-TITLE- RACHEL HELFGOT

-I\_DATE- 1/7/84

-SOURCE- ONE GENERATION AFTER\BOSTON

-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND\_QUALITY- POOR

-IMAGE\_QUALITY- FAIR

-DURATION-

-LANGUAGES- ENGLISH

-KEY\_SEGMENT-

-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-

-PERSONAL\_NAME-

-CORPORATE\_NAME-

-KEY\_WORDS-

-NOTES-

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Q. (not recorded)

A. My mother died, she was burned by a kerosene lamp when I

was 7 years old. Her name was Mottel. Before marriage it was

Zatterman. My father's name was Meyer Wasserman.

Q. Were they from Poulev?

A. They met there at a wedding. I know that my family were

very fine people. My father had a store and he was a teacher.

My mother worked in the house and helped in the store. I had

a brother, Shemen, and 2 sisters, one died- I don't remember

her name.

Q. Before the war how was business?

A. He made a living. We were very poor. My dad got married

again. I could not stay with them. I was almost 10 years old.

I took my money for shoes and gave it to a man to take me to

Warsaw, where my mother's brother lived. They were poor

people too. I had to work but they gave me nothing. I got a

job in a grocery) 6 days a week. After 7 I had to stay

outside to look for policemen~ because we were supposed to

close at 7, and we were open from 7-10. Then the maid touched

my leg. He scared me and I went away.I went to Prague.

Q. Where did you live?

A. My brother was locked up in jail in Germany. My uncle gave

me $3000 and sent me to Germany. I was good-looking and tall.

I went to see my brother in jail. I invited 2 men there to a

bar where I worked. They drank and wanted me to drink but I

didn't drink it. the men wanted to take me to a movie, but I

saw a hotel, not a movie. I say I'm tired and drunk but I

would meet them the next night. The second night I said I

want my brother. I took him and went back to Warsaw and gave

the money back to my uncle. I bought a store when I was 14

years old, a candy store.

I had a husband but I no like him. It was in the Jewish part.

Later I sold the store and I open grocery. I sold vegetables

and fruit- the customers know me and like me. Later, Hitler

come and take me away. One half hour they gave me. I have 2

kids, a son and a daughter. I make very good business. Lots

of people worked for me. I treat my husband very good.

Q. What year is this?

A. I was 15. (could this be a mistake??????)

Q. And your children?

A. They were 5 years old and 7 years old when they were

killed. My daughter was Mottel, and a son, Moshe.

Q. What year did Hitler come?

A. In 1939. My children were in the country and I couldn't go

pick them up. They took away the kids and put us in the

ghetto. My husband got sick, typhus there was no doctor. I

got a doctor and he said to put leeches on him. He was sick

almost 2 weeks. I went out and I couldn't find the doctor. He

(husband) was dead. Every day they send you to another block.

I had a job- I put bristles into the brush. That is why they

keep me, they were sweeping brushes. I was there 4 months.

Later they have a selection. they need 10,000. My son was 5

and my daughter 7. They put the kids "5 in a line". They

looked you in the face, the people to kill. They pushed me to

one side and my sister in law to another. I said I want to go

with her. they whipped me and took her, her 2 sons and other

people.

I see the boy. He had a gray suit and black hair. They

took him by the arms and threw him out the window. They shot

him. I went upstairs- nobody there. Downstairs in the 4

corners were SS men. I beg one, "They took away my kids,

please let me go with them!" He took a gun and hit me on the

head. I woke up and it is light already. I ran out- I

couldn't go back in sharp day. I stay a week. I hide myself

underneath stores, with no food. At night I look for food in

the basement. there were 2 Jews dressed up as SS men. He said

do you have money? The other day they took out all the people

and burned them up in the crematorium. They say everyone is

going. Everyone was hiding in the basement. He took a

newspaper and a match and threw it in. He said, you're going

to get gassed anyway... I saw my sister. She had asked how I

was. they shot her. Again, I hide without food. Outside the

shop there were kids, 1 and 2 years old, laying outside.

Q. They took you in a cattle car?

A. yes. I don't know how long it traveled. The trip to

Treblinka was terrible. No toilet, just 3 pails . No a place

to sit.

One person killed the other. There were 10 dead people/ We

had to stand up the whole time.

Q. You didn't stay there?

A. I was in Auschwitz maybe a year. In Maydonik they give you

a star. But no needle. They said Where is your star? I said I

had no needle. I got whipped 15 times. In auschwitz they took

off our hair. I got pants and a jacket. We had a cold shower,

ice cold. 4 girls sleep to a coil. A fat woman on top fell

and broke all the coils. They give you a slice of bread in

the morning for all day. You have a dish so big but you only

get a coffee cup full of soup. Always the same. You got shoes

made from wood, so big. The shoe got stuck on a march and you

could not pick it up. I stopped and the German shepherd bit

my behind. When I got hungry I go into the dirt. I suck the

bones. I was so happy.

Q. How long were you there?

A. About a year. Later everybody had to go out. Not with a

train but walk, run. 40 miles an hour. Every minute they shot

another one. I said I have to make it. After Auschwitz I went

Ravensburg. I went to work. I went to pick up the shit and

put it in a trunk. At Auschwitz I do other things. They bring

people from other countries. I search their clothes for money

or gold, etc. Many times I throw money and gold in the

toilet.

Q. Did people try and smuggle things?

A. No. They give you different clothes when you left. I saw a

friend there. She knew she would not make selection, she was

too skinny. So first I went for me and then I went for her.

What difference did it make? She died later.

Q. Were you sick there?

A. Yes I got a swollen breast.They put me in the hospital but

didn't do nothing. There was a selection and they took out

all the people. I say I work everyday. She said they can do

nothing. I hide under the straws that we sleep on and I found

safety. Later they find me. They say they will shoot me like

a dog. I say I don't care. A French girl told many people how

to escape. She tried. They brought her back. They said you

can say you're sorry. She spit in their face. They were going

to hang her. She asked to speak to the girls and she cut her

wrists with a razor. They took dead people away in a truck. I

beg him to put me with the dead people. He said you got

money? I said where would I get money? I no eat for a week. I

eat snow. When you got sick, they kill you. The hospital was

the worst thing. They say come and take a bath. One body

would stick to the other. They would open up the window, and

throw gas in.

Q. Did you say there was a song about Auschwitz?

A. I sing what I know (sings, crying) Where they cook food

they give me an axe to chop wood. I knock my finger almost

off. I held my hand up for the blood. I showed the cook- she

told me to hold my hand down. I couldn't she slapped me. I

got no food. I rip off a piece of my dress, and heal it

myself.

Q. I t healed?

A. My breast it was the same thing. I healed it with urine. I

don't know if that's what other people did. We got a slice of

bread. All these people are hungry on the other side of the

fence. I say I'm hungry too but I throw my bread. The SS men

see- they ask the people, who threw it? No one says a word-

he says the girl will get killed and everyone next. All the

people were not killed. They were shaved. But nobody said a

word. Because I helped as much as I could.

Q. Were there Polish in the camps?

A. Germans took the children. there were Polish and gypsies.

One day they burned 5000 of the small people and gypsies up,

no selection.

Q. Was there anyone from Poulev?

A. there was no one. There were 4 girls in a bed but they

were not friends, because everyone grabbed the quilt. When

the Russians came I say I am Jewish. He says I can't believe

you are left! He went in a store and got me the nicest

clothes. I told him there was a starving boy and he took him.

Q. Is that your number?

A. 47372. they put a needle everywhere. The 4 is 16 times

with a needle. It hurts like hell. They do it right away.

they shave you. Every 2 months you take a bath- a cold

shower. I have a lot I can't remember- 1939- 1945! How can I

remember?

Q. Did you want to live the whole time?

A. I said I am going to live. They put a truck up. All the

people fall like coal. They say to take a bath. They lie. In

the selection, you are so skinny- how can you look good?

END OF TAPE ONE

Q. Were there incidents where Jews killed gunmen?

A. No.

Q. You were strong?

A. I was skinny but I went like this (pinched cheeks) to have

color. Once they need blood for tests. When I saw this I know

I have good blood. I hide- they don't catch me. I said I have

to live. I met a guy there in Auschwitz, He liked me-I didn't

like him. I met a guy here I like. I married him.

Q. About 1945?

A. Yeah.

Q. Then, you were liberated?

A. Yeah. The Germans locked us up where we leep. No food, no

nothing. Later when the americans come in thy opened up the

door. SS men shot 7 girls when the Americans were far away. A

lot of girls that ran to the food and ate fast died right

away. I ate little. They gave us to eat and took us home. I

thought I might have somebody there when I came to Warsaw. A

Pollack had my store. I had no place. The Pollack said,

"You're nice but the Jews got what they deserved." I had to

leave. I met my husband- a tailor. He had a room that slept

maybe 15 people. We got married in 1945.

Q. You were liberated in April?

A. In May. I took the Pollack to court. They said I could

have it but when I walked out of the store he put a gun to my

back. I got married in my house. We had a little party. In

the summer. We went to Germany, Hof-?. I would go anyplace. I

was pregnant already. I had my daughter in 1946. My sons were

born in 1943. He was a fine man.

Q. Were there still Germans?

A. No, they were good. I cigarettes, cigars, chocolate- they

love very much coffee. They give me clothes. I went to

america.

Q. Did you have trouble getting a visa?

A. No. You didn't need family in America. I got sick on the

ship. I thought I'd die. the ship took 10 days. They gave us

a hotel in NYC on Montrose Street. They look for a room. I

didn't know English. I bring $700 from Germany. I open up a

candy store with friends- candy and fruit. It was on 8th

street- maybe 40 blocks. I pushed the carriage there. i speak

what I could. There were 3 stores on the block. I bought

another store. my husband borrowed $300 but paid $40 a month

in interest. I said you put the money back in the register. I

went to the bank. They wouldn't lend. I took a bottle and

money I collected and (tells man off) We opened 7:00- 12 atr

night. I worked very hard. Later i bought the other store.

One day he went out to pay bills and went in to eat lunch,

and put down his head and died. He was 52 years old. He was

too fat- he loved food.

Q. What year?

A. I stayed there almost 2 years. I didn't have any money. A

woman came in and pinned a little bag to my shirt- it was

$400 ! I couldn't make it. I looked for a job. I worked there

19 years. In Streit's Matzoh. I worked in the store. I sold

and bought. I couldn't write or read! I took in money and

everything. They loved me. The customers come from far away.

English I learned for myself. My husband spoke Jewish.

Q. Did you ever join a shule?

A. Yeah. I'm not very religious, but I believe in God very,

very much.

Q. In the camps did you believe in God?

A. Yes. I didn't want to eat bread. I wanted to eat potato.

Q. Despite what happened to the Jews?

A. Maybe they sinned.

Q. Could it happen again?

A. I don't think so. It was foolish. They killed 6 million

Jews. Hitler tried to kill all the Jews but they couldn't.

Q. Did you tell your kids?

A. They know I cannot forget.

Q. How does it make you feel about being Jewish?

A. I was born a Jew. I want to be Jewish.

Q. How do you like America?

A. I like it. I like to make a dollar!

.END.