

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

Oral History Interviews of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center

**Interview with Eva Kempinski
March 2, 1987
RG-50.002*0012**

PREFACE

On March 2, 1987, Eva Kempinski was interviewed on videotape by Irene Katz, Sidney Langer, and Bernard Weinstein on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum houses a copy of the interview as a result of a contributing organization agreement with the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the contributing organization agreement.

Summary of the
Interview with Eva Kempinski
March 2, 1987

Eva Chava Kempinski was born in 1925 in a Polish shtetl. Eva's family, of which she is the only survivor, consisted of her father, mother, six sisters, and one brother. Her father was a highly respected scholar. Eva attended a public school that was only for Jewish students and her brother attended a Yeshiva.

Eva was 14 when the war broke out in her town on September 1, 1939. Her arm was broken in this bombing. Eva moved to Warsaw, Poland from Łódź, Poland in December 1939. Eva witnessed many atrocities while she lived in Warsaw. When Eva's father was taken to Treblinka, a concentration camp in Poland, he brought his Tallis and T`fillin with him. After Eva's father was taken to Treblinka, Eva and her 43 year old mother went to Majdanek, a concentration camp in Poland, in 1943. In Majdanek, they carried stones to build a crematoria. Eva's mother was sent to shower and never returned. Eva was transferred to Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland, after two months in Majdanek. Eva wonders why and how she survived the concentration camps, especially Auschwitz. Eva worked in a munitions factory in Czechoslovakia from December 1944 until May 1945.

Eva was liberated in Czechoslovakia by the Russians on May 8, 1945. Eva describes her misery at the time of her liberation. She also expresses her anger toward Jews in the United States for "not doing enough" during the war. Eva moved to Slovakia, Austria, and then to Israel in the first group of "Agudat Israel" to reach the land. She met her husband in Israel. She moved to Switzerland in 1958 and then to the United States in 1964.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Eva Kempinski
March 2, 1987**

01:00:00

Born in Shtetl in Poland of 22,000, including 8,000 Jews. Had a mother, father, six sisters, and one brother. Her father was a highly respected scholar. She is the only survivor of her family.

01:03:00

September 1, 1939: Bombing at beginning of war in her town. Her arm was broken. She was 14 years old when the war broke out.

01:06:00

Attended a public school that was only for Jews. Her brother attended a Yeshiva. Three of her sisters were married before the start of the war. Her special memories are growing up in her home.

01:09:00

She remembers her father's stories at the Sabbath table, about Hasidism, about Grand Rabbis, and especially their "Gerer Rebbe." She's still a believer, after all that happened.

01:12:00

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Went to Warsaw, Poland in December 1939. She saw a child thrown from the third floor; it wasn't human. She went to Warsaw from Łódź, Poland. Her father's injury caused him to be unable to pray Amidah for three weeks at the beginning of the war.

01:15:00

Her mother was taken to Majdanek, a concentration camp in Poland, after her father was taken to Treblinka, also a concentration camp in Poland. Her father took his Tallis and Tfillin. Young people were taken to work. All of this happened in Warsaw.

01:18:00

Eva remained in Warsaw with three women. This was shortly before Rosh Hashanah 1942. She escorted her mother to Majdanek, even though she understood the gravity of the decision.

01:21:00

She was 17 years old and her mother was 43 years old when they went to Majdanek in 1943. They carried stone there to build a crematoria.

01:24:00

Her mother was sent to shower. Eva told a Pole: "They took my mother." The Pole responded "There she is," pointing to the smoke.

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01:27:00

After two months in Majdanek, Eva was transferred to Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland. She wonders why she was the only one in her family to survive..."maybe it's a punishment." She says she did nothing special to live (e.g. stealing bread).

01:30:00

When she was liberated by the Russians in Czechoslovakia on May 8, 1945, she was sick for two days with remorse over her situation.

01:33:00

Eva tells a dramatic story of watching bread all day in Auschwitz for a working acquaintance and she did not touch it!

01:36:00

This was Rachel's bread. Rachel's last prayer before she died was for Eva to live and that she loved Eva. Eva recites a prayer for her on the holidays at Yizkor.

01:39:00

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After her time in Auschwitz, Eva worked in a munitions factory in Czechoslovakia from December 1944 until May 1945.

01:42:00

Majdanek and Auschwitz were the worst.

01:45:00

She and a friend had agreed to go to "Canada" the next morning. In a dream, her father told her not to go.

01:48:00

This saved her life.

01:51:00

"Why didn't U.S. bomb the camp? I'm angry at the Jews of America also for not doing enough."

--BREAK--

01:54:00

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Eva talks about her neighbors. The father of one neighbor was beaten while praying with Tallis and T`fillin. Another neighbor's baby was killed during this action.

01:57:00

She describes her misery at the time of liberation.

02:00:00

Eva returned to her Shtetl. Her neighbors were shocked that she was alive. They seemed to say "Why are you alive?" She went to Slovakia, Austria, and then to Palestine. This was the first group of "Agudat Israel" to reach Israel.

02:03:00

She never really feels completely safe.

02:06:00

She was in a Kibbutz for two weeks. Then she worked in a factory in Israel. She shared a room with a friend.

02:09:00

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She met her husband in Israel. They are now married 37 years. In 1958 she moved to Switzerland from Israel. In 1964 she moved to the United States. She has told her children everything, just as she has done on this tape.

02:12:00

Discusses her children, grandchildren, and continuity.

02:15:00

"Did you ever feel God abandoned you?"

"Maybe I was too stupid that I had so much (faith)." Eva never waived. She still likes flowers, a nice home, and wants to look nice. It is unbelievable that we could have lived through all this.

02:18:00

"What lesson would you give [for the young]?"

If they know it happened, it may not happen again.