



ELLA MANDEL

Born: December 2, 1926 (Zdunska Wola, Poland)

Interview Date: August 1994

TESTIMONY EXCERPT

"I am Ella Mandel, born Joskowitz, December 2, 1926, from Zdunska Wola, Poland. I was 13 years old in September 1939 when the Germans came to Poland. I lived with my parents, Hela and Berak and my two sisters, Zosia and Lola.

In 1939, September, the Germans came into town and that was havoc. They closed us off the first day in a ghetto. We would get together and continue as much as we could our education. Food was limited. They came one day and they chased us out, all of us, to the cemetery. They took away my little sister Lola in the cemetery. She was maybe 9 years old and they killed her right there. They killed the children and the old people. Whoever was left went to the Łódź Ghetto. My father died in the ghetto. That was 1942.

In August 1944, they took us to Auschwitz. It was my mother, my sister Zosia and I. We were holding on to my mother because we did not want to be separated. When the selection came they took my mother away. It was the last [time] that I saw my mother. Then, we made a pact, my sister and I, not to hold [on] to each other. Because we realized that by holding on to my mother we



got separated.

I didn't believe that I'm never going to see my mother. I didn't see her die. I just saw her being taken away from me. And if you are young, no matter how bad the situation, you always hope. Maybe tomorrow, some-



thing will happen. I had this nature of believing in people. I had this nature of thinking tomorrow will be a better day. I had this nature of thinking people are basically good. People need people. I had this need to go on.

We were just a few days in Auschwitz and we were selected to go to a labor camp in Hamburg, Germany, where we worked digging ditches. We were there until February 1945.

In February 1945, they made us walk to Bergen-Belsen. My sister and I, pushing each other and holding on to each other, we made it to Bergen-Belsen. I was very sick, I had lost my hearing. My lucky break was that one of my friends was a nurse. She claimed she was a nurse so they put her in charge of this drug store. She would steal whatever there was, there wasn't much. She probably brought me aspirin. Or maybe occasionally there was some antibiotic. This is probably why I survived. We are very close, we are like sisters because of that. She is still my best friend.

We were liberated April 15. They treated me and I got well. The only thing, I didn't have my sister since I had typhus and it's contagious. And I remember laying in bed and writing her name on the wall over and over and over again. I had to get well, I had to find her. I got well probably two weeks later, I just wanted to find my sister and I did because she was waiting outside to see me. But she was sick.

The [Red Cross] came and said they want to take her to a hospital and I absolutely refused because being separated means, that's it, I'm never going to see her again. So every time the car was coming, I would hide my sister. Everybody talked to me, saying "What are you doing, she's dying! You've got to let her go to a hospital." She had tuberculosis. They promised me I can visit her every weekend. But she was fading. She died two months later.

That was probably the hardest part for me, to lose my sister. Maybe had I let her go sooner and seek professional medical help, maybe she would have survived. But my fear of being separated was so strong that I was hiding her for weeks, I wouldn't let her go. So I will blame myself for the rest of my life. I was left all alone.

But [now] I have a family and a continuation and that's what makes me go on."



1930s portrait of Ella's mother and father as presented during her testimony.