

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Breder, Linda

Date of interview: 7/17/1990, 6/26/1991 & 2/7/1994

Summary: Linda Breder was born on February 24, 1924, in Stropkov, Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia). She was raised by her father and stepmother, and had three brothers (including a twin brother) and one sister. They were an Orthodox family and Linda recalls only happy memories from before the war. She remembers people coming to their home who had escaped from Poland. Jewish students were kicked out of schools around 1939 and soon after that Linda's family was forced to leave their home. They lived on the edge of the city in a crowded room with several other families. She remembers having to wear a Star of David on her clothes and various other anti-Semitic signs.

In March of 1942, the Hlinka Guards came in the middle of the night and rounded up all the girls ages 16-24. They were put onto trucks and into army barracks, and several days later were marched to the train station where they were crowded into cattle cars. As they marched into Auschwitz after several days in the cattle cars, Linda remembers the barbed wire and the sign, "Arbeit Macht Frei." There were about 1000 girls from all over Czechoslovakia, and they were the first female transport into Auschwitz. Linda remembers clearly the terrible experiences of the first few days. The women were shaved and given uniforms that had previously belonged to Russian soldiers. They were also tattooed with numbers on their forearms.

By May, Linda says there were 47,000 female prisoners in the barracks. She worked in the fields for a while but eventually managed to consistently be placed in the commando called "Canada", which was the sorting unit that went through all of the clothing belonging to the people in the new transports. This way, she was able to steal some food and warm clothing for herself and her friends.

As more and more people were transported into Auschwitz, the conditions got worse and worse. Eventually there was a selection in which most people were sent to the gas chambers. Linda remembers seeing people stand in the hot sun for hours as they waited their turn to go to their deaths. She was able to get some news from the arrivals, and she learned that her brothers and parents had been gassed. By the end of 1944 the mass transports and the crematoria had stopped, and in January of 1945 Linda was forced to march to Ravensbruck. During this time (3-4 days), the women ate only snow. The Russians were close, so the Germans kept pushing the Jews deeper into Germany. They also started drawing blood from the Jewish prisoners to send to German soldiers who had been injured in the war. In May, on another move, she and about nine friends were able to escape the SS and hid in an abandoned barn. The next day, the Russians arrived and she was liberated.

After the war, Linda learned that two of her cousins, an aunt, and her sister had survived. The rest had been killed (her father was one of 10 siblings,

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and her mother was one of 11 siblings). Linda eventually returned to Czechoslovakia and was married in 1946 to a man who had also been in Auschwitz. They came to the United States with their two children in 1966.