

**HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT**

Name of Interviewee	<b>FREDA SCHMELZER</b>		
Name of Interviewer	S. Garfinkel	Date	7/11/84
Name of Abstractor	Esther Potash	Date	2/23/88

**NARRATIVE SUMMARY**

Freda Schmelzer was born in a small Rumanian town in the region of Transylvania. Her parents ran a small general store, and she was one of seven children. She recalls the beautiful Jewish traditions and the peaceful life among the gentiles in her childhood.

Freda's first memory of trouble is associated with the arrival of the Hungarians. She tells of the beginnings of different treatment for Jews, even in the defense of their country. While Jews were restricted from business and opportunity, conditions did not become critical until 1944. She tells of her family's last time together at their Passover mead in 1944, and of the great psychological distress of not knowing what was happening elsewhere or of what was going to become of her family.

After Passover of 1944, the Jews of her town were taken to a ghetto in Soluge, where they remained for four weeks. They were then transported to Auschwitz. Freda retells the horrors of separation from her family, the terrible conditions and the murders in the camp.

In the fall of 1944, she was selected to work in a grenade factory, where conditions were slightly better. She remained in that factory until the liberation by the Russians.

**ABSTRACT**

**VIDEO 1 OF 3**

EARLY CHILDHOOD IN SMALL RUMANIAN TOWN, IN THE REGION OF TRANSYLVANIA

SMALL JEWISH COMMUNITY OF 45 FAMILIES LIVES PEACEFULLY AMONG GENTILES UNTIL HUNGARIANS TAKE OVER IN 1941

FREDA HAS THREE BROTHERS AND THREE SISTERS; PARENTS RUN A GENERAL STORE

DESCRIBES HOME LIFE

Jewish girls educated in homemaking by assisting mother.

ALTHOUGH LIFE GENERALLY PEACEFUL, ANTI-SEMITISM DOES EXIST, AND SURFACES MORE VIOLENTLY AROUND THE GENTILE HOLIDAY SEASONS

IN 1937, GERMAN INFLUENCE FELT; HER FAMILY FORCED TO KEEP THEIR STORE OPEN ON THE SABBATH

VERY OBSERVANT OF JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND RITUALS

She was deeply affected by the beauty and solemnity of worship, ceremonies.

DESCRIBES THE SANCTITY OF FOOD PREPARATION, PRESENTATION

FIRST INDICATION OF TROUBLE OCCURS WITH ARRIVAL OF THE HUNGARIANS

Jews not accepted for military service. Telephones, radios confiscated. Jews prohibited from attending high school. Much business restriction.

IN 1940, TOWN BOYS TAKEN TO BUILD BUNKERS

IN 1943, ONE OF HER BROTHERS "DISAPPEARED" WHILE IN ARMY SERVICE

ASSERTS THAT GENTILES KNEW WHAT WAS OCCURRING; SOLDIERS COMING HOME FROM THE FRONTS COULD HAVE WARNED THE JEWS

STATES THAT ESCAPE WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE THEY WERE GEOGRAPHICALLY SURROUNDED BY FASCIST COUNTRIES

IN 1944, CONDITIONS BECOME CRITICAL FOR THE JEWS IN HER TOWN

Jews experienced dire poverty due to restriction in work opportunities. Jews prayed and fasted constantly.

ANOTHER BROTHER DISAPPEARS AND DIES IN 1944

PASSOVER 1944 FAMILY'S LAST TIME TOGETHER

Village was full of German soldiers, who harassed the Jews physically and psychologically.

JEWS "ROUNDED UP" AND DETAINED IN THE SYNAGOGUE FOR THREE DAYS

Endured terrible crowded, fearful period.

TAKEN TO GHETTO IN SOLUGE; REMAIN THERE FOUR WEEKS

**VIDEO 2 OF 3**

RETURNS TO DISCUSSION OF PREPARATION FOR MOVEMENT TO GHETTO

Repeated terror and misery of night in the synagogue.

GHETTO EXPERIENCES

Jews did not work in the ghetto, but waited for movement to Auschwitz. Gestapo confiscated all valuables. Jews forced to march in formation to instill discipline, control.

TRANSFER OF JEWS TO AUSCHWITZ

Jews endured silent, crowded journey in cattle wagon for three nights and two and a half days. Some died during journey. Remained in locked wagons during Allied attack.

ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ

Recalls her mother's shock at the terrible noise of the Germans and the dogs. Polish youths from the camp separated her from her mother.

DESCRIBES MENGELE'S SEPARATION OF YOUNG, HEALTHY PEOPLE FROM THE OLDER PEOPLE, MOTHERS, BABIES AND THE ILL

RELATES TERRIBLE CONFUSION AND NOISE

PHONY "NURSES" LOAD BABIES ON TRUCKS, TO BE TRANSPORTED FOR EXECUTION

DESCRIBES SHAVING, DISTRIBUTION OF INADEQUATE CLOTHING, APPLICATION OF PAINFUL DISINFECTANT

CZECH AND POLISH JEWISH GIRLS SUPERVISORS. MANY HAD BEEN "GIVEN" TO SOLDIERS IN EXCHANGE FOR COUPONS OR TICKETS

#### DAILY LIFE IN CAMP

Described horrid sanitary conditions, food, roll call. Tells how they were kept busy all day, just "running around."

#### SUPERVISOR TRIES TO PROTECT HER CHARGES

Forbade any of them to remain in the bunks for illness. Knew they would be sent to the gas chamber.

#### FREDA BEFRIENDS YOUNG CATHOLIC OFFICER

In the Polish army. Advised her not to volunteer, and served as her contact to the outside world.

### VIDEO 3 OF 3

#### ELABORATES ON PRIOR DISCUSSION OF SUPERVISORS AND THEIR PROTECTION OF THE INMATES

#### EACH DAY HAS SURPRISES AND BIZARRE INCIDENTS

Described one horrible night of banging and shooting noises when 1,200 girls were taken from the barracks to be killed. Described another incident when three SS men completely dressed in black silently searched the barracks with their dogs and then suddenly left.

#### RECALLS FIRST SIGHT OF THE CREMATORIUM

#### EXPLAINS CHRONOLOGY OF SELECTIONS, AFTER HAVING BEEN IN THE CAMP FOR TWO MONTHS

#### IN THE FALL OF 1944, SELECTED TO LEAVE AUSCHWITZ TO WORK IN A GRENADE FACTORY

Improved conditions, but tight control remained.

#### STEALS POTATOES IN THE LINING OF HER COAT

Was discovered and punished. Forced to sleep outside in cold weather. Head was shaved because she refused to reveal names of others involved.

#### JEWS IN THE FACTORY GO TO THE BUNKERS WITH THE GERMANS DURING AIR RAID ATTACKS

#### END OF WAR APPROACHES

In February 1945, the Germans knew the end of the war was imminent, and Freda's group was marched to some unknown location and detained for four weeks in a horse barn.

#### WAR'S END

When the war ended on May 9, Freda went back to home town, amidst the confusion and turmoil. Even though the war had ended, there was danger because of the chaos. Jewish women were warned against the Russian soldiers, and well as the Germans.

#### LIBERATION BY RUSSIANS

One of them was a Jewish soldier, who was amazed and thankful that some Jews remained alive in Europe.