

ELLI KAM
RG-50.005.0029 (Recorded 1983)

Elli Kam, nee Diamond, was born in 1926 in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, the only daughter of Molly and Simon Diamond. They also had 5 sons. Her parents ran a department store and she describes a happy childhood. She felt that the family didn't believe that bad things could happen in Germany, although her oldest brother emigrated to Palestine. Then the Gestapo arrested her father and brothers Leo and Freddy and she found that they were sent to Sachsenhausen. The family got letters from then, which she believes were fakes. An aunt in New York had previously obtained visas for her father and 2 brothers to various South American countries. Her brother Sammy fled to Holland.

In January 1942 Elly, her mother and youngest brother were sent to a ghetto in Riga. The Latvian Jews were being killed to make room for the German Jews. She remembers it as being very old and chaotic. Many other transports from Germany arrived and their transport was called the Dortmund transport. Elly got friendly with a German girl Lotte Berger, who told her the rules of the ghetto. The family got a room in the ghetto and Elly went to work for the Wehrmacht outside the ghetto as the support of her family until 1943. Elly's mother and 7-year-old brother were notified they were being sent East. When Elly went back to the ghetto from the train station to get some shoes, her mother and brother left on the transport to Auschwitz. She found out her father and brothers were also sent to Auschwitz and her father was killed immediately.

Elly was eventually sent to Kaiserwald concentration camp run by criminals. She was stripped and given prison clothes. She got a job as an office worker where she was allowed to keep her hair. Soon after she was sent by boat to Stutthof, a death camp where Polish non-Jewish criminal women ran the camp. In this camp she was busy scrubbing floors, and witnessed many deaths from typhus. Towards the end of the war many in the camp were marched to Magdeburg, but Elly was very ill with high fever and she managed to hide in the camp until she got a little better. Then she and the rest of the prisoners were sent near Danzig, where there was slightly more food. At this point she didn't think she would survive, but one day it was very quiet and the gates were open. She and 3 friends somehow avoided being raped by the Russian soldiers. They got an apartment together and started running a small restaurant. There she met her husband Ben and married in September 1945.

Elly found out from her brother Freddy, who had survived, that her father and another brother had not survived. She wanted to go to Palestine where her oldest brother lived, but she was pregnant and unable to make the trip. She and Ben stayed in a kibbutz (Geringzo) and had a baby girl. They waited until Ben got his Polish visa and they moved to the US in January 1948. They lived in New York for 10 years and then moved to California, where Ben ended up as an owner of a firm. They had two children and several grandchildren.