

RG-50.493.0077

Oral History: Lilly Black, December 7, 1993

Summary

Part 1 of 2

Lilly Black (née Deutsch), born in 1930 in Satu Mare, Romania (Szatmar, Hungary), describes: being born into a very religious family; having an older sister, Shulamit, and a younger brother, Martin; living in a small apartment; her family owning a nut factory in which all participated; going to public school; a Jewish population of 24 percent; having both Jewish and gentile friends; living a fairly normal life until 1940, when Hungary occupied the city; food becoming more difficult to get; in 1942, her parents taking her to the local train station, where they saw a train full of Czechoslovak Jews; by 1943, being aware of rumors that the war was going badly; the family business being in difficulty; in 1944, the Germans occupying their town; a German soldier mistreating a neighbor's child; the Germans ordering residents to prepare to leave for another town "to be safe"; being taken with her extended family of twelve to another Jewish area, then marched to the railway station; being rousted by the Germans, one of whom hit her mother for not moving fast enough; this being the first time Lilly saw violence in her family; after about two and a half days, arriving at Auschwitz; being warned by an inmate "to eat everything"; with her sister, being separated from the adults (and presumably her brother) and marched to a barracks; having her hair shorn, being forced to undress and being given camp clothing; being marched to Lager C; crying nonstop for three days; standing in line for five hours for an unknown reason; a pregnant woman in the line giving birth and the baby being shot; smelling burning hair continuously; appalling hygiene and hunger, and coming to understand the advice upon arrival to eat everything; wondering how their parents "could let this happen to us"; believing they were all to be killed; breaking rocks for months; Polish-Jewish kapos being almost as cruel as the Germans; being taken to an infirmary following erroneous suspicion of having typhus; her sister encouraging her to escape from the infirmary, which she did; in October, being taken by train with about 200 women and her sister, who almost was left behind in Mengele's hands, to a small town in Germany to work at an ammunition factory; a Dutch group caught trying to escape and being brutalized; Lilly and others in her group being severely beaten by a sadistic guard; as Allied armies closed in, being taken to another factory camp, in Bavaria, and then to another camp, where she became sick; arriving at yet another camp, where there were Italian men; having no food at all; being liberated by U.S. soldiers, who fed them; after about six days, the Americans being replaced by Russian forces; being taken in U.S. Army trucks to Bergen-Belsen, where they were cared for and fed; the Belsen camp being converted into a DP camp where she spent about two years; finding a relative in New York; coming to the U.S. on the "SS Ernie Pyle"; shows family photo from childhood.

Part 2 of 2

Continues with family photo; Lilly and her sister being the only survivors; [Asked to elaborate on her time in Romania-Hungary]; her parents hiring a tutor to teach her and her sister; encountering rumors of Jews being relocated; [asked to reflect further on life in Auschwitz],

questioning the existence of God; wondering what the Jews could have done to deserve the Holocaust; being happy and feeling guilty about her survival; her sister meeting her husband in Belsen, marrying in 1946, and immigrating to Israel; being profoundly moved at the sight of the Statue of Liberty; traveling to Los Angeles; living with cousins, then sharing an apartment with a friend; moving to Long Beach and attending high school; meeting her husband, Gabriel; remaining very close to her sister in Israel; having three children; shows family photos, including grandchildren; becoming very active in humanitarian and political affairs, including racial discrimination; having great and constant appreciation for the basics of life that she has.