

RG-50.002.0098

Summary

Elsie Brunstein born in Czernowitz, Romania (now Chernivtsi, Ukraine) in 1912. Czernowitz had a large Jewish community with a population of 450,000. Elsie describes her early years as extremely hard; her mother was a widow due to her fathers' early death in WWI (1917) and she had 2 sisters and 4 brothers. She worked in a local store, married in 1936, where at that time Jews were stripped of their rights. They could no longer attend public universities and they were treated horrendously. In 1939, Russia occupied Poland and Elsie and her family began sensing danger in the air. Late 1939, the war broke out, everyone went into hiding. The Russians and the Romanian police murdered people in the streets in Czernowitz and beat them badly. In 1940, the Germans arrived and made all Jews wear a yellow arm band with the Star of David so they were easily identifiable. Initially, they tried to concentrate the Jews but the city was too big. During this time, Elsie's mother passed away from ongoing sickness. Then in 1941, she and her husband were deported with their 3 month baby girl. Romanian soldiers drove them out in trucks, stole her valuables, and put them in a ghetto with 2 rooms of 6 occupants each. People informed Elsie and her family that they should try an escape because they would eventually kill them. She took the advice, tried to escape, slept over in a sugar factory, but was eventually caught. In 1942, they took her husband away to work as a brick layer, she was then left alone with the baby and was very sick. Authorities, sent her to hospital for 7-8 months, where she stayed until liberation. She reunited with her husband and they tried returning to Czernowitz. They returned, however the war had not ended. The Russian authorities looked for Elsie's husband to fight in the war, so she hid him. In 1946, they decided they were going to join the Zionist resistance in Israel. They first went to Bucharest, in cargo ships, but were caught from the British who blocked them from going. In 1947, The British dragged them to Cyprus where they were stuck for almost a year. When Israel became a state, war broke out, and that subsequently made it difficult to travel there. Elsie found out she was pregnant with her 2nd daughter. They eventually moved to Israel, where life was okay. Her husband was very sick and he later died in 1956. She moved to the United States in 1957 by herself, but settled back in Israel because she couldn't bring her children to the U.S. She visited Czernowitz and she said it is awful and was no longer what it used to be. Her experiences in the Holocaust has affected her to this day and made her realize how strong of a person she is.