

MS: Yes. And you often wonder how those feelings come again, come on so strong.

AS: I don't know.

MS: And...

AS: But most of my friends, they feel the way I do.

MS: It's very hollow.

AS: Very hollow. I would lie, if I would say differently...

MS: No, there's no reason to l-...

AS: I go because of tradition, because I always will be Jewish. But it's very...

MS: Ann, I want to thank you very much for your, for your, for this interview, and for your comments about your life. I know it's been a very difficult experience for you to go through this, but I hope in many ways it will bring you satisfaction to know that actually you have it down on tape, and that it will be a lasting thing for your, for your son—and for yourself too, that your experience is recorded. And I thank you once again for sharing it with us.

AS: You're welcome.

MS: It's very kind of you.

AS: What I would like to say is the most important thing, it is that Jewish people should *never* ever forget what happened, because my parents always told me when it happened in Germany, "It could never happen to us." And it did happen.

MS: So we always have to be on guard.

AS: Yes.

MS: Yes. Thank you, Ann. Thank you very much. [tape off? then on] Having it forced, you're a doll.

AS: I am sorry.

MS: You're a doll. Don't be sorry! My God, if anybody should be sorry, we should be sorry! You know, I, I have thought so many times...

AS: [unclear] together [tape off].