

RG-50.120 #0242
ETA NEUMAN nee Zimmerspitel

I

- 1.00 Born Oct 12 1926, Poprad Slovakia. Happy childhood, in a religious home. Mother died when she was 12. In 1938 were kicked out of school. In 1942 were sent to Auschwitz. Father and brother died there. Eta and sister survived. Both now live in Israel.

Tells about Auschwitz - Eta was among youngest in that transport - she was 15. Thought at first it was just a labor camp. Four of her cousins were there too.
- 1.06 Tells of shaving of hair, disinfecting 'pools', fear and despair. Medical, gynecological examinations - Eta herself was spared this type of examination. Sent to mass kitchens to cook for Germans.
- 1.09 Eta sees a group from Slovakia and spots her father. Brother too ended up there.
- 1.13 Recaps expulsion from Poprad, March 21, 1942. Believes it's for labor camp for a few months duration. Concentration camp was guarded by Slovaks. When girls number reached a thousand, they were sent to Auschwitz on March 26, 1942. Describes journey on train - 3 days and nights. Slovaks on the road yelled profanities gleefully.
- 1.35 Tells of moments of despair - a dream that her father was dead. Eta wanted to end her life by touching electric fence - a German guard dissuades her. Many other girls did commit suicide on the electric fence.
- 1.38 Tells of Himmler's visit. Tells how he actually shot a few women standing in one of the infamous roll calls [Appels].
- 1.44 Describes life in their block - number 10. Work, first in kitchen, then in laundry. Had to launder clothes of the gassed victims. Identified clothes of her cousin's children! Gas chambers had not been built yet - Germans used mobile gassing units at first. One of her cousins was 'block leader'. Slovak women stuck together - the four cousins were great organizers and tried to keep the 'good' jobs in the family.
- 2.06 Meet other prisoners [German nationals], Jehovah Witnesses, political prisoners [wore a black triangle], thieves [green triangles].
- 2.15 Transfer to Birkenau, on foot. On gate is written 'Arbeit macht Frei' and 'God's windmills grind slowly but surely'. De-licing and disinfecting again, shaving of heads, etc. Had to wear old Russian uniforms. Heard stories of extermination of Russian soldiers and officers. Worked at sorting clothing of victims - these clothes were sent to Germany. Valuables were searched and removed. Already knew about the systematic killings.
- 2.38 Polish prisoners were arriving, but Jews and Gentiles. Sees selections in Birkenau -

camp was getting too crowded. New transports arrived constantly, so thousands were sent to gas chambers [elderly and children first]. Describes screaming of children torn away from their young mothers.

- 2.45 Tells of hostility of Polish arrivals toward the Slovaks who were forced to tell them truth about extermination. Slovak women were considered 'veterans' and 'privileged' and resented by the Poles.
- 3.00 In Birkenau there was some contact with male prisoners. Eta heard there of father and brother's deaths.
- 3.10 Talks about the Sonderkommando - special prisoners who were responsible for removing bodies and disposing of them. These 'commandos' were themselves exterminated by the Germans, since they were witnesses to the mass killings.
- 3.15 Eta tells how some of the valuables that had to be removed from victims clothing, sometimes gold and silver, she kept, hidden. Most of it she just threw away so as to prevent it from going back to the Germans. Some of these hidden valuables were given to prisoners for escape and resistance.
- 3.22 Moved to block named 'Kanada'. July 1943, her four cousins tried to escape - were caught and executed. They concealed the fact they were related to Eta and her sister, in order to spare their lives. 10 men of the Sonderkommando buried the cousins' bodies and said Kaddish.
- 3.50 Tells of a young SS female guard who befriended her.

II

- 1943 Birkenau block B: One day Mengele spots her and orders her to his 'hospital' for experiments. When some of the male prisoners see it, they sabotage the water supply and he lets her go. Later she is told how furious Mengele was to have his victim slip away. Eta still wonders until today who his next victim was, who may have replaced her.
- Oct 1944 Last transports to Auschwitz - all to gas chambers. Rumors that Soviet Army is very near. Gas chambers stop. Eta is transferred to a camp A [A lager] where gypsies were shot in one night to make room for the Jewish inmates. The Sonderkommando blow up several gas chambers, anticipating the Russians. They are all caught and shot. Red Army is still away.

Eta meets a family of Jewish dwarfs, who actually survived and now live in Haifa. Tells of experiments performed on these dwarfs, on sets of twins [Menegele's special favorite subjects].
- 4.15 Eta meets group of chimney sweeps who were allowed to come and go - supplying stories and news of what is happening in the camps. Tells of concerts and other musical programs to keep the morale of the SS.

- 4.20 Tells about Katya Singer, the 'lager fuhrer' or camp leader, who was responsible for their block and was instrumental in saving Eta's life. She survived the war and died in 1995.
- Jan. 1945 Feeling the Red Army is very near, Germans are very nervous. A few isolated bombardments of Auschwitz, but not enough damage. Orders to evacuate the camp and to march away from the camp. The march in the dead of winter killed hundreds and thousands, especially the sick and elderly. The march towards Germany. They are put on trains and taken to camps near Buchenwald, Ravensbruck. Tells of encounters with Slovaks who joined the SS as Volksdeutsch, Slovaks of German origin.
- 4.51 Eta tells of 'blood drives' - they had to donate blood for German soldiers.
- 5.00 Eta tells of Jewish-Slovak girls who had affairs with SS soldiers. Talks of different cases where women used their bodies and sexuality in order to survive. She herself was too young to fully understand the full meaning of what was happening.
- Transferred again to Neusdat Glebe. All are aware the war is ending. Most SS are gone. They are watched by elderly Wehrmacht [German army] soldiers. The women were sent to work in forest, chopping wood, etc.
- 5.36 April 1945 - the camp commandant tells them they are free. The Slovak girls start marching. Arrived in camps which already were occupied by French and Russian troops. Finally found food supplies. Describes brutality of Soviet soldiers. Girls tried to reach American zones. Marched about 30 km per day. Tells of a Russian Jewish officer who befriended them. He warned them against returning to Czechoslovakia saying 'better go to Palestine' 'you are not wanted there'. They found out he was right when they arrived in Bratislava and encountered again anti-Semitism. Etta worked for Zionist underground organization helping them smuggle weapons to the Israeli army, collect everything from bread to gold and jewelry for the Zionist cause. She acted as agent and go-between also for the Joint.
- 6.10 Meeting with Benes, communist Czech president. His message to repatriated Czech refugees was 'pull up your sleeves and start working for the fatherland'. 2 Czech men, also liberated prisoners [they were imprisoned for being communists] helped them along the road to get to Prague and helped protect them from Russian army. One of these men was related to President Benes and was well connected with the new communist regime, and helped the group of 15 Croat girls during the early tough days in Prague. Eva stayed friends with them for a long time after.
- 6.23 Repatriations in Prague. Eta did not want to go to the States. Her sister settled in the States but at present lives in Israel.
- 6.30 Eta tells of her activities for the Palestinian Jewish Brigade - Czechoslovakia - raising money for supplies and weapons for Israel's young Haganah and relations with an Israeli emissary, members of the Haganah. Eta helped with different missions.
- 6.44 Sept 1949 Eta comes to Israel.