

ELLY GOTZ



I am a Litvak – a Jew from Lithuania. I was born in 1928, in Kovno (Kaunas), when it was the capital of Lithuania between the two world wars. We were not wealthy, but we had a rich library at home. Father worked in a bank, mother was a nurse. I attended a secular Yiddish school.

In 1941, Lithuania was in the path of the German army's advance towards the Soviet Union. That was when the war started for us.

At the age of 13, I was confined with all Jews in the Kovno Ghetto – Concentration Camp. We endured three years of deprivation, hardship and slave labour. By 1944, more than seventy percent of the people who entered the ghetto were killed or deported. We were amongst the last Jews in the ghetto to be deported to Germany.

My father and I ended up in a working camp of Dachau, near Landsberg. We worked twelve-hour days on a construction project with an ever-diminishing diet. Most people died from hunger and illness. My father and I somehow survived, supporting each other. We were liberated by the American Army at the central camp, Dachau, near Munich. At liberation, at the age of 17, I weighed less than 80 pounds. After liberation, my father and I spent six months in the hospital. We had the rare luck to find my mother alive too. She survived in the Stutthof Concentration Camp, in North Germany.

We began to rebuild our lives. We moved to Norway, later to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and to South Africa. I managed to fulfill a lifelong dream and graduated as an electrical engineer. In 1964, I immigrated with my wife, Esme, and three children to Canada. Here, we experienced a wonderful life. Esme and I build and managed several businesses. I realized my dream to become a pilot.

I am now a regular survivor speaker at the Holocaust Centre of Toronto. I feel it is my duty to tell my story for all those who died in the Holocaust. I want to tell the new generations the consequences when hatred and prejudice become government policy. I want them to be vigilant, politically alert and active, and to learn to recognize, in themselves and in society, the poison of prejudice.