

### **Oral History: Gisele Vadasz, December 15, 1996**

Gisele Vadasz, born July 7, 1934, an only child, in Bratislava, Slovakia, describes: an upper middle class home; speaking German, Hungarian, and Slovak in the home, and not Yiddish; a sizeable Jewish community in Bratislava; remembering little about the early German occupation, as she was about five years old at the time; being forced to move from their home; existing in an anti-Semitic environment; her parents' hat shop being relinquished to a very good friend who was Christian; her father being arrested in the middle of the night and sent to a concentration camp; never seeing her father again and hearing later that he had perished in Mauthausen; she and her mother hiding after hearing that there was to be a roundup of Jews; being smuggled into Sered, which was controlled by Nazi-aligned Slovak Guardists and where her mother was able to work in a factory; being sent in 1942 to live with an uncle, a doctor, based on a false note that she was ill; staying with her uncle for about a year; being taken away by the Germans and jammed into cattle wagons with her mother, aunt, and uncle; traveling for about a day and a half to return to Sered, which had changed, with a large German presence and a concentration camp; an uncle committing suicide rather than being taken; being reunited in the camp with her mother and a third uncle; her family deciding that, in order not to be taken in the next transport, it was essential to not show up at the muster point; finding a place to hide within the camp; now part of a group of seven, hiding for a few days with only some stolen sugar to eat until the transport left; in 1944, the camp being dissolved and Gisele being smuggled out in a crate with a false bottom; being hidden by the person who smuggled her until it became too dangerous; going by passenger train to Bratislava; having a fortuitous meeting with an Aryan-appearing cousin; being hidden in her mother's old shop, then obtaining false papers; being taken in by a family in the nearby rural area and spending the remainder of the war with them; being reunited with her mother and other family members; her mother surviving for five years after the war and dying of heart disease; making her way to an aunt and uncle in Vienna; immigrating to Australia, where she met her husband (a survivor of Bergen-Belsen) and had two sons; many members of her family, including her grandparents, perishing in the Holocaust; feeling grateful and lucky to be in Australia; doubting the existence of God, her husband, who had died recently, never being able to discuss his experiences in the Holocaust; providing financial support to the Melbourne Holocaust Center largely to counter Holocaust deniers.

\*As heard