

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN, CLEVELAND SECTION**

**HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT**

Name of Interviewee	<b>JENNIE `ALPERT</b>		
Name of Interviewer	Judy Levendula	Date	8/21/84
Name of Abstractor	Michelle Heyer	Date	6/13/88

**NARRATIVE SUMMARY**

Jennie Alpert was born in Czechoslovakia, the second of three daughters. Her mother died when Jennie was three, and when her father remarried she went to live with her stepmother's sister.

Eventually, Jennie became a dressmaker, and had a small business which employed several young girls.

In 1941 Jennie and her Aunt were sent to a ghetto in Ungvar. Her father, stepmother and eight brothers and sisters were sent elsewhere.

Six weeks later, they were deported to Auschwitz. Jennie was 29 years old and her aunt was 53, but despite her age, Jennie's aunt managed to pass selection. They continued to pass, because as barracks workers, they wore special red arm-bands which practically exempted them from selection.

As the Allies advanced on Auschwitz, in 1944, the SS began to frantically kill prisoners. At the final selection, Jennie's aunt was sent to be killed. Jennie was assigned to a group also marked for death, but when the crematorium ran out of fuel, they were forced to wait, naked and without food, for three days. At that point, Jennie was one of 2,000 selected for work.

The workers were given a piece of bread, a dress, and were transported to Traxenberg. There, Jennie became a favorite of the camp commander, who was not a member of the SS, but of the Wehrmacht. When the camp was evacuated in November, and they were forced to march for three weeks, this man became extremely upset by the prisoners' suffering. He told them that he wanted to kill all of them and then to kill himself.

Finally they were taken to Bergen-Belsen, where Jennie remained until the liberation in April.

Jennie was very sick at the end of the war, and was taken to a hospital in Juttaborg, Sweden. It took nearly three years in hospitals and convalescence homes before Jennie regained her health.

During her hospitalization, Jennie discovered that she had an uncle in the U.S. She emigrated, as did a brother and two

sisters. They were the only survivors from Jennie's family.

In the U.S., Jennie met and married a man who had emigrated from Poland in the 1920s. They had a daughter and now live in Cleveland Heights, Ohio.

**Jennie Alpert**

**ABSTRACT**

**VIDEO 1 OF 2**

**PRESENT LIFE**

69 years old. Lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Married, has one daughter and three grandchildren. Very happy life.

**CHILDHOOD**

Born in Czechoslovakia. Had two sisters - one was two years older, one was three years older. Mother died in childbirth when Jennie was three. Father remarried, Jennie went to live with stepmother's sister.

**FAMILY SITUATION**

Father and stepmother had five sons and one daughter (three sets of twins). Father was a tailor. Jenny and aunt were very close. Aunt's husband died after Jennie came to live with them.

**JENNIE BECOMES A DRESSMAKER**

Eventually had successful small business employing several girls.

**JENNIE AND AUNT ARE SENT TO GHETTO IN UNGVAR, 1941**

**HUNGARIANS TAKE OVER, LIFE BECOMES DIFFICULT FOR JEWS**

**THEY DO NOT KNOW MUCH ABOUT WAR**

Some non-citizens were taken away, but no one knew where.

**THEY ARE SENT TO THE GHETTO**

It was one day after Passover, so they had no bread. Gentile neighbors gave them some, despite risk of punishment. Allowed to bring only what they could carry. Slept one night at a school in home town, then sent by train to Ungvar.

**JENNIE'S FATHER, STEPMOTHER, BROTHERS AND SISTERS ARE SENT TO A DIFFERENT GHETTO**

**NO ONE KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO THEM**

**CONDITIONS IN GHETTO**

Slept on the floor. Got food rations once per day.

SIX WEEKS LATER THEY ARE SENT TO AUSCHWITZ

Had no idea where they were going. Packed into cattle cars on a train.

ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ

Stepped off train, heard music. Older people were thrown onto trucks, then covered with gasoline and set on fire. Mengele was there, conducting selection. He whistled as he did this. Jennie was 29, aunt was 53.

THEY WALK PAST A PILE OF BURNING BODIES TO SHOWER ROOMS

They were shaved, washed, given one clean dress. Without hair, Jennie didn't recognize her aunt.

THEY ARE ASSIGNED TO A BARRACKS

Blockalteste is Polish. She has been there four to five years.

JENNIE LEARNS AFTER WAR THAT DRUGS WERE PUT IN FOOD TO PREVENT MENSTRUATION

JENNIE VOLUNTEERS TO CLEAN BARRACKS IN EXCHANGE FOR EXTRA FOOD

Shared it with aunt, other friends.

MENGELE COMES EVERY DAY TO MAKE SELECTIONS

Workers, like Jennie, wore red handkerchiefs and armbands. Blockalteste allowed Jennie to give her aunt one to wear, because workers were never selected.

THEY ARE EVACUATED, SEPTEMBER 1944

Allies were advancing. SS began frantically killing prisoners. Jennie and aunt had to face final selection. Jennie passed but aunt did not. Jennie thought of running to be with aunt, but decided to save her own life.

AT THIS POINT IN THE INTERVIEW, JENNY IS OVERCOME BY TEARS.

JENNIE AND OTHERS ARE TAKEN TO CREMATORIUM

Sat inside for three days - naked, no food or water.

THERE IS NO FUEL FOR CREMATORIUM SO THEY ARE NOT KILLED

JENNIE IS ONE OF 2,000 WOMEN SELECTED FOR WORK

They were given a dress and a piece of bread with liverwurst and put on trains. So convinced they would die, they thought it was a trick.

TAKEN TO TRAXENBERG

Worked digging trenches in the woods. Forced to sing as they walked to work.

JENNIE BECOMES A FAVORITE OF THE GERMAN COMMANDER

He was not SS-member of Wehrmacht. Gave her bread and an apple.

THEY ARE EVACUATED IN NOVEMBER

Marched for three weeks. Wehrmacht commander is upset by their suffering. Said he wanted to kill all of them, then himself.

THEY STAY AT GROSS ROSEN FOR SEVERAL WEEKS TO REST

GIRLS FROM PRIVILEGED BACKGROUNDS DIE. POOR GIRLS ARE USED TO SUFFERING, ARE BETTER ABLE TO SURVIVE

THEY ARRIVE AT BERGEN-BELSEN. STAY UNTIL APRIL, WHEN AMERICANS ARRIVE

Jennie was sick. Got bread only once per day. Some girls who worked in kitchen brought them scraps.

ONE NIGHT GERMANS LEAVE THE WATER RUNNING. JENNIE SNEAKS OVER TO WASH

A GIRL IN JENNIE'S BARRACKS IS DYING. JENNIE TAKES HER BREAD. EVEN TODAY SHE FEELS TERRIBLY GUILTY

VIDEO 2 OF 2

JENNIE IS VERY SICK. SURE SHE'LL DIE

AMERICANS ARRIVE APRIL 21, 1945

Jennie not sure of exact date. Germans were still there.  
Jennie does not know what happened to them.

AMERICANS OVERFEED SURVIVORS. MANY DIE

Germans were forced to take away dead bodies.

JENNIE RECALLS THAT SOME MALE PRISONERS ATE LIVERS OF THE DEAD  
PRISONERS

AFTER LIBERATION, JENNIE GOES TO A HOSPITAL

She had pleurisy. Ever since, she has had swelling  
problems.

RED CROSS TAKES JENNIE, OTHERS TO SIGTURNA, SWEDEN

THEY GO TO A HOSPITAL IN JUTTABORG. JENNIE SPENDS THREE YEARS  
IN HOSPITALS, SANATORIUMS, CONVALESCENT HOMES.

JENNIE'S UNCLE (FATHER'S BROTHER) IS IN U.S. BROTHER AND TWO  
SISTERS ARE STILL ALIVE

Jennie was told she could emigrate to America when she  
became healthy.

SWEDES WERE VERY GOOD TO SURVIVORS

JENNIE SHOWS A PHOTOGRAPH OF HERSELF IN THE SWEDISH HOSPITAL

A WOMAN ORGANIZES A GROUP OF YOUNG SURVIVORS

They worked together in a shirt factory.

JENNIE COMES TO U.S., WHERE SHE MEETS HER HUSBAND

He had come to U.S. from Poland in 1921 or '22.

JENNIE IS VERY HAPPY IN HER PRESENT LIFE

SHE COULD NOT BREAST-FEED DAUGHTER BECAUSE OF WAR-RELATED  
ILLNESS. STILL HAS NIGHTMARES

SHE SOMETIMES TALKS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES, BUT SHE TRIES TO FORGET IT

BEFORE THE WAR, JENNIE WAS STRONG AND HEALTHY. BEING USED TO HARDSHIP HELPS HER SURVIVE