

Oral history interview with Esther Blatt

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Summary

Born in Rumania, 1930, parents were Orthodox Jews

Sister, two brothers (one three years older and one three years younger)

Lived on farm not far from the city of Oradea in Transylvania (Romania)

Lived in the city during the week and returned to the farm on the weekend

Children went to school in Oradea

1940 Nazis came to Hungary and took everything away from the Jews. That was the end of their business and they were left with the farm

Family had lived in area for several generations.

Mother had a brother and his wife and their 7-year-old boy

Father had many relatives

Esther had about 10 cousins

Jewish community in the city was larger Jewish population, Had a schul in the small town.

Father had a teacher for her brothers, she had to learn too. Father and brothers went to Schul on Saturday and Saturday night.

Mother looked after the family, cooking, made her own challah

Had help in the house because of the farm and in the house

1940 - Until she was ten she went to Romania school, When the Hungarians came they had to go to Hungarian school (until 1944) all secular subjects

Languages spoken Romanian, Hungarian and Yiddish

Religious family, active in shul, no other religious organizations that she knows of

Sister married when she was 18, had a baby when she left in 1944

1940 father's distillery was taken away

Before 1940 not aware of what was going on, as a child had a lot of non-Jewish friends even after Hungarians came, no problems in school

Only heard her parents talking about Poland and Czechoslovakia

Until 1944, life was normal for her

Only difference for her was that she had to wear the star (1944), not good

In May 1944, put in Ghetto, Police came and put them in a cart and took them to a brick factory.

Could only take a few bags, dishes, knew nothing about where they were going

In ghetto for two weeks, had 14th birthday in the ghetto, then taken to Auschwitz, taken in trucks to the railway, put in railroad cars, like cattle, then taken to big hangers with her mother, brother and mother's brother and his child, rest of family were in barracks. When put in train cars had no idea where they were going

Thousands were in the ghetto

Told taking people to work in train cars, heard stories about Poland, but did not believe

[16:30]

Train ride, little food only what mother had, shared food with a lady

Arrived at Auschwitz in middle of night, mother said they would not separate. Had to stand in rows

German Soldiers shouting children under sixteen would go with parents

the selections: her mother said Esther was only 14 so she was pushed aside

In Auschwitz for 6 months doing nothing

Daily routine, only shoes could stay with them and glasses, hair cut off, had an ID

A thousand women and girls in one block

Woke up early to go outside to stand to be counted

Black coffee and did nothing all day, hung around block

Not enough water to wash

Number on clothing

Mother's cousins were with her, and her two cousins, so five together

Slept in three bunks with 12 girls in each space

Went through three selections in Auschwitz before three doctors

Urinated in front of doctor, covered with her hand, got through

Food was black hot drink, soup that was water, and a piece of black bread

After got morning food just hung around

In Auschwitz she knew what was going on, crematory was there, when a transport arrived they knew what was going on

October (1944?) took 600 girls to work in factory (probably the Flossenbürg subcamp Hertine located in present day Rtyně v Podkrkonoší, Czech Republic)

Taken to Czechoslovakia to work in a bomb factory, treated a bit better there.

When put in a transport were given more food, even a piece of wurst

6 girls in a room with straw mattresses,

Built 500 and 100 kilo gram bombs

Esther worked on 100 kilo bombs

Were required to wash, probably because of materials they were working with
better food and milk to drink.

Had to wash when entering factory

Spent 5 ½ months there

Bomb came on line with head on, she had a machine to take off screws and head, so the bomb could be filled, then at end head was put back on

9-hour workday

Difficult work

Not as bad as Auschwitz

Germans going up and down screaming, did not hurt them because they needed their work

Italian and French men prisoners working there, had more food, sometimes would give bread to the women

Accident after a few months, bomb exploded, half the factory destroyed, a German was killed

No work for the girls so they were sent to the fields to dig holes, next day would cover up the holes since there was not work

Tried to continue religion so fasted on Yom Kippur, someone stole her bread, so she had to fast for two days, said she would never fast again

No longer religious

Aware of passage of time

Block of 2000 girls from Lodz, Poland would tell what date

[32:52]

American and English would fly over factory

Germans would leave factory and girls would go outside when planes flew over

Hoped the Americans and English would come down

Food workers would put food in the bottom of their pants. Cabbage so had a little more food

Little heater in room

Ate raw potatoes

Was with friend and cousins in the room, helpful to be together

Germans wanted to liquidate factory so put in wagons and taken to Theresienstadt

Put in barrack, very little food, and it was just before the end of the war

Theresienstadt, given bread, crowded

Shortly before liberation, was in Theresienstadt about two weeks.

Worst was in Auschwitz when they shaved her hair, in working camp her hair had started to grow back but they cut it in a strip down the middle

French and Italian did not have the same strip of hair shaved

In factory did not hurt them but shouted

In Auschwitz and not having much to do so they searched for food. If Germans saw them they were punished, this only time when was hit

Russians came,

[40:28]

Electric Wire was between the two barracks in Auschwitz, saw people go to wire

her youth kept her going, thought it would end and she would go home

Theresienstadt, just stood around. could go to city for a walk lived in big house, not a barrack.
had nothing to do

little food

washed in a big block, could shower early with cold water

would hear that the Russians were not far

guards did not hurt them if did what they were supposed to do

Liberation, someone said the Russians were very near, heard gun shots

suddenly, no German in sight

Russians came in

Russian Jewish officer spoke in Yiddish and said they were liberated and told they could go home.

a kilometer or so was a town so they went to shops in town

got a bag full of bread and smaltz, ate slowly smaltz, cousin said she had to eat slowly

others ate everything quickly and got sick

first transport was to Hungary, so she was first to go

put on train. should have taken a few hours to Budapest but it took a whole week, Russians would take the locomotive, no food, left in the middle of nowhere, eventually the locomotive was returned

lot of tragedies in the middle of the night for the girls. girls were taken out by the Russians. she looked like a boy with short hair and pants

From Budapest she wanted to go home so a Jewish organization put her on a train to Oradea, where the city and it was empty, nothing in it

then went to farm, everything was gone; she waited in case any of her family came home, stayed there for three months

town mayor was Jewish and took her in. she could not stay there; going to live with her cousin for three months, wanted to go to America. got transport to Italy. her cousins and her and 45 Hungarian Jews sent to near Rome. in Italy for 3 ½ years. it was a religious kibbutz, Mizrachi

kibbutz, not far from Rome waiting to go to Israel, met her husband there. Kibbutz had fifty Hungarians and took in two Polish people (her husband and his aunt) 1946

stayed in kibbutz, getting married in 1948, waited to go to America but quota was very low so decided to go to Australia

wedding in kibbutz, religious ceremony, rabbi from Rome could not come, her friend married them. had a dinner, a little better than every day. sweets and cakes

had uncle in America

decided to come to Australia, young Jewish doctor from Rome came to take care of her, husband had a friend in Australia, so went to Australia

very hard when they got to Australia, difficult to find a job (1949) and to find a room.

got a room and she found a clothing factory job, had to work on sewing machine. stayed for two weeks and then husband and she found jobs in another clothing factory.

language was hard, her boss was Jewish, only spoke Hungarian or Yiddish in factory

Australians did not like newcomers, if they heard them talking together Australians told them shut up

The worst effect of her war years is the nightmare which still occur

At first the dreams were about her, but later her dreams were about her husband and her children, her grandchildren seem to have helped and dreams are better, dreamt of always running and water up to neck and holding up her children

two sons, named after husband's father and younger one after her uncle

discussed only bits and pieces of her wartime experiences with her children,

[1:02:25]

She feels they are not like Australian born people

Her children were affected as don't have a family, no grandparents or aunts or uncles.

Attributes her survival to strength and always thought her mother was with her, believed there would be an end and it would be better

[At this point in the interview the interviewer returned to asking questions about life in the camp.]

Incident that comes to mind, Hard when taken from working camp to Theresienstadt, standing outside and brought in a transport of men, all standing, about 600 altogether grew to about 1000 men and women, no more than 50 survived to be taken to transport wagons

In Auschwitz, not very good memories of other Jews. Little dish was stolen, and it was a tragedy for her, when food came the Jewish Blockälteste took out meat and potatoes, left water for the others

Jewish Blockälteste treated them worse than the Germans, she did not want to go to Israel because of the way the Blockälteste treated the others

Kept her shoes by tying around her neck. Did not wear them too much, came back with same shoes

In working camp, brought milk to sick friend