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TAPE NO. 60

INTERVIEW WITH: Ilona Schwartz

TRANSCRIBER: S. A. Mettel

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TAPE NO. 60

INTERVIEW WITH: ILONA SCHWARTZ

REPORTER/TRANSCRIBER: S. Mettel

Q. Tell me your names again.

MR. SCHWARTZ: A. Peter Schwartz.

MRS. SCHWARTZ: A. Ilona Schwartz.

Q. When did you two meet each other?

MRS. SCHWARTZ: A. In '46.

Q. How did you meet?

MRS. SCHWARTZ: A. Happen so that I was with his two sister in Bergen-Belsen, but I never knew they had a brother. And I didn't -- was planning to go back to Hungary. I want to go to Israel. But the meantime, through the Red Cross I have a letter from one of my brother that my other brother is home and very sick -- he's in a clinic -- and I should go right away. But that time wasn't train transportation. It take me ten day to get to Hungary --

MR. SCHWARTZ: Cattle wagons --

MRS. SCHWARTZ: -- cattle wagons, you know. And when I get home, a few days before he died.

So, it is a big shock after Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. And I was -- a couple of months I was home, and somehow he came to us. I never see

2 him, and I didn't know exactly who he is. But then
3 he come into my brother's house. Right away I says,
4 "Don't you have two sisters in Bergen-Belsen?" And
5 he says, "Yes," and he says the name. And I says,
6 "I was with your sis --," because he look like one
7 of his sister. And then, you know, we met. And
8 three weeks later we was engaged.

9 Q. No kidding.

10 A. Yeah. And he want to go to Paris. That's
11 why he come to my brother's house. He want to sell
12 some cooking oil. That time after the war, it was a
13 big thing. And he got three sister in Paris before
14 the war. And he want to go there to them. So, but,
15 we met, and we got engaged three --

16 MR. SCHWARTZ: My sisters went from Bergen-
17 Belsen to Paris, but never come back to Hungary. So
18 they said I should go there, and we'll be altogether,
19 who were left because we lost two brothers -- by
20 Russia.

21 Q. Let me check this. Okay. Tell me -- I'm
22 so sorry, it's hard to talk about this. This is a
23 record for the world, and that's why I'm asking you
24 to talk about it. What -- when did you know --

25 MRS. SCHWARTZ: A. It's very hard to talk

2 about it. But we have to talk about it. You know,
3 I tell you something. If I would be, you know,
4 when we come to this state, it hurt me very much
5 when I got here. (Inaudible two words) and we was
6 talking about it, and he told me that you should
7 forget. We had a hard time here, too. We had to
8 stay in line for sugar. It hurt me awful. But
9 maybe, if I would be here and somebody would come and
10 tell me what happen, maybe I would think about it,
11 too --

12 MR. SCHWARTZ: It's unbelievable.

13 MRS. SCHWARTZ: It's unbelievable. But you
14 know, and I think that human being mind can't even
15 think how they could -- how shall I say --

16 MR. SCHWARTZ: It's too barbarous.

17 MRS. SCHWARTZ: -- to figure out that kind of
18 killing and that kind of torturing.

19 Q. It was too barbarous?

20 MR. SCHWARTZ: A. They don't give food. They
21 don't give clothes. They let you work in winter in 20,
22 30 below -- big kennels, you know. And it was
23 raining, freezing a lot, like ice. If somebody
24 went home, they stayed in line and every fifth of
25 them they shoot -- kill them. So you can't go

2 home. You cannot work, but you have to work.

3 Q. Did you see them shoot people?

4 A. Sure.

5 MRS. SCHWARTZ: He was in Russia.

6 Q. What --

7 MR. SCHWARTZ: A. We were in a battery of 215.
8 And we come back three.

9 Q. What happened?

10 A. We had f-l-a-t typhus.

11 Q. What happened then?

12 A. Then there was high fever. In a Russian
13 barn, you know, wood and straw roof. They burn --
14 600 burned. And who ran out, they shoot. And they
15 said they carry -- they carried the fire to another
16 building. But they don't want us alive. That's why
17 the shoot. No matter how -- no food, no clothes,
18 and shoot you. So what you can do?

19 MRS. SCHWARTZ: -- barn which one they was in.
20 They put under fire. And they was, you know, in
21 typhus --

22 MR. SCHWARTZ: (Inaudible word.)

23 MRS. SCHWARTZ: They wasn't able to run out.
24 So, who was a little (inaudible word), they climbed
25 out. So happen so he climbed out and three people

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2 from the --

3 MR. SCHWARTZ: I was able to walk. I was
4 climbing in there, staying alive. Who was walking,
5 they shoot them.

6 MRS. SCHWARTZ: -- crawling, like climbing,
7 climbing, you know -- I don't know the exact words
8 to use, the exact word.

9 But you know, I was in Auschwitz.
10 And a couple -- I was a healthy, young girl. I was
11 19 year old. A couple of days later they pick me
12 for work. And I was with my sister -- one of my
13 sister. But I went to Auschwitz with my parents
14 and one of another sister. She was 24 year old,
15 and she has a 10 month old baby. And you know,
16 when we get there, we see people -- they torture,
17 they work, and they survive. But without any --
18 how shall I say -- any warning, you know, we went
19 together, and we just -- you know, come to a point.
20 They push my mother, father, and my sister and the
21 baby --

22 MR. SCHWARTZ: To the work --

23 MRS. SCHWARTZ: -- to the one side, and me and
24 my other sister, she was single -- the other side.
25 I never before get the picture. I don't have a

2 chance to say goodbye. Just my mother was looking
3 back --that picture is, you know, always in front
4 of me. And, you know, we don't realize right away
5 that they going to kill them. So I went to the b-
6 b-e-r-g-m-e-i-s-t-e-r who was like the --

7 Q. The k-a-u-f-o?

8 A. Yeah, so I don't want to use that -- but,
9 the k-a-u-f-o. And I want to ask her --

10 Q. Where are they --

11 A. Not even that.

12 Q. You wanted to ask her where they were?

13 A. Not even that. I just want to ask this
14 person what shall I do? You know -- it was an
15 uncomfortable situation. And she don't even let me
16 to say the words. She give me such a slap in my
17 face I thought my eye falling out. And then she
18 says, "That's what you think about it. You should
19 think -- you should, ah, memorize this day, because
20 you should know that this is the (inaudible word)
21 for your parents." So I, you know, say to myself,
22 you know, I said, "My God, she don't have no heart?
23 How could she tell for us something like that?
24 They're not going to kill half the people."

25 But a couple of day later they come,

2 you know, looking for workers. And I was a tall
3 girl, and I was a strong girl, so they pick me.
4 And I always was holding my sister, and they pull
5 me out, and I pull my sister with me. But they
6 didn't want her because she was short and, you
7 know. But I was begging, and they let to stay with
8 me. And then they put the numbers on my arm, and
9 they take me to work to the --

10 MR. SCHWARTZ: -- sorting the clothes what they
11 take from the gas chamber.

12 MRS. SCHWARTZ: No, that was in C-a-n-a-d-a,
13 that called B-r-a-z-i-l. And there, you know,
14 I see thousands of people ran into that building
15 and never nobody come out alive. I never see
16 nobody to come out. And the clothes what they take
17 from the people, we have to put separate. Like
18 skirts, separate blouse, separate nightgown, separate --
19 every kind separate. And we have a scissor -- have
20 to cut in and rip it. And we put in piles, and
21 they was taken to Germany or whatever they did with
22 it. Collars we had to cut. The material we have
23 to cut.

24 Q. You had to cut?

25 A. See, just to cut in and rip it. Yeah,

2 sure. We did that. And you know that is all for
3 all the clothes. And a few days later I find my
4 mother's dress. And I was screaming. And you know
5 then you --not -- there we wasn't -- we wasn't
6 allowed to cry. So everybody was looking at me
7 like what happened. And, you know, everybody was
8 crying with me. But the -- how you to say 'German
9 soldier woman'? In German they call it (inaudible
10 German word). I don't know how you call it in
11 English. German soldier lady. And she was there
12 with us, and she was asking, "What's going on?"
13 And they told her what happened. And she turned,
14 and the girl told me the tears was coming down her
15 face. Because you know I didn't care. If they
16 shoot me, they shoot me. Who want to live? I
17 don't want to live.

18 And, you know, when they burn --
19 they got so much bodies that the crematorium wasn't
20 able to burn that much, and they was pulling outside
21 to the like --

22 MR. SCHWARTZ: Yard --

23 MRS. SCHWARTZ: You should say in the yard --

24 MR. SCHWARTZ: Piles --

25 MRS. SCHWARTZ: I was there. But outside the

2 crematorium. I never was inside.

3 Q. Thank God.

4 A. So I mean there was a time when they
5 start to burning the people. I still was in Auschwitz.
6 And I would be able to get inside*

7
8 *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: At this point, the voices on
9 the tape fade. Due to static,
10 the voices are unclear.

11
12 but I don't, you know, want to see it. They pulled
13 out the people, and they had like a swimming pool
14 with furance -- but not that big like a swimming
15 pool, and the bodies that the crematorium wasn't
16 able to burn, they pulled out. And you know, they
17 was killed.

18 Q. Inaudible.

19 A. Sure. And the little food we was given,
20 I wasn't able to eat. The smell -- the bone and
21 the flesh that was burning -- you wasn't able to
22 eat. And then you see them bringing out the ash.
23 And they put it in the driveway -- in the street.
24 And you have to walk on it. So how could you tell
25 the feelings, but could you ever, ever -- nobody,

2 nobody.

3 And even if today, if I see the Ku
4 Klux Klan and the Nazis on the television, I'm sick
5 after a couple day. I never hurt nobody, you know,
6 during the - everybody lose their manner, you know.
7 Everybody was wild and nervous and this many people
8 went crazy there. I never had nothing with nobody --
9 I am, you know -- friendship and everything. But
10 if I could catch a gun now when I see in the television
11 they show it -- I would be willing to kill. And I
12 never kill nothing in my life.

13 MR. SCHWARTZ: (Inaudible.)

14 MRS. SCHWARTZ: And then I really -- sometime
15 I, I, you know, hold back myself not to kick in it.

16 So, since the war I am always under
17 a doctor care. My nerves is nothing. So if I have
18 to tell -- I got only one daughter. But I always
19 feel better about it because I never have patience
20 to tell her a story or anything because if she was
21 asking me once, twice, then I was like this -- so
22 tense. And even today, I always under the care --
23 I always take medicine since I get liberated. I
24 always have medicine in my pocketbook here --

25 Q. (Inaudible.)

2 A. That's awful. You can't imagine. And
3 then you know that's mine brother when I went home.
4 He was there a few days back home.

5 But from Auschwitz they take me to
6 Bergen-Belsen. And there, right away, give me
7 work. In Auschwitz we don't have lice.

8 MR. SCHWARTZ: (Inaudible.)

9 MRS. SCHWARTZ: Because I was working in
10 Auschwitz and that was, how shall I say -- we
11 was -- they want to show off before the commandant.
12 There was 3 or 400 girls in a bunch. They want to
13 show us off. We have to wear white scarf, and they
14 got polka dot dress. But these dresses they pick
15 out because in Europe -- special in Hungary -- was
16 very stylish woman wearing navy blue dress with
17 white polka dots or something. So from this --
18 what the people they take off from the people and
19 what was in the packages. So everybody has the
20 same color dress with the white polka dots. And we
21 was -- we was chic because we got to wear white
22 scarf.*

23
24 *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: This is about 9 minutes into the
25 tape. There is nothing but

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2 static for the rest of the tape,
3 approximately 18 minutes. Two
4 phrases did (barely) come through.
5 they are:

6
7 MRS. SCHWARTZ: -- keep them there a couple months,
8 3 months. And they sent him to another crematorium --

9
10 and

11
12 MRS. SCHWARTZ: -- because he see everything in
13 the crematorium. How he die. He was waiting. Everyday
14 they going to take him, too.

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