

RG-50.407.0119

Summary

Edith Tarjan, born on November 20, 1914 in Budapest, Hungary to Armin Gutman, jeweler, whom she characterized as a good, charitable Jew and Irman Leiblich; discusses growing up in modest circumstances in Budapest with older brother born in 1908; when the family store was robbed in 1916 and mother was killed Edith was sent to live with paternal aunt and 4 cousins in Czechoslovakia while brother was sent to another aunt; Edith was reunited with father at age 8; grew up speaking Hungarian and German; socialized with Jews and belonged to the Jewish Youth Club in Budapest; married Ernest Tarjan, CPA, age 33, in May 1936; daughter Judy born in 1938 in Budapest; was apolitical and not aware of Hitler's gain in power even after the annexation in 1939, considered emigrating to America where Ernest had relatives but Ernest was drafted in 1942; told of changes in 1942: Jews were made to wear yellow stars, the gold and jewelry in the family store was confiscated and only watches could be repaired and Edith gave Judy to sister-in-law as feared deportation; in June 1944 Edith's family was deported to Auschwitz; Ernest fled army in October 1944 and went into hiding; Edith was deported in mid-November 1944 and forced to walk to Dachau, arriving November 20, 1944; slept in twos on lowest of three bunks, each less than a meter wide; worked cleaning latrines; heard rumors of Jews being shot but never witnessed this; in December 1944 endured a 4-day transfer to Bergen-Belsen via rail cars with 40-50 persons each; attributes her survival of Bergen-Belsen to her stubborn nature, her belief in God, though she did not consider herself very religious, having kept her warm boots and getting a job in the weaving department through bribery, as that came with extra food when one worked hard; at Bergen-Belsen received tattoo #11342, endured occasional torture when forced to gather wood in the middle of the night; made to pile corpses for two days before liberation; felt lucky to have remained relatively healthy throughout, though at liberation on April 15, 1945 was suffering from typhoid, sepsis, edema and diarrhea and weighed just 28 kilos; upon liberation was happy to witness roundup of guards as well as Mengele and assistant Ilse; learned that 35 family members had perished, including her father, but reunited with husband and daughter in Budapest on September 25, 1945, recovered and weighing 55 kilos; Ernest returned to work as a CPA and in 1954 Edith returned to secretarial work; in 1956 Judy emigrated to Austria rather than pledge allegiance to the Communists in Hungary to gain entrance to university to study engineering; in 1957 Judy went to Australia where she was joined by Edith and husband in June 1959; first year was very hard but Edith learned enough English, shorthand and typing in 11 months to get work in son-in-law's engineering firm and still worked there as of 1996; has visited Budapest several times since emigrating; admits to continuing nightmares and dreams about the Holocaust but says she is now apathetic to the entire experience and does little reading on the subject; attends Ellwood Schul in Australia on holidays only.