

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

Oral History Interviews of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center

**Interview with Edith Farben
May 7, 1987
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PREFACE

On May 7, 1987, Edith Farben was interviewed on videotape by Charles de Fanti and Bernard Weinstein on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum houses a copy of the interview as a result of a contributing organization agreement with the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the contributing organization agreement.

Summary of the
Interview with Edith Farben
May 7, 1987

Edith Farben was born in Velka Polana, Czechoslovakia (Slovakia) on April 9, 1925. Her father was a shoemaker and she was the third of four children. At the outbreak of the war, the town was taken over by the Hungarians, who were "fed anti-Jewish propaganda" by the Germans. The Jews were forced to wear yellow stars and were given little food. In 1944, Edith and her family were taken to a ghetto in Munkács, Hungary. They remained there for about a month before being shipped by train to Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland. Edith was forced to work and was separated from most of her family. She saw people entering the crematorium on a daily basis. In December of 1944, Edith was sent as slave labor to the Waiswasser factory in the Sudetenland, German occupied Czechoslovakia. Edith remained there until the end of the war. At that time, she went to Bratislava (the present day capital of Slovakia) and was reunited with her mother, brother, and two sisters. In October of 1945, Edith married and she and her husband spent a year in the displaced person's camp in Wasserburg am Inn, Germany until 1947 when they came to the United States. Her husband worked in a lumber factory while she worked in a dress factory. Edith's husband died in 1987. She has one daughter and three grandchildren.

**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Edith Farben
May 7, 1987**

01:00:00

Edith was born in Velka Polana, Czechoslovakia (Slovakia) and was the third of four children. Her father was a shoemaker. Her family moved to the city of Munkács, Czechoslovakia for a short time but soon returned to Polana. After war broke out, the Hungarians took over. Jews had to wear yellow bands and could not go out at night. Before the war, Edith and her family had few material things but they were happy and content. All the children had to go to school through eighth grade. The oldest brother went to Hebrew gymnasium. After the Hungarians took over, things became more difficult for the Jews. Velka Polana had about three hundred families, mostly non Jewish. All the Jews were practically related to each other. Edith's grandfather was everyone's "uncle." Czechs were very democratic with no discrimination. Jews were set apart only because they were better educated, not discriminated against.

01:06:00

Hungarians were fed anti-Jewish propaganda. In the winter of 1943, the Jews knew they were going to be discriminated against. They had to wear the yellow star and they received little food. During Passover of 1944, Edith's father, brother, and sister were in synagogue. She and her mother were home. Two Hungarian soldiers who were friendly with the family, came to the house. One soldier asked her mother to go for a walk. They soon returned. These soldiers had come to tell them that they were going to be taken away. The soldiers

wanted to help the two girls by taking them with them but her father would not allow it. The next day, their home was surrounded by Hungarians.

01:11:00

Between 1939 and 1944, Edith's family was trying to find papers that might help them ward off deportation. They could not find papers for their grandfather. He had to report every Sunday to the police. The police knew their family and had frequently come to their home on social occasions on behalf of her grandfather. In the spring of 1944, however, the police department personnel were changed. Edith was forced to go home and bring her grandfather. They were always afraid that his beard would be shaved or that he would be beaten. In April of 1944, Edith's family was sent to the ghetto and her grandfather's beard was shaved off. Her grandfather died less than three weeks later. The Rabbi told them not to cry. "He will have a grave," he said. "We will not." They were in the ghetto in Munkács, Hungary from mid April to mid May of 1944.

01:16:00

The family was together in the ghetto. In May, they were taken by train to Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland. All Carpathian ghettos were liquidated before the end of May. They were locked in a train for two to three days. They were herded off the train when they arrived. The Kapos told the young girls to give their babies to their young mothers, but they sometimes refused to do so. They finally came to a table where a finger pointed them to their fate. Edith's mother was told to go to the right. Her mother said she had to take care of Edith's grandmother. An old lady volunteered to go with the grandmother. They saw chimneys and smoke. Later they were told that the smoke was the smoke of flesh burning.

01:21:00

Edith's father and brother were separated into different Kommandos. Her father was killed but her brother survived. Edith got tattooed. She worked in the "Kanada," kommando sorting clothes. It was physical work but not difficult. They worked under a shelter so they didn't get wet and the sun did not burn them. Life was relatively "easy." Even a modicum of food was available. The women wore white kerchiefs that they used to carry things secretly. Her aunt, who was with them, was beaten. They decided after that incident that they would only take care of themselves. They were "fortunate." Physically and mentally, though, it was awful. They spent five to six weeks with "Kanada."

01:26:00

Edith saw people enter the crematorium on a daily basis. There was no mistake about what was going on. The elderly were brought in by truck and "dumped" into the crematoria. A few years ago, Edith saw a couple at a function. They were Greek Jews. They asked her, "How did you live a normal life?" Her mother, sister and maternal aunt were all together. They made sure that her mother was always in the middle of line. Thus, she was not conspicuous. In October, 1944, there was an uprising in Auschwitz. Men and women were not in contact and didn't know much. The rebels were thrown into ovens. Edith had to work on making parachutes. This was near Yom Kippur.

01:31:00

The SS made sure that the inmates worked on the holidays. During the summer when it was Tisha B'av, the SS rounded up those who fasted and drew every ounce of blood they could take from people. Edith and her family managed to escape the blood-taking. They never

knew who was or was not going to be gassed in the showers. Her sister grew ill. She was taken out of line and shipped to Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp in Germany, where she died. Edith's mother arrived in Bergen-Belsen two days after her daughter died there. Edith was separated from her mother and taken to a camp in the Sudetenland in German occupied Czechoslovakia. It was a communications factory named Waiswasser. Edith was saved because she was nimble-fingered. Nobody in that camp died. There were non-Jewish Czechs doing forced labor there too. Edith learned that the war was ending soon.

01:36:00

Occasionally, someone brought in sugar or salt. A friend of Edith's once desperately grabbed some salt, but Edith seized it from her so she wouldn't get caught in possession of it. Another friend had night blindness and was sent to the night shift. Edith asked some woman to take care of her so the German SS wouldn't discover that she could not see.

01:41:00

In the spring, they went one morning to be counted but no one showed up to count them. The SS director came and told them that the war was over but warned them not to go anywhere because the SS were roaming around and would shoot on sight. They didn't believe it at first. Later, forced labor Czechs came and took the girls to their homes. They gave them simple food because they didn't want them to get ill. They brought them shoes, dresses, etc. They could have remained there but they wanted to go home. They were given food and provisions.

01:46:00

During their long train ride home, they encountered Russian soldiers, many of whom raped unescorted women. The area was entirely Russian. Women had to attach themselves to a man as not to be assaulted. One night at a train station, there were no men around and they had to hide out in a bathroom. Edith was traveling with a childhood friend. They came to Bratislava, Czechoslovakia (Slovakia), and Edith wanted to get off there but her friend didn't. Edith tried to appeal to her but her friend was adamant. The train left and Edith was alone. She met a woman who knew her who told Edith that her mother was there and alive. She saw a "skinny woman" coming towards her with a tall thin man.

01:51:00

These people were her mother and brother. Someone told her mother that Edith was alive. Everyone watched them. Her friend's two sisters were there also. Edith remembers seeing birds and saying "Aren't they lucky." Hearing planes and wishing they would drop bombs, she feels her life was comparatively "easy" yet it was a "nightmare." She found out about her father and sister.

01:56:00

They stayed in Bratislava about a week. They went home and the house was occupied by neighbors. Edith's mother's older sister had been married before the war, survived, and found her husband. The United Jewish Appeal had communal shelters. They went to another town after Velka Polana. Edith met her husband-to-be there. His first wife and children had been killed. She married in October of 1945. Edith's brother from the United States was in Czechoslovakia. She and her other brother went to see him, although her mother and husband stayed behind.

02:01:00

They went to Wasserberg, Germany from the spring of 1946 to June of 1947. In January of 1947, Edith's mother went to the United States and stayed with her sisters. Edith and her husband went in July. They lived and worked there and made enough to live on. They never went to an agency for help. Edith's husband was very proud and wanted to earn his own living. She worked in a dress factory. He worked in a lumber factory. Healthwise, they were not in good shape. Her husband's boss sent him to his doctor because his hands and feet were swollen. After a while, he got another job.

02:06:00

In 1948, Edith's daughter was born. Edith went back to work. In 1953, they had a son who died at three and a half. Edith's brother got sick and died. Her mother remarried for a short time. She now lives near Edith. Edith's husband died in 1987. She has three grandchildren. Her mother had her own experience. She was shipped to Mauthausen, a concentration camp in Austria, Regensburg, a concentration camp in Austria, and Bergen-Belsen with her sisters. They were sick and infected. Her aunt had blood poisoning and could not show it to anyone because it meant certain death.

02:11:00

Edith's mother found a potato in a field. Her first instinct was to eat it. Instead, she gave it to her sister as a healing device, a folk remedy. She once got a piece of bread from a German soldier and shared it with her sister. Both survived. Edith feels it was just fate. Some who were stronger than she, did not survive. What happened should not be forgotten. She would never want anyone to go through what she went through. She can understand what it is like

to be discriminated against. She does not want anyone to become an object of discrimination for their race or religion.