



## CATHY WEISS

*"Don't ever be prejudiced; anytime, anywhere. Everything is based on the individual."*

Cathy Weiss was born Ecaterina Lebi on June 12, 1926 in Satu-Mare, Romania, a large town in Northern Transylvania, with a population of 50,000 people, approximately 1/5 were Jews. Her father, Henrik Lebi, was the owner of a local lumberyard and her mother, Blanka Lebi, stayed at home. Cathy had a very protected, happy childhood. She began her education at a private school and was fortunate to be one of the few Jewish students to attend the public high school, from which she graduated when she was 18 years old.

By March 1944, antisemitic laws forced Jews to wear the yellow star, and armed police were everywhere. In May, life for Cathy changed radically when she and her family were forced to walk to Szatmar-Nemeti Ghetto in Hungary, packing only whatever food and clothing they could carry on their backs. For the next three weeks, Cathy and her family lived in horrible conditions. They survived on the minimal food they had brought, and they had to squeeze 10-15 people into a single room. From Szatmar-Nemeti Ghetto, Cathy and her family were transported in closed cattle cars to Auschwitz Concentration Camp, arriving on June 3, 1944. She survived many selections by the infamous Dr. Mengele, and then in October 1944, she was forced to go by train to Schlesiersee Work Camp, in Germany.

While in Schlesiersee, Cathy had to rise at 4:00 a.m. for roll call and then had to march to work, where she dug trap ditches for enemy tanks. She managed to endure these conditions from October 1944 until January 22, 1945, when the prisoners were forced on a Death March through knee-high snow to a nearby village. At night, they rested in a barn, and the next morning, the March began again. Those who could not keep up were shot. During the March, Cathy lost one of her wooden shoes and knew that she would never survive the March

with just one shoe. In order to survive, she decided to hide under a pile of hay in a barn on the next night, and she watched as the Death March continued on past her. Cathy walked to a nearby farm in hopes of being allowed to hide there. The woman who owned the farm was generous enough to give her a meal, shoes, and jacket but then asked her to leave. Word quickly spread through the town that an unknown girl had been seen and an SR officer soon discovered her. The SR officer interrogated her, but he did not believe the fictional story that Cathy told him about being a Hungarian refugee. He had no soldiers to spare, so he ordered a few of the local peasants to escort her back to the Death March.

The peasants took pity on her and brought her to the City Hall in Weisenberg and dropped her off. There were many other refugees there, and they placed her into a group with French Foreign laborers. A German soldier spotted her and asked her to work as a maid for his household. At just 18 years old, Cathy was placed on a train bound for the Czech Republic where she soon discovered that she was to work in a circus owned by the family of this German soldier.

However, her stay with Frau Schlesinger was short. In April 1945, Cathy became ill and went to the hospital and on May 5, 1945, the Russians liberated the town of Peschen Bodenvach. Soon after, Cathy traveled home in search of any surviving family members, but when she arrived she found her home deserted. Fortunately, some aunts and cousins, who had lived in Romania during the war, managed to locate her and brought Cathy to live with them. In 1946, Cathy married Sigmund Weiss, a Holocaust survivor from her hometown. For 18 years, they lived under Communist Romania until they were finally able to move to Rome, Italy, where they waited 6 months for their immigration papers to the USA to be processed. Cathy, Sigmund, and son Gabriel were finally able to move to Los Angeles in 1965, where she worked in accounting and her husband as an engineer. Together, they have one child, two grandchildren, Michael and Johanna, and five great-grandchildren.

Cathy tells her story at the Museum of Tolerance in the memory of all her murdered family members, for as she explains, "It's important for people to know, remember, and prevent future tragedies. Don't be prejudiced. Don't hate."