

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

**HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT**

Name of Interviewee	<b>ESTELLE BEDER</b>		
Name of Interviewer	Reva Leizman	Date	8/27/84
Name of Abstractor	Esther Potash	Date	8/5/87

**NARRATIVE SUMMARY**

Estelle Beder is a very sensitive woman, who recounts her experiences with great anguish and difficulty. The mental cruelty and emotional torture that she endured make her coming forward especially courageous.

Estelle was born in Lutsk, Poland. Her father was a tailor, and her mother sold his hand-made clothes from a covered wagon. The family struggled financially, but the concept of charity to those less fortunate was instilled in Estelle at an early age.

Lutsk had been a fairly peaceful village until the war broke out. The presence of the Germans brought curfews, mandatory armbands, sexual abuse and fear to the town. The ghetto was established in Lutsk in 1942, and Estelle's family began to suffer terribly. Although her father was very ill, he sewed for German women, and Estelle helped her family by delivering the clothes and procuring food.

Estelle remembers acts of great cruelty to the Jews while in the ghetto. She is astonished at the horror and the barbaric taunting perpetrated upon the Jews. Her father was beaten and her brother was killed in public spectacles in the ghetto.

Estelle and her sister were separated from the family and sent to the Lodz ghetto, where they were treated very poorly. They remained there until 1944, when they were transported to Auschwitz. In her account, Estelle tells of the great physical and mental cruelty in the wait for death at Auschwitz. She and her sister were designated to be put to death in the gas chambers, but the Germans ran out of their supply of gas.

The two girls were then sent to work in an ammunition factory for a short period, where they received better treatment. Since this was at the end of the war, the distraught Germans began to move prisoners randomly, and Estelle was moved from place to place without reason. She passed through Bergen-Belsen, and painfully tells of walking on thousands of skeletons, wondering if her family was among them.

Finally, she and her sister are selected to be among those Jews to be exchanged for German soldiers in Sweden. After a perilous trip to Sweden, Estelle and her sister are finally treated with kindness and are nursed back to some normalcy.

At this point, Estelle wanted desperately to be reunited with her family. Unfortunately, except for her sister, her entire family was killed during the war. Estelle was able to contact her cousin Rose in the U.S. Rose arranged for her and her sister to come to N. Y. The sister lived with Rose for two years.

Estelle was slowly able to build a life for herself. She met and married another survivor, Sam Beder. Together they had three sons and moved to Cleveland, where she has enjoyed a peaceful life in a community of other survivors. Her health continues to suffer from the physical and emotional tortures, but she is thankful for her family, for her religious and community affiliations and for the opportunity to live in the U.S.

**Estelle Beder**

**ABSTRACT**

**VIDEO 1 OF 3**

**CURRENT LIFE DESCRIPTION**

Lives in Beachwood with husband, Sam Beder. Has three sons and one granddaughter. Is very proud of children.

**DESCRIBES CHILDHOOD IN LUTSK, POLAND**

Lived near large, close, extended family. Father was a tailor, mother sold clothes from a covered wagon. Had two brothers and one sister. She recalls that times were not always good for her family economically.

**SHOWS PICTURES OF HER FAMILY**

FAMILY, ALTHOUGH ITSELF NOT VERY WELL OFF, IS VERY CHARITABLE TO OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Grandmother was very religious. She made Sabbath meals for poor people, which Estelle regularly delivered. Father and his friends produced fund-raising amateur performances to raise dowries for poor young women.

**REMEMBERS MINIMAL ANTI-SEMITISM IN SMALL TOWN OF LUTSK BEFORE THE WAR**

Jews lived in their own neighborhoods, but there were no enforced ghettos.

**SHOWS PICTURES OF HER LARGE FAMILY, AS IT WAS BEFORE THE WAR**

Identifies family members, most of whom were killed by Hitler. Identifies woman whose baby was buried alive.

**QUESTIONS REASONS FOR THE SORROW AND HORROR**

**FIRST AWARENESS OF CHANGE IN LIFE COMES WITH THE WAR BETWEEN POLAND AND GERMANY**

When German Jews visited and told of the Germans' treatment of them, the Jews in Lutsck did not believe them.

**THOSE IN THE ZIONIST ORGANIZATIONS DO BELIEVE THE NEWS OF ANTI-JEWISH TREATMENT**

She belonged to a Zionist organization like the Girl Scouts. Older brother was more heavily involved.

IN 1939, THE GERMAN BOMBING FORCES ESTELLE'S FAMILY TO LEAVE THE VILLAGE FOR A SHORT TIME

When they returned, the Germans occupied the area. Rumors of the ghetto began, but the Jews believed they would only be taken for work detail.

RECALLS A BRIEF PERIOD OF PEACEFUL GERMAN OCCUPATION, FOLLOWED BY THE GESTAPO ESTABLISHING CURFEWS, GHETTOS, AND MANDATORY YELLOW ARMBANDS FOR JEWS

GERMAN BARBARISM FIRST NOTICED WITH THEIR SEARCHING FOR YOUNG JEWISH GIRLS TO ABUSE

Grandmother hid Estelle and sister in closet every night.

GHETTO ESTABLISHED IN LUTSK IN 1942

Grandmother died at this time. Father very ill. Father employed as tailor for the Germans. Estelle delivered father's products to German women, which was quite dangerous for her. She wanted to help the family in any way possible.

DOES NOT RECALL ANY NON-JEWS TRYING TO HELP

IN THE GHETTO, HER FATHER AND OTHER MEN TAUNTED AND BEATEN WITH LEATHER STRAPS AS A PUBLIC SPECTACLE

Father not well, but withstood tortures anyway.

VIVIDLY RECALLS INCIDENT IN WHICH TWO JEWISH BOYS WERE WRONGLY ACCUSED OF STEALING AND SPYING AND WERE PUBLICLY HANGED

Great anguish in re-telling this episode. Jewish committee in the ghetto pooled gold and silver to try to pay the Germans not to hang the boys.

GERMANS THREATEN TO KILL MORE PEOPLE FOR THEIR SINS; GERMANS ACCUSE RABBIS AND WEALTHY JEWS OF NOT PAYING THEM ENOUGH

GERMANS PICK TEN MEN TO SHOOT THEM. ESTELLE'S OLDER BROTHER IS AMONG THE MEN KILLED

Turning point of demoralization and feeling of sure doom.

GERMANS "ROUND UP" JEWS AND TAKE THEM TO A CHURCH

Older, religious people thought it was sinful to be in a church. Much confusion, panic, and sorrow while the Jews waited to see what would become of them.

FATHER ADVISES ESTELLE NOT TO ADMIT SHE HAS ANY SISTERS OR BROTHERS

Remembers father trying to reassure her, but was too distraught to comprehend much at this point.

2,000 JEWS SENT IMMEDIATELY TO DEATH AT CHELMNO; 1,000 SENT TO LODZ GHETTO IN CATTLE CARS

Estelle was with her brother and sister on train to Lodz. Brother killed shortly thereafter.

CONDITIONS IN LODZ

Treated like animals. Food rations consisted of potato peels and coffee grinds. Jews tried to look for work in the factories.

MINIMAL COMMUNICATION WITH WORLD OUTSIDE THE GHETTO

Did hear rumors of Auschwitz.

GHETTO GOVERNMENT

Judenrat was set up to govern Jews. Rumkovsky, the leader, was suspected of collaborating with the Germans. She recalls that he had plenty of food and did not care about the others.

LEAVES LODZ IN 1944 WITH SISTER; IS TRANSPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ IN CATTLE CARS

ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ

First sight was of people electrocuted and hanging on the barbed wires. Told her sister she did not want to live any longer. Her sister urged her and encouraged her constantly to keep trying to survive.

STAYS WITH SISTER ALL THROUGH CONCENTRATION CAMP EXPERIENCE

Never admitted they were sisters. Had numbers, not names, for identification.

RECALLS THE TWISTED IDEA OF THE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC AT THE ENTRANCE OF AUSCHWITZ

VIDEO 2 OF 3

CANNOT DETERMINE HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE IN HER BARRACKS

There were no beds and no way of organizing the inmates. Since everyone looked so horrible from the treatment, she states that there was no way of recognizing people one might have known before.

DISCUSSES ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ AGAIN

Instead of shaving her head, the Germans pulled her hair out by the roots. She was delirious. Her sister helped her and kept her from giving up.

GERMANS SEXUALLY ABUSE GIRLS

HER WORK CONSISTS OF PICKING UP STONES, DIGGING GRAVES, OTHER UNPLEASANT, MEANINGLESS TASKS

Only complied because her sister encouraged her.

FIRST AWARENESS OF GAS CHAMBERS

She saw the transports of Jews and was aware of a terrible odor.

ESTELLE AND OTHERS TAKEN TO SOME WILDERNESS AREA FOR TEN DAYS

When she asked for some water, a guard punched her several times in the face and knocked her teeth out.

THE GROUP IS DESIGNATED FOR GAS CHAMBER, BUT GERMANS RUN OUT OF GAS AND TRANSPORT HER TO NOKEL, NEAR BERLIN, TO WORK IN AN AMMUNITION FACTORY

Has some confusion reporting events at this time. Remembers the agony of waiting and wanting to die to "get it over with."

CONDITIONS SLIGHTLY BETTER WHILE WORKING IN FACTORY

German guards were decent, told them they would live if they kept working. Were permitted to wash themselves.

AGAIN DISCUSSES HOW HER SISTER KEPT HER ALIVE DESPITE HER OWN DEATH WISH

JEWS IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMP HAVE SOME EXPECTATION THAT AMERICAN JEWS WOULD HELP THEM

Also, could not understand why the Red Cross was unable to help.

ESTELLE NOT AWARE OF ANY RESISTANCE GROUPS, BUT SHE HAS LIMITED VERBAL CONTACT WITH OTHER PRISONERS

FROM THE FACTORY, TRANSPORTED BY TRAIN TO RAVENSBRUCK, ORANIENBURG AND BERGEN-BELSEN

ARRIVES AT BERGEN-BELSEN IN 1945 AND CAN ONLY RECALL BEING FORCED TO WALK ON THOUSANDS OF SKELETONS

RECALLS BLOCKING OUT EVERYTHING AT THIS POINT, GOING INTO STATE OF SHOCK

SHE AND HER SISTER AMONG 200 JEWS THAT SWEDEN EXCHANGED FOR SOME GERMAN SOLDIERS

Journey to Sweden was perilous. Bus was bombed and her sister was injured.

SWEDISH PEOPLE TREAT JEWS VERY KINDLY AND GENEROUSLY

Swedish people gave up their ration cards to Jews, housed them in public buildings.

ESTELLE IN VERY POOR HEALTH

Suffered from severe headaches, scalp problems, gum problems.

SHE AND SISTER LIVE IN A COLLECTIVE HOUSE WITH 50-60 OTHER GIRLS IN SWEDEN

Orthodox Jewish women gave them supplies. The girls worked in a clothing factory.

KIND SWEDISH COUPLE SEEKS TO ADOPT ESTELLE AND HER SISTER, BUT ESTELLE WANTED DESPERATELY TO SEARCH FOR HER FAMILY

ESTELLE SEARCHES FOR HER FAMILY BY CONTACTING AMERICAN COUSIN ROSE, LOCATED BY HIAS

Rose had not heard from any other family members, but offered to bring the girls to the U.S.

ESTELLE AND HER SISTER TREATED VERY WELL BY HER COUSINS, WHO TAKE THEM IN AS PART OF THEIR OWN FAMILY

They stayed with cousins from 1946 to 1948, when her sister got married.

**VIDEO 3 OF 3**

PARTICIPATES IN JEWISH SOCIAL ACTIVITIES SPONSORED BY HIAS

ATTENDS NIGHT SCHOOL IN N. Y.

SUFFERS NERVOUS DISORDERS CAUSED BY CONCENTRATION CAMP EXPERIENCES

Experiences difficulty swallowing, eating. Had terrible recurring nightmares. Cousins tried to comfort and distract her.

MEETS HUSBAND THROUGH A FRIEND FROM HOMETOWN

MOVES TO CLEVELAND IN 1951 FOR HUSBAND'S IMPROVED JOB OPPORTUNITY

SHE AND HUSBAND OPEN A SMALL CLEANING SHOP, BUT STRUGGLE WITH THE BUSINESS AND TO SUPPORT AND CARE FOR THEIR YOUNG SON

ESTELLE'S FAMILY GROWS AND PROGRESSES

She had another son. Her husband began his career as an electrician. They moved to a larger house, and took in a border for extra income.

DISCUSSES HEALTH PROBLEMS AGAIN

Spent much time in the hospital. Husband helped a great deal with the children.

HAS BEEN VERY RELUCTANT TO TALK ABOUT EXPERIENCES BECAUSE IT IS SO UPSETTING THAT IT ENDANGERS HER HEALTH

DID TELL HER TWO OLDER SONS OF HER EXPERIENCES; THEY ARE EXTREMELY PROTECTIVE OF THEIR MOTHER

DECISION TO SHARE EXPERIENCES MORE PUBLICLY RESULTED FROM YOUNGEST SON'S INTERACTION WITH PROFESSOR BUTZ, (of Northwestern University) WHO ASSERTS THAT THERE WAS NO HOLOCAUST



**Estelle Beder**

ESTELLE BELONGS TO TAYLOR ROAD SYNAGOGUE AND IS VERY ACTIVE IN  
THE KOL ISRAEL FOUNDATION

Believes it is her duty to help in the community. Loves the  
U.S. Is more trusting of others now.

BELIEVES THAT OTHER JEWS CAN NEVER REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT  
SURVIVORS ENDURED

IS ENCOURAGED THAT PEOPLE DO WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE  
HOLOCAUST NOW

WANTED TO ATTEND THE LODZ GHETTO SURVIVOR REUNION, BUT POOR  
HEALTH PREVENTED

LAST PERSONAL MESSAGE IS THAT SHE HOPES A HOLOCAUST WILL NEVER  
HAPPEN AGAIN AND THAT THE U.S. SHOULD PROTECT FREEDOM FOR ALL