

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Bertha Rosenberg

2 INTERVIEWER:

3 DATE:

4 PLACE:

5 TRANSCRIBER: Jacqueline Martin

6
7 Hi, my name is Bertha Rosenberg and I live in
8 Los Angeles for twenty years. I was born in Rumania and
9 when I was nine years old, I was deported to Poland.

10 My father was killed and my mother and two children
11 taken to Bergen-Belsen and never came back.

12 I survived in the ghetto. I was deported -- I
13 was in the ghetto Man-u-sa -- and then was Judenrein --
14 Judenrein means that no more Jews allowed to live in this
15 place, so I was deported. My and my brother, Iliesa.

16 My name from the house is Yegendort, Iliesa
17 Yegendorf and Bertha Yegendorf.

18 And we were in the ghetto for one year. Later,
19 they make Judenrein in Borschtuk, too. I lost my brother.

20 Q. How old was your brother?

21 A. My brother was 12 years old, and I was 10
22 years old at that time. I was 10 years old; I was completely
23 alone on the street, walking around, sleeping in the forest
24 and sleeping in the fields.

25 Later I met -- I went to the hospital and
26 I met some people. They were sick in the hospital, but
27 the Germans just made, how you call it, experience [sic]
28 on them. They cut up the feet and the legs. They were

1 frozen. They were taking him to work and I saw a cousin,
2 he was from Rumania, too, but he was from a different village.

3 His name was Hein Meche. He had cut off
4 his hands and the feet, because they were frozen. And then
5 I met his sister in the hospital, too. She used to take
6 care of him, and then after a few weeks, I lost them.

7 I was living there in the basement in the
8 hospital. I was hiding there. Then I saw a man and he
9 picked me up and he said I'm going to take you to my girl-
10 friend's, and she's a Polish girl and she lives with her
11 mother. So he took me there in the night, and he said please
12 take care of this little girl. She doesn't have nobody.
13 And she will work for you.

14 And I started work there. They had a farm.
15 I took care of the cow. I scrubbed the floors. I washed
16 the dishes, and I was living there with this lady. Her
17 name is Bierscha Marashova, and her mother was Bogootska.
18 And they were living in Borschtov, and all of a sudden start
19 to come in Germans there, Nazis, and she was cooking for
20 them dinner.

21 Mostly all the time they were taken to the
22 Jewish people -- the concentration camps. They used to
23 make a big party -- I have to clean up the dishes and every-
24 thing.

25 One one German -- when he saw me, he start
26 to cry and he said I was just like a daughter -- will please
27 come here. I want to give you a kiss. I was scared to
28 death, but meantime he gave me a kiss and a hug.

1 And then another German was laughing at
2 him and he took him out and he shoot him in the chest.
3 I was still working there but I was scared, very scared
4 because there were still people hiding in the bunkers.
5 They took them out, used to kill them.

6 And one day the lady told me, the neighbor,
7 that she doesn't like me because I'm too smart and she wants
8 to get rid of me, but I was still staying there.

9 And then moved in a man and he was from
10 the Polish underground. And his name was Inatovsky,
11 and he always told me I shouldn't worry, that everything
12 would be okay.

13 But I didn't know that he knew I was Jewish.
14 But one day everybody left the house and he told me I know
15 everything about you. I said what do you know, because
16 I told him I'm not Jewish.

17 And he said I know you're Jewish. You just
18 want to hide yourself. But you're a very smart girl and
19 you will survive. And me, I'm going to make for you a birth
20 certificate.

21 So I was ready for the other people make
22 for me a little paper, a birth certificate, but he just
23 promised me, and later he changed his mind.

24 Then Germans were still coming, the Nazis
25 there. Each time they were still killing the Jewish people.
26 They used to catch a lot of Jewish people and used to take
27 them to the cemetery and they're supposed to dig a big grave.
28 And then they all kill them and then after that they used

1 to have a party. They were drinking. I just couldn't take
2 it anymore. And a lot of time in the night I used to wake
3 up and scream because when I was working on the street,
4 a young Jewish girl was killed near me -- a German just
5 shoot her in the head.

6 And they didn't have any water
7 in the house. I used to go to -- how you call it -- I used
8 to go with a pail, I used to go pick up the water, and a
9 German just passing by with a motorcycle, and he just shoot
10 in the pail and the pail fly away. And I got so scared,
11 and there was many people there, and they were shooting
12 everybody.

13 I just fell on the floor and I just act
14 that I was killed, and a German came and kicked me and he
15 left.

16
17 Then when he was gone I was running back to the
18 house and I came to the house and I was thinking the night
19 I should run away from here because I can't take it anymore.
20 And I stole money from Mr. Inatovsky, because all the time
21 he finish his work he used to tell me clean up my shoes,
22 polish my shoes and hang up my clothes. And I was cleaning
23 his clothes and polishing his shoes, and there was money
24 in his clothes.

25 So I pick up the money in the middle of
26 the night, it was 11:00 in the night when everybody was
27 asleep. I went to the station and bought myself a ticket
28 and was going to go away where nobody knows me. I was

1 running with the train maybe three stop signs, maybe 40
2 kilometers. So I was there maybe 20 kilometers on the way,
3 and all of the sudden Germans hold up the train and they
4 said whoever is Jewish they should identify themselves and
5 who doesn't have a birth certificate, he is trouble too.

6 So I was managing to sit, and then I walk
7 to the last wagon and then I just decided I will jump from
8 the train.

9 I jumped from the train and I have plenty
10 of bruises, but I was still alive -- hey, I made it.

11 I was happy, hey I made it.

12 It was dark in the night, a forest, and
13 I didn't know where to go, but I was thinking I should follow
14 the railing so I shouldn't get lost. I was walking for
15 maybe five hours and it started to get a little bit lighter.
16 That was in July, so the sun start to rise early. When
17 I was walking, a young boy stopped me and he said do you
18 have money? And I said no I don't have any money.

19 And he said I know you are Jewish and I'm
20 going to take you to the Gestapo. And I said to him, look,
21 you going to take me to the Gestapo, you will never find
22 peace in your life. If they kill me, a ghost will come
23 in the night and will choke you every night. And then you
24 would like to die but you can't die because you will suffer
25 every night. I will do it just deliberately, every night
26 I'm going to choke you little by little. I won't choke
27 you to death. So he got so scared that he became my friend
28 and he took me to a priest and I came to the priest and

1 he said to the priest please take care of this little girl
2 because she is looking for a job.

3 So the priest said to him God bless you
4 my child that you brought in somebody. You may live. And
5 I'll take care of this little girl. So he said please bring
6 her a piece of bread and milk. And I was eating fast because
7 I was so hungry. And the priest said, you poor girl, you
8 must be from the ghetto. And I said no I'm not from the
9 ghetto. I tried to lie to him that I'm not Jewish, but
10 he insist, and said to him please do not be scared, I know
11 you're Jewish. And he said I will take care of you.

12 You may go to sleep after you finish your
13 milk, and next day early in the morning I will take you
14 to a lady in a village and she will take care of you. She
15 has a cow. She is alone, she doesn't have nobody. She
16 has a horse and she has two goats. You will work in the
17 farm and you will be all right.

18
19 So I trust already the priest. I said all right
20 and I kissed him on the hand and I said I appreciate whatever
21 you're doing.

22 And then he took me to this lady and he
23 introduced me to her and he said that he found a little
24 girl, but he didn't mention I was Jewish, because I spoke
25 fluently Ukraine and I spoke fluently Polish.

26 So I was working there. And she said I tell
27 you what, you can work in the village, but you have to take
28 care of my cow. I have a wild cow and a wild horse, and

1 you have to know how to feed them because otherwise you
2 can't work for me.

3 So I said don't worry about that. She says
4 my horse is biting. So when I went in to feed them, first
5 I took a big stick and slugged the horse and then I give
6 him the food. And the same thing I did to the cow. I slap
7 her before I feed her. I walked next day in the barn, the
8 horse was shaking and the cow was shaking. They were afraid
9 of me. But this way I train them who's the boss.

10 And the next few months I was riding already
11 the horse. Because they say the Jewish people can't do
12 anything. You know, they're afraid for anything.

13 And I want to show them, hey, I'm not Jewish.
14 I'm not afraid of anything.

15 And I was riding that horse. And I took
16 care and I was milking the cow. And I was worked there
17 for a while and then I met some neighbors, two Polish guys,
18 they were very nice to me. And they said would you like
19 to go to church Sunday? I said of course I will go with
20 you. So Sunday we were going to the church and there was
21 an in the church. We went to pray. I
22 learn all the prayers and then I went out and there was
23 a bazaar for the church and they have a carousel so I went
24 with the guys on the carousel and I was riding. All of
25 a sudden the boy came to me, his name was Chesler, and he
26 said guess what happened? We must run away from this place
27 right away, because there is a man after you, he wants to
28 kill you.

1 So I didn't think too much. I run away
2 with him to a forest and then we went home. He told me
3 there is a guy that saw you in the ghetto and he wants to
4 kill you. You must not come no more to the church. And
5 he knew that I was Jewish. And I was scared already. Because
6 I was afraid for him too, I was so scared that I was frightened
7 even for the shadow. So I tell him please, I take care
8 of myself, you don't have to worry. And he said I just
9 like to be your friend.

10 I trust them but I still run away to another
11 village early in the morning. I run to a village the name
12 was Saleschea. The villages were all just like 10 kilometers
13 from each other.

14 I run to another village and I was working
15 for another people. I found a lady, she had a little baby,
16 and I took care of the baby and there were two sisters a
17 mother and a father. They had a farm. And I took care
18 there. I worked hard.

19 But meantime the war was still going on.
20 The killing were going on. When I used to take early in
21 the morning, the cows, you know, I saw how Jewish people
22 were be'ng killed. And then I was thinking to commit suicide
23 and had enough of that. But I didn't know how. So finally
24 I went out on the bazaar and I found a book, how to commit
25 suicide. I was reading the book but I finish the book and
26 I was -- there was a girl, she commit suicide. She fell
27 in love, she was very upset, her boyfriend left her, and
28 she put around herself flowers, jasmine, is very strong

1 in Europe. If you put a lot around your body, if you fall
2 asleep, you die. It's like poison. And I said I need to
3 do the same thing. But where I can find the jasmine, it
4 was already, it was already the fall. The jasmine was nowhere
5 blooming. So I can't commit suicide. What can I do?

6 So I was thinking something else. I was
7 thinking maybe I should throw myself under a train. But
8 then I was thinking what would happen if I wouldn't get
9 killed right away, just wounded, I will be a cripple. That
10 would be even worse.

11 And then I start to talk to myself, and
12 I think I'm really stupid. I shouldn't do that. Then start
13 already to be Christmastime, and this was snowing. I was
14 reading another book that a girl was so disappointed in
15 her life that she wants to commit suicide too. And she
16 start to walk around so long that she was tired and she
17 fell asleep in the snow.

18 But with me it was different. The more
19 I walked around, the more I had energy, and I was hungry.
20 And I knocked on somebody's house, I want the food. And
21 everybody took me in with open hands, because I spoke good
22 Polish and they tell me you welcome to eat with us supper
23 if you want.

24 When I walked in, I start to say the prayers
25 like they say, you know, the Catholics, I make a cross on
26 myself. The Polish people, they used to make once, and
27 the Ukranian people, they make three times, and I just used to
28 imitate, whatever they did, I did.

1 Finally I found a new place I was working
2 there, and they have two daughters, there was a couple,
3 they had two daughters, and they had a little baby too.

4 So I took care of the baby and her daughter
5 start to date and she met a German and the German used to
6 come in the house, and he tell me, you know what, I saw
7 you in the ghetto.

8 I said I think you make a mistake, because
9 a lot of people look like each other. I was never in ghetto.

10 He said look I remember very well you, and
11 I'm positive that was you, but I wouldn't hurt you because
12 there are so many killings, it's already disgusting. So
13 I said look, even if you saw me, I tell you I admit I was
14 Jewish, but if is going to happen something to me, you will
15 say to somebody I'm going tell that you related to me, and
16 when the Germans don't like mixed up marriages, you know,
17 mixed up blood, if they found that, that you my cousin,
18 they will kill you too.

19 He said don't be stupid. I will do it.
20 You too pretty to die. I won't do it. I won't tell nobody.
21 I want to be your friend. But meantime I still didn't trust
22 him. And I run away to another village.

23 I was working around from one village to
24 another village, I was already 11 and 12 years old when
25 I was running from one place to another place.

26 But they used to ask me for a birth certifi-
27 cate. So I used to say my aunt is going to send me a birth
28 certificate. Because I tell them I'm an orphan. I don't

1 have no mother. I don't have no father, and my aunt used
2 to raise me and my aunt is very old. And I said I didn't
3 take with me the birth certificate, but I'm going to bring
4 you a birth certificate in two weeks. And after two weeks,
5 I went to another place. But meantime I was 11, 12, 13,
6 14, 15, the war was over.

7 There was in the night somebody is knocking
8 at the door. Nobody was home, only by myself, because the
9 people that I was working for then, they run away in bunkers
10 because they hide themselves because they said that the German
11 losing the war and the Russian supposed to come, and they
12 will bomb from this place and they went all someplace and
13 they were hiding themselves in a bunker.

14 When they hide themselves, and they didn't
15 wake me up and I was still sleeping. But meantime I hear
16 somebody is knocking on the door and they scream in German
17 "aufmachin," and I said, oh, come on, they going after me.
18 So I said to him, I went down and I said to him, hey, please
19 relax gentlemen, I'm German, too. What do you want.

20 And they came in, that was already the
21 last soldiers, little boys they were 14, 15, 13. They
22 were crying, and I said what's the matter? Please don't
23 cry. I will try to help you.

24 And they said we have a wounded soldier.
25 I said bring him in and I tear some linen and I stopped
26 his blood because he was terrible bleeding in his leg. I
27 put very tight, and I put alcohol on his leg. And I stop
28 the blood, and then I gave him some food and the war was

1 over.

2 And then start to come in already the Russian
3 people. And I was liberated.

4 And another boy knew there in the village
5 that I was Jewish, but he was afraid to tell me because
6 he was afraid I was frightened. And his name was Ted and
7 he said to me, you know what happened? I knew all the time
8 that you were Jewish. I just didn't want to tell you because
9 you were frightened, you would run away to another place,
10 and I just hate to do that.

11 So he tell me I couldn't believe it that
12 you helped the Germans, that you gave them some food. I
13 said look, these children, maybe they were innocent, maybe
14 they just took them to serve in the army. Maybe they just
15 children and they didn't want to fight. They just took
16 them away from their parents. I can't feel so much hostility
17 to them.

18 Q. Some people feel bitter and some not so.
19 What was the longest you stayed in one place?

20 A. Well maybe six months and constantly I was
21 running away, because when I was in the ghetto I was in
22 a temple, and upstairs was the women and downstairs was
23 the men. Every day so many people died of typhus, you know,
24 it was so filthy there, and I was wearing the same clothes,
25 you know and people had so many disease. They were dying
26 every day. In the ghetto they used to give us some soup
27 to eat, and I always looked so good, I had red cheeks because
28 was living in country, you know, so I always looked so

1 good, so everybody was pinching me. They liked my complexion.
2 When I came to the ghetto, the boys used to give me thick
3 soup. But meantime, I had lice, too. You know what is
4 lice? You pick them out?

5 So I used to take them out from my clothes,
6 the white lice I used to have. And I used to knock them
7 out, and then I put back my clothes. But I still was happy
8 but in my heart I was sad because I see so many people dying.

9 Every day they are carrying people out from
10 the ghetto, just like garbage, you know. And they used
11 to take the people to shoot them, you know. They used to
12 put a lot of people together, like collecting people, how
13 you call that, collecting people? It's like to our meeting,
14 a lot of people come together, but used to put them all
15 together. No, it's not a congregation. It's like, they
16 say, hey, we take you to work. You need to be identified
17 himself here and here.

18 But meantime they supposed to march around,
19 they took them and kill them, you know. And a lot of the
20 children they run away, so they used to shoot them, and
21 under the walls was so many children, and then they used
22 to catch them for the ghettos, you know, put them on the
23 train, and they never came back.

24 Q. Did you come across any other children that
25 were doing the same thing, that you would meet and talk
26 to. Or did you not associate with people at all other than
27 the people you were working with?

28 A. Well, the beginning I used to be in the

1 ghetto with a lot of children, you know. They took away
2 my mother before, and when they make liquidation of one
3 ghetto, you know, they call Judenrein, that mean people
4 in this city not allowed to be, and I hire a wagon to take
5 me to the other ghetto.

6 So my brother was crying, you know, he was
7 very sensitive, you know, because he was a very spoiled
8 child because our first child died before the war. And
9 my mother spoiled him so much that she was afraid he will
10 die too, because he was a poor eater, so mother used to
11 cook for him special meals, and then I want to
12 my mom, too, and I said I wouldn't eat. I eat at my grand-
13 mother's house because I couldn't stand it. She treat him
14 better than me. But later I forgive her because I knew
15 what happened, how my mother was dying, and you know, what
16 kind of hard life he had.

17 But my brother was still such a "gretch"
18 she always told him I'm his mother. So one day I was living
19 in the ghetto and an old man took us in and the place was
20 so filthy that I try to clean up the place and I was sto
21 strong I start to wash the dishes and the pots that I make
22 holes in the pots and the old man start to cry.

23 And I said please don't cry. And he said
24 how could you do, you ruin my pots. And I said don't worry
25 about it, what do you care. Maybe tomorrow the Germans
26 will come and kill us and you don't need no more pots.

27 So my brother was very upset that I insult
28 the old man. He was crying. And then I was cleaning his

1 closet and I found some buttons and needles and I try to
2 steal that and then go to a bazaar and sell that and buy
3 myself a few apples or a piece of bread. So when he find
4 out, he was so upset. I came home and he gave me some food,
5 some soup, and I don't want to eat the soup, because he
6 had a cold and a beard, and when he was cooking the soup,
7 was dripping from his nose in the soup. So I said no I'm
8 not hungry, never mind. You eat and let my brother eat.
9 Then was in the same place was living a lady, a pregnant
10 lady with her husband. And you know, she was, like in
11 the last month she was pregnant. And I -- and he said to
12 her, please give the little girl a little bit food.

13 And she said no, and she turn around, she
14 looks good without the food. She has red cheeks. She doesn't
15 need the food. So I didn't feel any bitterness because
16 of that. I had already a few apples from the bazaar and
17 I eat it, and I gave my brother an apple too.

18 Because I was not hungry so I didn't feel
19 upset because of that. But in my mind I still see when
20 she turned around and said she doesn't need the food because
21 she looks okay. Her shadow still follow me. And then in
22 the night I gave my brother an apple, and he said, my brother,
23 where did you take that apple? I said never mind, I steal
24 from the old man some buttons and needle and I went to the
25 bazaar and I sold it and I had a few apples, one for me,
26 one for you.

27 So my brother beat me up, and I run away.
28 Then I never saw him again, my brother. And then I found

1 another family, I was living with them together, a Jewish
2 family, still in the ghetto. And the people took care of
3 me. It was living together maybe five families in one little
4 house. But everybody was so nice, they want to share. Because
5 they knew I didn't -- the Germans what they doing. So they
6 want to share, they want to help.

7 They had a little boy, his name was ERIC.
8 So I ask him, Eric, where we going to hide when the Germans
9 come? And he show me on the attic we can hide. One of
10 the ladies was pregnant, she had a baby. And then we live
11 in the house and all of a sudden they start to catch Jewish
12 people to the loggers, you know, to the concentration camp.
13 And everybody run away, you know. We all hide in the attic.
14 The little boy was quiet. One of the babies was crying,
15 you know, and somebody choked the baby. Because they were
16 afraid the baby start to cry they will come up the house.
17 One of the baby was choked. And one they didn't got time
18 to take in at the attic, and the Germans take them away.
19 We still don't know what happened to the family. But nobody
20 survived from this family. I was looking for them.

21 Q. Did you find anyone here of anyone that
22 you had met?

23 A. I didn't expect to find nobody, but I was
24 looking around for somebody from that ghetto, but nobody
25 was. I checked. There was nobody there under the sign
26 where I was.

27 Q. What was the name of the ghetto again?

28 A. One was Melitza, one was Chotkoff. But

1 I didn't see hanged up a sign of this ghetto. But I knew
2 some people survived. They lived in Canada. And a family
3 survived, they live in Israel. Because I was living by
4 myself five years in Israel. And I was searching for myself
5 for someone who survived. And I knew a girl when we were --

6 When we were deported, you know, to Poland,
7 my mother was shot, and -- when we came on the other side,
8 a German tried to catch my baby sister and you know, throw
9 her in the water. And they wanted to make like a party,
10 you know, to kill us at a party, and they were supposed
11 to get some music. But we -- a girl came there and her
12 name was Bella Schturnlie. And she came back there and
13 she gave the Germans some money so they should let us go
14 to the ghettos. So they let us go to the ghettos. Then
15 my mother jumped in and she took out the baby. And we were
16 going to ghettos. And when we were going to the ghettos
17 they were throwing rocks after us, some Ukraine people. But
18 some of them were nice, they came out to give us bread and
19 milk, you know, they felt sorry.

20 And then when we were in the ghetto, my
21 mother that time was taken away and I never saw her again.
22 I used to work on a farm and I used to walk everyday 5 kilometers
23 to bring my mother milk and bread in the ghetto. But that
24 night when my mother was taken away with my younger brother
25 and sister, I never saw them again.

26 When I came next day, I was a whole night
27 in the forest, hiding, because I hear some shooting going
28 around. At that time they took a big transportation to

1 the ghetto -- from the ghettos to Bergen-Belsen, you know,
2 to the death camps. And I met a guy and he said he saw
3 my younger brother, my younger sister, my mother and my
4 aunt and my cousin, they took them away to the train. And
5 they never came back.

6 That time I knew I had to take care of myself.
7 I was thinking they didn't live no more, perhaps they better
8 off, because I still have to suffer, you know.

9 But I still proud to be a holocaust survivor,
10 and I'm happy I'm here and it was very good experience for
11 me to come here to the survivors because I felt that I didn't
12 learn enough for my family. So here when I come, I
13 spent together with people, I felt like I have close friends
14 and family. You know, because all holocaust survivors,
15 they like family, because not too many survive.

16 Not too many children survive. But when
17 one from there was a chaplain and he found a little boy,
18 and that was in I think Auschwitz, he found a little boy
19 and he was five years old and the boy was scared from him
20 and he put a blanket around him and he said please don't
21 be scared, but the boy couldn't laugh. And he asked how
22 old are you, son. And the boy said I'm older than you.
23 And he said why. Because I can't smile and I can't cry.
24 That means I'm older than you. But today he was at our

25 , and he came to the meeting. So I'm very proud
26 to see him. And was a very good experience for me. I felt
27 I didn't learn enough. I didn't because I was running.
28 I feel like I celebrate together.

(End of tape)