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HEDY ELLENBOGEN BRASCH 1

1 Q First of all, why don't you tell me your name.

2 A Hedy Ellenbogen Brasch.

3 Q Now why don't you tell me what happened to
4 you when you were first deported, how you got deported.

5 A Well, I lived in a small town. The name is
6 Mishkoltz, in Hungary. And when the Germans came in
7 they -- first you were living in a ghetto for about six
8 weeks. And then they collected everybody and you went
9 outside in the outskirts of town and you stayed in an
10 open area, really, like an arena sort of. And you stay --
11 We were there, I was there with my mother and my sister.
12 My father was taken two years before we were taken, and
13 then we never heard of him. And then we were in this
14 place for about two or three weeks and then they put us
15 into cattle cars and I went to Auschwitz.

16 Q During the time -- Where was this ghetto that
17 they put you in?

18 A The first ghetto was in the area of the city,
19 certain houses, certain streets were designated, you know.
20 It wasn't -- there was not a wall, it wasn't like the
21 Warsaw ghetto, it was just certain areas. In fact, our
22 house became the headquarters for the Gestapo. When they
23 came, when the Germans came in they took it -- took --
24 The first thing was they took over our house. And our
25 house was divided into two sections: One side there were

1 two Jewish families, ours and another family lived there.
2 And the other side Gentile people lived there.

3 You know, in Hungary people were more assimi-
4 lated, let's say, than in other areas. My town I went
5 to a Protestant school and so did my sister and my town
6 my father worked for a national company for the govern-
7 ment. In fact, to the ghetto the company which was a
8 national dairy company, even though my father left two
9 years before, he was taken, the company did not sever the
10 ties and my mother carried on the business, sort of.

11 And then, of course, there was a big article in the paper
12 that distribution of dairy products was from the ghetto.

13 And, of course, until then the company really
14 did not withdraw this dealership from my family. So when
15 the Germans came in and they took over our part of the
16 house, the Gestapo, it became the headquarters for the
17 Gestapo. And they used to -- they took -- We had to
18 actually -- We were the only family that the first thing
19 when the Germans came in they asked us to vacate the
20 house and they put our furniture all out on the street,
21 anybody could take whatever they wanted to take. And we
22 had to leave the house. And we went then to other Jewish
23 families. But people were sort of reluctant. It was
24 very difficult to take us in because they were looking
25 for my mother.

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1 The Gestapo did not know what to do with the
2 people who -- they took other Jews into their house and
3 they started to dig in our garden. They made these people
4 they were each Jews and they wanted to know where they
5 hid their money or all kinds of other things they wanted
6 from that. And they dig up -- They dug up our garden.
7 And, of course my mother hid some jewelry there, and they
8 found all these things that my mother hid there. And
9 then they were, of course, looking for them. So there
10 we were in, in -- already three times in jeopardy at
11 that time.

12 But meantime then afterwards the Gentile
13 family stayed on on the other side. And I heard later
14 on that they questioned them constantly: Why did they
15 stay on and what connection they had. So they had also
16 some problems with it. As it turned out the only bomb
17 that hit this little town hit just the other side of the
18 house. So it was a very, very unfortunate place, really,
19 out of all the area, our house.

20 Now when we went to the outside -- outskirts,
21 we lived in the ghetto for about six weeks with some
22 other families. And the rumor was that if you worked
23 outside you are going to have a card, you know, work
24 card, permit. So you, you will be fed better and things
25 like that.

1 My sister was very young, and I was very
2 young. And I went to the, to a tobacco factory where
3 Jews tried to get jobs. And the head of the tobacco
4 factory, the man was a very nice gentle -- Gentile man.
5 And he told me he tried to have me, but, I mean -- I was
6 lying all the time. I was always lying about my age.
7 I was 12 years old at the time and I looked even younger.
8 And he said, "No, you are ten." And he just couldn't do
9 it. But finally he took me in. Of course he didn't
10 have me because the Germans, you know, then they trans-
11 ported us outside of the place.

12 Q That was the only rumor -- Did the people
13 have any idea what might happen to them? Did they think
14 that they were just going to be -- stay in the ghetto
15 for the duration --

16 A They were constantly telling you that they
17 are going to take you to work. If you are young, if you
18 can work. And my mother told that if, if two of us will
19 have a card to leave the ghetto sort of. You know, we
20 will, we will have a card and we will get some food,
21 you know, these were the rumors, also.

22 Q How did the Germans tell you things? How
23 did they communicate with you? What did they do?

24 A To the Jewish community. You know, the
25 agency. And, and, of course, the first day I tell you

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1 the second day they arrived. They march in a whole, I
2 think about five or six very high-ranking SS came to our
3 house and they just told us to get out.

4 Q Were they rough?

5 A Yes. Very, you know, rough in manner and
6 brusque. They told us in German that they wanted us, they
7 wanted the place clear. And they wanted all the furni-
8 ture out. And they wanted everything, they wanted us
9 out. And they didn't want anybody to be there.

10 My mother and my sister were hiding opposite
11 street, trying to see what was happen -- what was going
12 to happen. And I stayed there to give the apartment over
13 to them, because my mother always thought well I'm a
14 child, they are not going to do anything to me.

15 Q How many people lived in the ghetto at the
16 time before you were all deported?

17 A I think there were about 15,000 Jews. This
18 was a large Jewish community with about two very large
19 synagogues, a very active Jewish life and other smaller,
20 you know, synagogues.

21 My parents were Orthodox.

22 Q How did life change in the ghetto when you
23 were put in there, in the ghetto?

24 A It changed completely. First of all I couldn't
25 go out. I couldn't go to school. You know, one day you

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1 went to school, the next day you couldn't go out because
 2 you were not allowed to go. And your life just -- you
 3 had to stay in this certain number of streets that you
 4 couldn't go out.

5 Now one time I went and I wanted to pick up
 6 a newspaper. And I crossed the corner, this was still
 7 in the ghetto when were living there. And I was
 8 immediately caught and I had to show up at the Hungarian
 9 police station. Now the people there were sort of nice.
 10 YOU see, the police actually -- the Hungarian police,
 11 refused to have anything to do with the deportation and
 12 the state police had to take over, because the state
 13 police were deporting the people and accompanying them.
 14 The regular police refused in Hungary.

15 So it could be done, you know. I don't know
 16 how it was, but that's how it --

17 Q What was the Jewish leadership telling you,
 18 the leaders of the community? Was there any talk of
 19 revolt or --

20 A What? No. I lived in a--you know, that
 21 really amuses me when people ask about revolt. You know,
 22 Hungary, you have to know another country and to live
 23 there and especially at the time. First of all, not just
 24 Jews, but everybody, even today, I went back to -- I
 25 lived in France, now, in 1963. And at that time also in

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1 Europe you have an identity card. This is western
2 France we are talking about. In Europe the minute you
3 are born you are given a card. Jews and Gentiles, every-
4 body, your movements are not as free as in this country.
5 It's hard for people to understand, you know, that with-
6 out a card, without identities, what kind of -- to carry
7 a gun, I mean, that was unheard of. I didn't know any-
8 body who had a gun.

9 My father was in the army, mind you, in the
10 regular army since 1938, and he carried a gun and he was
11 fighting on the front. And he didn't have a gun. No.
12 There was no question of revolt. In fact, I read now
13 that the Communists in Hungary are making a big to-do
14 over -- that was a reward, you know, the Underground
15 movement, maybe the Communists were the most organized
16 at that time.

17 And I lived near to a steel mill place, steel
18 town. And you would -- the workers there were probably
19 organized better than anyplace else. And from what I
20 hear the revolt, they make a big thing of it. I didn't
21 see any revolt there when I was there. But, no. There
22 was no organized revolt on the Jewish community part, no.
23 No. Maybe some resistance, I guess. You know, there were
24 people who offered, Gentile people, not many, and
25 especially for a price would have offered -- I was a

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1 little girl -- they will take me, they will take my
2 sister, they will take my mother, but not two -- three
3 of us together. And we were very afraid, rather reluc-
4 tant to separate, so we didn't go.

5 Q And from the ghetto you went to the camps,
6 right?

7 A Yes. From the ghetto I went to this outside
8 place.

9 Q How were you told to, to leave the ghetto?
10 How did that come about?

11 A The Germans came in and they told you, they
12 posted a list and they told you tomorrow they are going
13 to be here for you -- get -- you have one suitcase or
14 one something and your bag and what, you are allowed to
15 take two suitcases and that's it.

16 See, each station you went you were allowed
17 to take less and less.

18 Q Um-hmm. I see.

19 A You see? (laughter) And pretty soon you have
20 nothing, really.

21 Q Do you remember what it was like to leave
22 the day that you left?

23 A Yes. I, I will never forget that day.

24 Q Why don't you tell me about it.

25 A It was an ordinary day and the thing that

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1 bothered me terribly, that we had to walk in the middle
2 of the street in a group with the Hungarian State Police
3 following you and they had these, you know, all these
4 feathers on, very rough-tough guys, and some SS, also,
5 behind us. And in the middle of the street, you know,
6 like real criminals, and I started to cry. And my
7 mother told me that she wanted me to stop this crying,
8 and she didn't want me to ever, ever show them that it
9 hurt. And I just should try to control myself and not
10 to cry at all. And she didn't want me to cry. And she
11 said that if you are going to start to cry they are
12 going to think that you are a baby, and I want you to
13 be able to, you know, to look older and to look more
14 mature. I was always, was standing on tiptoes then
15 because I was so small and you were five -- you were
16 always standing in five in a line. And they always
17 took me into the middle so that I didn't look the
18 smallest. And sort of -- My mother and my sister were
19 sort of shielding me in between them, and I had two
20 cousins, a cousin and an aunt, so that, you know, they
21 didn't see how young I was.

22 Fortunately I was very muscular and, you know,
23 I was athletic. And I walked alot. My parents were
24 climbers, mountain climbers. So, you know, I had more,
25 maybe, that's why I survived.

1 Q Was it the whole community that left that
2 day or was it just a segment of the community?

3 A Each day a segment, different segment left,
4 of the community.

5 Q How did they choose the segment? Was it
6 done by where you were living?

7 A Apparently. I really don't know how they
8 did it, because --

9 Q Where did you think you were going?

10 A I thought I was just going to the -- to this
11 outside place, to the factory, and they are going to
12 keep us there _____

13 Q When did you stop walking?

14 A When we, when we got to this outside factory,
15 which was outside of the city limits, way out in the
16 outskirts, that they could surround, you know, it was
17 completely surrounded.

18 Q Could you describe what the factory looked
19 like?

20 A It was really not a factory. They, they
21 called it, you know -- they had stones and --

22 Q I have it in my jacket --

23 QMale Can I see it?

24 Q Yeah. Sure.

25 A Oh, he's making such a --

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- 1 Q I know. When you start asking --
- 2 A Yes.
- 3 Q -- people around here --
- 4 A Yeah --
- 5 Q -- where their badges are --
- 6 A -- oh God -- It's really something --
- 7 Q -- bad taste.
- 8 A Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 9 Q Okay. You (laughter) were telling me --
- 10 A (laughter)
- 11 Q -- you were telling me that it wasn't a
- 12 factory at all.
- 13 A What?
- 14 Q You were saying that it wasn't a factory.
- 15 A No, no. It was probably a stone, you know,
- 16 a stone cutting place or something like that, that's
- 17 what they, what they did outside. I don't know what
- 18 they use it for. It was nothing, you know, really.
- 19 Q What did you do when you got there?
- 20 A Nothing. There was nothing to do. There
- 21 were no facilities. You just -- it was a gathering
- 22 place where they probably gathered and waited for the
- 23 truck -- for the cattle cars to come.
- 24 Q Next to the railroad tracks?
- 25 A Yes. It was near to the railroad tracks.

1 Probably that's why they used that.

2 Q How long did you wait there?

3 A It was about five days, I think. It was
4 awful. It was just that there were no facilities, no
5 place to wash. There was no place to go to the bathroom.
6 There were latrines and you lie on the floor. It was
7 really, ah, I mean, that, that was really an awful place.
8 I mean it started --

9 Q Were you fed?

10 A Fed? No. You were not fed, but you still
11 had food from home. And, you know, they allowed you,
12 they told you to pack up and --

13 Q Okay.

14 A He's my husband, and I --
15 He had a badge. He probably lost it.

16 Q Okay.

17 A Okay, now.

18 Q When were you told to leave that place?

19 A About five days after we were there.

20 Q How did that happen? And where did you go?

21 A Oh, they just came and they announced it to
22 get ready with your two suitcases or whatever it is. In
23 fact just before I got on the train there was a bombing.
24 It was only, probably only time that planes were buzzing
25 around and we had to lie on the floor, but nothing

1 happened. And we got on the train.

2 Q And what was the train like?

3 A Train was awful. There was nothing. No foo- --
4 no water, no food. Nothing to stand around, just closed
5 cattle cars. And I was not -- no place, you know, just
6 people were on top of each other, and you just crouched
7 down on the floor or you stood. And there was very little
8 air. There was no water, no facility.

9 Q Were people talking to each other?

10 A I guess I was talking to my mother, but
11 mostly I, I think it seems to me I was very quiet. I
12 got very quiet, more and more withdrew to myself, and
13 just, you know, most people were, I guess, just dazed,
14 probably. It's -- I really, sometimes I wonder what I
15 did, what I talked about or -- I, I can't remember if
16 I talked about anything.

17 Q How long was the train ride?

18 A The train ride was, I think, two days.

19 Q And was continuous?

20 A Continuous. Yes -- No. They stopped. They
21 stopped. They opened the cars. And they were always
22 counting, you know, they were forever counting. And by
23 that time, I think there was only -- there were no
24 Hungarians there any more, no Hungarian police. It was
25 all SS. And with these big dogs and all that.

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1 Q Did you still have food by the time you got --

2 A Yes. We still had food. I remembered now
3 you told me, about the food. I remembered that my
4 mother baked some little cookies and I -- we had some of
5 that and I wanted to have some and my mother said, "Let's
6 wait. You are not too hungry. Maybe we have some left."
7 Of course they took that away when we got into Auschwitz
8 and they took that off immediately.

9 Q Why don't you tell me what happened when you
10 got off the train.

11 A It was terribly dark. We arrived at night.
12 And the confusion was terrible. They told us to jump
13 off. See actually I went with very young people. My
14 sister was very young, my mother was very young, and
15 my aunt and cousin were very young. So we jumped off
16 and I know that people were shoving in all directions.
17 But all five of us stayed together and they sent us to
18 the same site. Because we were young, probably. We all
19 probably looked alike and we were really young, so they,
20 you know, we stayed together. It wasn't that they
21 selected us. I know one -- somebody in a striped
22 uniform was pushing us and taking us or taking babies
23 from somebody and pushing it to somebody else. Every-
24 body was crying. But I didn't notice so much because
25 I was with the people I went there. You see my

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1 immediate family was with me.

2 Q Were you still with your mother?

3 A Yes. My mother was with me on the side, yes.
4 My mother stayed with me in Auschwitz.

5 Q And were they telling you anything? Or they
6 just were pushing you around?

7 A Everybody was pushing and, you know, in
8 German they gave orders, always: "Las, las, las" (phonetic)
9 and get here and, you know, move along.

10 Q Did you understand German?

11 A Yes. I, I have quite a bit of German. So
12 I understood German. And, in fact, it was sometimes
13 bad that we understood German. Also, my aunt was from
14 Vienna, so she spoke. And we did speak a lot to the
15 German guards.

16 Now you asked me -- you see, we didn't speak
17 to the Hungarians and to the others, but the German
18 guards, as we were walking towards Auschwitz, as they
19 were taking us from the train my aunt asked, and we
20 asked, and I talked to the German guard. And I asked
21 them where we were going. And he said, "Don't worry.
22 You are going to go to work." You have nothing to worry
23 about." And, yes. He, he did talk to us. "And you
24 are going to work. You are young. You are going to
25 work."

1 Now when we arrived into the -- that what
2 they call the baths, you know, the showers. The showers,
3 the baths. They said, "Put everything," you know, they
4 had in every language they had things around, and signs,
5 what you should do and how -- where you put your clothes.
6 And then they -- when you're completely undressed, which
7 was very frightening to all of us, because here you were
8 naked and all these men with the dogs and the guards all
9 around you and looking and watching, you know, where you
10 go -- I had long curly hair at the time. And one of the--
11 as I turned around all of a sudden I didn't know what
12 hit me. And I felt a razor completely go over my head --
13 shaven off -- and a young Polish girl grabbed me because
14 an SS woman was looking for me and asked to see the girl
15 with the locken, with the curls. And when she heard
16 that she immediately went and she shaved my head off.
17 I was the first one among the five of us whose head was
18 shaven off. And she pushed me away. And I thought that
19 was awful that here was, you know, I didn't know she
20 was Jewish or what, and she did that to me. And she
21 just pushed me real hard to the other side. And when --
22 I -- when this SS woman came around, she was looking
23 all around for the girl with the, with the locks, and
24 maybe she saved my life. I don't know. Maybe she was --
25 She realized what they were looking for, and they were

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1 looking for die kleiner, the little one with the lockens,
2 and it might have been that, you know, she, she realized
3 what was going on and I didn't. And that's how, you
4 know, it, it --that, that feeling I will not forget.

5 Q What happened after? They then put you in
6 the showers?

7 A There was very little water that came out and
8 then they give you these awful 1920s kind of sacks, just
9 one piece of dress. And the first thing I put my hand
10 into this pocket and I found like a hundred dollars here.
11 I found a hundred Hungarian money in that and I was
12 scared. I didn't know what to do. And my mother said,
13 "Just put it inside and don't, don't show it, don't
14 touch it," because we really didn't know what they were,
15 you know. And somebody must have left it in there, the
16 money.

17 Q And what happened, was the next step there?

18 A The next step, again, they got you in lines
19 and they march you out from there. You never saw your
20 stuff again, what you brought with you. And then they
21 took me in a, sort of a wooden barracks, and there, again,
22 nothing to lie on or just a bare hut and they didn't,
23 you know, it was just -- You were like sardines in this
24 place. And then they started you -- every morning --
25 I was in Auschwitz for six weeks. And every morning they

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1 started you ah -- but the weather -- I don't know if
2 you know anything about Auschwitz, it's the -- it's --
3 The climate is so unbearable. In the morning about
4 3:00, 4:00 o'clock it's terribly, terribly cold, windy,
5 and you had nothing on. And then about 11:00 o'clock
6 this terrible, terrible heat starts to come and-- until
7 about 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock. And I remember Auschwitz
8 that the only thing I did was standing in line, you were
9 constantly -- They called that saalappell, which means
10 getting up and be counted. And you were standing in
11 line all the time and they were coming around counting
12 with the dogs. And if you fell down then, of course, they
13 either shot you or beat you or kick you out.

14 Now we stayed here for about six weeks.
15 During this time they were constantly walking you around
16 in different parts, making you take more showers, always
17 telling you that they're for -- they were afraid of lice,
18 and disinfecting you and all kinds of things. I don't
19 know what was the purpose of it. And always counting,
20 they were always counting. And they didn't give you any
21 water. They gave you, maybe about three cups of water
22 and this terrible, terrible mush of a food. I mean --
23 even though I was very hungry none of us touched it.
24 And --

25 Q. Did you guess what was in it?

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1 A No, I -- I don't know what was in it but it was a
2 slimey, awful thing and we never touched it. And my
3 mother was -- We didn't. My mother -- We got four slices
4 of bread and that's all we had. And my mother was
5 forever thirsty. She had terrible -- She, she became
6 terribly dehydrated and thirsty. And what I had to play
7 was go around trying to steal some, get some water,
8 because we had only a little cup, and, you know, the
9 lines were so long that by the time we got there we never
10 had any water. So during the time they were counting us
11 I used to go around the lines in the back and run around
12 and try to get some water.

13 Q But they never worked you there.

14 A No, not in Auschwitz, no. I did not work.
15 And that's what everybody said, "Try to get some work."
16 Because work, you know, then if you get to work that
17 would be the best part, if you can work.

18 Q Did you have any idea that there were any
19 killings going on there at the time?

20 A I saw the crematoria constantly going, but I
21 never saw -- I saw the smoke. I was constantly walking
22 around it, but I didn't see people being taken in and
23 not coming out. I didn't know it, as hard as it is to
24 believe, I did not know it.

25 Q So what did you think it was?

1 A. I thought maybe your clothes was being burned,
2 but I, I didn't, I didn't think at all what was going
3 on.

4 Q. Did you know about the gas chambers at the
5 time?

6 A. No, no. No, I didn't know anything about it.

7 Q. What type of -- Were you mistreated yourself
8 there or saw people --

9 A. Yes, yes, yes. I, I got -- Once I got caught
10 and they went over, you know, with a stick over my head
11 because they, you know, they saw me running out and I
12 was supposed to be standing still. But that's the only
13 kind of beating I have seen, really, or I received.

14 Q. Did you see anyone else get beat?

15 A. Yes. I have seen people getting beaten, but
16 not to, you know, to death. I didn't see anybody.

17 Q. Did you know of any medical experiments that
18 were going on?

19 A. No. I didn't know of anything, no.

20 Q. What was going on -- Was there any sort of a
21 social interaction between people?

22 A. Yes, you tried to take care of each other.
23 I mean my job was to jump into the windows because I was
24 the most agile, to get a space for the five of us, you
25 see, and, you know, protecting us. I told you, my family

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1 protected me and we took care of -- all five of us taking
2 care of each other. If, if we got something, you know,
3 to -- a little bit piece, bigger piece of bread then we
4 certainly we shared that, yes.

5 Q To that extent other people -- Did you start
6 talking with other people and trying to protect your
7 people?

8 A I was constantly looking for friends, for,
9 for people we knew, you know, where they are, what happened
10 to them. I didn't find many of my classmates or the
11 children I knew of my age because everybody was taken.
12 They had special children's places. And I guess my
13 mother tried to protect me, to keep me with her so that
14 I wasn't going to be, you know, taken away.

15 Q And she did throughout the six weeks?

16 A Yes. The six weeks we were there together,
17 and then they were constantly selecting people and the
18 sixth week when finally we were separated I came -- the
19 first, I was the first one in the line. No, my, my
20 cousin and my aunt went before me. And they were sent
21 to one side and when I came he sent me to the same side,
22 and then my mother came. He sent my mother to another
23 side. And it was Mengele. And when I, and then I rushed
24 back, and I told him in German, "That's my mother."
25

End - Two 32 R