

-TITLE- WEINSTEIN SOPHIE
-I_DATE- DECEMBER 3 1983
-SOURCE- UCLA HOLOCAUST DOCUMENTATION ARCHIVES
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY- EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY- EXCELLENT
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

1:00 Born in Warsaw in January 1922. Family of 7 - father, mother, 2 brothers and 2 sisters.

2:00 Sophie had Just graduated from high school when the war broke out. She was 17 years old.

3:00 The war came unexpectedly to Sophie. She had expected to continue on with her studies. Her older sister was at the Sorbonne in Paris.

4:00 The first shock of the war was terrible. She had really thought that it would Just pass over.

5:00 The Germans started rounding people up in the streets. Her younger brother got caught.

6:00 They didn't know what happened to him and they didn't know what was going to happen to themselves. They had a hiding place behind several large books in a bookcase in their home. They hid there when the raids were going on.

7:00 In 1942 when the first raids were going on, her youngest brother (13 years) gave up hope and gave himself up to the Germans.

8:00 The Germans took him away and Sophie and her family couldn't get to him. He was her fathers favorite and after he was gone her father lost his will to live.

9:00 Her father worked for the Germans outside of the ghetto and one day he just never came back.

10:00 She remained with her mother. Her father was gone, both brothers were gone, and her other sister had run away to Russia in 1940.

11:00 Things were terrible in the ghetto and they had to move from place to place constantly. She left notes in every place they left so that someone might find them and know that they were alive.

12:00 Her older brother eventually came back but he was very sick.

13:00 The Germans started burning buildings to get the Jews to come out. They started hiding out in bunkers underground. At night they would come out and look for food and water.

14:00 The ghetto was completely devastated. They had heard rumors of the gassing but they didn't believe them. They believed that people were working. Her mother was 52 years old but she looked older.

15:00 She wanted to dye her mothers hair to make her look younger but she had nothing to do it with. She found a bottle of ink and tried to use it but her hair came out violet.

16:00 In May of 1943 the Germans found their bunker.

17:00 Her brother remained in the bunker after everyone else got out and the Germans bombed it and they never saw him again.

18:00 There were a lot of people in hiding then and it was easy for the Germans to find out where they all were.

19:00 They were starved and half-naked when the Germans found them. They were marched to Stufski St.(ph.) and taken to the Umshlagplatz (ph.) which had been a public school before the war.

20:00 Many people were waiting for the trains, and the Germans made them all sit on the floor. The people were naked and hungry.

21:00 The Germans would pick someone and make them stand in the window. Then they would tell them to jump, and they had to do it or get shot. There were bodies lined up on the street of people who had jumped.

22:00 There weren't enough rail cars for everyone, so they had to wait with no food - she and her mother survived on sugar cubes.

23:00 It was a terrible scene - beatings. 200 people to a rail car.

24:00 Parents and children were screaming for each other. They were finally taken away. The train stopped in Lublin, and when they got out, many people had died.

25:00 They were to Maidaneck (ph.). She and her mother lost their shoes and had to walk barefoot.

26:00 When they got there they were all in a large field. There was a lot of confusion and a soldier grabbed her mother and pushed her away to another group of people. Sophie didn't understand what was happening.

27:00 She thought that she would see her mother later. Sophie was taken to the showers and was searched.

28:00 They were given clothes and then taken to the barracks

29:00 The first few days she noticed tall building with large chimneys that had smoke coming out of them. She didn't know what it was. Awful smell struck her - like burning flesh. At first looked for her mother.

30:00 She soon realized what happened to her mother. The shock was so great that she lost her voice.

31:00 She was a broken person. She had nobody, and was at the mercy of whoever was in charge. She was in four concentration camps - Maidenaick, Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, and Marlhoff (ph.)

32: 00 Maideneck was the worst of all of them. She was swollen all over her body.

33:00 She couldn't make peace with what had happened to her mother. She had been with her but unable to do anything to save her. She felt that maybe they had taken her away because of her violet hair, and she felt responsible.

34:00 Maideneck was so terrible because it was disorganized hell as opposed to the other camps which were organized hell. It was run by German woman soldiers.

35:00 These woman were always drunk and brutal. Sophie tried to hide and not work, but she was always found.

36:00 They wore wooden shoes and had to pick plants that gave them blisters on their hands.

37:00 She was in Maideneck for 4 months with other people from Warsaw. Then 600 women were selected to be transferred and Sophie was one of them.

38:00 They were put on rail cars that had carried coal, and taken to Auschwitz.

39:00 Soldiers and inmates were waiting and when they saw them shouted "The Germans brought people from Africa" because they were black from the coal.

40:00 She was in Auschwitz for 16 months. It was a terrible experience. She went through countless selections but had some hope because people were working as well as being killed.

41:00 Eventually she was the only girl left out of nine that she had shared her bed with. Almost didn't survive because she got so ill with dysentery and typhoid.

42:00 She couldn't tell anyone that she was sick because she would have been taken to the gas chambers. She even went through selections while sick.

43:00 One day Dr.Mengele came and said that they needed inmates for a commando called Canada(ph.) It was a separate camp next to the gas chambers and ovens. In 1944 the transports came day and night.

44:00 They needed people to sort out the clothing and belongings of the incoming people. It was a good commando to work on because it was better organized and they had better conditions.

45:00 She could also take showers in this commando - before she had washed herself in her tin bowl that she ate out of. She could also sleep and was left alone to work.

46:00 Mengele made the selections for the death commando - she thought she wouldn't make it.

47:00 She snuck into the group selected for Canada because she knew she wouldn't make it otherwise.

48:00 The last five months she worked in that commando. They went through mountains of clothing but had no contact with the people who were taken for extermination.

49:00 Evacuation January 1945 - told to march out. Bitter winter, they were lightly clothed, starving. They were taken to Ravensbruck in Germany.

50:00 Gas chambers and ovens not working there anymore because the Germans knew that they would soon be defeated. They tried to hide traces of what they had done. In May 1945 they were taken to Marlhoff(ph.) as the Russian front approached.

51:00 In May 1945, they were freed from the Germans - heard guns and knew that the front was near.

52:00 They hid in a cellar in a German house, and when they saw Russian soldiers they knew they were free. 10 girls stayed close together. First thing on their minds was food.

53:00 There was plenty of food in the German homes, but they got sick from it because they weren't ready for it yet. Made contact with the Russians.

54:00 The high Russian officers were sympathetic, but the rest were animals. The women looked terrible, but they still had to hide from the soldiers so that they wouldn't be raped.

55:00 There was no way for them to get back to Poland - they couldn't walk because of the soldiers. They hid during the day and walked at night. Some were still raped.

56:00 She keeps in touch with some of the women she knew - one she is very close with. They made it to the Polish-German border.

57:00 From there they took trains to different places - she went to Warsaw, still in her uniform. People on the train acted as if nothing had happened.

58:00 Her worst post-war experience was the looks on the faces of the Poles - the disbelief that there were still Jews alive. They had thought that the Jewish question was resolved.

59:00 She had thought that people would be happy that there were survivors - but she realized that the hate of the Poles had started long before the Holocaust.

1:00 She believes that there is no limit to how much a person can suffer. When she came back the same hatred was still there.

2:00 She believes that the hate for the Jews was nurtured in the children. She went back to Warsaw to see if she had any family left. The ghetto was a rubble of stones.

3:00 The Jewish Community organized to help survivors find their families. Her sister in France was still alive in Marseille.

4:00 She slept on ruins in the Ghetto. She heard about and found a small group of survivors in a town outside of Warsaw. She met and married her husband there.

5:00 From there they went to Breslau (ph.) and waited for their visas from her sister in France, then went to France.

6:00 She can't even begin to tell her story in full. For example: when small children and babies cried in the bunkers, they were often smothered by their own mothers so that the rest of the people wouldn't be caught. She hasn't talked about this for 40 years, never even told her sister, children; husband knew in general.

8:00 Relating her experience is like unbarring something more than just suppressed. She hasn't forgotten, but it is hard to bring to the surface. She understands the importance of telling her story.

9:00 She feels relieved that she has finally told her story. This experience has changed her completely.

10:00 It is hard for her to trust people and get close to them. She hopes that her children have a better life than she did.

11:00 She didn't know how to tell her story after 40 years, and she started out by writing some of it down little by little.

12:00 It got easier and easier as she wrote it down, and now she wants her son and daughter to know.

13:00 She has another sister in Israel. She was in Russia during the war. They had a reunion in Warsaw in '46 until Sophia left for France.

14:00 This sister stayed in Poland with her family for a few years after the war - she believed that it would get better, but it never did.

15:00 It was the same people and the same attitudes - her sister went to Israel and now won't go anywhere else in the world. Sophia has been happy in the U.S.

16:00 Sophia was broken but happier in the U.S. than anywhere else. Right now she wouldn't care if she had never heard that Poland existed. She believes that if the Poles had had the same capabilities as the Germans that not one Jew would have survived.

17:00 She is very happy in the U.S. It was hard at first but it is the best place in the world for her. The only peace she could ever find was in the U.S.
.END.