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Summary

Gita S. Neumann born on December 16, 1920 Gizlia Salamonovitz in farming community Starina, Slovakia (Sztarina, Cirkokaofalu); village had 4 Jewish Orthodox families (3 owned country stores); attended parochial school, most students Russian Orthodox, "great respect for each other" (acc to Gita), Christian training optional to Jewish children, carolers respectfully sang secular Christmas songs to Jewish homes, town-no electricity/plumbing, transportation horse/wagon, later bicycle, 1-2 taxi automobiles seen; mostly Yiddish spoken in home, parents spoke Hungarian to each other; one set of grandparents die when Gita is 4 yrs. old; father orphaned (age 3), brought up by a rabbi in his extended family (Hungary); "Education very important in our house-father always humming, mother an avid reader"; 4 siblings, Gita oldest, yr. younger very close brother, another brother Herschel (sickly middle child), sister (6 yrs. younger), "baby of family" brother; living with aunt (in separate town) during high school, graduation age 14, then learned dress-making; resenting having to recite prayers not understood, wanted to learn Hebrew; bicycle riding "not a nice thing to do for Jewish girl," so father assisted her bike riding; joyful Jewish holiday celebrations; mother excellent at chess, playing with husband & Jewish peddlers who came through town; 1939, Hungary & Poland had occupied parts of Slovakia, hoodlums started coming in store, taking what they wanted, Jewish liaison officer (between Slovakia & Poland) marched out hoodlums but soon after, Hungarians marched in, officers took over Jewish families homes "considered cleanest," father's business taken over; Gita moves to Budapest, finds work sewing, parents send packages with clothes/bread, delivery boy requests piece of bread in lieu of tip; parents, sisters join Gita in Budapest (sister begins sewing too), 1942 closest brother "taken away," killed at Auschwitz, other brother taken but "never heard was happened to him"; Budapest's ghetto's dire conditions, then parents "taken away"; Summer 1944 Yellow-Star Houses designated as ghettos, owners obliged to take care of other families; bombings, "Soviets one side, British from other"; Gita lives in ghetto "safe house"; receiving word sister taken away & forced to leave her 2 year old alone in house; Gita loses hope, believes she too will be taken, with roommate sneaks out ghetto to seek shelter for sister's 2 year old & another 5 year old, Red Cross finds home for children; transport on train "no food water", through bars, sees train going through Vienna, Prague, Berlin, arrival to concentration camp Ravensbrück, "pushed into tent like sardines," brick floor, in December, water to ankles; "saw dogs, chimney, flame," reassured "crematory only for people already dead"; 200 at a time taken away, returning at day's end without clothes, hair, dressed in rags; bunk beds being built in tent, so shabbily constructed, prisoners worried about collapsing, killing someone underneath, "people dying a lot, dysentery, hunger, every morning they took out deceased"; placed on cattle trains to labor camp, 3 mile march from barracks back and forth to slave labor; end of day grass water, "They didn't bother to clean the grass," slice of bread, pat of margarine; women & men guards, beatings if prisoner couldn't stand straight; barracks built more solid but filled with lice; slave labor at camp Penig in Germany; Dutch supervisor nicer, would leave Gita occasional piece of bread; April 1944

marched out during bombardment of Leipzig, marched east, "If prisoner fell down – shot," Rose dragged one of the girls; after 5 days taken off open air trucks, Red Cross gave food, told the still imprisoned women to rest in forest, Gita & 9 other women escape, made up story as they progressed through villages that they were lost Hungarian workers, receiving kindness from villager who provided women with their first hot meal & barn shelter; hiking through mountains, crossing border into Czechoslovakia; kindness from strangers who provided food/shelter, obtaining papers, May 6, 1944 liberation, "nicest sight" seeing German prisoners being marched; US Army assist with "clean bath & bowl of soup," Gita now 100 lbs. down (from usual 130); returns to hometown, stays with friend who is surprised anyone from Gita's family had survived, then stays with cousin survivor, family home occupied by police & three families, only original items found are some papers found in attic, only 3 other girls from town's 4 Jewish families had survived (Ravensbrück); Rose inquired about boy she had known from before, Joseph "Joe" Neumann (future husband); staying in hometown for a while sewing then leaves for Prague, works in salon owned by a survivor; marriage, settled in a small town where Joe had work (married not by rabbi but by head of Jewish community); daughter 1948 Vera b. Prague; Gita able to obtain her own birth certificate, assists move to Palestine; Gita reflects on learning about fate of each family member, "Mother had been gassed immediately," devastation learning sister died 2 days after liberation (Bergen-Belsen); Gita & Joe in Haifa, living in "field of tents," still very ill, baby Eve ill too; immigration to NY where Gita had family; birth of daughter Vera; Gita & Joe's reluctance to share "horror stories" with their children, Joe's trauma, nightmares, difficulty sleeping, but in later years able to share his story; pre-war family photographs and pictures of their children & grandchildren.