

## LIBERATION ■ EDITH IS FREED IN AUSCHWITZ



Edith on the rooftop of her house in The Hague, Holland, before the war

*Edith Neuberger was born in 1925 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. After the Nazis invaded her country in 1940, her parents sent her and her older sister Bobbie into hiding with a family near The Hague. Her parents and little brother were arrested, and soon after, in December 1942 when Edith was 17, she and her sister were discovered and arrested. They were sent to the Westerbork camp in Holland, from which Jews were sent to death camps in Poland. Separated from her family, Edith was sent to Auschwitz alone and endured brutal treatment. In January 1945 as the Soviet army approached Auschwitz, she was sent to the camp hospital with suspected tuberculosis. The Germans abandoned the camp, leaving Edith and thousands of other survivors on their own.*

I had such a tremendous fever that I was petrified to fall asleep in case I wouldn't wake up in the morning. It was really very very bad. Finally they decided to examine me, and they decided that I had TB. How they decided it, I don't know, but it was highly likely, and it turned out they were correct. So they put me in the TB block, and it was well known that when it comes to selection [for death], the whole TB block goes. I and another girl—I remember her name, it was Enid—she was a German Jewish girl, and we were both so-called diagnosed having TB and had to go to the TB block. So we go through the doors and I remember saying to Enid, "We'll never get out of here. This is really it. This is it." And it was it for her: she never made it.

I stayed in there for about a week or ten days, when an announcement came through from Berlin, an order that all the crematoria had to be broken down because they wouldn't want to leave behind any evidence for the Russians, which was my luck. So I remember a German SS man walking through the barrack and talking about this in a loud voice and saying in German he had never seen those Jews work so hard, trying to break down the crematoria.

We knew the Russian front was coming near. During all the time I was there, whenever a transport [train] came into the camp, I tried to find after appel [roll call] some Dutch people and learn where the transport had come from. One day I came across a transport from Grenoble, France, and one of the people told me that landings had begun in June [D-Day invasion], so we were aware of that. I also found out through the grapevine that Bobbie was in Auschwitz I—Birkenau



Women survivors on the day of liberation, January 27, 1945



One of the destroyed crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau after the liberation, late January 1945

was called Auschwitz II—and that Bobbie was used as a guinea pig in experiments. She survived it all; she lives in Holland. So I knew Bobbie was alive, and that gave me some hope. I thought, if she's alive, then I'm going to make sure that I stay alive.

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The Russians were coming near. By now it was near the end. It was December '44 and we could hear shooting or whatever. We heard something. The day came that the Germans decided they were going to leave the camp, so they went into every barrack and gave the order to the kapos [inmates assigned to be guards] "*alle Juden raus!*"—all the Jews out! The others could stay. So I made myself as flat as possible and tried to hide. But I had no such luck. The Ukrainians were only too glad to get rid of the Jews. They hated us. They found me and they dragged me down, and they told me I had to get out. They gave me a thin blanket, a safety pin to get the blanket around my body, and a pair of shoes.

And I went out in the cold, and December in Poland is very cold. I went out and we were supposed to line up five abreast. I was number two in one of the five somewhere. And I was standing there, and the SS man in charge of this particular group somehow caught my eye and told me to come to him. And I was scared stiff, of course, and I came to him, and then he pulled his pistol and put it on my ear, and he said, in German, of course, "You can't even walk half a mile. What do you think you can walk, five miles?" Well it wasn't any five miles; it was hundreds of miles, or hundreds of kilometers, that these people walked. "You can't even walk half a kilometer." And he was right. I couldn't. I was really in sad shape. So after he cocked his pistol, he told me I wasn't worth his bullet. "So go back into the block, and eventually we'll shoot all you Jews in the block that can't walk."

So I walked back to the block, and I was petrified that he was going to shoot me in the back anyway. But he didn't. I got into the block, and the Ukrainians that had thrown me out wanted to throw me out again. And so I told them in German, hoping they at least would understand some German, because I don't speak Ukrainian or Russian, that the SS man had told me to go back. He was going to shoot me here; he wanted to shoot me here, I said. So they said, "All right, go!" So I was allowed in, and I stayed. I went back to my bed—of three, up high—and I stayed there.

Eventually I learned that they had gone away, the Germans, with all these people that were supposed to walk [on a "death march" to Germany]. And what happened, I heard later, that as soon as you sat down on this walk, they shot you in the neck. They didn't leave you sitting—they shot you. They killed each and every one who couldn't walk anymore. So I almost certainly would not have made it. I wouldn't have made it even one mile.

So now the Germans had gone, and there was no food at all. There wasn't even that turnip soup. I just lived on snow. I went outside and tried to find some snow that was clean, because the so-called potties were overflowing, so everybody went out in the snow and did whatever they had to do. So I tried to find some snow that was clean. And I lived on that for about five days, I think.

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Then the Russians came, and there was a Yugoslav partisan girl that had a bed close to me. But the only way I could talk to her—she didn't speak any German—she could speak a little bit of school French, and I could speak school French, so we made do with that, and the rest talking with our hands. So one day she handed me a pocket knife, and I didn't know what was going on. I thought she'd gone mad and was going to attack me. But she put it in my hand and

she pointed it at the door of the barracks. And I went there and I saw a whole group of women hovering over a dead horse. And they were all cutting a piece of horse to eat. So I worked my way through them and I cut myself a piece of horse and just ate it. It just about killed me because my dysentery was worse than ever. I couldn't digest anything anymore. So I made my way back to my bed and I passed out. Then when I came to, I just stayed there. I was having dysentery all the time. It was just terrible. There was blood all over the place.

*The Russians began transporting the survivors to their home countries. Because the German railroads were destroyed, the Dutch survivors were to go by train to the Black Sea and then by ship through the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to Holland. While still in poor health, Edith began the journey, which stopped for a time in Chernivtsi, Romania [now Ukraine], on the way to the Black Sea.*

I had with me about seven or eight dresses which I had received from the Yugoslav girl, who was in much better shape than I, because after all she wasn't Jewish so she wasn't beaten, she wasn't treated as badly. And she had gone after the Germans left and raided the barracks where they kept all the clothes that they took away from the Jews when they arrived. Everybody that could, did, but I couldn't. She had grabbed armfuls of clothes. Now when she got back to her bed, seeing that it was January and it was cold, she kept all the winter clothes, and the summer clothes that she had grabbed were no good to her, so she gave them to me. So I was thrilled with it. Although they were cotton dresses, I put one over the other. I was nothing but a skeleton, anyway. I weighed in at 59 pounds after liberation. So I put just one over the other, and I thought, well, six summer dresses will keep me just as warm as one winter dress.

When we got to Romania and it got warmer, I didn't need them all, and so I sold them on the marketplace. People came up to me and didn't speak my language and I didn't speak their language, so they came and they touched my clothes, and you talk with your hands, and I stripped off the dress—I had plenty underneath. And I got money for it, for which I bought—they sold a lot of yogurt and blueberries there. And I ate yogurt and blueberries, which I'm sure was very good for me. By that time I could digest food again. So this is how I got some money, by selling my clothes off my body.

One day we went to the marketplace in order to sell a dress of mine again so we could have some food. And I passed out. I completely collapsed and I was out. I was totally out. When I came to, I was covered with paper money. All the farmers in the market knew where we came from, because we had no hair, you know, we were shaven. And your hair doesn't grow back if you don't get anything to eat. Your hair just doesn't grow. So they knew where we came from, and I was covered with all this money. And my friend and another Dutch girl—there were three



Liberated women in Auschwitz, January 27, 1945



An Auschwitz warehouse overflowing with clothes taken from prisoners, January 1945

of us together—thought this was fantastic, and right away told me “We’re going back tomorrow and you’re going to faint again!”

But it didn’t work out that way, because a woman came up to me, very well dressed, and spoke to me in German, and she said, “Do you understand German?” And I said, “Yes, I do.” She said, “I am Jewish and I am Austrian, and I’m married to a Russian Jewish doctor here. And I think it would be better for you if you would be in a hospital bed.” Everybody knew in Chernivtsi where we were and who we were. She said, “Why don’t you come tonight for dinner?” And I couldn’t believe my ears. So the three of us went there, and I hadn’t sat at a table with a tablecloth and with a knife and a fork and regular food—I just couldn’t believe it. So they treated us very well, and it turned out that the Russian Jewish doctor was the head of the TB hospital there.

*The doctor confirmed the diagnosis of TB and Edith was treated in the hospital and regained strength. She left Romania on a train bound for Holland, this time traveling through Poland and Germany. In Berlin, Edith and her traveling companions were able to get from the Russian occupation zone to the American zone, and from there Edith finally arrived at the Dutch border.*

When I got to Holland, they gave me a hard time at the border, because this stupid man said to me, “Where are your papers showing that you are Dutch?” And I said, “Well, what do you expect? I don’t have any papers.” And so he started with “Well, then we can’t let you in.” I got so mad that I started swearing in Dutch till there was no end to it. And he said, “If you can swear in Dutch like that, you’ve gotta be Dutch.” And so that’s how I got back into Holland.

*Edith was reunited with her sister and successfully treated for TB. She learned that she could not emigrate to the U.S. until she had been free of TB for five years, so she decided to go to Israel. On the way, she met David Ross, who as a child had been sent from Germany to England through the Kindertransport program. They were married in 1949 in Israel and, after living in London for several years, they moved to the U.S. in 1953, settling in Delaware. They moved to Apex, North Carolina, in 1988. They have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.*

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- Oral testimony of Edith Ross, 1997, video, 2½ hrs. (USC Shoah Foundation) [youtu.be/dXifQsbQ-ZA](https://youtu.be/dXifQsbQ-ZA)
- Women in Auschwitz (classroom activity with readings, Yad Vashem) [www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/ceremonies/women-auschwitz.html](http://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/ceremonies/women-auschwitz.html)

Excerpted from the Shoah Foundation testimony of Edith Ross, 1997, from the archive of the USC [University of Southern California] Shoah Foundation, [youtu.be/dXifQsbQ-ZA](https://youtu.be/dXifQsbQ-ZA). For more information, see [sfi.usc.edu/](http://sfi.usc.edu/). © USC Shoah Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the USC Shoah Foundation. Images credited USHMM reproduced by permission of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Family photographs reproduced by permission of Edith Ross.



Edith and David Ross on their wedding day, Haifa, Israel, 1949



Edith Ross during her interview with the Shoah Foundation, Apex, NC, 1997