

MEET ELLY



Elly in 1937.

BIOGRAPHY:

Elly Gotz was born 1928 in Lithuania. His father, Julius, worked at a bank as a bookkeeper, and his mother, Sonja, was trained as a surgical nurse, but after Elly was born she worked at home as a dressmaker. Growing up, Elly learned five languages, including Yiddish, a Jewish language that had developed in Eastern and Central Europe, and he attended a Jewish school. He was an excellent student and was particularly strong in science, math and reading. During the German occupation, Elly continued his studies in the ghetto school and learned locksmithing and metal work. Elly's family managed to stay together for most of the war, but in July 1944, Elly and his father were separated from his mother when they were deported to work in Germany. For nearly one year, Elly and his father were imprisoned as slave labourers in a concentration camp. After liberation, Elly's family moved to Norway and then to South Africa, where Elly attended university. Elly settled in Canada with his own family in 1964.

“One day it occurred to me that my thoughts were busy with the wrong issues. Instead of thinking about my own future, what I wanted from life, I was daydreaming about revenge, letting my anger play with ideas that were surely not realistic. I decided that I was not a killer and was not going to become one.”

—ELLY GOTZ

Elly Gotz is a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to Canada after the war and settled in Toronto. You can learn about his experiences by reading his memoir, *Flights of Spirit*, or on the digital resource Re:Collection.

Below is some background that will help you understand Elly's story.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Lithuania is a small country in northeastern Europe on the Baltic Sea. By the twentieth century, Jews had lived in Lithuania for hundreds of years, and the capital city of **Kovno** (also known as Kaunas) had a large Jewish population. Before World War II, an authoritarian regime ruled Lithuania and persecuted the Jewish population, for example by limiting the number of Jews who could enroll in universities. In 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a **non-aggression treaty** that divided up Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania the following year. In June 1941, when Nazi Germany broke the treaty and began its invasion of the Soviet Union and its territories, **Lithuanian nationalists** seized the opportunity created by the Soviets' retreat to proclaim a Lithuanian government, which brutally repressed and attacked Jews. During the subsequent **German occupation** of Lithuania, Jews continued to be persecuted, murdered, confined in **ghettos** and **deported** to killing sites or concentration camps. The Nazis used some Jews as **slave labour** in concentration camps, including in Dachau, which was the oldest concentration camp in Germany. By the end of the war, more than **90 per cent** of the Jews in Lithuania had been murdered.

