



RENÉE FIRESTONE

Born: April 13, 1924 (Uzhorod, Czechoslovakia)

Interview Date: October 1994

TESTIMONY EXCERPT

"My name is Renée Firestone. When I was brought to Auschwitz 50 years ago, my name was Renée Weinfeld. I was born April 13, 1924, in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia—Užhorod—now belongs to Ukraine. It was a lovely town.

I come from a very loving middle-class Jewish family. My father was a businessman, and he had a textile business and a tailor shop. My mother was a businesswoman before she was married, then became a housewife. I have a brother who is four years older than myself. And I had a sister who was five years younger than myself.

Jews were sort of slowly, systematically reduced to second-class citizens. Deportations began in 1944. We were herded into cattle cars in my hometown. My brother was no longer with us. He was in a Hungarian forced labor camp. But my parents and my sister and I were in a cattle car.

The journey to Auschwitz was horrifying.

I very vividly remember this old woman sitting on the edge of the cattle car who ripped open her coat lining and reached in and removed a little gold locket and started to cry bitterly. And I, being young and still very



optimistic and romantic, I was sort of fantasizing that maybe that's her wedding picture in the locket, or maybe her family, her grandchildren, whom she left behind. Then she closed this locket and, through the cracks of the cattle car, handed it to the Nazis.



When I jumped off that cattle car and looked around, I knew right away that we're doomed. I turned back to the cattle car for my mom and dad...they were gone. I asked this kapo [guard], 'When are we going to be reunited with our parents?' She pointed to one of the chimneys of the crematoria and she said, 'Do you see this chimney? There go your parents, and, when you go through the chimneys, you'll be reunited.'

We were caught in this human tide and being pushed towards the camp. I found myself standing in front of this Nazi officer, a young man, very handsome with a smiling face. He had a leather whip, pointing people to the right and to the left. I turned back and saw my sister being shaved. I was afraid that she was going to pass through and I'm going to lose her, so I just turned around and walked away. One of these kapos came after me and hit me on my back. She kept saying that I'm lucky I wasn't shot. So that was my first lucky day, I guess, to survive.

Later, I was selected from my camp, going into another camp. It was then that I was separated from my sister, Clara. We arranged to meet at the wires every morning at a certain place so that we can tell each other that we are still alive. And on Yom Kippur, in 1944, my sister didn't show. I knew that something happened to her. After the war, I found out that she was selected out to be killed that day.

That's when the second miracle happened. The night before, I was burning up with fever. I became very ill. There was a mother by the name of Farkosh. She stole somewhere a blanket, and she wrapped me in this blanket, and she dragged me out for zählappell [roll call]. Would she have not done it, I would have been finished that morning. And then I went on this death march, about 60 kilometers, where we were again put into cattle cars. My prisoner friends surrounded me and hugged me for body warmth.



Renée with her husband Bernard Fires-tone during her interview.

I arrived to Liebau camp, and we were assigned to work at a Krupp factory. A Russian officer rode in. He looked at us, and yelled, 'You're Jewish?' We didn't know whether we should say yes or no. This officer jumped off the horse, came over, and started to cry and hugged and kissed us. He came back a few days later, and he told us that we can now leave. And there we were, on our own, realizing that now we have to re-enter that world that didn't want us."