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Christopher Patti: Today's date is June 24, 2010. This is an interview with survivor Anita Waiberman. I'm the interviewer, Chris Patti. We are in Land O'Lakes, Florida, in the United States of America. The language is English, and the videographers are Nafa Fa'alogo and Richard Schmidt.

Okay, we were just talking a couple seconds ago about your sentiment about wanting to talk about being a survivor. Can you say that again?

Anita Waiberman: Yes. I feel caught. Most of the people are older than I am, and I'm practically the youngest in the group. And usually when they talk about it they have, like, a sad face. You know, they have more memories than I do, in a way, because I was two years old. And I just want to have a happy face, you know, talking about it, because I did survive and I am here in the United States and do the best I can.

CP: Well, I think that's just wonderful, and it's a pleasure to talk to you today. So, let's start from the beginning. Can you please tell me your name?

AW: Anita Waiberman.

CP: Can you spell that for me?

AW: The first name or the last name?

CP: Both names, please.

AW: A-n-i-t-a, Anita. And Waiberman is W-a-i-b like boy-e-r-m-a-n.

CP: Have you ever gone by any other names throughout your life?

AW: This name, Waiberman, was my married name. And I was born into Bitterman. My last name was Bitterman, and it's spelled B like boy-e-r—no. Yeah—no—

CP: B-i-t-t?

AW: B-i-t-t-e-r-m-a-n.

CP: Okay. Did you ever have any nicknames?

AW: I have no other—the kids, the boys—because I didn't speak good English, the boys used to call me and make fun of me "I need a better man," you know. And we're still friends with that guy; he was not Jewish. But that's another story.

CP: And when were you born?

AW: Where?

CP: When—when and where, actually?

AW: In Poland, in a little town called Biłgoraj, Poland. And I was born on January 5, 1937.

CP: And can you tell me—how old does that make you today?

AW: Seventy-three.

CP: Seventy-three. Okay, let's start with your childhood. You said that you don't have too many memories before the war. You were born—you were only two years old when the war started. So, what do you remember from your childhood?

AW: I don't have any memory of what the house looked like inside or outside, but I do remember when they started talking about the war and I was able to hear it; you know, my family talked about it. And they were saying that they were going to go to the market to buy, you know, like flour, sugar, whatever, potatoes. And my older sister went with them—her name was Sonia—and my mother and my father. And my sister Pauline and I—she was seven, and I was two—we were just left behind, and we were just playing outside, you know, like children do. Playing with pebbles, you know, barefooted, you know, just kidding around, playing.

And all of a sudden, you know, it was smoke. So what we learned from neighbors at that time is that they put a fire in all four corners, when the Germans came in in 1939. And we were sitting there and the neighbors came over, just grabbed us, and they say, "You got to come with us, because there's a fire and it's moving real quickly." And they grabbed us and we left with them—lots of people, you know—and then we started walking and running.

It was all day long, until it was almost dark. And since we were barefooted, I was screaming because it was hurting my feet, because we were running through fields, you know. And I don't know if it was summertime or whatever season it was. And it was hurting me, so my sister kept picking me up and carrying me a little bit at a time. And then we wind up on this farmhouse, and they let us in and they gave us, I think, a little bit to drink, something to drink and something to eat, because we were exhausted. I know I was little, you know, nothing. You know, hungry, thirsty and complaining to my sister, and she was five years older than me.

CP: Can I interrupt you for a second?

AW: Sure.

CP: Can you tell me about your parents, your mother and father and your sisters as well?

AW: My parents finally—they came back after they finished shopping because it was, you know, the fire going on. But before that, before they went home to see the house,

they wind up in this big lake. It was like a river, maybe a river or something. Everybody was there because that was the only place you have a place to run away from the fires. So there was everybody, and when—those people that took us to that farm place, they brought us back to that lake and everybody was finding each other. Like, we found our parents; everybody was finding everybody. And that's when the fire kind of calmed down a little bit, and everybody started walking back to their homes.

And when we were walking back to the house—which my father was carrying me; I couldn't walk anymore—we found—my parents found that the house was on fire. The whole community there was on fire. And he was trying to get into the house to try to save some stuff. So he couldn't go through the door anymore, and he went through the window and he packed up whatever he could and he came out.

And then, there was a house next to us that lived a very old, old couple. They must have been in their nineties: very, very religious, more religious than Orthodox are today. And my father heard, "Oh!" you know, (inaudible). And he couldn't go in through the door either and he went through the window, and he came out carrying this old rabbi, this old man, on his back. But he couldn't save his wife; his wife was already dead, from probably the smoke. And he couldn't carry both, and he was carrying them back to that lake where everybody was staying. There was no place else to be. And there was no food, there was nothing, because whatever was brought—and you couldn't do nothing. I don't know what we ate.

And for some reason or another, the Germans did stay there. I don't know where we were or someplace. Like broken walls, you know, when they bombed—when they dropped the bombs, you know, we were running through—it was also fields; the whole place was actual fields. And here comes an airplane and dropped a bomb, which I remember. My mother was trying to hold my hand and hold my sister and my other sister; we were running and it was really—she was holding me so tight, and I was screaming. I said, "You're hurting me," you know, in my old language, in Jewish. You know, and we were just running, and then it calmed down.

And then, you know, usually the men—what happened with the men, you know, after a bomb came, after they dropped the bomb, it was like a group—my father was one of them—that he formed, like twelve men, to go out where the market is, wherever it was, and trying to see if they save anybody that's still alive, if anybody was still alive. They was trying to take them to safety. And the only safety place was, like, any wall that was still left. You know there was nothing much as far as a house to go into, with everything in it, but mainly like a wall.

And this was going on and on and on and on for three weeks. And then it was announced—I don't know who announced it—that the Germans are leaving and the Russians were coming in.

CP: Can I interrupt you again real quickly?

AW: Sure.

CP: Your father sounds like an amazing man; can you tell us his name?

AW: Jack Bitterman. Oh, but before that, I'll go in with this. You know, when they went out to look for people, the plane came back and dropped another bomb. And he was with about five other men at that point, and they dropped a bomb and they all wind up in that big hole. You know when you drop a bomb, you know how deep it goes? All of them, my father and about four or five of those men that was with him, wind up in there. This is the story of when my father made it out of there: he was telling us the story that he thought he was dead, too. And he was feeling them, saying, "Oh, he's got his hat on; he's got his arm and leg," but the other ones, they was like shredded to pieces.

But going back a little bit further, when my father was carrying this religious man, he was wishing him—like a prayer, that him and his family will survive though this war. And I feel that this is what happened. When my father found himself still alive, you know, he was realizing that he's still alive. And he saw the other ones were like a hand here, a foot here, and he put up a pile together and somehow he climbed out and he came back to us. And he was telling what was going on.

And what was that other question you wanted to ask before?

CP: Oh. Well, can you tell me what your father did for work?

AW: See, I never knew what he was doing. But I think what he was doing—I think he was a shoemaker.

CP: Yeah, because you were so young at the time, and then all the chaos.

AW: Yeah, because we were talking about—you know, the kids—I don't think we talked about it during the war, but after the war we were talking about it and, you know, I had more questions to ask, to say things. And I think this is what it was said, that he was a shoemaker.

CP: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother? What was her name?

AW: My mother's name was Ruchel.

CP: Do you know how to spell that?

AW: Ruchel, Ruchel—it would be probably also R-u-c-h—Ruchel—l-e?

CP: Okay.

AW: Well, in English they called—they named her Rachel.

CP: Rachel, okay. That makes sense.

AW: Her Jewish name was Ruchel, and Yankel. My father's name in Jewish was Yankel, and they named him Jack.

CP: Perfect. Yeah, that's very helpful. What did your mother do? Was she mostly a homemaker?

AW: She actually was—in the olden days, which I don't remember that; my sister was telling me—they had this machine with the thread and working like this—

CP: A loom?

AW: —and making stuff.

CP: Is it a loom?

AW: I don't know what it's called. You know, like a piece of rug or something. They would sell those things. You know, where you go (makes sound effect). Yeah.

CP: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your parents or your sisters?

AW: Well, my parents—we were a close family, I guess. And did I mention here before to you about something like this before? I don't know.

CP: I'm not sure.

AW: Did I talk to you—when you were the last time here, did I say anything about the kind of living, which I don't really have any memories of?

CP: Not too much, no.

AW: Because see, I don't know what was done, you know, the cooking, the eating. I don't remember any of—I have no vision on something like this. But I'm sure we had, you know, before the war. And so—

CP: Well, this is actually a good time to bring up—you have an interesting story, because for most of your life growing up as an adult, once you moved to the States, you kind of—you said that you didn't really think about the war. And then it wasn't until—

AW: What happened, you know, when the Russians came in, I didn't say that.

CP: Yeah, we can get to that, too.

AW: Yeah, want me to go into this?

CP: Sure. Yes, please.

AW: All right. After three weeks the Russians came in, and they stayed for a while—I don't remember; a week or two—and then they said they were leaving also, and the Germans are coming back. And they said, because they knew my father was participating and trying to save as many people [as] he could, and they said to him, I guess—and to the others, whoever survived, that helped out or something like this—that if they stay—if they stay—

But you know, there was an incident before that, before the Russians came in, when a group of the people my father—they went into the market, over into the streets, to see who needs to be saved, and they got caught. And there was the Germans took him and put them all—I think there was twelve altogether, whatever; eight, twelve. And they put them against the wall that was left after the bombing and were aiming on them: they were going to shoot them. And then my father said, "Let's go for it"—but you know, I'm just putting in this kind of word—because there was this one wall and you could go escape on both sides. And so, they made a run. Part of them went one side of the wall and the other one, but most of them got shot. But my father didn't.

CP: Wow!

AW: And okay, so this is when the Germans were leaving, so the Russians were in already. So he was able to get away from them, because the Russians stopped him. Whoever survived that said they were shooting those Germans. So this is what they said, that they are going to stay for a while. I don't know, a week or two; I don't even remember how long they stayed. And then they said they were leaving again and the Germans are coming in, and whoever wants to come with us could come with us.

CP: So the Russians were saying that?

AW: Yeah, the Russians were saying that. And especially they said, because they knew my father was doing what he was doing. He was a strong person, and they said he would be the first one to get killed if they get him. So, we decided to go with the Russians, but—we went to Russia and they took us to Siberia.

CP: Do you remember the trip going to Siberia at all?

AW: I remember the trip was, like, sitting on freight train. We were sitting actually in the front with the motor, you know. And then—you know, when the train stopped—but before that, you know, we were sitting in the front and I stuck my foot between—it was like circles, two circles hitting the freight train, you know, the open freight train and then

the motor with the train—the locomotive, whatever they are called. You know, when they stopped and they went like back and forth, and I had my foot and (claps hands) it went like this. It squashed my heel. And besides, we didn't even have shoes anymore; we didn't even have nothing; so we had rags on our feet, and it was very hard. And we were screaming, everybody was screaming. It's a good thing we were close to the motor. And he pulled a little bit, and I was able to get my foot out.

And we were, I don't know, for a very long time. It took weeks—maybe longer, I don't know—to get to Russia, to Siberia. And every time the train stopped and there was place to get some kind of food, maybe a little bit of rice, a little bit of water, a little bit of soup or something, so my father got off the train and tried to get something like this. And he didn't get back on time and the train pulled out without him. And he was a very smart man, so he tried to catch up because he knew where the train was going. So he was catching different trains and kept getting off, and finally took weeks—I think two or three weeks—and finally he caught ahead, because he remembered the number of the train, so he knew what train, and we finally met. And we wind up in Siberia. And this is when—it was like a warehouse. There was at least 200 families there.

CP: Were they mostly Jewish, all the other families, as well?

AW: As far as I know. I didn't know the difference then.

CP: Yeah.

AW: I don't think I knew the difference.

CP: How old were you at this time, maybe around four or five?

AW: No, it was still in 1939. I was about two and a half or something like that, not even three.

Every family was given like the army bunk bed type of things, like two or so. And we were five people, so not all of us were able to fit into those little cots, and the parents was under the cot. You know, we had two cots, so the kids took the cots and the parents was kind of under on the floor, I don't know. And there was a lot of kids running around, playing.

But what happened was they—after a few days or whatever, they took my parents away, and my oldest sister, into labor camps. And there was no food, there was really nothing to eat, but they gave my parents and my oldest sister a piece of bread, and once a week they were able to come back to the place and they brought a little bit of bread for us. But then my sister—my oldest sister was still there, so my younger sister—you know, she was older than I was—she was also taken there, so she can have some food. And what it was, what we were able to get like neighbors, people—I don't know, they were able to get like this skin off of potatoes and the stuff from cabbage from gentile homes, I don't know, brought back and this is what we were able to eat. I remember I ate that, and I still love the middle from the cabbage, when I used to make cabbage soup, and I still love it to this day, the middle of the cabbage. But yeah, I think I skipped some of these things.

But before we wind up in Russia—or was it afterwards? I think it was after; I'm not sure now, anyway. Now, like I said, there was like a steel type of oven there in the middle to heat us up, you know, to get warm. And the kids are playing, and one little child sort of—some kids pushed me against it, and I got burned. I still have, like, a mark over here. Pushed me, and it was really something. And when my mother came back and she saw that and took me to this doctor, it was so infected and they said that I would have to come back and they were going to cut my arm off.

And as we were coming back, there was this old lady; I remember she was on top of the cart. And my mother was crying, and she says, “What's the matter?” in Yiddish. And she was telling her that, “My baby has to go back; they need to cut her arm.” And you know what? I'll tell you something. She sat like this. “Let her take a *schmatta*”—it's a rag, in Yiddish—“and piss on it, make a pee on it, and put it on it.” And this is what we did, and a week later when we came back—and it healed the infection. And when my mother took me back to that doctor, he was so amazed. He says, “We don't have to cut your baby's arm off. It's healing.”

CP: Wow!

AW: And we just kept doing it and doing it and doing it, and it's a real mark over here. So this is—

CP: That's amazing.

AW: Yes. It was also very hard with food; there was nothing to eat or anything, you know. And then—but I don't remember what part of it was that after we left Russia or after—you know. Anyway, so they were talking that war was starting in 1942. We were there from 1939 in Siberia, in Russia, until the war started in Russia—in 1942, I think it

was. And they were starting to drop bombs, the Germans. And we went up also on a freight train. I remember—I must have been at that time—let's see, forty-two [1942]—about five years old?

CP: Yeah.

AW: Five years old. There was a lot of Russian soldiers sitting on this particular train, and we were on that freight train, and I remember I was sitting on this soldier's lap. And they did drop a bomb. The Germans dropped a bomb and destroyed the whole freight train. And it killed that soldier that I was sitting on the lap, when a piece of shell went on my—over here on the side; I still have a mark there; just a little piece of shell. And everybody was dead on that freight train. And my family, we all survived.

CP: It's miraculous.

AW: Yes. And we always thought that because of that very religious rabbi more than offered us what he was blessing, my father and his family, to survive, and we survived. And according—after that, we were just walking hundreds and thousands of miles, and hiding out. I remember a lot of hiding out in woods and on the ground.

CP: It must have been—do you remember it being really cold? It must have been cold up there.

AW: Oh, gosh almighty. We were waiting for something to pick us up or something; everybody was by this—waiting for a ship to pick us up. And there was also this place, like a wall, where they were supplying—I don't know where that was, though. And I had malaria, I had the chicken pox, we had the yellow fever, being there in the cold and the hunger.

And it took us weeks—two, three weeks—and we finally got on that ship somewhere. And there was no food. And there was this gentile person; there was gentile families, too. I remember my mother told me when we came to the United States—we talked about it. She said she was begging and they [the gentile family] had some bread, begging just a little piece for me, and they wouldn't do it. And I shouldn't say that, you know because most gentile people are okay. But you know, they had their own family to feed and all that, and there was nothing.

I don't know where we wind up. I don't remember what happened, getting off from there or anything. I don't know; we didn't talk about it. And we wound up walking again, like I said, hiding out in the woods. My father was carrying me, carrying, and the hunger. We wind up with a group—they were also in the woods—and, like, hiding out. And then what happened was at nighttime, they would send out the young kids to gentile homes, and also find whatever is in the garbage. I don't remember what kind of garbage they had, because I have no clue. But picking out whatever, potato skins—

CP: Scraps.

AW: Scraps, you know, from cabbage, whatever we could bring back. And that's what we lived on. And then finally decided it was enough, you know: my father says, "Let's get moving," and we started moving again. And we were just moving and moving and moving and walking, and I don't know. My sister said we wind up back in Poland, which I don't recall in Poland. And then from over there—I don't think we wind up where we used to live, because there was nothing there, but somewhere in Poland; and then after that, we moved on. And I don't know what happened, I can't even imagine.

We wind up in this place, Bindermichel. I don't know how. And in Bindermichel, there was like a community where they were giving us homes. There was like two or three floors. There was bedrooms, let's say, in one of the places—which I have a picture of that, me on it. I should have prepared it. It was where each family had one bedroom; it was a kitchen and one bathroom. We used to live there. And it started like a little school; you know, all the kids was like in one-room school. And soldiers: the American soldiers was there and we had friends, kids, and a little bit of school, teaching us some Hebrew—which I couldn't learn. My sister did; I couldn't. And we used to be—like, on line they would give us food and packages from United States used to come, packages, clothing, supplying us clothing and good stuff, goodies.

And then school—this was the first time I actually—I was at that time eight years old—started some kind of school, and everybody else like my sister. Actually my middle sister—you know, you were able to get lessons to learn English and my sister took all those lessons, and I tried just one or two and I says, "I can't do it." You know, I just could not learn nothing. My head was like—I don't know. But you know, making friends—that was the first time having friends—visiting each other from different buildings. It was like where you go through from one section to the other, and that was probably a couple hundred homes.

And then all of a sudden, it was announced—that was in 1945—that the war ended. And everybody was dancing in the street. It was, "Oh, my gosh," you know, "the war ended!" And there was a lot of people—the adults, the grownups, recognized a lot of those

Germans that they had, you know, even from the concentration camps there. I can't talk about concentration camps because we were not; but everybody came from this place from concentration camp. Whoever survived came to this place.

CP: So was this Bindermichel place, was it like a displaced persons camp after the war, like where if you had no home or if your home had been destroyed, you would get to go there?

AW: Yeah, like over here, like a projects. Don't they have projects here?

CP: I think they still have projects here.

AW: I think they have projects in Long Island. They have projects in Long Island. Whoever couldn't afford nothing used to live in the projects. Those types of projects, sort of. You know, with clothing—we had some clothing, we had some school. And soldiers used to come to that little class. There was one big room where all the kids—tables and paper cups and paper plates, and put some food down. And they would take pictures, send it to United States, and they used to come, packages from United States, food packages, clothing. And there was a lot of American soldiers there giving us gum, which I never knew what that was, or chocolate.

And then we had, like I said, the school. And we wind up having to be in shows, like show business, like—you know, putting up like a Purim show, you know, where you're like Esther and all this. At this time I was almost like—well, when we left there, I was twelve. And I went up into gymnastics, acrobat. I wound up very double joint. And I remember there was a show—giving shows—actual real actors, you know, German shows, and you had to buy a ticket. So I couldn't get a ticket, because we didn't have any money. So one soldier picked me up, and I was looking through the window, you know, to see. He says, "Do you want to come in?" and he picked me up and he took me inside. And it was really nice.

CP: That must have been a big contrast from your first—you know, the first ten years of your life, when you're just in chaos and there's war surrounding you; then, all of a sudden, you're in a place where there's art and you can have food and your family's safe.

AW: Yeah. And then, you know, the war was ended and it was good. But we still had to rely on somebody giving us food and clothing and all that. And then my mother had, I think, two brothers in United States, and a sister, because my mother was the youngest. And took us out to the United States, and we had to go through the all the kind of things.

And they just don't let you in to United States without being checked out to make sure you don't bring in any diseases and all this. And they found a spot on my lungs, and they couldn't let us into United States. And what they did—whoever was not well enough, they sent us all to this camp. And we were in this camp for weeks there, and they were feeding me like a pound of butter, it seemed to me, like this a day, to cover up the spot.

And I think it took almost a year—I must have been eleven at that time then, because when we arrived to United States I was twelve. So finally we got through, and they wanted to do the shot, to give us a shot, and I never knew what that was and I was very scared. And I remember I was screaming—I was running around this table where this doctor was giving the shot and screaming. Finally my parents said, in Yiddish, “We’re going to leave you here if you don’t do what they want”—but in Jewish, you know. And finally I went along, though I don’t know what type of injection. What is it, to let you in to the United States?

CP: Probably some sort of vaccination, I would imagine.

AW: Vaccinations and all that?

CP: Polio or something.

AW: Whatever it was, you know. We came in and we saw the Statue of Liberty. This is the first thing we did, we saw Statue of Liberty. And it was a funny part of it, because I never saw black people.

CP: I’ve heard that from a number of survivors, actually. It was surprising, all of a sudden.

AW: Wait till I tell you the story when I came to the United States. (laughs) So they sign me up in the sixth grade and they gave me this name, Anita. But I was also hit in the eye—down the line during the war—because I remember I didn’t speak English or anything. There was assignments on a blackboard and I couldn’t see it, and I went like this with one hand to try to see. And my teacher was talking to me and I didn’t know what she was talking to me. But she got in touch with my aunt, the people that took us there, and told them that they’ve got to take me to the eye doctor, and they said this eye is damaged.

So anyway, there was a black girl, right, and she must have been very smart. She must have been very good, because the teacher assigned her to come next to me, to sit down by

the desk, and this is a twelve year old talking. When I saw her coming to me, I let out a scream and I ran out of the class and I start screaming. I didn't know what it was. But you know, this is really something. And then the teacher ran around and tried to communicate with me to come in—you know, I was not dumb—to understand what's going on. And finally I calmed down, and I let her sit next to me.

And then—there was gym, you know, and everybody was doing gym and I couldn't communicate with the kids. But then I said to myself, "I'll show those kids." And I started doing the gymnastics, the acrobat—you know, I was able to go down on my hands and over my feet and go like this with my feet. And everybody was surrounding me and saying, "Oh, my gosh!" and wanted to be my friend. But I knew some words already, because you know, I tried to pick it up. It took me six months to be able to speak, but you know, broken.

And then, walking home, my aunt would pick me up because I didn't know how to get where I lived. So then I knew a few words with that girl and she was walking, and I saw she was walking the same place where I was walking. And she lived on my block in Brooklyn, and we became the best friends. We became—we used to see each other. And we used to walk to school, and after school—I think we were there six months. I was six months in the sixth grade, because I think we came in the wintertime, in January. So I did pass and I wind up going into seventh grade, so I didn't see her anymore.

And I don't know; do you have any more questions?

CP: Yeah, there's one last thing that I wanted to ask you about.

AW: And then I'll tell you about—

CP: Well, I just think your story is so interesting, because the first time we talked you mentioned that for much of your adult life, you didn't have too many of these memories, or they were maybe blocked out, and then something happened. You started to feel very stressed, and in the 1990s when the Gulf War was happening [1990-1991], all of a sudden all these memories started flooding out. Can you talk to me about that?

AW: Or do you want to say any more about living in Brooklyn?

CP: Um, I think—

AW: This is, you know—

CP: Well, whatever you like, yeah.

AW: Okay, I will talk about what you just said, say just a little. You know, I had four children and grandchildren. One of my daughters was going to college to become a nurse, and one of my daughters went to school after she graduated high school to become a beautician, you know, to cut hair. And she had already a boyfriend, and what happened was they decided to go in together and buy one of the Lemon Trees in Long Island; we lived in Long Island then already.¹ And then, you know, she got married—not to the same guy, that guy; to somebody else—and had a baby. And she was working there, like Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday; and I was there Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, you know, answering the phone and getting customers—you know, all those things taken care of—and I stayed with the baby at home. And then when she was home I was there, and when I was there she was home with the baby.

Okay. Now, this was going on for all those years—some years. And then in 19—what year was it, 1991?

CP: Ninety-one [1991], I think.

AW: In 1991, when there was talking about the war. Growing up in United States from twelve years old, you know, I was like—you know, happy-go-lucky sort of thing. You know I pushed everything aside. I knew I was born in Europe, I knew I went through a war, and I pushed aside all the kind of hunger and diseases. You know, I was not even putting much into it, actually what was going on. I was like a little skeleton. Like, I missed out on the things that my mother put me on this chest and this person threw me off it; it was his belongings. You know, things like that.

Anyway, it was like flashback, you know, it was really—I said, “Oh, my gosh, it was something that I don’t even know what’s going on.” And I started buying cases and cases of food and preparing, and this was dragging on like four months. And I kept saying to my daughter Sharon, “I don’t know what’s happening to me. I can’t deal with it all. I’m getting—like with the customers, with the girls that work for you, I says, ‘I can’t do it.’” But I kept doing it. And then this was dragging for four months, and I was preparing in case we didn’t—and figuring out where we were gonna hide.

¹Lemon Tree is a franchise-based salon.

And then finally, on my day working in there, I couldn't deal with it. I started acting up. I was going crazy. She had six girls working there, and I started to curse, because I never curse. And customers came in—it's like a Lemon Tree, you walk in without an appointment. Anybody called up to make an appointment, I said, "Go on!" and cursed and hung up. So at that point I end up all by myself. All the girls are left, no customers. I call up my daughter. I say, "Sharon, you better get here. I can't deal anymore, and nobody's here and I can't deal. I can't cut hair or anything." And when she came over I left, and I don't know if I was able to drive or—I was so, you know, like you wouldn't believe. It's very hard to put it into words.

My daughter that was becoming a nurse, she was already working in a hospital, Stony Brook Hospital. I call up Stony Brook Hospital and they said, "What's the matter?" I says, "I need help. And I cannot—how to explain. I need to see some kind of—" see how I'm getting? Like a—

CP: Psychologist?

AW: A psychologist—

CP: Therapist?

AW: A therapist, that's the word. I need to see a therapist. When they asked me what's the matter, I says, "I don't know." I said, "Something's happening to me. I need counseling. I need to be calmed down. I just lost my daughter's business." She really lost her business. And so they said, "Well, we can't get you in; it takes weeks." And I start cursing and I says, "It's now or never, it's got to be now or never," and I start cursing the other person that was on the other side. And in about five, ten minutes, the person calls me back. "Can you come in tomorrow?" And so I said, "Oh, yeah, sure." You know, I still had some of my mind, you know.

And I came in. Actually they had—because I didn't have any job anymore, I didn't have an income anymore, I was interviewed there at the Stony Brook Hospital—I don't know if you ever heard of it, on Long Island; it's the biggest hospital there is—to see if I really need to see a psychiatrist. And the way I was acting—I was like a tornado hit, you know. And they assigned me to the psychiatrist, and you know what, he was very good. I was able to come and talk with him, because I don't want to talk to nobody. Actually they were giving me medication to calm me down, and they did a lot of blood work on me and, you know, getting to talk about it.

And that was six months it took, with medication, with blood work, to see how I'm doing with the medication. It was not so good. I couldn't handle medication because I never had any medication, you know, that kind of medication. And then, they put me into a group. I was seeing a psychiatrist single once a week and in a group also once a week, and I was getting a cab and I was getting some kind of—I think they put me on SSI [Supplemental Security Income] at that time, that point, because I couldn't work. I couldn't do nothing and I couldn't deal with people, and that dragged till 1994.

So my daughter lost the business, so she took the baby and moved to Florida because my son moved to Florida already before that. And so after a while, I said, "I need to go to Florida. I need to be with my daughter because I raised that child until she was five, six years old," you know. And she also had surgery; she had spina bifida; she had five years before going to Florida; she had surgery. Anyway, but I was afraid I couldn't handle it, to make that trip, and they put me through all kinds of explanation and get me to realize that I can make that trip, and I can have those things. And I brought everything out in the open to learn how to be able to cope with it and learn to live with it. It took a long time.

CP: Is that—during that time with all those therapies, is that when a lot of your memories started to come back from your experiences?

AW: Yeah.

CP: Was it kind of a coming to terms with that history?

AW: Yeah, to come to term with it, to bring it out and to be able to live with it.

CP: Yeah.

AW: But I still have moments when I'm alone, you know, thinking about certain things where I go into a panic. Certain things like, you know, the way my health is going. It's very hard for me to cope with everything, but I say to myself, "I lived through everything, you know, I got to be strong." I'm a strong person. I work out and used to give exercise classes in Long Island when I was young. You know, just to learn to live with it. But it still hurts; it still hurts.

CP: And so, do you link that period of time in the early nineties [1990s] when you were starting—you say that you started to feel like you were losing it, like you were losing it. Do you link that to the Holocaust and being born into the Holocaust?

AW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Everything is like this. All my problems, because since there was no food, there was nothing really to eat, I have a damaged (inaudible) tube, which my problem with my bowel. I have a problem which—

CP: You talked about the problem with the eyesight and your eye.

AW: Yeah, I'm talking right now, what's inside. I had a hysterectomy already, taken take out the uterus. I already have both ovaries taken out in surgery. I had—my gallbladder was—it started out when I was twenty. I already had my—

CP: I don't want you to reveal too much of your medical history, too much of your medical record.

AW: Oh, okay.

CP: Just because it'll be part—and we got about five minutes left, so that's perfect. Is there anything else? I think that's everything that I thought we might talk about. Is there anything else that you'd like to say, or for people who might watch this, future generations who are learning about the Holocaust?

AW: Okay, the only thing I really want to put into it—

CP: Please.

AW: Which when I came to the United States, I didn't know what kind of food was out there, until I was fifteen years old. I spent some time with a friend in their house and they served steaks or lamb chops, real meat. The only thing I knew about is chicken and rice and soup. And they served like a piece of steak or a lamb chop, and I said, "What is that?" And this is how I learned that there was some food, more than what I knew about it.

But there's another story, you know, with my mother—and I also get the injections in my eyeballs. I have macular degeneration and I have already—I went through twelve injections already. After a couple of months after that they did the dye again, and I'm closer now. I'm still hemorrhaging behind my eyes. I'm closer now to the macular degeneration, and I start again with injections and I take vision (inaudible) two pills a day, and everything else.

CP: Well, it's inspirational to see you still fighting and still surviving, and we appreciate that.

AW: I'm a survivor. I'm a survivor. I fight every single day not to lie down and die and collapse.

CP: And I think that's a very important story. Is there anything—to end this interview, is there anything else that you'd want to say to future generations who are looking at your testimony?

AW: You know, whatever problems they have, they should be able to talk about it and get help for it. Do the best you can and make the best out of it. And as long as you're still alive, you fight for your life!

CP: Well, thank you very much. It's been a pleasure talking with you today.

AW: Is that a good ending?

CP: That's a perfect ending, yes.

End of interview