

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

Oral History Interviews of the University of California, Los Angeles Holocaust Documentation Archives

**Interview with Ilse Diamant
December 4, 1983
RG-50.005*0009**

PREFACE

On December 4, 1983, Ilse Diament was interviewed on videotape by Arnold Band on behalf of the University of California, Los Angeles, Holocaust Documentation Archives. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Department of Oral History created time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that the time-coded notes attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet has not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The time-coded notes should not be used in place of the interview itself.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Ilse Diamant
December 4, 1983**

1:17

Ilse was born in Germany 10/2/28 in the town of Krefeld (?) in a family of five children. They had their own house as well as a supermarket.

2:00

In 1937, they were the only Jewish children in the village and the kids had to be sent to Stettin to attend a Jewish school and the family paid people to take care of the children. One sister went to Israel in 1937 and another went to Israel on a Youth Aliyah program in 1939.

3:00

Her father was arrested during Kristallnacht and was sent to Buchenwald.

3:40

Ilse describes how her parents had a chance to go to Shanghai but did not want to be separated from the rest of the family.

4:10

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In Stettin, on 2/13/40 Ilse was studying when she heard a knock on the door and she was forced to open it. There were five SS men with guns who ordered Ilse and the woman she was staying with to pack in 30 minutes and get out. She was mixed up. She took her canary bird, given to her for her tenth birthday, with her and a gestapo man twisted the head of the bird off and said to her 'like the bird died, you will die too.' She was confused. He took away her earrings.

6:30

The gestapo said you will see everybody where I take you while hurrying her along. She remembers seeing a lot of people and trucks. They were taken to the railroad station.

7:30

Ilse wanted to go with her brother. She saw one of the Nazis hit her brother over the head with a rifle butt and she recalls seeing the blood all over.

8:20

The people who had been round up by the Nazis, went to a hall where they were given sacks full of sweet and salty food. In Ilse's view, the Nazis did it on purpose to make them thirsty and die. They went on the trains for three days. Ilse remembers that winter as the coldest winter. She describes the train ride which went through Poland and finally stopped in Nablinnopova (sp.?)

10:00

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The train stopped and according to Ilse they smelled like animals. there was snow all around and there were a lot of dead people on the trains. Everyone was extremely thirsty and people were shot for eating the snow. 'The snow became a blood bath.' They were given some hot water.

11:00

They went into a large hall and were divided into villages. Of the 1300 originally taken from Stettin, 7 survived. They went to Bergitsa (sp.?) - near Lublin - and they totaled approx. 600 people. Bergitsa became a ghetto and then it became worse and worse. Ilse recounts a story about the lack of water in the ghetto and how one had to go outside to the well to fetch the water. It was her turn to fetch the water one day and she noticed a bunch of Germans laughing around the well with a host of dead people lying about - electrocution. She herself was out like a light for a long time before she regained her senses.

13:45

Ilse says that there were a lot of selections in the ghetto and that these usually occurred on the 13th of the month. She remembers how in the spring (of '43?) a horde of Germans arrived very early in the morning on motorcycles with sidecars. There were noises and shootings. She remembers Freiks a Sturmfuhrer (sp?) Wielding a revolver and entering the sick barracks. He shot everybody in the sick barracks in the head and took the men to build a huge grave. He ordered that the children be taken away and the babies' heads were smashed against the wall in front of their mothers. Ilse remembers the craziness - the screaming and the praying - the selection of young men and women. She was selected to go on the truck while the people that remained in the square undressed and Freiks ordered the Ukrainian (guards ?) to shoot them around the grave, to push them into the grave, and some of

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them were still alive.

20:00

Ilse is hysterical - she cries about how she is tortured by her memories. She has a number from Auschwitz; hears screams; knew too many people who went into the grave but she remembers that those on the truck couldn't cry - they were paralyzed. She wants to - tears and hysteria.

22:15

she regains her composure and thinks about all those who died. They went to Arbeitslager first, in the forest. She did not know anybody. Her friends had been shot in the grave though one did survive. She thinks that she stayed there for a year and a half but she is not sure. At one point she raised her hand to show that she was a German child. She was taken out of the group along with 3 others and the rest were shot. She and the 3 others were housed outside the camp and were assigned to clean an SS man's apartment where she was given a clean uniform to wear. One of the group would boost Ilse's morale when she was down and Ilse herself gained strength from her experience at Burgista. She wanted to speak for all the people who can speak no longer.

27:00

There was an evacuation and Ilse describes the walk to Madjanek with the Nazis and their trained dogs. She describes how people would be shot for trying to run away. They ended up in Krashnik, then went to a brick factory where people were forced to walk up this step and then be burned. It was Ilse's turn to step up when she was told to run - she heard Russian shots in the background. She was

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forced to run and she felt very weak. She felt like she could not go on but 2 young men lifted her up and told her she would make it. One of them helped her.

30:30

They received food and water and were taken to the cattle railroad. She ended up in Auschwitz where she was selected for Mengele. She knew what a gas chamber looked like and she found her friend. Her friend had a sister who was selected to enter the gas chamber and Ilse's friend wanted to go in as well. She recalls the mayhem of the moment - scores of Hungarian transports arrived and Ilse remembers feeling very light amid the craziness. She remembers hiding under dead people to save herself while nearby people were having their heads shaved and having numbers branded on to them. She was still moving and she describes how some girls pulled her over to where they were 'like a miracle.'

34:45

Ilse mentions how her hair was shaved and she was given her number, given a dress, and given some food and how they were all treated like animals, called by their numbers.

35:30

Ilse recalls how people were selected into groups and how she worked with a Dutch group, cleaning out latrines in the crematoriums and carrying them out to the field. She also would open seams of dresses to find money and notes. She worked with the grass commander as well and helped to make a lawn. She remembers working and talking with the other girls. She remembers a big evacuation and

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how the Lagerkommandant Josef Kramer liked the orchestra. One time she was punished for bending over to pick up a potato that had fallen and she was forced to stand by the orchestra holding bricks in her hands. During one selection, she noticed how the orchestra girls were on the opposite side from her so she smuggled herself to their side.

40:15

Ilse went to Bergen - Belsen where she remembers standing next to Anne Frank, pelted by the cold and the wind with no barracks. She remembers Frank as a quiet girl who was crying all the time. She told Frank the story from Burgista - how one must survive to tell the stories of who cannot tell their own - but Ilse recalls that Frank was much more pessimistic than that.

42:10

Ilse recalls working with parachutes and meeting a woman who knew Ilse's father - she had met him in Trieste. The woman's name was Emily Zinger and she said she would take care of Ilse. Ilse helped with the soup in the camp which allowed her to eat a little more food. Ilse tried to feed Emily to help her to survive but she went to the sick barracks and soon died. Ilse mentions a girl from the orchestra, Hilda, who was very kind and received a bit more food.

47:45

Ilse contracted typhus and the orchestra protected her and hid her.

49:00

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Ilse mentions that a friend of hers wore a black bracelet.

50:00

Ilse describes her happiness upon seeing a British soldier wearing the Star of David. She recalls her excitement and how the British said they would take care of everyone. The British gave Ilse a can of pears which were 'so juicy' according to Ilse's recollection and Ilse still remembers that feeling of happiness every time she opens a can of pears. The orchestra helped Ilse a great deal and Ilse discovered a means to obtain more bread.

53:00

She recalls her time spent in Madjanek. She remembers working by a crematorium; how her group was the last one to come out of Madjanek; how she worked as a gardener, worked in the crematoria; worked with clothing. She remembers inscribing her name on the wall and the wooden shoes at the camp. She remembers the gassing of Russian invalids; she remembers the Russians and Germans fighting; how they went out and were taken to Lublin only to find that Lublin was burning.

56:00

Ilse was in seven camps. In Madjanek she recalls how some beautiful girls were raped by German soldiers and then shot. She says she was lucky that she wasn't shot, that she wasn't pretty.

57:40

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Ilse reads something about what it was like for her after liberation - she remembers her family, her girlfriends - 'I was like a stone.' It took her a long time to become adjusted - she couldn't stay in a movie theater, she would start to cry when she heard music.

1:40

Ilse continues reading. Hilda tried to prod Ilse into sitting in the movie theater. Ilse insists that in the camp, she was like a stone, paralyzed, she couldn't cry. Now she could cry, she was free.

2:40

Ilse describes the screams, the scenes at Aushwitz, but now she is free. In her mind, the Germans are not the only guilty ones. The whole world knew and the testimony of the survivors is crucial.

3:45

'What I went through.' - Ilse wanted to stay with the girls from the orchestra and she wanted to go to Israel. Ilse couldn't recognize people from the lists of survivors. She mentions Joseph Rosensaft as one person who helped people in their efforts to emigrate. Ilse found out that she had two sisters in Israel and she wanted to go to Israel. She met her future husband Fred (Diament who also was interviewed by the UCLA people) - very intelligent and brave. He liked chocolate and Ilse gave Fred a bit of chocolate. A man in the American Army, Yezeriah Slutzky (sp.?) smuggled guns, etc. to help people go to Israel. The American wanted her to go to the United States but she wanted to go to Israel.

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8:30

She remembers her journey - she went to France in covered vans, she went on a freight ship which almost sunk and the British police caught them when they went to Israel. An American guy contacted her sister.

10:30

Fred went to the kibbutz while Ilse went to school. She was reunited with her relatives and went to Haifa for one or two years. One of her sisters was a manicurist while the other was a hairdresser and Ilse felt like she was a burden on her sisters. She entered a program which encompassed a half day of study and a half day in the army.

13:30

Later she went to a kibbutz and met up with Freddy. She claims to have been good with hand grenades. One day while shooting was happening around the kibbutz she moved close to Freddy. - 'I moved too close and we got married.' Ilse expresses a sense of pride and excitement about Israel.

15:00

she recalls that the sun in Haifa hurt her and that she had three kids. She talks about the names of her children.

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16:45

Ilse discusses her religious feelings and how she only refers to God in prayers - 'help us God.' Her religious feelings helped her - her parents were religious but she wondered why they died.

18:00

Ilse talks about a trip to Washington - riding on a bus, reminded of the mass grave. Ilse started crying in Stockton where the lights in the darkness reminded her of the lights when she was on a cattle car when it was painful to see those people living lives while she was going to possible death.

21:00

Ilse is proud of her family. She's afraid that she will have nightmares again though she hopes not. She hopes to arrange a special day - a Hagadah - to remind people to 'never forget' and to tell the youngest child.