

# EDITH SCHWALB GELBARD



I was born in 1932, in Vienna, Austria. Our family consisted of my father, Chajem Schwalb, my mother, Magdalena Spitz Schwalb; my big sister, Therese; and my only grandmother, Hermine Spitz. We were part of a very large extended family. My father worked for the Siemens Company, and was also a semi-professional soccer player.

In the beginning of 1938, when Germany annexed Austria, my father was detained by an SS soldier rounding up Jews for deportation. Luckily, this man used to play soccer with my father and warned him to leave Vienna right away. Edith, her father and uncle fled that very same night. About three weeks later, her mother, sister and grandmother left Vienna to join them. My brother, Gaston, was born there in 1938.

In May 1940, we had to flee again, this time to the South of France. In 1942, the French Gendarmes arrested us, and we were taken to Septfonds, a holding camp. My mother succeeded to get most of us out of there except my father, who was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Shortly after, my grandmother died, and my mother was left alone with three young children.

Gaston and I were placed in Moissac, in a Jewish children's home, directed by Shatta and Bouli Simon. The townspeople, by warning Simon of an impending police raid, saved more than a few hundred children by sending us camping or to hide under a bridge. In 1943, this home was closed, but all of us were hidden somewhere. I lived in a college under a false name. After the war, I was reunited with my whole family, but my father died shortly after being liberated.

I met my husband, Isaac Mendel Gelbard, in 1947, in Moissac, and married him in 1953. We came to Canada in 1955 with one son. In Canada, we had three more sons, all professionals. I have nine grandchildren and I am very proud of all of them.

My mother died in 1983, and my husband, in 1999. For the past 30 years, I have been involved with Jewish Women International. I am a survivor speaker at the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, and in 2006 my experiences in the Holocaust were the subject of the book "Hiding Edith" by Kathy Kacer.