

Jewish Historical Society Oral History

Dorothy Finger interviewed by Yetta Chaiken

July 29, 1983

- Y: Dorothy, would you like to tell us where you were born, when, and something about your early life?
- D: My maiden name was, in Polish, Disha Kraushar (?). I was born in in Hararov(?), Poland on August 8, 1929. I was an only child. My parents had a small department store and I had a very happy youth, going to school, playing with friends. I was even allowed to sometimes hang around and watch in the store. One of the things they would permit me was to pour perfume into little bottles; in Poland the perfume did not come wrapped individually as beautifully as it does here. It came in a big bottle and you weighed it and poured it. These were very happy years.
- Y: Your parents had a retail shop?
- D: Yes, at first ladies garments.
- Y: Were they comfortable? What was their economic (status)?
- D: I would say upper middle class, I was told it was called the "pecca", which means the aprotectary (?) which means the merchandise was very expensive for that region where we lived.
- Y: What about your Jewish background?
- D: I went to a Zionist (?) Hebrew school after school, which had nothing to do with religion, but it had to do with Zionism, with Palestine. My parents did attend the synagogue, and on the High Holidays, I went later on, but I never attended any - they didn't have any - the _____ had it so it was either going to the Heddrah (?) or the Hebrew school, modern Hebrew school. Unfortunately, in September, 1939, the famous World War II began, and Hitler the war on Poland and Poland help up for two weeks and it was divided between Hitler and Stalin. The part where I came from, which was the eastern part, called Galitsia (?), was occupied by the Russian army, from September 1939 until June or July 1941. Life suddenly became very difficult for us; of course, we didn't know what was in store. My parents' store was nationalized. The government took it over. They put a lock on the door.
- Y: You no longer could work in it, or your parents?
- D: Not in the store or have the income from it. We were still quite comfortable.
- Y: What did your parents do during that time?
- D: I really don't remember. We were hiding most of the time because they were going to take us to Siberia. On Friday nights, for some reason, first of all they sent all the people who came from the other part of Poland; many people ran away knowing that Hitler was coming would run across the water. These long trains would stand at the station. Most of these people were Jewish, of course. And also the people they decided were anti-communist or bourgeoisie, they were sent to labor camps, and we had successfully, and luckily, or unluckily, maybe later on in history, we found out we were unlucky, because some of the people who were taken to Russia survived. Then Russia established a school system, where before we all went to public schools.
- Y: Let's go back to your education. You were educated in Polish schools first.
- D: I finished three years of public school in 1939. In Poland you start school at 7.

- D: In my writings I described it. I cried every night for about a year, every night.
- Y: How was your mother able to manage in terms of your well-being?
- D: We were supporting each other; we became partners. I had to be with her, and my mother was very brave, and tried to help me cope with it, but to me the loss was just about the worst thing that could happen.
- Y: Did you have a special relationship with your father?
- D: Yes, and the night before, he had me on his knee, which he used to do, but during the war, and the last few months, he hadn't. As if he had a premonition that it was to be the last time together. And that stayed with me. One thing, the Germans never let you mourn, because whatever happened next was worse. The next thing we knew we were thrown out of our home, and I remember we had to move on a sled, and the farmers and people around would just come and take everything without asking. You had no control of what you owned, and we were left with very few possessions. And we were lucky. We moved, my mother and I, to a house with three or four families living on one floor. They were forming a ghetto, and it was blocked off, of 300 people who were allowed to stay in the city; you had to be employed. And we had a very good friend who was a physician and he obtained employment for my mother and myself, so we could stay in the city. We were allowed in two blocks or something like that.
- Y: What kind of work did you do?
- D: My mother worked in a hospital. And I worked in a public bath.
- Y: What was your job?
- D: I think carrying water. I never saw anybody being bathed there, but it was the idea that you were employed doing necessary employment. That lasted until March, 1943. Then chaos broke out; twelve of us gathered together, and asked our Christian friend if he could save us or help us.
- Y: What kind of chaos?
- D: People running around because they know the next day/city was going to be ^{the} _____ or _____ which means free of Jews.
- Y: Someone had let it be known that the Germans were going to come in and/move ^{re} all Jews physically.
- D: Exterminate. Evidently there must have been trenches being dug because there weren't that many.
- Y: You don't know how many Jews?
- D: I have a feeling maybe 2,000. They were down to 300. In all ghettos, you did not only have the population, the original population, but (also) people from the villages, which were very close by. During the war, it may have 5000 or 3000, the original population, and then we were down to about 300, but we had several "actions", but of course, I described the one that affected me the most, the loss of my father. At that point, this very fine Christian led us into a

- D, cont. hiding places. My father - We got this later, somebody came to ask my father to intervene, somebody else was taken by the Germans, so he was asked to intervene, since he was sort of safe, and of course, when he went to intervene, they took him. And they took him on the train.
- Y: And this was in 1942?
- D: A week before Rosh Hashannah and it was the hottest day of the year, and he went on that train; that train stood all day long, it stood while they were gathering people.
- Y: Did you see them take him?
- D: No, we were like five miles away, on the farm, hiding. I never remember right now being as hot, and we were covered with straw, dying of thirst, but we couldn't turn or make any kind of noise, because the farm help would hear us; they would have reported us. We heard the screams, the screams were awful.
- Y: What do you mean, the screams?
- D: The screams of the children being gathered.
- Y: But you told me you were five miles away?
- D: You could hear the screams, Maybe it was three miles. You could hear the shooting.
- Y: And this was just gathering people up for the train?
- D: Gathering up the people for the train, people knew where they were going, people were resistant. They would take a child and throw it against the telephone pole; and the mother would be watching, and the laments were just awful. And we told later that there two murders. My father always said that he would never go to the crematory alive. Some people jumped out of the train; that were two versions: that he suffocated, and somebody told me that he hung himself. Later on, they came to release them and he was dead. Now, I don't know which is true.
- Y: He was being released because he was doing this important work? But he had said they would never take him alive?
- D: The trains pulled away, and as far as I know from somebody ...
- Y: observers...
- D: There were no observers because everybody went to the crematorium, but people used to jump out of the trains, and occasionally, somebody would survive. Each wagon had an SS man with a machine gun. Even though it was very difficult to jump, but they would break a board and jump, and a number were killed. Of the few who jumped, occasionally one would survive. The train was going fast and people may have been shot in the leg or arm, so this was the report of the death of my father.
- Y: What was your mother's reaction?
- D: When my mother and I returned to the city, how does one feel when one loses a parent? I thought it was the worst thing that happened to me, and only to me.

- D-cont. or some kind of an edifice built in a big garden, out of the city, and we took a bucket of water, and some clothes with us, and we went to that third floor, and he locked us from the outside. And it was freezing. March in Poland - March here compared is very mild. And we almost froze. My mother and I and 10 other people, a friend of mine, and her mother; at this point, nobody had a full family, either single people, or two people left in a family. We had gone through all kinds of extermination processes over there. This is one of my times when I still get goose pimples when I think of it. The screams were right under our window, the screams of the people not wanting to go, people being shot when they wouldn't move.
- Y: This was into the trains?
- D: No, this was into the ditches.
- Y: They dug ditches and were forcing people, they way they did in Kiev and Babiarz - the same kind... you were saved from that ?
- D: We could not leave because we were locked inside that barn. No one could see us but we had nothing to eat, a little bit of water, and this went on for two days. Everyone was hiding, which is why it took so long, but they gathered everybody, and in the evening of the second day, they came to our place, and they because they knew where people would be hiding. They tried to break the door, they couldn't do it, but I think each of us died every second.
- Y: The fear that you had is still with you.
- D: It is still with me. I was thirteen. And my mother was with me. And we trying to think what to do, and they came up to the door, they were very very clever, brought some wax and went back to make an impression, and the next morning brought a locksmith with them, and they had dogs with them. They knew there were people hiding there. God forbid somebody didn't get killed. We were planning, what could we do? Tie our clothes together in knots and jump out from the 3rd story window, but they left a watchman. Any kind of planning didn't help. We were sure that was the end. The next afternoon, we heard the door open and we said in the meanwhile, we heard the man say, Come down, it was the man who let us in; it's quiet now. Everybody has been killed. And run where the eyes take you. I have to leave because I will be killed with you. And we came down and started to run.
- Y: Did all 12 of you stay together or did you separate?
- D: We ran together; we ran for about a few miles, and suddenly a young SS man with a lantern approached us, and he said (I'm waiting for you) and follow me, I'll take you to the station and we'll shoot you in the morning. So we turned around and followed him because he had the gun. We walked a few steps and he turned around and he said, give me your money. Everybody always had something, money hidden, I had money in a down vest, so the visible things, and he let us go. And it was snowing, and it was a beautiful evening, and that was the last time I left my city. We ran; we had to tiptoe through the village; we knew that that the villagers were worse than the Germans because of the anti-Semitism.
- Y: This was the Ukraine? or Poland?
- D: ~~Y/~~ The Ukrainian part of Poland. Just as we past the village, a

- D, c. a slack (?) pulls up with the emblems on it, one has a bayonet, one has a gun, Halt, they stop and they come down. We would rather be killed by the Germans because the Germans would shoot, but they had other forms of torture, I was the first one, walking with a friend of mine, and they told us to undress. So I had to undress, to my slip and barefoot, undies no, it was below zero, And then everybody else, they searched the clothes, and found what they found, and then they let us get dressed, and then they would take us to be shot. So we started begging with them, pleading with them, crying, and after they had determined that they had gotten everything, they let us go. They let us go, we go for another twenty miles, no, three or four miles, again, and another group, they tortured us. They could have shot us, but they didn't. But at that point it was worse than being shot. And this went on three or four times. And finally, I remember my mother said, let's run...
- Y: Were you on a main road?
- D: A main road, but just village roads, where one connects to the other,
- Y: Where were you heading?
- D: There was a ghetto in the city named Rohokin (?), I can't remember the mileage, 25 kilometers. And we got there. We arrived early in the morning, and of course, the ghetto was always surrounded with wire, and luckily we found a place we smuggled into the ghetto. There was a very systematic geographical elimination of the ghettos. And the Germans knew that if any Jews survived, they would get into the next ghetto. Next month, or next week, they would liquidate that ghetto. And until that was all,
- Y: Didn't you feel that going to a ghetto was unsafe?
- D: There was no place that was safe. At least you were with Jews. Anywhere else all your neighbors were so hostile. There was no other place to go.
- Y: You talked about some Polish people...
- D: Yes, there were individuals, but at this point, nobody could help us in our own city any more. Just remember to help a Jew was almost worth your life. But I can understand why people didn't help, but most most of them helped to kill us. If they had stayed neutral, thousands of Jews would have survived. I'm not talking about other countries, I don't know, but where I came from, because the Germans could have never never accomplished the objectives without the help of the natives. When we came to that ghetto, there was somebody there that we knew, and they took us in. Again, about 20 people lived in one room. And my mother and I stayed in that room, and we stayed in that room for a week, I think, and we had a little half cot in the back, and half a night she would sleep and I would sit, and the other half a night I would sleep and she would sit. Of course, we had what was on us, and it was very cold,
- Y: How could you survive the weather?
- D: It was a miracle. How I survived later when I left in the forest in ^{the} one dress
- Y: You had no coat, no blankets...
- D: Just what I had on.
- Y: Did you cover yourself...

D, con't. commander looked at us, and he didn't know whether to shoot us or not. He told us, he'd save our life and send us back to the ghetto, because my mother was too old, she was forty, and I was too young, I was thirteen. We begged and pleaded, and told him, we'd do anything. He let us out to work for that day, and they beat us while we were working, and we didn't have any food all day, of course. And the next morning, they sent us back to the ghetto. And we knew that the ghetto was just about to be liquidated, so my cousin again arranged with the Germans to send just his mother, and she was accepted as working in the yard for the commander of the camp. Shortly, she came for me and took me with her. We lived in the camp, and I used to build roads; I would carry stones, and would hammer the stones, and then I would pour the tar on them; the tar burned the eyes terribly. Everything was done manually because labor was cheap, and we were already the envy of the people in the ghetto because perhaps

Y: you might have been saved

D: There was hardly any food, but maybe we would live. My mother and another aunt stayed in the ghetto, and again, my aunt had paid quite a lot of money to a Christian family, whose house was backed up to the ghetto that when the action came, they would be able to hide in the attic there, with another cousin. There were about six of us there. The action came, and my mother, and aunt, and cousin hid in the attic, and another cousin was captured, but he jumped out of a train, and he was shot in his leg, and he somehow got over to us, we brought him on a sled or a wagon, and his legs were bleeding; I remember the clots of blood, and for the time being, things were fine. After a little while, the Christian friend told my mother and my aunt that they had to leave, that they could not stay there any longer. And my mother and my aunt left, and went into the fields. It was springtime, May 1943, and the rains were pouring and they had no food for several days, they stayed in the fields. I did receive a note from my mother, I don't know how, saying for me to have courage, you will survive, and it's easy for me to die, knowing that you will survive. You must remember to tell the world. These are the words which most of the survivors echo, that their parent or some older person had said to them. You must fight, you must live, and you must tell what has happened to the Jews. As my mother and my aunt, some of the farmers saw the wheat moving, and called the Germans, and they were shot in the forest, in May, of '43. And I was left with my aunt and two cousins.

Y: Did you know about this?

D: Yes, I knew because my aunt... I think they were not shot immediately; I think they were taken into some prison because my aunt even tried to plead and bribe, and nothing helped. We were in that labor camp. That lasted until May until July, and July 29, 1943, we heard shots, and we knew that was the end of the labor camp. And fortunately, we were not far from the forest and we managed to run into it.

D: There was not a fence around this labor camp?

Y: No, because at that time, my aunt managed for us to be working for this commander. We were not in the fenced in area. at the labor camp, men were hung by their feet, because they didn't work fast, and other horrible atrocities committed to these people and left for others to see every day as an example.

Y: The labor camp, the workers were Polish, not necessarily Jewish?

- D: Only Jewish,
- Y: No incinerator, there? Just a labor camp?
- D: From there, once you couldn't work any more, you were either shot, or sent somewhere, or you couldn't work fast enough.
- Y: What was the name of the camp? That's all right. What were the kinds of things they did at camp?
- D: Build roads between Germany and Russia, and and it was a Polish part. I guess when the road was built, that's when they shot everybody. We ran away into the forest, my aunt Clara, she had one son...who was a brilliant boy...
- Y: This was your mother's sister?
- D: She was my grandmother's half sister; she was close to my mother, like a sister.
- Y: Age-wise, she was...
- D: She was my mother's age, 40, maybe a year or two younger, but her son was a few months older than I and he was the one who did most of the negotiating with the Germans, through large sums of money, and he, unfortunately, was shot to death. Then she lost him, she came into the woods with us, but she had
- Y: no will to live
- D: no will, she would just sit and just cry, one of the most pathetic things to see. She had lost her husband, and her son was an unusual boy. We survived in the woods; we lived on berries, on nuts, we got wet, we got dry.
- Y: Were you able to build shelters for yourselves?
- D: In the wintertime; we were killing lice, that was the occupation;
- Y: Lice? You were covered with lice?
- D: We were invested with lice.
- Y: Was there any place to bathe? a stream? drinking water?
- D: No, I don't know. In the wintertime, melted ice. Some little stream, maybe, I don't remember.
- Y: Did you learn how to live off the land?
- D: You couldn't live off the land, because you had to move. Anytime you lit a fire, the dogs, and the Ukrainians and the Germans came after you. So you became nomadic people.
- Y: You were in the southeastern part of Poland?
- D: That is now the Ukraine part of Russia; before 1939 it was Poland, and before the first world war, it was Austria. Then my mother was born, the same land, it was Austria-Hungary. But presently it is the Ukrainian part of Russia, there is a little fertile land, mostly populated by peasants, but it is sort

D: Just somebody to give me some ice, melted ice.

After several weeks, I tried to crawl out of that bunker, and walk. I had grown cartilage under my knees and my legs would not come up. And I lost all my hair from that, completely bald. And I couldn't walk. I called. Luckily, it was too cold for them/for us at that time because I could not to come have made it.

Y: Why didn't you suffer frostbite? exposure from cold?

D: I had frostbitten toes.

D: The bodies were very close to each other.

Y: How about during the daytime?

D: In the daytime, when moved, we would build a fire and I had no shoes. I may have had them when I ran, but I didn't have them then. But I survived.

Y: Did all the people in that little group?

D: One day, after I was better, they came after us again, but they didn't start shooting because they were afraid coming into the forest. There were some parts of the forest because of the Russians (?). The Germans would never enter the forest without the dogs.....

As you heard them shooting, the men had followed somebody a few kilometers, you would start to run; nobody would run together, it was an instinct. You didn't know where you were running.

Y: How 'bout climbing trees? Hiding from them?

D: That's only for animals, not for people. What I did was to jump into a very small pond, through the ice, into the water, and grasp and branch that was lying on the ice, and covered myself up/. The water was quite cold. After the up to my neck.

shooting, I heard them come up to the pond, and I heard the Ukrainian saying to the German. I think I see someone in the water. He was very anxious. But the German said, It is too cold. If there is somebody we'll get them the next time. When he said, I think I see somebody, that was another time that it was my end. And then they left. I waited a while. You waited to be sure they had departed, and I got out of the water. Of course, I immediately became ice; I had nothing to change into, and ran back into the bunker. There was another little girl, I don't know who she belonged to, and another bigger girl, who wasn't all there who used to take care of the little girl. The little girl was a Jewish girl, but she could only talk Ukrainian, no Jew. Ukrainian was a native language; either you used Jewish or Polish because the child must have been hidden by Ukrainians, and she was four years old. And she said to me, in Ukrainian, I saw them and I hid, in the little hole, it was dark in there. The instinct of a four-year-old to know to hide. No, I don't know what happened to that child, but it made such an impression on me. I was already mature, 13½ almost 14, but a four-year-old having the instinct, of realizing that the Germans and Ukrainians were coming to kill her and she hid. At this time, they killed my male cousin, 19 year-old boy, his name was Goetha(?) The Ukrainians got to them and they were not happy with this killing; they cut off his ears, cut his eyes out, cut his tongue out, and they left his body. This was the type of killing, not barbaric, not just killing, a 19-year-old boy, trying to hide and live; they did not know him personally,

D, con't. just because he was Jewish, because they hated Jews. At the end, my cousin, his sister, Lorna survived. She and I were liberated.

Y: She had been hiding with you?

D: We were together most of the time. There were times when we were separated.

Y: She was older?

D: She was seven years old. There were times when she ran away from me; I not an asset. I was younger, I was _____ probably; sometimes, she would leave me, because it was the survival, but we managed to get back and forth together, and we were liberated together. When we were liberated, it was summer; the living situation was better again, because at least our clothes were dry and we were not freezing.

Y: And it was easier to get things to eat...

D: Much. Our strength was running out, too because it was so much longer.

Y: This was 1941.

D: This was 1944, and I would lie and hear the planes come, and I would pray that they would throw the bombs for a quick and easy ending instead of being tortured, or slaughtered like my cousin. We heard shots, and we were told that they were coming after us, like before, and the bullets were just flying all over, and we were ducking all over, and suddenly we heard the Russian soldiers, saying Come out; we were being liberated. But we didn't realize. We didn't know where the war was, we didn't know what was going on. We didn't know....

Y: You had no idea at any time?

D: We thought that it was the end, and here we were, being freed. In fact, some of the people died while being freed, between the crossfire of the Germans and the Russians.

Y: The Germans were retreating at that time.

D: When I was liberated, people were still dying at Auschwitz because I was liberated exactly to the day, July 27, 1944. I went into the forest on July 27, 1943. The crematorium worked for another year until May, 1945. But I didn't realize that either. We didn't know. Russians didn't tell us what was going on. They immediately established schools, and kitchens; they gave us food, and I went to school two weeks later.

Y: With whom did you live?

D: I lived in the same city with this cousin for a while, Chenslamic? .., and her family had owned large property and we got a room .

Y: You went back to the property that they had owned?

D: And we had a room there, she and I and another girl who had survived with us. There are a few things that are very important that I have forgotten to tell you.

- D, con't. My mother's family, most of my mother's family, lived in a city called Steinaslov (?), a large city, population 40-50,000, 40 kilometers away from where we were. The Russians have changed the name now. I had an uncle who lived there who came from Warsaw - I'm not sure if he was a psychologist or a psychiatrist - but I know that he worked with disturbed children. When the Germans came, they had run away from Warsaw to Stanislaw to that city, and the Germans had a proclamation that all the intelligentsia, intellectuals, were to report to the market place because they would get the better jobs. They tricked us in with all kinds of things like this.
- Y: But by that time...
- D: No, that was in the beginning, about a week after they came, two weeks, so, hoping to get some sort of job to support his family, my uncle reported there with 4,000 other intellectuals, doctors, professors, lawyers. They transported them to a place where they had surrounded, and in the place they had on the floor, or on the street, barbed wire, nails, broken glass, any kind of object which is pointed, and they made these people undress and run over that, back and forth, back and forth. Those who couldn't run were shot. Those who didn't die there were taken after a half hour of running into the ditch. And this was the introduction to the German.
- Y: How did you hear about this?
- D: In the beginning, people in the night would come back; there was communication; it was not legal... it was not full, but it was.
- Y: There must have been terrible fear that was generated.
- D: Everything was gradual, and there was always maybe that was once, and they won't do it again, to teach us a lesson. They must have psychologists working on that system, because it was a very gradual, insidious way of intimidating. By the time they killed, very few people could rebel. They hadn't eaten, they hadn't slept; they'd been tortured, intimidated. It is amazing that there was as much resistance as there was, from what I have read lately, in all the camps, and the provocation pouring out of the resistance, which was not known before.
- Y: You mentioned that Polish people did help you in your town.
- D: They helped my mother obtain a job; the job didn't pay but it was a way of staying alive.
- Y: You said there were people who risked their own lives. What ratio of the population did this?
- D: Very small.
- Y: The Ukrainians were the worst, but the Polish ...
- D: Unfortunately, anti-Semitism is sort of the basis, or was the basis, I don't know what it is today, of the church teachings, and when the children were very little, they were taught that the Jews killed Christ, Christ-killers, drilled into them, and it was like it was almost a good deed to kill a Jew.
- Y: Did you have any opportunity, when you were growing up, to have Polish/Christians as your friends?

- D, con't: Yes, I remember in Poland we used to have a first breakfast, and a second breakfast. You would eat your breakfast home, and then you would promenade in school, and you would sit and eat some sort of little tea (?) sandwich, and I remember promenading with a very prominent girl, very proud that she was promenading with me. And another girl came over and said, why are you socializing with her? She's Jewish. I didn't think that I was any different. I also remember going to my grandmother's farm once and having some sort of white beads, and another little girl, peasant girl, who they brought over to play with me so I would have company, so I wouldn't be there alone, and she said to me, Oh, they're made from dead Jews' teeth. Things like this...I was exposed to very little anti-Semitism. This was a minimum, because I didn't live in a ghetto, and we were like assimilated.
- Y: The Jews in your community did mingle with Christians? It wasn't completely segregated?
- D: Oh definitely (mingle)
- Y: Were there many Jews lived in your town?
- D: I must say that my parents given many possessions, with what the Russians had taken away, there were still certain things hidden, and they had given quite a few possessions to one farmer to hide, and after the war, I came back and took him to court - at the age of 14 - to a court of his peers, which I didn't realize. And he denied having taken anything into hiding. But I did go back to one lady who was a schoolteacher and she returned to me three or four items which my mother had placed with her. To this day, I have one piece of material which I had made into a suit immediately when I came to the United States, which is like the only physical link between me and my parents and my past, my home, my city, nothing else that I can put my fingers on.
- Y: When your father had given these things to this farmer, he never gave back anything?
- D: Of course, they were shocked. What are you doing living? You are supposed to be dead. He denied it.
- Y: Did you go back to your home?
- D: Yes, I went back, yes, once. And there were very few that were left, three or four Jewish people, and they were all leaving. Nobody was going to stay. First of all, fear, too. Some people went back to other cities, and were murdered, survived, and they were murdered. But to this day I dream at night that I want to go back. I know there is nothing for me back there; there isn't even a cemetery. I don't even have anybody buried there, and yet, before I die, I would love to see it again.
- Y: I hope you have a chance.
- D: I would be murdered. I would be scared to go.
- Y: Not now.
- D: Yes. The fear is in me. Would they still be in the peasant-type mentality?
- Y: What was your course immediately after the war?

- Y: The war was still going on? You still had a lot of education to catch up? you weren't fifteen.
- D: Immediately, the Russians established schools and I was living in that one single room, eating in a public kitchen, not owning a watch or a clock, never late for school one day, had to walk quite a distance; I had clothes already, had a pair of shoes, and something on my back, and no books, of course, because it was still the front; we heard shooting not far, and I remember, of course, all the teachers were Russians; now they came from Russia, so again, it was a different language; it was the third time in my life which everything was taught in a different language. I started in Polish, went into Yiddish, now it was Russian, every subject, geography, history
- Y: Did you have any trouble with that?
- D: I had trouble with writing because we had no books. The teacher would lecture, and you had to study, and whatever she said, you had to write it, because you had no books. I remember my wrist hurting me so badly, maybe because I had to write. I finished that year in school. I remember we had to take exams; they gave us a month to study for exams and anything you had studied up that stage in your life - I had skipped a lot -
- Y: You were responsible for
- D: I don't think any kind of Boards here put you through (as much); the Russian educational system was tough in 1944 (1945).
- Y: Were there other people in your circumstance in your school?
- D: I don't even know if I was the only Jewish kid or if there was somebody else; It's a blank. I do remember going to school, and I do remember being in that city and when school was over I decided I had to leave. That's when I went to my own city, and found that there were no Jews there, so
- Y: You went alone? You went with your cousin?
- D: I went with my cousin, once, and then I went alone. Then I went to another little city where there was a friend of my father's who survived. I didn't know him and he sort of like adopted me. And he had a son, and I stayed with them for three months, and then Russia declared that anyone who was a Polish citizen can leave Poland now. My nationality was Polish. I was not born under the Russian (rule) so the borders have moved. We all began loading into the train and again, at least we had no Gestapo sitting on the train, but the trains had no locomotive because there was a war going on. So they would hook up a locomotive, and push you for twenty miles, or fifty miles, then drop you there for a week. So I don't know how long it took us, and we didn't know where we were going to be.
- Y: What was your reason for leaving Russia? Weren't you frightened about going into an area... the war was still going on?
- D: There was no reason... by that time, it was a year later, 1945. The war was over, fall of 1945, and no Jew was going to stay in that land; to us, it was Poland, and covered with our blood. Maybe invalids and people in their 80's left, and many of the Polish people left, non-Jews. They, too, wanted to be in Poland, but we went to Poland only as a vehicle to get out of Poland.
- Y: Did you know that you could get out of Poland?

D: You hoped. But you knew nothing. Once we got to Poland, they dumped us in Galasia, which used to be German, now it became Poland, and stuck us on some German farm and we stayed there for the winter. We had no way of getting out. But once the snow melted, the first day I could get out, I left for Praka, a big city with many Jews. And there they had started a kibbutzim.

Y: Was the joint distribution there?

D: It was helped by Briccha (?), Israeli, it was all done illegally, to smuggle them up from Poland to the DP camps in Germany, from the DP camp to Palestine. And everybody ended up in Cypress. And that was the way I was going. That was already a very healthy and happy part of my life, compared to what I had gone through.

Y: You had had some kind of Zionist background in your early life, so it sounded like a logical path for you to take. What determined/you to come to this country?
that

D: I was on my way. I was in a DP camp and not well, tapeworms and a bad heart. I had rheumatic heart fever as a child. I was supposed to have been a sickly child, but what I have lived through, it is amazing. I had written a letter; I knew somebody who was going to the U.S. and I wrote a letter.

Y: Did you want to come to the United States?

D: I just wanted family, more than anything else, I was looking for family. I wrote a letter and gave it to this friend, and said, put it into any kind of a Jewish paper; this is my name, this is where I'm from; I've survived and this is where I am. I think that I have an uncle, but I wasn't sure. I didn't know his name, and or where he lived. They put that into the Jewish newspaper in New York, and not my uncle from Philadelphia, but a distant cousin of my parents, my mother's maiden name was the same as her married name because my grandfathers were brothers; this was another brother's grandson saw that name, and he got in touch with my uncle here, and I got a letter and they sent me the papers.

Y: And that's how you came to this country.

D: I would have gone to Israel. And it was not easy. United States did not want to let me in.

Y: Weren't you in the first group of people who came?

D: One of the first; they insisted that you had to have certain regulations, and being in Germany at a certain time. I remember one time being so upset because I couldn't come, and at that point, I couldn't go back. I sat in the American Consulate four days straight crying, and they said, we're sorry but we can't let you, but I said, I have no place to go; there's no place in this world I can go.

Y: So what made them change ...

D: I guess it was my appearance (?).

Y: You came to this country in what year?

D: November, 1947.

in Frankfurt

- Y: You went back to school? High school?
- D: Everything was in English, now. Now I'm starting in my fourth language as a main language. Of course, I had a little bit of Hebrew in between, and German; during the war, my parents saw to it that I had a private tutor, the first part of the war. They were very concerned with education.
- Y: You came to this country, and went to what city?
- D: I came to Wilmington.
- Y: Why did you come to Wilmington?
- D: Because I had an uncle and an affidavit, and he sent the papers that he would responsible for me; my uncle was in Wilmington.
- Y: What was his name?
- D: Jacob Krass (Kraus)? He wrote that he would be responsible that I would not be a burden, but at the same time, even with all this, he had to declare his buildings and all this, they still would not let me in.
- Y: So you came to Wilmington, and you had a lot of schooling to make up?
- D: I went to Wilmington High School for a year and a half, and then I graduated.
- Y: Compare the education.
- D: It was much easier here; everything was strange; I didn't belong. Unfortunately, my experiences - I was never a teenager. I was a child, and I was a woman. And I was a woman with a tragic past, and I found that was normal for the age group was only immaturity, the giggling; I was the teacher's pet, because I was serious and I studied; I wanted to get through, and I wanted to graduate. To me it was something to take very seriously; to most of the kids, it wasn't, I also was older. I was 18 when I came, and when I graduated I was 20. I was two years older. I couldn't date anybody in high school.
- Y: So it was another trauma, even going to school?
- D: It was not, compared to the traumas I had gone through, nothing would count any more. It wasn't that difficult, but I did have one very good friend who became very interested in me; she would help me; she would tutor English, and I had a teacher who adopted me.
- Y: Who was the friend and who was the teacher?
- D: My teacher was Anna Kane. She made me very special and I sat at her desk. And I was an example to all the students; I would have to speak, and she would bring other people, and she really helped me tremendously to adapt to the new system. For example, she started with a book with G.A.T., and H_A_P, and before I knew I was reading.
- Y: Did you know any English?
- D: I knew English which I had learned in Germany. It was not fluent.
- Y: Let's go back for a moment. You were talking about your experience in the

Y: con't. labor camp. It occurred to me, were you ever beaten there?

D: I was beaten once. I was beaten severely on that night when we ran from our city, my mother and I and 10 other people, on that cold winter night, which was nightmare and the Ukrainians would come with the sleds and tortured us. They could have killed us in the beginning or taken everything away from us. By the time they got through with us, we had nothing left, but they sort of like teased us a little, beat us, rip off our clothes, take some of our things out, and let us go. Yes, I was beaten then, by Ukrainians. And I was beaten in the labor camp when we built the roads by the Germans.

Y: They were dissatisfied with the way you were building, you were too slow?

D: Sometimes I think just for the entertainment, the brutality of it; sometimes for the slowness, sometimes for the fun of it for them, not for us.

Y: These were young men who were beating you? At that time you were 14?

D: 13½.

Y: Were you large for your age?

D: Yes. I could have passed for a 15 or 16 year-old. If they had known my age, I would have never been there.

Y: I only ask you this because I have a feeling that you've hidden away many things...

D: Some of them are even hidden from me; it's very difficult to remember these things, and I guess your conscious mind - some painful things...time has gone by.

Y: In order to survive... when you came to this country, your experience was written up and people talked about it.

D: No, only one teacher, and she asked me to write a little story in the Wilmington High School paper about my life and my past, with poor grammar, and then somebody read it and came from the News Journal and interviewed me. Nobody ever asked me and I was hurt because they didn't ask. And they didn't ask because they didn't want to hurt me. It was a very interesting phenomenon that people did not want to parrot me. And this is not only mine. In talking to other Holocaust survivors, and reading the history now, it took thirty years for the movement suddenly to come into the open, like something we were supposed to be ashamed of.

Y: I don't think you were supposed to be ashamed but people probably didn't know how to evoke that kind of ...

D: I know survivors to this day who will not talk about it; I've met some. And I think it's worse, if you do not.

Y: Your life after Wilmington High School?

D: After Wilmington High School, my sweet teacher Anna Kane came to the Wilmington General Hospital, and told them I was very special and I got a scholarship. And I went three years to the Wilmington (Nursing) School and became a registered nurse.

Y: And then you worked?

- D: No, I got married. I was sick hepatitis, and I was sick for three months.
A carry-over? You don't know.
- Y: When you were sick in the forest, there was nothing you ever had.
- D: If I survived that typhus, with my legs like this, and I could never walk, I thought that I was going to have to creep; I thought that I was going to be bald. It's a very interesting thing, and spending a lot of time and energy now, I have raised my family, time has elapsed, maybe something hasn't healed but I can cope with it better, and I am attending any kind of conference on the Holocaust, and I'm reading all Holocaust literature. I'm also searching very desperately, trying to find out things about my city. I found out there are a few people and I hope to meet with them in the fall. And I called somebody who was supposed to be my age, but I don't remember the woman, and her husband answered and I told him who I was and where I was from. I know nothing about him and said, I met you at the forest just before the end of the war, and you were bald. It was a shock to me; I had forgotten that I was bald. You had no hair; you had some kind of _____ around your head. I was all of 14. And he remembered that. I was so happy; I sort of welcomed his remarks. Luckily, my hair grew back in.
- Y: You haven't met with this lady.
- D: I'm hoping this fall to do it. They have a very small group, 7 or 10 people,
- Y: From your city? Did they mention any other names? Did you know any? You were so young,
- D: I was so young and socially, a little bit out of this. They are ultra-orthodox.
- Y: Your family was not orthodox, so you weren't a part of that. Was there a large ultra-orthodox community?
- D: Probably.
- Y: Your family might have been called
- D: Almost assimilated; they were Jewish, but there was no...
- Y: A little bit of intelligentsia ?
- D: Right. Definitely.
- Y: They probably look down on these people as being their inferiors.
- Dorothy, is there anything else you'd like to say about your experience?
- D: The only thing I want to say is, we are now, from all the literature, finding out first of all we are all getting older, survivors, many are gone already, and in a certain amount of years, all of us will be gone. Our survival was almost like a mission, so we could survive, and we can tell it. And we have certainly told it to our children, and we told it, and some of them have even paid the price and _____ suffered from listening and finding out about the tragedies that have befallen their parents. Just last night I was looking for some articles and I found a report that my daughter had written when she was fifteen, in the 10 th grade, how the concentration camps of the world

(?)

D, con't. were affected the Jewish faith, and she interviewed me for it, which I had forgotten. And she has a comment which I would like to read because I think we have to get the younger generation, or the second generation involved. And I was very moved yesterday, and I think I would like to end with it. This is the last page, called the author's comment:

(And Susan writes):

Personally, I would have to say that there is no way the concentration camp of World War II could not have affected my life since my own family was killed because of it. My mother has done more than a sufficient job of making sure that I understand why it is so important to know my heritage and something about the Jewish history. I am far from Jewish in the religious sense. I have my own concept of God, and I pray my own way, differently than what is done in the synagogue. However, I am strongly Jewish and knowing my identity, and being proud of my heritage, and I feel that this is far more important than how one prays. I think all children of survivors paid the price. I think they all paid differently, and it will continue for a long time.

Y: Thank you, Dorothy.