

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Lola Bleweiss
2 INTERVIEWER: Unknown
3 DATE: Unknown
4 PLACE: Unknown
5 TRANSCRIBER: Nancy J. Campbell, Fort Dodge, Iowa.

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7 Q. The first thing I'd like you to do is just
8 repeat your name, please, and phone number on to the tape.

9 A. My name is Lola Bleweiss. I live in New York,
10 6710 Junean, Parishville.

11 Q. Okay. Where were you interned during the war?

12 A. During the war for the first four years, I was
13 in ghetto in Lodz, Poland.

14 Q. You were born in Poland and raised in Poland?

15 A. Yes, in the same city, Lodz. And I was a young
16 girl at the time they closed up the ghetto.

17 Q. How old were you?

18 A. I was 12 years old when they closed--when they
19 closed the ghetto.

20 Q. And where did you go from there?

21 A. There I stayed for four years. I stayed in the
22 ghetto.

23 Q. After they had closed it up?

24 A. Yeah, with my father.

25 Q. Were you in hiding?

1 A. No. The ghetto--they knew about us, but we just
2 couldn't go out of the ghetto. We had to stay there.
3 They took the poorest part of the city and they gave it
4 to the Jews.

5 Q. And that's where--

6 A. You lived there.

7 Q. And worked-- Did you go-- Was the war still
8 going on after you left?

9 A. Oh, no. They send us-- In 1944 in September,
10 they decided to liquidate the ghetto. They send us to
11 Auschwitz. There I was for very short time. They send
12 me to Stutthof. This was the most awful camp. It was on
13 the Baltic. They took thousands and thousands of girls;
14 and they mined the ship they were traveling on, and they
15 destroyed a few ships that way. But I don't know, it was
16 by luck, by accident, I was sent to different work, to
17 dig ditches.

18 Q. You were sent from Auschwitz--

19 A. No, from Stutthof to dig ditches.

20 Q. And where was that?

21 A. It was in the small village not far from
22 Stutthof. It was in that vicinity.

23 Q. That was between--

24 A. The liberation and after the ghetto. I spent a
25 few months. They call this-- It was winter of 1944. We

1 were almost naked. They gave us ripped silk stockings;
2 and we were a thousand girls were digging ditches, most
3 awful experience. And then after a while, they realized
4 that the America front is coming here and the Russian
5 from the other side. They took together everybody that
6 was left, and we traveled by day. We walked by day, and
7 at night were sleeping at churches, at barns; and whoever
8 got sick, they shoot. Whoever couldn't walk, they shoot.

9 Q. Let me just try and figure out when things--
10 You were first in the ghetto for four years?

11 A. For four years.

12 Q. And then you went out to dig ditches?

13 A. Then I went to Auschwitz.

14 Q. Auschwitz, and from there to dig the ditches.

15 A. Then to Stutthof.

16 Q. Stutthof was--

17 A. --was another concentration camp, yes. And from
18 then on, my (inaudible) Miriam. So from then on, we were
19 traveling by day, now traveling by walking from one place
20 to the other all day. And who couldn't walk was shot.
21 So the only--the one, the healthiest, survived. And by
22 the end, they left us all. There were a few hundred,
23 about two hundred, left from the thousand.

24 We stayed in a barn and were dying every day.
25 In fact, they thought that I-- They took my number--I

1 haven't got here number, had it on my dress--and to know
2 who died. And somehow I was thinking to myself, "You
3 don't know that I'll die. Maybe I'll still live." And,
4 I don't know, it was unbelievable experience.

5 When I touched a person, I thought it's a person
6 laying, but it was already a body. We lived without food.
7 We just lived on snow. I realized (inaudible), it was
8 yellow. It was from people urinated. And that was--most
9 of us had typhus. And my feet were frostbitten. I
10 couldn't walk anymore. So I didn't go out. I was just
11 afraid.

12 I heard the gun kill-- At that time I was not
13 afraid anymore. I just prayed they shouldn't burn the
14 barn, because that's what they used to do.

15 And one morning I got up, and they started to
16 screams (?); and the people that could walk, walked out.
17 The Russians liberated the camp. I couldn't walk anymore.
18 So I was waiting until the evening. Nobody came. Nobody
19 wanted to go into the barn because they knew this typhus
20 was there.

21 So I took a piece of blanket, and I put on my
22 feet that were frostbitten, and I crawled on all fours.
23 I crawled to the door. And at that time they took me out
24 on a wagon, and they took us to a makeshift hospital. I
25 was very sick at that time. I-- Most of my friends--

1 I was very lucky. Most of my friends, they cut off their
2 fingers. But somehow it healed, but I was sick for about
3 three months. I was from one hospital going to the other.
4 Even I was feeling better, I--the doctor told me, he
5 doesn't see any more physical. But I was afraid to go
6 out and take care of myself.

7 I'm all right. No, I'm okay.

8 They destroyed the will to live. They took away--
9 I was a young child, but I didn't want--I just didn't
10 want to take care of myself. I wanted again somebody
11 should do something for me. Took me some time until I
12 got myself together. And I went to the city that I was
13 born, in Lodz.

14 Q. What happened to the other people in your family?

15 A. Everybody-- That's what I'm coming to. When I
16 came to Lodz, I realized I was living, still not
17 (inaudible) as a young (inaudible). I had young uncles.
18 I thought maybe I would find them when I come to the city
19 that I was born. And then I realized nobody was alive
20 anymore. I was only one survived.

21 Q. Do you want to stop for a couple minutes?

22 (Pause)

23 A. So was it a traumatic experience. Nobody was
24 there to take care of us. Was sick physically, mentally,
25 broken people. But I don't know, I guess when you're

1 young, your will to live is strong. I met a man, my
2 husband. He was also alone.

3 Q. In the camp?

4 A. No, in Lodz, in the city that he was born. We
5 got married and we had a family. And I'm coming to the
6 better part of the story. We have three children. One
7 is a scientist, this one here. One is a lawyer. And we
8 build up our life. I don't know (inaudible) that
9 strength.

10 Q. How did you come to this country?

11 A. To this country. I had an uncle that was living
12 here, and he found out my name in the DP camps. In fact
13 my daughter, this one that's here, was born a small
14 village in Braunau. That's the village that Hitler was
15 born in. She was the first Jewish child born there.
16 Poetic justice. And it took hard work, a lot of strength.
17 We built a life for ourselves, a decent life. It was
18 very hard, but I'm very proud.

19 Q. What do you remember most about the camps? Is
20 there something that really sticks in your mind?

21 A. Yeah, when I came there and I looked at the
22 people dressed well and the people, survivors of the
23 concentration camp; and through my eyes was a picture
24 coming through when I arrived in Auschwitz, and I thought
25 that I'm coming to a--

1 (End of side 1 of tape.)

2 A. And I'm very proud of all of them that they pick
3 themselves up from that awful thing that they wanted to
4 do to us, so much hate and--and like somehow we picked
5 ourselves up and we was strong. And I'm very proud of it.

6 Q. Why do you think that you survived when so many
7 others didn't?

8 A. I was thinking many times in the beginning, I
9 had some guilt feelings about it, not because I did
10 anything wrong, because the opposite. I was more
11 idealistic about things. As I was telling you in the
12 beginning, it was an accident. If they would take
13 another two, three days, I would be dead, too. If they
14 would have time to destroy the Bonn, I would be dead. It
15 was an accident. It was maybe meant that way. I--
16 there were long time that I cried because I felt guilty.
17 "How come it's only me, nobody else in my family?" But
18 there's no answer for that.

19 Q. When did you first realize that the Nazis were
20 deliberately killing Jews?

21 A. Oh, when-- It was strange that thing, that they
22 were intelligent people. They used unbelievable
23 psychiatry on us. See, they try to deceive us that
24 they're not killing us. They're just taking us into
25 ghetto. We should be together. And they're sending us

1 to war. Then they told us that we are going to the
2 concentration camp. I had realized when I arrived in
3 Auschwitz, I was asking a man, "Where do you think my
4 father is, where my family is?" "See," he showed me,
5 "here are the crematoriums. There is your family." And
6 then I realized what was going on, that they was killing--
7 they were killing us. It was so sad to think that at
8 that late a time they were fooling us, because I cannot
9 imagine (inaudible). There were certain things-- If I
10 know that I'm going to die, I wouldn't go to Auschwitz.
11 I would run out from the train, you know, these cattle
12 train, and I would--I just know I wouldn't go. I
13 wouldn't. But I still-- I guess human nature is like
14 this that you want to fool ourselves, to--subconsciously
15 they burn it in you. I didn't see it. I saw it in
16 Auschwitz. But I thought maybe, you know, I'm young and
17 my brother's young. He went to another city. Maybe I'll
18 find him. I had so many uncles. Nobody survived.

19 Q. Do you feel bitter about the fact now that so
20 many Jews were trying desperately to escape from Europe
21 and no other country would let them in?

22 A. I feel very bitter about that. In fact, now I
23 realize, because I received a letter, being in the ghetto,
24 from my aunt from this country; and she did write to us,
25 "If one of you is alive, please write." Here they knew

1 in this country that we are being killed. We had no
2 newspapers. They did have. We did not. How come they
3 didn't do anything? These were not strangers that when
4 you hear whatever happened-- We human. When I hear what
5 happened in Cambodia, I'm not that emotional as if I
6 knew my sister is in Cambodia. My aunt had sisters and
7 brothers, the whole family, they came from Poland. And
8 somehow it was quiet. I'm sure if they tried very hard,
9 they could do something. If the whole world--I mean, it
10 was the most barbaric thing that the world ever knew
11 happened, killing little babies, taking them and throwing
12 them away like--

13 Q. Did you see that yourself?

14 A. Yes, I saw that myself in the ghetto. Once at
15 that time, too, they took children, and all the people
16 they took away, they're sending them away some other
17 place. And I remember at that time my greatest nightmare
18 is now that--what would I do--how would I feel if this
19 would be my children. I was a young girl. I didn't have
20 yet that feeling of a mother taking away a child and
21 killing it in the eyes of the mother. It never-- I
22 don't think something like this ever happened, and I just
23 hope that's the reason that I'm here to--that I hope that
24 people--the whole world should know about it, because
25 these people supposed were intelligent people, the German.

1 They were intelligent, and they could do a thing like
2 that.

3 Q. Do you think it can happen again?

4 A. I hope not, but that's what I feel, there should
5 be a precaution that should be known that it--that people
6 are capable of such awful things. I don't say everybody
7 is, but I guess being brainwashed, being put so much hate,
8 and things can happen. They can happen because these
9 were (inaudible) people, the German.

10 Q. How did you tell your children about your
11 experience?

12 A. Oh, it was very difficult for me. In the
13 beginning I couldn't talk about it at all. I became too
14 emotional. My children went through a difficult time
15 because of that. In later years when--that pain would
16 never go away, but I guess quiet down a little bit, I
17 would talk to them. My daughter, my youngest daughter,
18 went to Israel to Yad Vashem; and she saw all these
19 things. My son read a lot about that, was easier. Now
20 I'm very proud of my daughter that--this is her. This
21 one, the scientist, that was born in Braunan, the first
22 Jewish child.

23 Q. Do you have anything more you'd like to say?

24 A. Well, that's what I want, you know, because we
25 are getting older. In a few years--I don't know how

1 long--we will be dead. And I want it should be known, it
2 should be remembered that there's a lot in human--there's
3 a lot of beauty, but there's a lot of ugliness that can
4 be brought up by manipulation of people. And now what I
5 get angry when I hear some people said it never happened.
6 A Ph.D. from Germany said that never happened. I don't
7 know about history, because I imagine the world--I feel
8 the world must feel guilty about things like this. And
9 if you feel guilty, you want to forget. I don't want
10 history should forget a thing like this. I want at least
11 they should be remembered.

12 Q. Is that why you're here?

13 A. I'm sorry?

14 Q. Is that why you're here?

15 A. Yes, that's why I'm here.

16 Q. Have you gotten together with other survivors
17 you know before?

18 A. We always live-- We always, I guess, our--the
19 things that you went through, it's so deep in us, that we
20 keep together. And we--whenever we come to a party, we
21 come to (inaudible), and we talk about it in our life.
22 It will always be there. It's the most horrendous
23 experience that a human being can live through. And if
24 he did--and as I said, that's the main thing that as it
25 should be, because we all getting older. I was one of

1 the youngest, that goes by what I see here, old people.
2 And when we go away, I want should be--should people
3 should be--should be written history a thing like this
4 happen to decent, good people, things like that could
5 happen for no reason but just because they were Jews.

6 Q. When did you realize what was really happening
7 in Germany and all over Europe?

8 A. Well, before the war, I didn't know. I really
9 didn't know much. I just remember little Polish children,
10 my friends, used to come over to me, "Wait, Hitler will
11 come," because even they were anti-Semite, they even were
12 my friends. "Wait, Hitler will come, and he will kill
13 you all off," you know. Sadly, they were killed too. So
14 we realized that Hitler, you know, I didn't read Mein
15 Kampf-- Mein Kampf that time. I didn't know that much.
16 I was a young child. And--but then in the ghetto, we
17 start to realize, as I said, more and more; but I didn't
18 realize that such a destruction, I didn't realize.

19 Q. When you were in the camps--

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. --were there cooperative groups among the
22 prisoners to help each other survive?

23 A. Well, it's a question that I should think--
24 There was nothing organized. There was nothing organized.
25 Yes, you know, it was strange, when I came to Auschwitz,

1 somebody gave me a bread, a man, I shared with a girl
2 that had TB I knew from the ghetto. Little things, you
3 know, when we used to go out, whoever was pale they took
4 to the crematorium. One had a little paper, red paper,
5 so she used to give to the other one to put on, she
6 should look a little bit--

7 Q. Did you pass by Mengele?

8 A. Yes. I here was pointed to life. My father
9 wasn't. He was a young man, 40 years old.

10 Q. And he was sent to the crematorium?

11 A. He was sent to crematorium. My mother was
12 killed with my brother. They went to a small place.
13 They thought maybe it safer then. "We'll go over there."
14 But they closed up the ghetto. They couldn't leave anymore.
15 I was with my father, and my brother was with my mother.
16 And so we were separated at that time. It's a very
17 emotional thing now that I'm going through. I came here,
18 and I thought that maybe-- I knew nobody from my
19 family's alive--that maybe some friends and--

20 Q. Have you found anyone?

21 A. I didn't find any friends. And I became quite
22 depressed, because, you know, I still thought that maybe
23 somebody--there were young children, but I didn't find
24 anybody. And it was-- We came back today, too, when I
25 was going around by myself. And it came back: I come

1 from a big family, and I'm all by myself.

2 Q. Take a break?

3 A. Miriam, do we have time? Your friend is here?

4 DAUGHTER: She's not here. I've got this for
5 you. You give me the two tickets, the one next to you
6 and I'll--

7 A. I should go and take that bus.

8 DAUGHTER: You take a bus. I'm going to wait
9 for her because I have to give her the ticket. She's
10 coming all the way from Maryland out here.

11 A. I was telling this gentleman that you were born
12 Branuan. That's poetic justice.

13 DAUGHTER: Well, let me tell you, I can think of
14 a couple people I could pay a little poetic justice to,
15 but in my case, the one--which one's the one next to you?

16 A. This one's next to me.

17 DAUGHTER: This one's next to you?

18 A. These are two. This are yours. These are the
19 seats today--

20 (End of tape)

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