

INTERVIEW WITH: Edna Weiner, 19 Milford Drive, White Plains, New York,
10606.

INTERVIEWER: Gloria Lyon

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10 Q Edna, I will ask you some general questions -- may I call you
Edna?

A Yes.

15 Q Thank you. What happened to you during the war? You might
start with your answers when you noticed something looming over
the Jews in your area. First of all, where are you from?

A. I am from Satmar, a part of Hungary Rumania, it's called
Transylvania.

Q Yes. Which town are you from?

20 A. I'm from Satmar.

Q Satmar. Thank you. Could you tell us what happened to you
during the war?

25 A. During the war I was deported to Germany to an extermination
camp with my entire family.

Q From Satmar.

A. From Satmar from a ghetto.

Q Were you in a ghetto? Was the ghetto in Satmar?

30 A. It was in Satmar.

Q In Satmar. Okay. Could you---

A. Elaborate.

Q ---elaborate? Maybe you'd like to come a little closer so we can hear you better. Okay.

5 A. I was sixteen years old when we were all taken into a ghetto. You know the history, you know, so I don't have to go into it how they first, we were not permitted to go to school, and then all the laws came gradual and we had to wear a Jewish star and then other laws came and we weren't allowed to go out on the street certain hours of the day. And it was a gradually planned way of doing things which we will know from the Germans. One day when we were not allowed to go out on the street the war came and got us and made us go into a ghetto and we took some belongings with us and we all lived in a room, my entire family, my mother, my sister and her children, and I don't remember exactly how long we were there living like animals. They told us they were going to take us to a different place to Germany, they were going to-- what's the---

20 Q Settle?

25 A. ---resettle us and we will be together with our family and we will be working and we will see each other. And they boarded us all on wagons with men and women together and children and we were on the train, I don't know how long it took us to go to Auschwitz, and when our wonderful neighbours were watching and nobody really knew us or lifted a finger. We looked out of the window from the wagon and we saw these nice neighbours and they were just like, they were pretending like nothing was really happening to anyone.

I'm so confused I don't even know how to tell this story.

Q You're doing fine.

5 A. And the train ride was the most horrifying thing. I was sixteen years old at the time. They were making noises and shooting and yelling -- we never knew exactly what was happening to us. And to me my first experience, that was, I was young and I had to go to the bathroom and I had to go -- the first time that I didn't realize what was happening to me but I had to go to the bathroom in front of everybody in the wagon, and I remember my dear mother took a blanket and put it around me so I wouldn't be so dehumanized. And we stayed in the same place with our bathroom and the pail with everything in it.

15 Q You had water and---

A. Well, not too much.

Q ---a barrel?

20 A. No barrel. We brought some things with us and they promised us they gonna give us water. And every time they arrived to a station we stopped, and some people were crushed to death, some people died, some people were crazy of fear. My sister lost, she went like berserk because she had a little daughter with her who was ten years old at the time, and she kept on telling us, "Don't forget," and to her daughter Ilse, "You are twelve years old, you are twelve years old."

25 Q How old was she really?

30 A. Ten, but she thought maybe if she was older---

Q She'd have a better chance. It's okay to cry. You're doing fine. So you were taken to Auschwitz.

A. You know what happened. After I was separated from them and I never saw anybody again.

Q You were the only one?

A. I was together with my two aunts. One is still alive.

Q But let me ask you first. So your family consisted of your mother and your father and---

A. My father was dead.

Q I see. You went with your mother---

A. And my sister and her children.

Q Several children.

A. Three.

Q Three.

A. And her husband and all my relatives. My aunts and their entire family. My mother was one of twelve.

Q But you were two sisters in your family.

A. Yes.

Q Your immediate family.

A. Now we were more than two because my other sisters lived in this country already.

Q Yes, I see. You had some---

A. And my brother was in a different place, he was in a forced labour camp.

Q Yes. When you arrived in Auschwitz and after the separation, what happened? What is it that you remember? Can you give me a typical day? What did you do?

A. When I arrived to Auschwitz, they, of course, separated us from our family and they took us into a room where the first

thing they did they shaved our heads off. And they took our clothes away and everything that we brought and they gave us a grey dress which we wore day and night and no underwear.

Q How about shoes? Did they take your shoes?

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A. They took our shoes, everything away, and they gave us wooden shoes. And---

Q Did you get tattooed?

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A. No, I didn't get tattooed. They just shaved my hair off and then we didn't recognize anybody (inaudible) because everybody looked the same and that's when I'm looking here when I can't find somebody it's like it comes a crack to me, you know, the same -- all these people -- and you try to find someone, you are looking because we didn't know what happened to the rest of the family. They told us we were going to meet. It was like it was crazy. We didn't know what was happening to us. And then they took us all after we didn't find anybody. We had to go around like a circle and they examined us all over, if you have a scar, if you have this or any imperfection about you. It was like unknown everything, it was scary, it was frightening. I was a young girl at the time, and to be separated from everybody.

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Q What happened to the children?

A. My sister's children?

Q What happened to your sister's children and to---

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A. My mother and everybody else was cremated and killed and we used to feed the chimney and the stench, we didn't know what was being on, and the lager officers would say, "You see that

chimney there? That's the only way we can squeeze all this is to ask where is everybody, you're gonna miss them." And they said that's the only way you will ever get out of here, through this chimney.

5 Q How did you find that out about the crematorium?

A. How did we find out? They told us, you know, and eventually we met people who were there and we were not allowed to talk to anybody but, you know, we still did, you know, sometimes passing each other or some older people would tell us what happened so we would stop somebody, a familiar face, and they told us, the ones who worked in the crematorium or something, they told us what happened. And we knew, then we already knew because every once in a while they would take, we would have to have a tsayl-up and they were counting us. They would take us to a certain place near there and they kept on; if somebody didn't feel good or if they were sick the wagon would come and they would put us on the wagon and we knew where the wagon was going already. And then they put us to work in Auschwitz, we were breaking stones to build roads.

Q (inaudible) Were there any pregnant women among you?

A. Yes, there were some and---

25 Q There were some. Do you---

A. ---in the middle of the night they came and they took them away. Anybody who was pregnant, anybody who had a baby, anybody who had anything to do with a child. Holding. It didn't even have to be your family. Everybody was exterminated, everybody was murdered.

Q Do you have any knowledge of anybody's abortion? Have you---

A. I heard about girls were performed abortion with hangers. They were whatever, they tried, because they find out that anybody who was pregnant would be (inaudible).

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Q Did you hear of anyone actually having delivered a baby?

A. Yes. And they were taken away, mother and baby.

Q Mother and baby. You don't know any situation where the mother stayed and the child---

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A. I heard but I didn't, you know----

Q You didn't see it.

A. I didn't see it myself.

Q But you heard.

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A. Oh, it was around because that was another form of cruelty.

Q Yes.

A. Saving one another.

Q Did you get your menstrual period?

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A. No. They gave us something.

Q Do you know what you got?

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A. We used a chemical that I can't think of the name of it that they put in our food that we never got our period. We never had any underwear. We had to go to the bathroom all together and we used to get very very sick from dysentery and I had diarrhea all the time because we used to (inaudible) all day long and it was hot during the day. The climate is such that it snowed at night and we didn't have any shoes or any clothes and we got very very sick and we used to make in our clothes. Or if we went to the bathroom they would beat us

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with a whip that it was already enough (inaudible) that we had to, you know, finish whether we were or not.

5 Q Very important to record that. I really appreciate it. Did your relationship with family or friends or lovers change at all in the ghetto or in camp?

A. Yes. I was closer to them.

Q You felt closer. You formed---

10 A. I had two aunts with me, my mother's sisters, and I was looking so much to meet some people from a certain town, from K'oszeg, I was a young girl, and when they used to take some people to the gas chamber there was an (inaudible) of the feeling that they would pretend they were going to give us something to eat to these people and they were looking for-

15 wards to eat and they shout the food and they took them all away without giving them food, and I used to climb through the lower window they had, you know the kolyas how they

20 slept, and I would go out and in my hand I was -- some people were timid, I was never timid -- I would bring food to the older ladies from K'oszeg, we were together with everybody. I was the only young person with them. I don't think that I could do it today what I did then.

25 Q When you were young and daring. And you did form intimate relationships with the women and close to them.

A. Very, yes. I love people. I always did. I still do.

30 Q I can tell.

A. I really do. And mainly my children.

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Q Did you take any risks?

A. Many.

Q Tell me, please. It's important for us to know.

A. Shall I tell you---

5 Q Please.

A. ---what kind of a risk?

Q Tell us what kind of risk.

A. I always had a little job in Auschwitz when we were sitting
10 and they needed volunteer basis all the time. And you know
what happened? Sometimes volunteer workers were murdered.
And I always said I'll do whatever toilet cleaning or taking
15 food to other sisters, would the rotten food that we brought
with us they would put it in water and cook it for us for
soup or boil potatoes. And I always would help because then
you were close to something, you could steal a little bit.
And I used to carry the big barrel of boiled potatoes, it
20 would set on the ground while we were waiting to be counted,
and I would sit there and I would just look at everybody in
rows and rows and, you know, all the people they were sitting
and nobody made a sound, you know how you do some -- and if
they would have seen me they would have shot me on the---

25 Q Your life was in danger.

A. But I always did things like that all the time. I always
stole food and gave it to everybody. Always.

Q We like to hear that.

30 A. My name is Edna and nobody was Edna in Europe. And my
brother was in a Russian camp -- I'm just mixing this up --

and when he came, like he was waiting for all the transports to come back, and he used to ask, "Do you know an Edna?" "Do you know an Edna?" And finally they said, "Oh, we know Edna." And he felt so good because they said that I was good and kind. After the war I had a big job because British occupying forces because I spoke English, but that's all I can tell you about people, my relationship. My children can testify that I do get along with people.

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Q You have two beautiful daughters.

A. I have three.

Q Three. All right. Certainly you're an amazing person. Were there any moments of relief for you in Auschwitz?

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A. How could there be?

Q Was there any entertainment?

A. Yes, music.

Q Please tell us about the music.

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A. On their way to the gas chamber there was this wonderful orchestra playing -- some big composer now --

Q Bach?

A. Bach. Beautiful gemütlich music while people were going to the gas chamber.

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Q Could you tell us where they were located? Where was the orchestra?

A. Of going into the gas chamber, around there. As they were going in. Because it was another deception that people would never really -- and another was they used to give you a piece of soap to wash yourself, thinking you're going to get washed,

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and they went into the gas chamber and there was no water coming, just gas.

Q And they heard the music and that was the deception.

A. That was the deception. The whole thing there.

Q Were the Jewish women sexually abused by the SS?

A. Not where I was but I know, I've got friends that were taken away -- I wasn't -- that were taken away, beautiful girls, and they had to go and entertain the SS guard, and after they'd served them they were all killed; none of them lived, these girls. But I was never abused by them sexually. How could I have been? I looked like an animal, I didn't look like a woman or a girl. It's dehumanized. I didn't look like a girl. They took us away from Auschwitz, we were there like a month, and we were resettled in Gelsenkirchen and we used to go to march every day from a lager to Krupp, I worked for Krupp in the munition factory when I was sixteen years.

Q In Bendorf?

A. Yes.

Q I'd like to talk to you about that because I was there too. And you're only the second person I know who was in that, in the salt mine.

A. Maybe you know me. I had a job there. After a while I worked on the crane. There was only two people on the crane. There's me and another girl, Lily Kaplan, that I met just recently through a chance. I was interviewed from a newspaper and she wrote the article about me and I knew her before and she phoned me up, she says I can't believe it we were in the

5 same concentration camp. Because there were only two people who did this and they gave us because I worked on the crane, they gave us a (inaudible) and a pair of pants to wear. You know how they used to take the iron out from the big urn? I was one of -- I don't know if you heard, if you remember the place where I was.

10 Q I'd like to talk to you about that later. Let me ask you a few pertinent questions that scientists would like to know about us, Holocaust survivors. Were there any non-Jews among you?

15 A. Yes. There was one person who was an Aryan, a German person who was married to a Jewish man, and when she tried to tell the Nazis that she is not Jewish, she wanted to be able to leave, they were more cruel to her -- just as cruel, I should say -- because they hated her, despised her more, because she did associate with a Jew.

20 Q So that answers both of my questions that I was going to ask about non-Jews. Were there any political prisoners or any other non---

A. I even met some political prisoners, lots of French people.

25 Q Was there any difference in the treatment between Jews and non-Jews by the SS?

30 A. Yes. The French prisoners had a lot more freedom than we did. They were walking with -- you know, they were not guarded like we were. And I don't even remember anymore who else was -- oh, the Italians we met after the war.

Q What was your experience of the Judenrat, the Jewish leadership?

5 A. In the ghetto you're talking about? Oh, you mean in the camp? Terrible. Terrible. They were very cruel and dehumanized -- I was just telling my daughters that it was the most -- the lager cruelty and terrible.

Q Were the kapos Jews?

10 A. Yes, all of them.

Q Were they better or worse than the SS?

A. Just as bad or if not worse.

Q What do you think? Do they have to be bad?

15 A. I think that they did. I think they thought that maybe if they really do their job, that maybe they are going to survive. It was just -- people that dehumanize -- I was not there, I cannot judge them, I was only very, I did not feel dehumanized at all and I know some people that---

20 Q Well, dehumanize. By the word---

A. I'm not aware where you are cruel to your fellow.

Q We were all dehumanized though, don't you agree?

25 A. What I meant is where you really didn't care. I never felt that way. I cared more and I could never be bad to them because I just -- I don't think I could. I don't think now, I'm not saying that -- I don't know if I was there five or six years, there's a tremendous difference. I don't know how I would have reacted. And I am the last one to judge anybody. 30 But at the time they were very very cruel to us. And that was, I feel, another form of cruelty to make your own Jewish

people do the horrible things to you.

Q Let me ask you another question. How has Israel been meaningful to you?

5 A. Extremely so. Unfortunately I have not been there yet, but I would love to go to -- I always feel that if my mother would only have lived to see that there is a Jewish flag and there is a kneset and there is a state, it's like -- it's incredible, it's like a dream.

10 Q There is an expression that the Jews went like sheep to the slaughter. What do you think?

A. I get angry when people tell us that.

Q Tell me why.

15 A. Because no one has a concept or understands that we were totally helpless, that this was a gradual thing, this didn't happen all at once, because nobody would even dream of anything like this to happen. And Jews are, we were known as placid and humble and believed them and today I don't think we would do anything like that or we would believe anybody because we are much smarter. I'm much more aggressive today than I was years ago myself. But at that time when they told us that you are going to go to a forest and you're going to see your family, you believed it. The sad thing you wanted to believe it, we were so scared. We were defenseless. How we gonna fight? Little children or with your bare hands? Nobody helped us. It wasn't that we had a country behind us or would somebody let us in, we could go someplace else. 20
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30 Nobody wanted us. And everybody turned their back. Just for

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5 instance I tell you a story. When I was in Bergen, when I was in Gelsenkirchen, every day used to march to go to work to the factory, and as we would walk on the street with our head shaven and be kicked by this bestial SS women if you walked too slow or if you didn't sleep the way they wanted you. Kids would look at us and they would throw stones at us on the street because we were so disgusting and would say verfluchte Juden. These are people that they say they didn't know what was going on. Everybody knew but they didn't care what was going on. After a day's work and I walked in through the door and at mealtime you went for your little soup, there was one SS guard that despised me. He would take his leather whip and first he would whip me in the face all the time.

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15 And one day -- I don't know why he didn't shoot me -- I didn't go to work because I ripped the wooden shoe that I had, you know, the top on it was (inaudible) because I wanted my aunt to be able to stay home. And in order to be able to stay home, not to go to work, you had to have a torn shoe. And I was selected not to go and I wanted to change with my aunt that she should be -- I always did these things out -- my aunt should be all right. And he find out and he took me behind the building and everybody thought that he's going to kill me and he didn't. He take his gun out and he didn't shoot me, he just beat me up.

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Q You survived that too.

30 A. I survived that. I survived everything.

Q To get back to my previous question, may I just -- that has to do with being a sheep, that we went to the slaughterhouse as sheep. Would you agree that's not really so in view of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the many people who attempted to escape? Do you know anybody who tried to escape and, if so---

A. Yes, they did.

Q ---what happened to them when they were caught?

A. They were killed if they were caught. I mean, these were chances but they still would take chances. We had four girls that escaped and I think they were hidden, I think, by Germans, but this was right before the liberation. They were not captured. But many of them were captured and they were taken back and immediately killed.

Q Okay. Do you speak of the Holocaust often?

A. Only lately. I have not -- it's a very, it's very accidental that I got involved with this organization at all. I was called one day from my temple to light a Yahrzeit candle and I met some wonderful people there, and I got very involved with it. I never even spoke to my children about it.

Q Not at length.

A. (inaudible) the most powerful thing that I have.

Q What?

A. I have dreams all the time of always losing -- you know who? My youngest child. And I---

Q You have a fear of losing your younger child---

A. Because I associate with my niece.

Q Your sister's children.

A. But why is it always that I always dream that I'm losing Betsy and not the others? I'm always looking when I wake up and I can't find -- but not so much anymore. It was like incredible before though.

Q The nightmares are thinning out now?

A. Some are; some are, yes.

Q Please, Edna, would you tell me what other camps were you in and, if so, and we'll go on from there.

A. From Gelsenkirchen it was B-----, this was a munition factory where I worked with Krupp, and---

Q Not Bendorf?

A. That was in Gelsenkirchen we -- I'm getting a little confused-- I was in two camps. One was in Essen I worked, Essen. In Gelsenkirchen we were on a cleanup squad where we just cleaned up the rubble after the bombing. And they kept us there. And then I went to Essen where I was making cannonballs and I was working on the crane and this was in 1945 already. And from there they took us, they took us on a train going to nowhere. We didn't know where they were taking us. And they would leave us in certain places and the train would go for a few hours and it would stop and it would go again. And this was our train that they were taking us to Belsen-Bergen with.

Q Bergen-Belsen.

A. Bergen-Belsen. That was the most---

Q So you were in four---

A. Four camps.

Q ---camps.

A. Yes.

Q Bendorf was not a---

A. This was Krupp, not Bendorf.

Q Okay. Kruff owned several ammunition factories and---

A. What's the name of this? I only know that it was Krupp factory in Essen.

Q I see. Did you by any chance go down into a salt mine through a mine shaft in an elevator---

A. Yes.

Q ---the great big mountain?

A. I forgot about that. To pick coal, they had like coal is it? I don't know if that was---

Q What's important is your recording.

A. You know that my memory really skips by, you know, and I don't even remember which place was what. I had certain things that stick out in my mind so vividly.

Q But you remember you did certain things in different camps.

A. I remember working in the ammunition factory making cannon-balls and this big -- it was like a hammer -- would come down and I had to hold the iron in. It was like a very long piece of like a round thing and I would have to hold it down with my shoulder and then this hammer would come down so you straighten it out the piece of iron. And I would stand like

in a pit there and do this. This was my job. And I was sixteen years old.

Q Thank you very much for this interview. I really appreciate it.

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Q I would like to talk to Edna's two daughters who are here with her since we have a little tape left, if they consent to talk to me, just for a couple of minutes, okay? Your name is Lorna Amy Weiner. Are you the oldest?

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A. I'm the middle child.

Q You're the middle child. Your mother has not talked very much about the Holocaust when you were a child, from what I understand. Have you felt anything special about your mother that's different from anyone else other than the fact that she's your mother?

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A. No. I've always felt my mother is a very special kind of person. I've never met anyone who is so warm and so giving with no strings attached and I think I've had a very unique childhood in the love that I've had, unconditional love. And I've heard bits and pieces of the story but never, I've never sat down and heard the entire story, and I think I've always felt it was too painful for my mother -- not that she couldn't handle it, but I didn't want to have her relive it again. That's why. Not that I didn't care and wasn't interested but maybe through time and through things like this I can learn the story more.

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Q Thank you, Lorna. What is your name?

A. I'm Betsy. I'm the youngest.

Q How old are you, Betsy?

A. I'm twenty-four.

Q Thank you. I hope you don't mind my asking your age.

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A. No.

Q Did your mother's nightmares ever make you wonder about what she might have gone through?

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A. Until -- I think I would have to say that I think about it every day. I think more so, I think, as she gets older and as I get older it scares me a little bit.

Q But you didn't know she had those nightmares.

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A. But I always knew that she had because she used to wake up and look in my room, I remember, when I was younger. But now it affects me greatly to know that she went through that kind of pain, because I feel that sometimes I go through the same pain or experience the same pain that she went through, although I know I never will, or hopefully will never experience the same thing that she did. But I would like to feel the pain that she did only to make it easier for her.

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Q But you know it will not make it easier for her. It's called the Holocaust Survivor's Syndrome. Maybe even on record I would like to recommend a book to you written by Helene Epstein. It's called Children of the Holocaust. Have you read it?

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A. No, I haven't yet.

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Q Well, thank you very much for this interview and I'm sure that it will benefit our library greatly.