

Summary of Oral History: Esther Wolrich

RG#: RG-50.061.0033

This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [05/2022]

Part 1

Wolrich was born in August 1927 in Radzyn Podlaski, Poland near Lublin to Malka and Jacob Bober; there were six sisters in all, born about two years apart: Hadassah, the eldest, Faigy (?), Henee (?), Sonia, ten years later Esther was born and Adele was born two years later; her father was a salesman to big cities, bought merchandise from small stores and shipped it and had a store where they sold a variety of items such as wallpaper and clothes for the bad weather; they lived in a nice Polish area; Esther started public school at age seven and found some of the Poles were friendly and some anti-Semitic; when it got worse, the family did not leave as did not predict war; Russians came first followed by the Germans when business and school stopped; her father was in his 50s when he died in April 1939; the family hid in a farm during the bombing; two sisters lived in Warsaw and came home during the heavy bombing in Warsaw and the married sister returned to Warsaw; all the Jews from Radzyn were sent to Międzyrzec, a Ghetto 27 km. away and Jews from other towns soon joined them; while the Ghetto was open, Esther lived at home and brought food to her mother in the Ghetto; she dressed like a Pole and took the public bus to trade clothing for food or perform tasks on farms; many in the Ghetto died from hunger and illness as it was crowded and there was no medicine; the Ghetto organized a Judenrat with Jewish police; there was no social or cultural life but homes were used as synagogues; after two months of forced labor on a farm, Esther and another girl escaped to the Ghetto; June '42 she learned that her family was shipped out to Treblinka concentration camp while she was at the farm; she hid with her remaining relatives; Germans continued deporting Jews and she was deported by train to Majdanek labor camp; there she was woken at 3 AM for appel (attendance), tea at 7AM, to work and a slice of bread in the evening; one day her bread was stolen and she got lashed for crying; in May '43 she was shipped to Auschwitz where they got washed, sprayed and shaved.

Part 2

Esther describes arriving at Auschwitz where she received wooden shoes, clothes made of burlap, a kerchief and a tattoo (47768) and placed in Block 2 in Birkenau with other young girls; the next day she was assigned to carry heavy stones and had similar nutrition and schedule as in Majdanek ; she made friends with the other young girls and still is in contact with a few; SS chose her for indoor work and better nutrition; eye was hit but recovered with medication and another time burned her hand on a hot pipe and medication helped; saw '44 transports that arrived went directly to the crematorium; December '44 she was shipped by train to Bergen-Belsen where only given water and no work; British and Canadian forces liberated her April 15, 1945; she got sick from condensed milk and others died from the rich food; placed in hospital and then UNWRA helped her find relatives; a cousin came and told her that her parents had been deported to Treblinka; she remained in Bergen-Belsen with friends until November '45; they tried to get new clothes and soldiers tried to be friendly but she did not know English; she went to Frankfurt Am Main, Germany with her girlfriends and lived in a German house and got food from the DP camp; September '46 she went to the US; future husband got an affidavit from his uncle in Brookline, Mass and came in '48 and they married; the uncle met Esther upon arrival and she stayed with him and worked in his clothing factory in Boston; she went to night school to learn English; Esther was lonely and cried a lot; she talked about her Holocaust experiences with her friends but less with others who questioned her survival as she looked fit; she received reparations; she prayed to God and thought God helped her survive; lived in Dorchester, Massachusetts and Marlene was born in '49 and spoke Yiddish to her; husband worked as a cutter and had a heart attack in '56; does not believe there could be another Holocaust as Israel exists.