

RG-50.005.0059 recorded in 1984 in LA

Sophie Weinstein (nee Sikora) was born in Warsaw in 1922 and had 2 brothers and 2 sisters. When the war started she had just finished high school. One sister was studying at the Sorbonne. The family thought that the war would soon be over. They evaded Nazi roundups by hiding behind a bookcase. Her younger brother lost all hope and gave himself up. Her father worked for the Germans outside the Warsaw ghetto, and one day he didn't come back. Sophie's other sister left and went to Tashkent in Russia in 1940.

Sophie was in the Warsaw ghetto during the uprising and hid with others in the underground bunkers. She recounts how some mothers had to suffocate their own babies in order to not warn the Nazis. Her other brother was killed in the uprising. They were eventually found by the Nazis and, starved and almost naked, taken near the railway station. While waiting for the trains in a nearby building, some of the Jews were made to jump out of a 4-5 story building. Then they were loaded onto the cattle cars, about 200 in each car, and taken to Majdanek in Lublin. Many were already dead on arrival.

She recalls that of all the camps she was in - Majdanek, Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Malchow, Majdanek was the worst because it was very disorganized and the German female guards were often drunk and very brutal. She was immediately separated from her mother and only later realized that her mother had gone to the gas chamber. She still feels guilt that she made her mother dye her hair with ink in an effort to look younger, and it came out purple. She thinks that maybe her mother would have been spared if she had not stood out. Sophie gradually realized that the awful smell of burning flesh was coming from the crematoria. Sophie worked at various jobs in the camp, cleaning latrines or walking miles and miles in the cold picking plants that burned their hands.

After 4 months in Majdanek, Sophie was part of a group of 600 that were sent by coal car to Auschwitz, where she remained for 16 months. She went through countless selections, and at one point was the only one left of 9 women on her bed plank. Sick with typhoid and dysentery, she snuck into a group that Dr. Mengele was selection to work in Kanada, an area next to the gas chambers that sorted out the clothing and belongings of those being killed. Sophie said this job saved her life, because she was able to sleep and shower and treated better. She worked there for five months until January 1945, when the whole group was marched out of Auschwitz and taken, freezing and starving, to Ravensbrück. From there she was taken to Markoff. In May 1945, when they saw the Germans leaving and the gate open, Sophie and some others took refuge in the basement of a nearby house, and then realized they were free and the Russians had liberated them. She said the officers in the Russian army were kind, but the regular soldiers were horrible and the group had to hide by day and walk by night to avoid being raped, although this often happened.

Sophie got on a train going towards Warsaw still dressed in her camp uniform. She can't forget the looks of horror on faces of Poles when they realized some Jews were still left. She found Warsaw in rubble and moved to a smaller town where there was a small group of Jewish survivors. She met her husband there. They had to get out of Poland and went to Breslau. She found out her sister was alive in Marseilles, and the sister sent them visas for France, and eventually they made their way to the US. She has a daughter and son, and her other sister came back from Russia through Poland and lives in Israel.

Sophie find it difficult to trust people and has never told her story to anyone, but she finds the telling somewhat of a relief. She finds peace in the US.