

BEATRICE SIMKOVICH
RG-50.243.0035 (recorded 1988 in Boston)

Beatrice was born in 1927 in Užhorod, Czechoslovakia (now Uzhorod, Ukraine), the oldest of 4. She said the Czechs were always nice to the Jews, but when the Hungarians took over in 1938, her father was sent to a work camp and then disappeared in 1941. She describes life after that in the ghetto where there was no more school and they all had to wear the Jewish star. She describes the place as a large area with a ceiling but no sides. The Jews stayed there for about 3-4 weeks and Beatrice worked in a brick factory. Some families committed suicide together, predicting the future. One of her brothers died in 1943, but in 1944 they were all sent on cattle cars to Auschwitz. It took 3-4 days to arrive. They only had the food they had brought with them and very little water.

Upon arrival the men and women were separated. She originally was going to go to the gas chamber with her mother, but Dr. Mengele called her back and said she looked like she could work. She describes the typical arrival scene and the daily counting in lines at 5 am and again in the evening. She learned never to volunteer and if you had a relative that looked like you, move apart because if the SS thought you were related they would take one away. Also learned never to look sick. She was punished by making her kneel and hold bricks in her hands, sometimes for hours. She describes fighting between different groups of women. At first, she did not know yiddish and that was the language of the camp so she quickly learned some. Beatrice thinks one of the reason she survived was that she never like to eat. People who suffered most from hunger were the ones who ate a lot before; sometimes the latter ate garbage and got sick and died.

She was among the last 1000 prisoners leaving Auschwitz as the Russians neared. Before they were marched out they all had to help in dismantling the crematoria and the camp. She worked in a factory that made components for radios. When liberation came they were in a German town and stayed in homes evacuated by Germans. They were afraid of the liberating Russians as they were mostly drunk and raped the women.

Beatrice went back home and found no one there. She then took a hard 3-week long trip to Bucharest and then Budapest where there were some services by the Joint and HIAS. Then she went back home where she found 2 cousins. She also met and married her husband whom she had known before. At their wedding they were disrupted by a Russian soldier and then several of them tried to kill her husband. They realized they were no longer safe in that place. They went to Czechoslovakia then Germany. They stayed there until 1949 when they left for the US with her 2 1/2-year-old daughter. She went on to have two more children; her son became a rabbi and was always interested in her stories. She told her children not to trust anyone.