Interview with Libby Rosenzweig

By David Zarkin

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Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League

of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: This is David Zarkin on June 14, 1984, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with an interview for the Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-defamation League of Minnesota and the Dakotas for the Holocaust Oral History Project with Libby Rosenzweig. Please tell me your complete name, including your Jewish name if it is different.

A: My Jewish name, Leibe -- it means “love’ -- and when I came here to arrive this country, it was changed from Luba, which in Polish means “love”, too, to Libby. Storozum is my maiden name. Rosenzweig is my married name.

Q: And when and where were you born?

A: I was born June the 5th, 1926, in Breslau, Germany.

Q: Was that town known by any other name?

A: No.

Q: What were your parents’, grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ names?

A: The only one I knew was my grandmother from my mother’s side -- grandmother Chayah. My grandparents from my father’s side -- his parents -- he was 21 years older than my mother, so they were dead. My grandfather from my mother’s side died, too, very early, and left four young children.

Q: How about your parents? What were their names?

A: My father’s name was Rachmiel and Berish. Berish was another name for strength -- for bear. And my mother’s name was Rachel -- Ruchel.

Q: And what kind of work did they do?

A: My father, after the First World War, he didn’t speak any Polish, when Poland came to existence. So he went to Germany -- with the Germans -- because he spoke German and Russian and Yiddish. And so this is how I was born in Germany. He had a fruit store in Breslau. But when the Germans came to power, he realized that something is wrong, and he moved us in the beginning of the ‘30s back to the border -- Poland. This was the borderlines of the First World War, where it was Russia, Germany and Austria. And at the time it was Poland already. And there he still went back and forth until ’35. 1935 the Germans took the passport from the Jews, from him, anyway, and he couldn’t go anymore. He tried a lot of things. He was a Gerehasid, and the Gerehasidim were a very close-knit group. So they helped him in different ways. But it was hard, because he was older, to get involved. The last things he did is dealing with fish. There was markets on Thursdays and Fridays for the Christians and the Jews -- for the Shabbat. And there we had a stand, with live fish.

Q: Did you observe holidays and religious events in your home?

A: Very much. Very orthodox! Hasidic.

Q: Did you receive any formal Jewish education?

A: Yes. There was an organization -- for the girls, it was called Bais Yaacov. It was a Hebrew, a Talmud Torah type school, for the girls.

Q: And what was the name of that town in Poland?

A: Modrzejow, pronounced Mo-dray-yoov.

Q: You mentioned that the Germans took your father’s passport away in ’35. Were you aware of any events that were going on, politically, in Germany and in Europe, at this time?

A: In Germany, politically, I knew. We always lived in fear. And especially the part of town I come from, because this was always the part of town where it was once German and once Polish. It went back and forth. And it was called mostly Volkdeutsch. And those are the ones who were worst to deal with, the anti-Semitic.

Q: Tell me about the incidents of anti-Semitism that you can remember.

A: As a child, being in school, even, we all feared. I know as a child, my father used to, when he even traveled back and forth to Germany, he used to come home very disturbed. And this was on the Polish side, not in the German as much. They used to take the religious Jews with the beards and stop them, and antagonize them. And they used to take always my father as an example, because his beard was always neatly trimmed and combed, and it was pure white. And as children, too, we always had this. We were not free. I didn’t feel that I have the complete freedom of the Christians in my hometown.

Q: Did you have any contact with gentiles, and if so, where?

A: Our next door neighbors. That’s as far as it went. We had right next door to us, a Christian, Catholic neighbor.

Q: Did you ever have these people in your home?

A: No, no. They didn’t come to our home. We were raised completely fearful of the Christians.

Q: Did you personally have any contact with anti-Semitism?

A: I was 13 years old when the war broke out. We always had to be better than anybody else. Maybe me, too, because my maiden name, Storozum, is in Polish, “100 brains.” And so I had to go through with this, through school. So maybe I had to go through more than any other child! (Laughs)

Q: Did you have relatives that lived outside your community?

A: Oh, yes. We had relatives, Sosnowiec, Bedzin, Dabrowa Gornicza. We had quite a few. I have a very interesting story for this, but it’s too long to put it on tape. But it’s going to be my story. This was my father’s second marriage -- my mother. We are from the second marriage. And his first marriage, they didn’t have any children; he married into a very big family, and they kept him as “uncle” all their lives until he died -- he was taken -- to crematorium or wherever. So we had close ties with his first marriage, and so we had a big family.

Q: Do you know what happened to your relatives?

A: No one, nobody is alive. None, except my cousin, Henry Storozum, is in Canada. I have one cousin in Jerusalem, on my mother’s side. My cousin was at the same concentration camp as I, at the end.

Q: How old were you at the outbreak of the war then?

A: Thirteen.

Q: And how did you receive news of the war?

A; We lived next to the borderline. On the other side was a gorgeous temple. It must have been a reform temple, because they were different that I was brought up. It was on the German part. A black river divided it. And when the Polish military started to move back, and in the situation they were in, we realized that it’s bad.

Q: You saw the military troops moving?

A: Moving back. They moved through our hometown, back into deeper Poland. And they were in a terrible situation. So there we realized what is going on. Otherwise it hit us so fast, because Poland was anyway betrayed through their generals. It came so fast.

Q: What was the reaction of the Jewish community where you lived?

A; Everybody fled. A lot of people started to move with the soldiers. Our grandmother got sick and we couldn’t move. The first things what we realize, that the Germans are here, or the Germans are coming close, is because this gorgeous temple was on fire. And when we saw that this temple is on fire, I had tears in my eyes. When this temple is on fire, then we knew that it is the Jews, not just Poland. And our grandmother started to bid us to go, because of us children. So we went just five kilometers away.

Q: What did you do when you got to this place?

A: Well, we went to this family my father had. And when we came there -- they lived on the third floor -- and we started to go on the steps, somebody in the lowest, bottom floor, opened the door and he says, “ Nobody is there. But I am alone. And if you want to come in to stay with us, with me, you’re welcome.” A Jewish boy who his family left them to take care of the house, because this part of the country, the Polack people were as same as the Germans. They robbed and everything else. We came to open doors. Everything was open. Whatever they wanted was taken. The Germans didn’t take this. It’s the Polish people -- our neighbors in Poland did it.

Q: So your family did actually flee. You didn’t go very far. And so when did the Nazi occupation occur? Do you remember?

A: First of October.

Q: And what actions did the German forces take in the early months or years of the occupation?

A: This is where my first horror really started. Because you see we went in this boy’s family’s apartment, and after three days we heard steps -- somebody going on the steps -- and we went out, and it was our family. They didn’t go too far either. They brought the news that there is a bakery opened, and they are asking all the Jews with beards to gather in a certain gathering place.

Q: Who was “they?”

A: The Germans. The Germans were already there. And the S.S. First it was the S.S. who conquered our part of Poland, the S.S. troops with the black uniforms and the red armbands. They asked, the S.S. that all the Jews with the beards should gather in a place. So we didn’t let our father go, we decided not to let him go. And not to even let him know that it’s a gathering. My sister went for a barber, and I went to stand in the line to get some bread, because we didn’t have any more to eat. So going out where I was directed to go, that was where my first horror started, because the streets were paved with bodies, with the opened skulls and bellies and stomachs. I had to go through in order to get to the bakery. There were my first horror of the war, started right away.

Q: So did you talk to other people in the community about this?

A: There wasn’t any way of talking to anybody in the community at that time. Everybody was on their own. Whatever the Germans did, this is what it was, or where. And this is why sometime it really bothers me when I hear people say that the Jews went like sheep, or didn’t put up a resistance. It really bothers me. There was no chance. There was no awareness of anything like it. Nobody knew that something like this could ever happen, especially my father. My father’s best friends, which they helped us out with permits, the Jews in Germany never knew that they were Jews to begin with. It was the best country in the world for the Jews at that time. Who could even dream that something like this will ever happen! Except in Poland, maybe. We were more afraid of the Polish people than of the Germans!

Q: Can you recall any specific anti-Jewish measures or legislation by the occupation? By the Germans?

A: Whatever it was, it was anti-Jewish. It wasn’t any more war against any other country except against the Jews. Once they conquered the country, there were the Jews -- nothing else. So whatever measures were taken, it was first taken against the Jew. Hitler’s politics -- and the Germans, the Nazi politics -- were to take everything from the Jews away, and give it to the Germans. And that’s what they did. They took everything from us away and gave it, and this is why Germany never asked where it came from. And they had the best time in their life -- is by Hitler. Right away the legislation was against the Jew.

Q: How were your freedoms restricted? Do you remember?

A: Yes, right away from the beginning I wore a white armband with a blue Star of David. And then I had the yellow band on both sides. A yellow Star of David. Seven o’clock we had to be home. A Jew could not be later than 7 o’clock in the evening out. And we had different ration cards than the Christians. We had less. We were enslaved right away. Once they came into Poland, we were enslaved. We had to work for them, dig ditches, clean the quarters. After the S.S. went on, they were replaced by the Wehrmacht. And the Wehrmacht took away villas and big buildings for themselves. And we, the Jewish girls had to clean the quarters.

Q: How many hours a day?

A: What the Wehrmacht did, made a Jewish Gemeinde -- a Yiddishe Gemeinde. This is a Jewish Committee. And they worked, the Committee, to get whatever they needed. If they needed people, to labor camps, they went to the Committee. Somebody from the Committee had to give them the amount of cattle they needed.

Q: Did you have radios or newspapers? Did you know what was going on?

A: No. But you know, word of mouth.

Q: And what did you learn from other people? Anything about other ghettos or concentration camps?

A: I went to a labor camp in 1942. A lot of people, in the beginning, they fled. It’s very hard to believe, but the Russian and China were the only countries opened the doors for the Jews. And a lot of them fled to Russia and didn’t come back .The ones who had the means, the ones who had the money, fled a little further -- deeper to Poland. They didn’t return. And they are not alive. The ones who couldn’t afford to pay for their lives were sent to camps. And the ones who were sent to camps are here today to tell the story. Because at the end of ’44, there were gas chambers already, it was more freely then burned and killed. The Jewish Committee and other committees, could save people. Everybody had somebody to work for them

Q: Tell me about the events leading up to you going to the labor camp.

A: I had a cousin in Sosnowiec, and she had a candy store, and they took her husband to labor camp. She begged my father I should help her. So one day we had a gathering and they gathered us together there. And it’s good that she had, again the connections, and we were out. I had such a fear that I am going to never see my parents again, that I quit and I went home to be with them. Whatever it will be, will be with my parents, because this was my first incident. So two weeks later they came early in the morning. They gathered us out. We knew that something is going to be. But we didn’t know that it’s going to be gas chambers. It was mentioned already about the ghettos and things, that they are moving the Jews closer together. So we had things packed. We took whatever was necessary, a suitcase and a knapsack. And they gathered us together. But being there, it was a horse of changed field. And being there, and being born in Germany, I was thirteen, and an interpreter. I don’t know how I understood German, how I spoke German, because I went just to Polish school, but I was the interpreter for our little horseshoe committee. I don’t know how to express myself, because there were three buildings, closing in. and there was a caretaker. And for this caretaker, when the Germans came, he took me as an interpreter. So when I came to the S.S. in the front, I stood in the front of my parents. I overheard one S.S. said to the other, “ If half of the family is in concentration camp, the other half can go free.” So I didn’t tell this to my parents, and I volunteered. So we were selected. Volunteered to work in camp, because my sister was already in a working camp

You see, we had to have “zonders,” it was called -- working permits. And my sister, through my cousin in Canada, had a German zonder, working for a German seamstress. And this was the best. And because he was a furrier and had an open store, to repair, at the time, he gave me the Jewish zonder, but they looked for me, and I was with my cousin in Sosnowiec, so they took my sister in my place. So my sister was already in working camp. So when I heard if half is in working camp, I volunteered. And they took me to working camp, and my parents they sent back home for two weeks. And then they did the same thing again, and they were gone.

Q: Do you know where your parents were?

A: No, no. The only place was the gas -- Auschwitz we were not too far from. We were maybe 35 kilometers from Auschwitz.

Q: So how did you go to this labor camp and where was it?

A: Czechoslovakia -- Arnau. It was a spinning factory.

Q: How did you get there?

A: First what they did is they gathered us again in Sosnowiec, it was called Dulak. Was a gathering place where 5,000 -- this is why I’m saying that I was a lucky survivor -- from 5,000 they got us all down on the fields in rows, and then selected. And I was selected, between 60 girls, from 5,000, to go to this working camp in Arnau -- a spinning factory.

Q: And how did they transport you there?

A: At the time in ’42 it was still by trains. A regular passenger train.

Q: And how long did it take to get there?

A: I took five days to travel, because I remember, on the train I was fifteen. My birthday is June 5th, so it was the end of May, 1942.

Q: Describe the labor camp. What the living conditions were like, and what kind of work you did, what your day was like.

A: Being that we were chosen 60 girls, and being that it was in 1942, the 60 girls, at the time, we were not treated bad. It’s barbed wire, and we didn’t have any freedom, but we were not treated bad. We were treated as prisoners of war. The same as the Russian prisoners of war and the others. We had a German Lagerfuhrer.

Q: What was that?

A: She was the camp leader. And then we had a Jewish camp leader, a German Jewish nurse. And we worked. We learned how to spin, and we were all in the age between 14, 15, and 16. There were maybe five older girls. We didn’t know of anything else. I went to concentration camp with the feeling in mind that I’m going to come home! That I’m going to still have my parents when I come home. The idea.

Q: So you were making material?

A: What we were spinning, it came from the raw, called flax. The raw material. But I worked in fine spinning. It came already in big spools. I had to bring it through water and gears onto little spools. And this is how I learned to spin. We were really good. And lucky to be good, because in 1944, it had to be concentration camp, and our camp had to be removed. So because we were so good, and our directors were so nice, he moved us to another camp of his. It was a paper spinning factory.

Q: Do you remember the name of the director of the camp that you were at?

A: Dietrich was the factory called, but I overheard once called him, the director. Mr. Dietrich. And he was an older grey-haired gentleman. He was so nice. The good Germans were afraid. They couldn’t do anything, openly, to help, because their lives were at stake.

Q: Do you have any idea what use was being made of the stuff you were making?

A: At that time, no. We were just making cloth. Afterwards it was made into uniforms for the soldiers. Masks -- gas masks -- for the soldiers, and plastic gloves. I used to sew.

Q: Where did you live?

A: Barracks.

Q: And what were those like?

A: From ’42 to ’44 we had nice barracks, because they were new, but when we moved to Bernsdorf there was where the concentration camp really started.

Q: Before we talk about Bernsdorf, let’s talk a bit more about the labor camp. What was your typical day like? How many hours did you work?

A: A typical day was a day the same as the Christian day. But what we had to do more is, when it came like Saturday and Sunday when it was off, we had to clean. We had to clean our part of the factory up for the Monday day to start again. And they were going morning and night shift. The morning shift was from 6, I think to 2 or 3 o’clock, and then it went from 2 to 11. By the time we came, it was 12 and the night shift.

Q: And this labor camp was in Germany?

A: Czechoslovakia.

Q: How about food? Did they provide food and fire wood?

A: We had a ration. We had in the morning, they gave us before we went to work, two sandwiches. One for breakfast and one for later on, it had to be lunch or supper. We could live on it. It wasn’t so bad. Me, being from a Hasidic home, a lot of things I didn’t eat because they were made out of blood, thickened blood, or other things. And then the meat -- if we had meat, it was horsemeat. But Jewish girls were cooking in the kitchen. So whatever the things, it had a little bit of Jewish taste in it.

Q: So you were in the labor camp for two years?

A: Yes, almost two years. Because in March I came to concentration camp. ’44.

Q: How did that come about? How did you hear about that?

A: Our director came and told us, when we gathered for whatever meal was at the time when we came from our shift. The director came and he told us that in order for us to stay alive, he is going to transfer us to Bernsdorf. But we did not know. I didn’t know. Maybe others knew through being with Czechs. But I was so naïve always, I didn’t know. I was a kid.

Q: You mean you were naïve about what was going to happen?

A: Yes. I didn’t hear anything. Maybe it’s my nature. I make the best of each situation. My nature is, all my life, that I do mostly the best to my ability, and I have to challenge myself in my life, whatever I do. (Laughs0

Q: So he said that in order for you to stay alive that he was going to have to take you.

A: In order that we should remain, we had to be 300 or over, we cannot be any more 60 girls. We had to be a group of 300 or more. And he is going to transfer us to Bernsdorf.

Q: In order to work in the plant there would have to have been at least 300 girls?

A: The small camps were already closed. There was no work to get there. The small factories -- I don’t know if they closed, but we couldn’t’ve been there any more 60 girls. The Jews had to be 300 and over -- concentrated!

Q: Were you the only people -- just the 60 of you that were working in the camp?

A: Yes. We were the only 60 Jewish girls at this camp.

Q: So did he actually take you to Bernsdorf then?

A: No.

Q: How did that happen?

A: The S.S. came. Bernsdorf had already S.S.

Q: What time of day did that happen? How did the S.S. come?

A: We were prepared, packed, whatever we had, and they transferred us to Bernsdorf. We came at night.

Q: That was in Czechoslovakia?

A: Czechoslovakia, too. It wasn’t so far. It must have been maybe 30, 40 kilometers.

Q: How’d you get there?

A: By train, too.

Q: What kind of train?

A: This I don’t even remember.

Q: And how long did it take to get to Bernsdorf?

A: The whole day.

Q: And then what time of day did you arrive there?

A: We arrived at night.

Q: And what happened next?

A: I remember arriving at night, because there was a barracks already, a two room barracks for us, waiting. With one almost on top of the other, very close together.

Q: Were there just the 60 of you to arrive?

A: Yes.

Q: How were you processed or registered at the camp?

A: In the morning, we had to go into the factory. And when we went in in the factory, we had to be in the lines and counted, and we all had the numbers. I think its in Bernsdorf we got this political number. It was the Star, too, with this number. Everybody got a number and then this red triangle thing, and a yellow number over our triangle thing. And that’s all we were -- by numbers.

Q: So then what were the living conditions like in Bernsdorf?

A: There it was horrible. I mean we all got half a loaf of bread for the whole week. And at night we got soup out of kohlrabi and potatoes. But this wasn’t it. There we realized what’s going on. Because to have 300 and we were at this camp with all the camps together. I think there were maybe 400 girls. And they brought girls from Auschwitz, with the striped clothes, with the shaved heads, skinny. When I talk about it, I get the goose pimples. And they told us the horrors. They told us that we can’t expect anything anymore. (Cries. Tape off0

Q: What kind of building did you live in then in Bernsdorf?

A: It was barracks. There were two rooms. One like a dining room, intimate, and everybody had those -- lockers -- type. And one room where the 60 girls were.

Q: These were all the same people that you --

A: Right, right. I stayed with the same people until the end.

Q: You already mentioned something about other people in the camp were from Auschwitz. And how about some of the others?

A: Hungarian girls, mostly -- the ones from Auschwitz came from Hungary.

Q: Were there any other people in the camp that weren’t Jewish?

A: Not with us. We were fenced in. The Jews were always separated from the others, except in the factory, and in the factory, too, we were not allowed to talk to anybody -- in both camps.

Q: What acts were you witnessed to or aware of about systematic killings and fatalities from other causes in the camp.

A: Killings, I did not. We didn’t have any killings. Brutality, yes. But killings, no. The S.S. were brutal to us. We had to be very careful with everything. They had a slogan, if they caught somebody with something what they didn’t like, is that they’re not hurting them because they did something they didn’t like, they are hurting them because they got themselves caught.

Q: Did you have any contact with relatives or friends during this time?

A: No, no. We didn’t know nothing.

Q: Was there a means of communicating throughout the camp?

A: We did. We could talk to each other. We started to know approximately what’s going on and what is to be expected.

Q: Were you aware of the on-going war effort at this time?

A: We were aware, because whenever the American military succeeded, we felt it.

Q: How was that?

A: Because they blamed us! (chuckles) Because the Americans were the Jews! And the Jews were succeeding! If they were succeeding, we were to blame. We felt it. We were antagonized, and we were hurt, because of the success of the allies.

Q: How often did that happen?

A: In ’44 until liberation, very often. There wasn’t any rest, any tranquility, any nothing -- I didn’t know even how to express myself. We lived in fear. And nowhere where to go, because when the girls came from Auschwitz, they told us there’s nowhere where to go. There’s no escape. So it hurts me when it’s mentioned. There was nowhere, anywhere to do anything about it in this war.

Q: Do you remember the names of the major German personnel at the camp?

A: No. I tell you what, I don’t even remember my liberation date. I don’t know if it’s psychologically I erased it, but I know that when the time came close, the S.S. slowly disappeared. And we were left alone. And all of a sudden, after a couple of days, the Czechs came -- a lot of Czech people came --to take some Jewish girls from Arnau, from our first camp. Came for a lot of Jewish girls, and I went with, because I had somebody in Arnau -- a family -- which is a story too big maybe to put on tape, where they helped me during the two years too. This is why I didn’t suffer any hunger. Maybe others were hungry, I was not. Because I was again lucky that I was placed to a machine with the manager’s wife, and she was the finest woman I could ever meet. They were childless. And she had such pity, she felt so sorry for me, that when we had morning shift, in the morning when she came, she put a sandwich with butter and things on top of the oiling board, and at night, before she left, she placed one. And when she went away, I picked it up and ate it. So when it was over, and we heard that it’s coming, the Russians are close -- we were liberated through the Russians – and when the Czechs came, I went to her -- to protect her in case the Russians would hurt her or something. And I stayed with them. So I don’t even remember any liberation day whatsoever. But I know one thing, when I came back, the Russians were as brutal as the Germans, because they raped. And a lot of the girls were raped until the high ranking officers in the Russian army realized what’s going on and put a stop to it. But in between, the few hours, lot of girls were raped. So when I came back to the camp, to Bernsdorf, from seeing that the Russians were not harming the German couple -- I had to pick up my pieces and went back o the camp and see what’s going on -- a lot of girls were heart-broken, crying, raped. A lot of them took advantage, found a lot of S.S. women --– and shaved their heads and made them clean their barracks. It was a mess! A different type of mess. But there, too, I didn’t stay long, because a truck came from Waldenburg, a truck with men and women. They were liberated a few days before us. And they knew that they had relatives in our camp. So when they came to our camp, I found out that my sister is alive. So I took whatever I had and I went with them to Waldenburg.

Q: Who were these people?

A: Holocaust survivors.

Q: And they had a truck.

A: They had a truck from Germany to pick up their families. And this is how I found out that my sister is alive. And I went. Too much of my liberation day is erased completely from my mind.

Q: Just one more question about the camp. Do you remember any other specific units, either police or military that you came in contact with or heard about when you were at the camp. You talked about the S.S., but were there any others?

A: The only thing was the S.S. We never had anything to do with the military, didn’t know anything about the military, except that we did sewing for them. We made the masks and gloves.

Q: That was at the labor camp.

A: No, at Bernsdorf. When I came to Bernsdorf we went in in the line, and they asked occupations. And because we had at home a sewing machine, and my mother used to, as a child, let me fix sheets, I learned how to sew on the machine a straight stitch. So when I came to the line, and they asked my occupation, I told them that I am a seamstress, I know sewing. But being that I was a good spinner, they didn’t want to let me go to the sewing. So they put me to spinning paper. And it was horrible. And seeing the girls from Auschwitz, and knowing what’s going on, I didn’t care any more, and I didn’t want to do nothing any more. I let the machine go, and I didn’t work any more for them. So they were threatening me, to send me away and everything else. The spinmeister -- this is the foreman there – that I’m going to be sent away to Auschwitz, killed. But I didn’t care. So they put me in the sewing room. And there where I started to sew, there were a lot of girls, and it was clean and things. I had a beautiful voice, and it saved me too. The girls were singing, I’d sing with them. And finally, I didn’t give out the production, because I wasn’t a seamstress, and I didn’t know how to do it right, and in order to do it right, it took time. So the girls used to give me half-done and half undone, that I should be able to make production, that they shouldn’t send me out, and this is how I was saved. (Laughs) Just be singing my way through.

Q: So your sister survived.

A: Yes. You see my father had a lot of German friends. And when they brought me to this big gulag, gathering, before I went to Arnau, before they picked the 60 girls, it was horrible there. The insects, the lice, one on top the other. The building maybe could hold, normally, 1,000 people. And there were 5,000 women. So we were walking, me and my girlfriends, and I heard over the loudspeaker that they are calling for somebody to clean the quarters. And I said to my girlfriend, let’s go, just to get out of this. So I go down -- God was with me, that’s all, I believe very strongly -- so I go down in the quarters, and we were cleaning. And in came three S.S. men, one guy close to seven feet. Big. And they started to ask me questions. So the big guy comes over to me and asks my name. And I told them. And he gave a scream. “Are you the Berish’s daughter?’ I said, “Yes!” And he tells me a story that, “I used to come with my father to his house when he was older.” When finally he said to me what he can do for me. And at the time we were on the third story on the church floor. So my mother came to visit me. I used to yell. She didn’t hear me. She cried her heart. We couldn’t talk to each other. I said I would like to see my mother, because my father, at that time, he cried his heart out when they took my sister, but when they took me, he stopped work. He gave up and he stopped working. So my mother came to visit me. So I said I wanted to go home. He couldn’t let me go.

Q: This was at what time?

A: I’m talking ’42. So this guy said, “What else can I do for you?” I says, “ You know, I have a sister in the camp. I would like to be with her.” He said, “Fine.” So, when the time came to go to her, four more S.S. went with. And I was afraid to go. I was afraid that he wouldn’t be able to save me. So I remained. And I didn’t go. What I’m saying is, my sister went through the horrors of the Holocaust. She went through worse camps, not exactly death camps, but almost like it. They were beaten there, to death, in her camps. And because of the five S.S., I decided not to go. And I remained. This is a long answer to your question. (Laughs)

Q: No, I’m glad I asked, because that was another element that we hadn’t talked about. I think it’s important. So after your camp was liberated by the Russians? Then you went back to Arnau? And then you came back to the camp?

A: Yeah, Bernsdorf. Then I went to Waldenburg, in the truck. And this was 120 kilometers away from the place my sister was, Pedesfaldo.

Q: Was that the reason why you went there?

A: Yes, to be closer to my sister. And then 3 more girls with me, walked the 120 kilometers.

Q: Which would be about how many miles? Tell me how long it took.

A: What happened is, we started out early in the morning. And toward the evening, we did see Russians go through, but with the experience we had, we didn’t want to stop any Russians, so we pretended we don’t see them, and we walked. But toward the end, we saw a caravan with Russian soldiers, with horse and buggy, and we were so tired, so we decided the last horse and buggy, was older Russians, and we decided to stop them. They took us, and after a few kilometers, they stopped the caravan, and one, the leader of this caravan, a Russian, came over to me, to our things. I was always a big kid, a fat kid, but with as much weight as I lost, I was still heavier than the rest of the other people, because I had something --to lose – so he came over, I was always good looking, so he came over to me. He put a hand on me, and I threw it off. Finally he got really mad. And he was scarred and mean. He said, “ If she is not going to go with me, I’m going to kill her!” in Russian. And because he must have been a Ukrainian, I understood what he said. And we decided to jump the wagon when it started out. So we slept over the night, and then we started. It took us two days, almost to get to my sister’s. Almost two days.

Q: Did you know if she was alive?

A: Yes. This is why. I knew that she’s alive, because the people who came with the truck told me that she’s alive.

Q: Were these people from your hometown?

A: No, but they were together in the camps.

Q: So then how did you find your sister?

A: I knew where she is, in Bedeslavda, so once we came to Bedeslavda -- as soon you went in in town -- I resembled my sister -- and people were wild, asking questions, “Where are you from? Do you know my sister? Do you know my relatives? Did you hear anything?” This is how we found each other, as much as we could.

Q: So what happened after that?

A: After that, I came closer where she lived. They brought me there, and when people came to tell her that I am coming, and she walked down the stairs, I didn’t recognize her.

Q: So did you return to your pre-war home? What had happened to your home in that small Polish town?

A: It was the southern part of Germany, and we were in the northern part. So this was now Poland, occupied by the Russians. So when we went to my hometown, our Christian next door neighbor took over our home, and didn’t even let me in -- even to take a look. And the killings there were terrible, because they were afraid that the ones who survived are going to take back the things what the Polish people have. So they killed a lot of Jews off there, too, after the war. I stayed in Sosnowiec with my cousin for a while and we went back to Bedeslavda and from there we went to Munich.

Q: How’d you happen to decide to go to Munch?

A: Because we heard that my mother’s sister’s husband is alive, and that he’s in Feldafing, by Munich. So we smuggled through -- with bottles of Vodka -- through the Russian borders.

Q: On a wagon or what?

A: No, there were trains going. Cattle trains and other trains going back and forth. And it took days and days to smuggle, and to go through the borders, until we came to Munich -- to the American zone. And there was a different life -- completely different.

Q: How so?

A: The freedom! And I’ll never forget, when I met a Negro soldier and I got so scared. For the first time in my life I saw a Negro soldier. (Laughs) But it was the freedom there.

Q: So you stayed with your uncle then, near Munich?

A: Yes, Feldafing, for a while.

Q: Did you look for your family?

A: We did look, but there was…the news traveled fast.

Q: Did you work there then?

A: No. There were the D.P. camps. Munich was a D.P. camp.

Q: And how long were you there?

A: There we were until March, ’46.

Q: Was there any question of choosing Palestine or the United States?

A: Yes, I always wanted to go to Palestine. But each time I started out, we were sent back.

Q: You were sent back? By who?

A: Caught. They didn’t let us in. We tried in the beginning, smuggling, to Palestine.

Q: How far did you get?

A: We went through the Austrian mountains to Italy. (Laughs) and there we were caught and sent back. I never wanted to come to this blessed country of ours (Laughs) because everybody thought that everybody’s rich here, and after a concentration camp. I didn’t want to look up to anybody any more.

Q: Did any organizations help you during this time that you were in Munich?

A: The UNRRA.

Q: And how’d you come to the United States and to Minnesota then?

A: We moved to Frankfort. And by me marrying two brothers -- this is my second marriage – my first marriage, one brother wanted to go to America so bad, was money-hungry, and I couldn’t say or do anything, so we came. This is a very long story, which I’m writing about it, too. This is how I came to America.

Q: Do you maintain contact with the Jewish community here?

A: Very much so. I am 100% American. I gave three gallons blood. I counseled for the Youth Emergency Service. I was president in Sisterhood. I am a three-generation life member in Hadassah, a life member in Mizrachi, a life member in Pioneer Women.

Q: Do you maintain contact with other survivors, or any other survivor organizations?

A: I am very disturbed with survivor organizations, and with the survivors too, because I don’t know where they are really going, and what makes them do the things I feel that’s so unjust. They are not connecting the Holocaust with Israel, that because of the Holocaust of the 6,000,000 Jews and because of our homelessness, we have Israel. They refuse to recognize it. And this is why I lost the desire to be in contact with anybody. I don’t know who’s doing it is in this community, but I walked out once of a Holocaust Commemoration meeting because Dora Zaidenweber said to me, “ Maybe in 1985, we’ll connect.’ First she said it’s political, and I don’t know where the political is, and what she has in mind, and how. But for some reason she took it over and made it hers. I’m glad that I have the opportunity to mention it. I got from Michael Greenberg, a letter with that professor from the University -- whatever his name is -- he’s in charge of the Holocaust thing what we are doing now. The oral history project. And he once said to me that it isn’t so, because the Zionist organization would have got Israel. And this is such a bunch of baloney. And he should know it, because he’s a professor. (Laughs) And it’s the truth. It’s a fact! It’s a fact that because of the Holocaust and our homelessness that we got Israel returned to us. So why shouldn’t our parents and 6,000,000 Jews get credit for it? They deserve it. I’m so disturbed! The film which was shown on Channel 2. Breaking the Silence: Second Generation -- they had children of Holocaust survivors -- Holocaust survivors who were once married, and they lost their first families, and got remarried and had children -- young children, children with a generation gap, worse than anybody else’s. And they blame their parents because of their failures in their life -- because they went with the generation gap trend, and with their lifestyle, and who knows what, drugs or whatever else, in the 60s and 70s, and blaming the silence of their parents, that they silenced the Holocaust! My children have asked me about the Holocaust. If they wanted to know, they knew! It’s ugly! And this they bring on television to make me feel bad! There is more survivors like me than the older survivors who had already families and lost their families. So I really don’t know. This is why I try to stay away! And I’m so anxious to pursue it with my life story, with my findings. And I am very active in the community. I was always active and I’m still active.

Q: You mentioned that one TV program. How about other films or books that you’ve seen about the Holocaust. Would you recommend any of those?

A: Yes, they are true. They are true.

Q: Any particular ones that stand out in your mind -- books or films or TV programs?

A: I tell you the truth: that I myself don’t watch them and don’t read them because I feel that those are the books and those are the movies for the ones who didn’t live through it. I lived it through. All my life I was very emotional -- and nightmares. And my kids lived with me through, because they had to wake me up from screams, during the night, thinking that I might get a heart attack, screaming from a nightmare and the fear. Those are for people who didn’t live through it. And it should be shown. And it should be taught. And it should never be forgotten. Not just for the Jews, but for mankind.

Q: So you haven’t read or seen any films except for that one?

A: I don’t watch. My husband watched. I learned how to turn myself off so beautifully. My mind and body is under my control. And I know how to adjust myself to those things. (Laughs)

Q: Has your belief or practice in Judaism or a Supreme Being changed?

A: Yes, very much so. Because I feel -- and this is what I’m going to write about -- my learnings from the Holocaust. I feel that Judaism was meant with righteousness, not religion. It was turned into a religion and left the righteous part out. We are becoming very selfish and not suffering. I believe it’s God’s will. And I believe that because we did not see to it, to prevent things, things happened to us. And we are still not doing it. Because a Jew was never a Jew first. They were all nationalities, but not Jewish -- until the Christians made them Jews. And if we are going to realize that we have to be Jews first and realize that in 1947 Israel made us honorable Jews and give them the credit, and see that we have Israel -- strong -- that in case something ever should happen, it won’t happen, because there will be a place where to go and be safe. There, where God will help us. But if we are going to overlook our second comings, then we are not worth it, nothing

Q: That leads me to this next question. Can you tell me what it has meant to you to be a survivor?

A: To me, it’s meant a survivor is; that I was saved with a purpose in my life. But I have never been given here, in this community, the chance of expressing it and pursuing it. Whatever I am doing, I am doing with my strong will and determination.

Q: If you can, after your experience during the Holocaust, could you please explain or describe to me you’re general feeling about human nature, non-Jews and Germans.

A: I feel we are all born with an Eichmann in us. We are not born all good. The goodness has to come. And we have to work with it. And if we let the bad take the goodness over, then we are not human. I feel that’s it our determination. It’s us. We let it go thousands of years ago, and it became a disease. We brought the disease unto/upon ourselves. And it started with the destruction of the Temple. And it started with making Jesus a god, with us letting this happen, because of fear. We always had the fear. And if, confronting Jesus and seeing what he had to say, and what he had to do, believe us as Canaanites, or whatever it was at that time, disregarding the whole situation. So, who made Jesus god? Because we didn’t look into him, he was made into god. But if he was right in his way, or in some of the things, if he could heal, if he could do something for the poor people, and for the people who needed him, it should have been confronted right away and looked into. And now we have to work with the truth. We have to seek. Israel is our self. And I believe from there, from Jerusalem, will come the peace. From there will peace come. And not just by God. Because God says, in my opinion, the way I was raised, that you do, and I shall help you. He didn’t give us nothing on a silver platter! He gave us this world that we should do it. And we should make it into what we want to. When we want it good, it will be good. And if not, it will be destroyed. But it’s up to us, not to God. And He is here to help us. And there is the truth. There is the archeological things if we are going to support it. And if we are going to see that the places where we can be digged and can be, there is being so much done, that the truth will come out!

I do have tapes which I spoke for the International embassy for Jerusalem, and I told them the same things. I feel, deep in my heart Jesus did not want to change the religion. The followers did, and made us Jews and Christians. We were Israelites at the time. And something has to be done. I know it can’t come overnight, but if we are going to work to it, Israel is going to be strong. And if Israel is going to be under Israeli occupation -- the truth will have to come from them -- the religious truth. History! Not the religion. History will have to come out from there. And we will have to unite, and work to a common goal, before the non-believers will destroy us. This is my feeling. And this is my main concern and my teachings from the Holocaust.

Q: Well, I think we’ve covered all the questions that I had on my list, unless there was anything that you needed to ask.

A: Once I get excited my mind drifts off. But my main concern is Israel. My main concern is religion. And my main concern is to try to unite ourselves. And peace and love and understanding.

Q: You stated it all very well. This concludes the interview with Libby Rosenzweig on June 14, 1984 for the JCRC-ADL Holocaust Oral History Project.

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