

HVT-154

K. Etta, 1920-

Etta K. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-154) interviewed by Anna Kaufer and Paula Tepper, February 26, 1996.

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

Summary: Etta was born on May 17, 1920 in Siauliai, Lithuania. Her parents raised four children in an observant Jewish home. Etta's father was a businessman who sold tobacco and her mother worked at home. Etta attended public school and the Gymnasium. She was active in Zionist youth organizations and associated with Jews and non-Jews. At home, the family spoke Yiddish. Etta spoke German and Lithuanian at school. In 1937, Etta's mother died as a result of an infection contracted during an operation.

In 1940, the Russians occupied Siauliai and forced people to share their homes with strangers. Etta moved to Kovno. She recalls that in contrast to Siauliai, where she was never confronted with antisemitism, many people in Kovno were in favour of Nazi policies. Many Jews left Kovno to go to Palestine. In 1941, the German Army occupied Kovno. Soon after its arrival the Germans released criminals from jail who later helped them to murder Jews. The Jews were forced to wear the yellow star, and in August 1941, ghettoisation was implemented. Etta witnessed many people being taken away and killed. One day, members of the Jewish intelligentsia were ordered to work in a library. Among the 500 people who went were three of Etta's cousins. Not one of these highly educated Jews ever returned.

Etta extensively describes the situation in the Kovno ghetto. People sold their possessions to buy food. She recalls that periods of relative calm were interrupted by round-ups and killings. During one of the round-ups, a group of children was taken away without their parents. In 1944, the ghetto was liquidated because the Soviet Army was approaching. Etta and her cousin, who had a child, were transported to Stutthof by train. The train was crowded and there was no food available. The child was gassed upon arrival. Etta was part of a group of 900 women who were forced to dig trenches in a subcamp of Stutthof. They were guarded by nine SS men.

Etta was liberated by the Soviet Army on January 23, 1945. A Russian Jew advised her to travel east to Cherachinka, where food was available. After the end of the war, Etta and her cousin moved to Berlin. The Russians instructed them to return to Lithuania, but they refused. Instead, Etta and her cousin travelled to Munich and applied for visas to enter the United States. They remained in Munich for approximately one year. During that time, Etta went to Nuremberg for the war crimes trials.

Etta had an uncle in the United States who sponsored her and in 1947, she moved to Philadelphia. In 1949, she married. That same year, Etta and her husband moved to Canada and lived as farmers. Their daughter was born in Montreal.