

## HVT-79

S., Bella 1925-

Bella S. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-79) interviewed by Musia Schwartz and Steven Cohen, May 15, 1995 and June 20, 1995.

6 copies: 1 SVHS first camera, part one; 1 SVHS first camera, part two; 1 SVHS second camera, part one; 1 SVHS second camera, part two; 1 VHS copy, part one; 1 VHS copy, part two.

**Summary:** Bella was born on October 28, 1925 in Dubovec, Czechoslovakia. She was the youngest of six daughters, and was raised in an orthodox Jewish home. Her father was a sales representative for Singer Sewing Machines. Bella and her sisters attended a Czech public school and got a Jewish education through a home tutor. Bella's sisters were active in the Mizrahi movement. According to Bella, antisemitism was not prevalent in Dubovec, but she remembers that Jews were often frightened around Easter and Christmas because local priests delivered anti-Jewish sermons that enraged the Christian population.

Starting in 1940, when Hungary occupied the area of Czechoslovakia in which they were living, Bella's family was subject to discriminatory laws. In 1941, gendarmes came to arrest her father, but he managed to escape and went into hiding. A few months later, random deportations of certain segments of the Jewish population started. One day, Bella's family was instructed to go to the synagogue with their belongings. Her grandfather, a veteran of the Great War (later known as WWI), begged those in charge at the gendarmerie headquarters to spare his family. Bella, her oldest sister, and their niece were permitted to remain at home, while the other members of the family were deported to the Kolomyja ghetto in Poland. With the help of their mother and a man from the Jewish labour office, three of Bella's sisters managed to return to Dubovec, where they went into hiding. Later, two of them went to Budapest. In 1944, Dubovec was declared judenrein. Bella, her sister, and her baby niece were ordered to the synagogue where they were moved temporarily to the Kacheva ghetto and then deported in cattle cars to Auschwitz.

Upon their arrival in Auschwitz, Bella was separated from some of her family but was able to remain with two of her sisters. They were stripped, had a number tattooed on their arm and were provided with striped uniforms. They were taken to Camps B and C. Belle was put to work making gravel by smashing rocks. Bella was told about the extermination process and saw the smoke emanating from the crematoria, but she still did not believe what was going on. She witnessed unspeakable torture and beatings. She felt dehumanized.

In September 1944, Bella and her sisters volunteered for a transport leaving Auschwitz and were transferred to Bergen-Belsen. In December, a selection took place after which Bella and her older sister were taken to Lippstadt to work in an air plane factory. The other sister was ill and remained behind. In Lippstadt, they heard Allied planes bombing the city.

In the spring of 1945, the women were marched out of the camp by the SS. They stayed in a bombed-out train station outside Leipzig during heavy bombing. Later, they joined another group under Ukrainian guard. Bella remembers these guards as being especially vicious. Due to a lack of food, the women ate parsley, roots, and grass and subsequently became ill with horrible cramps. Many of them were shot. The march ended in a small village near Würzburg. One morning the SS women left. The women from the march found American soldiers and military police and were taken to stay with German families.

Some of Bella's family survived the Holocaust. One sister, who had a Wallenberg Pass, had stayed in Budapest. Her second sister survived Mauthausen, and another sister was

supposedly living in Linz, Austria. Her sister with the baby died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz and another sister died in Bergen-Belsen. Her father was in hiding until 1943, when he was discovered and subsequently murdered. Bella's mother died of starvation in the Kolomyja ghetto.

Soon after the war, Bella joined Aliya Bet, a Zionist organization in Bucharest. Bella was determined to find her sisters and bring them to Palestine. After travelling through many parts of central Europe in order to find them, the sisters were finally reunited in Budapest. Once, they returned to Dubovec, where they found strangers living in their relatives' home. They decided that they would not want to live there any more. Three sisters went to Prague, where they lived together and opened a knitting factory. Later, they sold their company and left for Germany. In 1948, Bella married. In 1949, Bella, her husband and their newborn son went to Israel. In Israel, Bella and her husband had another child. Bella's spouse was a successful furniture maker. In 1957, they moved to Montreal. Two of her sisters still live in Israel and the other sister resides in Montreal.