

Introduction: Lilly Fuchs, interviewing her on her experiences in the Holocaust on June 30, 1987.

Q: Lilly, would you tell me a little about your family background, where you were born and how many children in your family.

A: We were five sisters, my mother, father, and my grandmother lived with us, my father's mother. On June 1944 we were put in a Ghetto for about a month... whatever we had, the little things we were able to take but not really everything just our belongings more or less. We stayed there for about a month and then they took us to Auschwitz.

Q: Where was this?

A: Rumania.

Q: How many sisters and brothers?

A: Well I had four sisters and me. Five. We were five sisters. And I was born in Rumania.

Q: How many Jewish people were there in the town that you lived in?

A: Well, it was a fairly nice sized population. I don't really know how many.

Q: Was it a hundred families?

A: No, no, no more, probably about 25,000.

Q: How old were you at that time?

A: I was close to sixteen, I wasn't exactly sixteen – fifteen and a half.

Q: And they took your whole family? Your mother? Your sisters?

A: Yes, my sisters, my mother, my father, my grandmother.

Q: What were the economic conditions at that time?

A: Well, the city itself wasn't a poor little city but we were comfortable, not rich people. My father taught Hebrew and Jewish education and that is how he made his living.

Q: Were there any experiences of Anti-Semitism before that time?

- A: Oh yes, I remember times when they like closed up the water and we only could take water, drinking water, from the water well. And my father wore a beard, because we were kind of religious, and a couple of kids, they were like teenagers, and they attacked him when he went to bring water, attacked him and he was beaten from the kids because they knew he was Jewish. And that much I remember. I don't remember too much, because you know we were still young kids, my oldest sister was twenty-one.
- Q: How about in school, for yourself? Did you have any experiences of anti-Semitism in school?
- A: Well I went part-time, I went to a Jewish school and a little bit which I don't, again I don't really recall myself, but I know that there were anti-Semites, because of my... you know when you saw Jews with the passes then you just couldn't go out already in later months... before we went to camp of course.
- Q: What situation led to their taking you to Auschwitz? How did that come about? I mean did they just come into your house?
- A: No, as I said before they took us to a ghetto. All the Jews were put in one part of the city. All barricaded behind fences and we couldn't go out. They let a couple of people from time to time just to go to pick up something to survive. But you had to wear the Jewish stars and a band with a Jewish star on it so they knew you were Jews. You know we were like... just certain times, we were able to leave the place, not myself but, an older person they let out from time to time.
- Q: How long were you in this Ghetto?
- A: We were there for about a month, three weeks or a month, something like this. And after they just said that we had to leave and they put us in cattle cars and that's how they took us to Auschwitz.
- Q: How far was that?
- A: Well, we were traveling a couple of days. Exactly how long, I don't remember.
- Q: Did you have any idea where you were going?
- A: No, I didn't.
- Q: They just said, "Let's go".
- A: Yes, they just took us and they not say anything. My parents maybe knew, I can't say I knew, because I did not know.

Q: And then you got to the camp?

A: And when we went to Auschwitz and when we got there, and the cattle car stopped. So the first thing they did, they took the men separate. My father was the only man in our family and we never saw him after that anymore. He just left us and we just don't know what ever happened to him. And then they started to select us. My older sister was put to the right and two other sisters went to the right and then they selected my mother and my younger sister to the left. Anyway, somehow I remained to the last. And when they put my mother and my younger sister - and of course was my grandmother, she was also with us too, she was also selected to the left and I wanted to go with my mother. And our (officer), who selected us, was Mengele which I'm sure people heard plenty about him. He spoke Hungarian.

Q: Yea, Mengele. So I told him I want to go with my mother, but I did not know what that meant left of right, I just know I wanted to go with my mother. Especially in Europe the kids when you're fifteen and a half, you still want to stay with your mother. And then they say, you can not go to the left. So they almost attacked me with heavy machine guns, they were holding at me and says you can not go there, and you got to go to the right. And I just didn't even realize that my sisters were there already, I just did not care. So I had no choice, I had to go to the right and that was why I survived which we had no idea about that. And then of course they took us in like they said we were going to take a shower or they were going to give you clothes and they do whatever, but then they cut our hair down all completely bald. I did not recognize my own sister and she was standing next to me and I had no idea who she was because it came as a surprise to us that they crop us completely bald. And we had to throw down all our clothes or whatever we had. They gave you their own clothes which were striped uniforms, little striped uniforms. And that's what we had. Then they took us, how far exactly to the camp, I do not even know, but they put us in bunk beds, for awhile we had beds. We were like five people in one bunk. And me and my four sisters actually, we were still alive. But already... No, how should I word this...I'm sorry.

(Break)

Q: Okay, you were saying you were with four sisters... How did they treat you?

A: So they gave us very little food, we had like a loaf of bread which I don't know how we just ate a loaf of bread for five people, so we got like four pieces of that one loaf. And one of my sisters got very sick, we don't know what happened to her, she just had a high fever, and there was a lady surgeon said she was a doctor, said "if you got her some sugar, I'm going to try to saver your sister." So there was no way we could get sugar so next to our lager, they called it lager, was a family lager, said maybe over there they'd have little kids who might get sugar. So we were able to talk through a fence. And one woman said, bring me your

bread, I'll give you sugar. So, but there was no way that you could really legally through there, because there was a gate and they had the SS standing in the middle of the gate. But some people already dug holes under the fence to go through the other camp. And I was like the skinniest and somehow the youngest and I don't know, I guess the bravest whatever you call it. So my sister says maybe you can go through that hole, try to get – her name was Enid – the sugar. But I just didn't get the sugar. So eventually I had to come back through the hole. So I came back through the hole and they saw me. The SS caught me coming back, so they kept waving, come over here. I made believe I didn't hear. So they kept saying again, come here. So I had no choice, I had to go. So I go to them and he says what did you do on the other side. And I said to him I wasn't there. So he says, but I saw you, you were there. So he says, "You know I could shoot you now." They always were ready with the guns there. And so I said, "What can I do?" I kept saying I wasn't there so he gave me a slap so that my teeth was... were in my mouth and I came back to my sisters. They saw my face was all swollen up and no sugar. And they asked what happened and I didn't want to tell them so I said, "Nothing, nothing, nothing, but I just couldn't get the sugar." So finally, they saw that my face was swollen so my oldest sister said that something must have happened to you so I told her what happened. But I survived it you know, what can you say.

Q: How long were you in Auschwitz?

A: We were there about eight months, or something like this. And then from Auschwitz we had to walk about ten days to... We went to Bergen-Belsen.

Q: They didn't tell us why. They just said one day you got to go and you have to go.

A: By this time, how many... So were you still together?

Q: We were still the four sisters. One of my sisters, whom we lost, she had a little heart problem already (at) home and every time we had to walk, so she just did not want to go, she wanted to give up. So we tried to drag her because they would see her... that she was limping. Anything like this forget it, they shoot you down right there. You can not move anymore. So we convince her finally and we got to Bergen-Belsen. But she was sick, over there too. And they said even if she would have remained alive, she wouldn't be okay. But we don't really know what happened to her.

Q: That's the sister that died at Bergen-Belsen?

A: She had... she was also like two years older than I. She was seventeen actually, seventeen and a half. We had no means to help her. And I always think, and my older sisters that, I think, they took her out alive, and she was still alive. They took her out and just piled up the people they called the muselmans. They did

not care if she was sick or not. They said that she was dead and we never saw her anymore. And we don't know exactly what happened to her... 100 percent.

Q: What would be interesting to know is, how did you occupy your time whilst you were in the camp?

A: Well they took us out to work... so we also had the apell... they woke you up like 5 o'clock in the morning, they put on the lights. In the morning you had to go outside and stay in line. I don't know how you would call that...like in the army...

Q: Drill?

A: Yes, like every morning, you had to stand, they call it apell...command...and even in there the sister, which one is still alive, thank God, she's in Israel, so she had...she wasn't really sick, but she looked sickly, very skinny and pale. And every time they saw somebody like this they were selecting, every morning they were selecting. If they saw somebody they didn't like, they pulled them out of the lines and my sister was pulled out two times from the lines because they said she was sick, and we were like panicky. Cause we didn't want to loose her. We knew already, by that time you know already, once they pull you out, you don't come back anymore. You go to the crematorium. They we know already. So we tried to snatch her back. Then they noticed that she came back and they selected her out again. So, second time they was the kapos, they call themselves kapos, the people they were under the SS, second-hand to the SS. So she came with them, with one of those rubber...and what do you call those things policemen use...?

Q: Clubs?

A: Yeah, rubber clubs and smacked her across her hand. So her little finger was raw meat. So then we know already that we're going to have a harder time to sneak her back again. So we begged some people who were alone, because we were four sisters, so we begged them, said please go in that line and let my sister come back for us. But nobody wanted to change because already, more or less, people knew what the other lines are. So...we're still lucky we got her back again. She was suffering with her finger because they like clipped her finger off.

Q: What kind of work did you do in the camps?

A: Pretty much what they made to do...carry bricks... for buildings and what they were doing, like roads, and all kinds of... That was really our job, the people in my time, who came to Auschwitz. That's what they did. Carried bricks.

Q: To build?

A: Yeah.

Q: Building something, you don't know really what.

A: Roads or houses or...I don't know...

Q: Did you work almost all day?

A: Yeah, they kept us there to about four in the afternoon. And that's the time when they gave us a little soup and a piece of bread. And that's what we go on living on, every single day. We had the same thing – soup and a piece of bread.

Q: What happened in Bergen-Belsen?

A: Well in Bergen-Belsen, we didn't really work too much anymore because almost everybody got sick over there. Most of the people they had typhus and they just took us to drills everyday still, and we just came back to the barracks and, you were just hanging around doing nothing for awhile.

Q: How long do you think you were in that camp?

A: We were there three months.

Q: What happened at the end of the three months?

A: After three months, we got liberated...We heard rumors that we're going to be liberated, and of course we were just thrilled and we were hoping that we were going to find our parents – which was a very slim chance really to have, but we thought maybe...maybe. More or less we know that we don't have them, but you don't give up hope...My two older sisters after liberation they went back to Rumania, and I met my husband already, so I stayed in Germany. They both went back home, for hopes they going to find somebody from the family, my father's family, or my mother's family... but they really didn't find anybody.

Q: Who were the liberators?

A: England.

Q: What happened when they came into the camp?

A: Well they just came in and they said you are liberated and brought trucks. And you saw the English soldiers...it was so unbelievable, we just didn't want to believe it...that it's true. And they said that you are liberated and don't worry, everything (is) going to be okay now.

Q: And what happened to the Germans at that time?

A: Well, they disappeared actually, before we even realized it. But the English, they took care of them, they pulled them, they destroyed some of them...oh yeah. They got what... They will never get what...

Q: Did they put them in camps too?

A: Some of them, and they had to drag the dead people because we had plenty of people sick during liberation...typhus. Lots of people. We lost lots of people already, even after the liberation.

Q: You mentioned you met your husband in the camp. And when you were liberated, what did you do then? How did you get to the United States?

A: Well I had family from my father's side. My father had three brothers and a sister so they send us...send me my sister's papers. We were happy that we are going to go to America. We had heard so much about America as young little kids. And we were very happy to be here and still are.

(Break)

...1949 – and we got married the same year 1949, a month later or so.

Q: You never found out what happened to your parents?

A: I just know they separated us and we never saw them anymore. Rumors were going around, they said that they were here... there...but nothing...nothing.

Q: When you came to this country, did you meet with any other friends or family when you came here?

A: You mean my family from before the war? No. We literally did not have really any relatives after the war...most all perished.

Q: Who helped you when you got here?

A: In America?

Q: Yes, I presume you didn't have any belongings or anything. Did you have anything?

A: The Jewish Federation helped us... they gave us clothes. Yes, we got clothes from them...we got jobs.

Q: They helped you get adjusted?

A: Yeah.

Q: Once you came here, you were able to start a new life?

A: Yes, we did. We both went to work right away... Because we didn't want to stay on the (Jewish Federation's) neck. So when ever they gave us jobs, we went. We got paid very little, but we were happy, it was ours. We got married, took a furnished room, and lived with a family for about a year or so and then we got our own place.

Wrap-up: I appreciate your taking the time to go back and giving us the story because we're hoping that people who hear about these things will understand better what happened and work toward achieving peace and something like this will never happen again.