

HVT-35

I., Liselotte 1925-

Liselotte I. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-35) interviewed by Marcia Shuster and Kimberly Rimer, July 27, 1994.

3 copies: 1 SVHS first camera; 1 SVHS second camera; 1 VHS copy.

Summary: Liselotte was born on July 7, 1925 in Listany, Czechoslovakia, a village numbering three hundred people, most of them belonging to the Sudetendeutsche (German) minority in Czechoslovakia. Liselotte spoke German at home, at school, and in public, but did not use the local dialect of the German-speaking population. Four Jewish families lived in their village. Liselotte and her younger brother were the only Jewish children in the town. Her father died when she was three-and-a-half years old, so her mother tended to the family's needs and managed the family store. Liselotte and her brother were raised to believe they were different because they were Jews, yet they were encouraged to play with non-Jewish children. For one year, Liselotte attended high school in Pilsen where she lived with a Jewish family. After that year, she returned to Listany and a Rabbi came from a neighboring village to tutor her.

Throughout 1937, Liselotte's family discussed Hitler's intentions toward the Jews. After Germany annexed the Sudetenland, she was sent with a convoy of Czech soldiers to live with relatives in a neighboring village. The family was reunited in October 1938 and they travelled together to Prague. On November 15, 1938, Liselotte was enrolled in a Czech school. After the Nazi invasion of Prague, she applied for a Canadian visa but was refused. Liselotte went to a Jewish Zionist school that was preparing Jews for emigration to Palestine.

On August 8, 1942, Liselotte's mother and brother were deported to Theresienstadt. Liselotte arrived there the following month. In the ghetto, Liselotte and her mother worked as nurses while her brother made toys. There were concerts and lectures while transports to the East occurred. On September 15, 1943, her mother and brother were deported to Birkenau and she followed in December. In January 1944, her mother died in Birkenau from an illness. The remainder of the survivors from the transport of September 15, 1943 were gassed. Among those murdered was Liselotte's brother. Upon her arrival at Birkenau, she was forced to shower before being sent to Lager B. While in Lager B, Liselotte remembered women trading cigarettes because of their value as appetite suppressants. She recalled the importance of hygiene. Women undressed and washed at the troughs; they made brassieres; being clean and looking good was indicative of their will to survive. Some women had boyfriends. In July 1944, Liselotte survived a selection by Dr. Mengele and was moved to the Women's Lager. She left Birkenau at the beginning of July 1944 and arrived in Hamburg on July 7. From July 1944 until February 1945, Liselotte worked in three camps outside Hamburg: Wedel, Neugraben, and Tiefstach. In the beginning of February, Liselotte was transferred to Bergen-Belsen where she remembers starvation, widespread typhus infections, overcrowding in the barracks, no bathroom facilities, and piles of uncollected corpses.

On April 15, 1945, the British Army liberated Bergen-Belsen. Immediately, the army set up showers, hospitals, and kitchens. Liselotte worked in the kitchen under British supervision. She found an old friend and together they travelled by truck to Prague. Liselotte took English courses at the Institute of Modern Languages and worked at several different places for the Jewish community in Prague including a warehouse and a newspaper. She also worked for the Joint Distribution Committee.

In June 1949, Liselotte arrived in Montreal alone. She lived with her uncle for one year

and was married in 1950. Today, Liselotte's family consists of her two children and five grandchildren. Her husband passed away in May 1996.⁶ Liselotte taught art to preschoolers in Montreal, and volunteers at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, speaking publicly of her experiences during the Holocaust.

⁶ Follow-up conversation with Liselotte I., 15 July 1998.