

RG-50.029.0010

Chase, Sally (Silberstein)

Note: This set of time coded notes was timed using the PAL-M setting on the VCR.
Sally Chase was born on November 20, 1928 in Radom, Poland, the youngest of eight children.

0:01:21 Religion—99% Orthodox. Little synagogue (shtibl). Most parents would pray every morning with tefillin. Parents were observant, but not fanatic.

Her father was a professor during World War I. He taught in a Russian gymnasium, which was the equivalent of a US university. After WWI, Poland became independent, but all of his papers were taken away. He could no longer practice his profession. He privately taught many people their professions.

Sally's father spoke seven languages. He knew the Torah by heart. Quoted verbatim Psalms, prayers, and pages from the Torah. A cousin, now 96, said that anyone who was anybody knew your father. He was called the educator of Radom. He was very distinguished looking; he had a Van dyke beard.

0:04:00 I was very proud to walk with him. Everybody always tipped their hats.

Holidays were joyous. We sang Seder songs until two in the morning. On Passover we kept windows open. Everyone in the neighborhood listened. Life was joyous and full of love as well as intellectually inspiring. Sally's family was the only one in apartment who had a radio. She remembered listening to classical music since her earliest years and humming, symphonies, operas, and concertos. Sally read Tolstoy when she was nine years old.

0:06:04 Reading was a major a part of her life. Intellectual life was more important than material things. Music and literature were in the atmosphere. The love of music, gave her a will to live. The family prayed to survive, so they could listen to music

0:07:21 Of the 150,000 people in Radom, 30,000 were Jews. Most of the Jews had little stores or workshops. Everyone thought that Jews had all the money, and all the wealth, but this was not true. This belief fed into the anti-Semitism.

0:08:25 Sally went to a public school. There were only three Jewish girls. She was the best student, but was given a grade lower than the gentile students.

One girl called her a “dirty Jew”. She didn’t understand why because she thought everyone was Jewish. She asked her father what to do. He told her to go back and tell the girl that she shouldn’t say that because Jesus was Jewish. The girl told the teacher who told Sally that if she ever said that again about Jesus being Jewish, she would be punished.

0:10:06 Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939. Sally’s family ran to the cellar during the bombing and didn’t leave their house for eight days. Poland was conquered during those eight days.

0:11:20 For eight days and nights, the Germans came into Radom with tanks. They had such might that all the buildings were shaking. All the radios were confiscated. The family remained in the apartment. Sally could not go to school.

After Radom was invaded, two of her brothers escaped by walking almost to the Russian border. One of the brothers decided to walk home. It took him months, but then he remained with the family.

0:13:51 In 1940, 30,000 Jews were crowded into a small ghetto. Sally’s family was forced out of their apartment. They went into a shack where they stayed until 1942.

Sally’s brothers worked as slave laborer. Businesses were confiscated. The ghetto was still open so people could come in and out as they pleased.

0:15:28 Every few weeks, the Germans had an “action.” They came in at dawn and picked up several hundred people and shot them. The “action” lasted a few hours. The ghetto was now only four blocks, and no one could go out. Each family had one room.

One morning at 5:00AM, the SS knocked on the door and ordered the family out of bed. They were looking for the family next door. Mrs. Finkelstein had two babies. The SS kept asking her where her husband was. She said she did not know. They threatened to kill her and the baby. The mother pleaded to save her baby, but they shot her and the baby on the stairway. It was a nightmare.

Every few weeks, several hundred Jews were taken by trucks to the woods and shot. They knew exactly what was happening.

0:24:57 Sally’s brothers were able to get some food because they worked as slave laborers. The family wasn’t hungry yet.

- 0:25:48** In June of 1942, Sally walked to the Jewish police station because she heard that 25 men and women were needed for work. She volunteered. Work meant survival.
- 0:27:24** Sally worked in Wermacht warehouses. One group transported clothes, blankets, and dishes to supply the army. Another section shipped food; another shipped blankets. Sally lived with 25 to 30 girls in one room with two levels of bunk beds. They worked in shifts from 8 am to 5 pm or 5 pm to 8 am. They were three miles outside Radom.
- 0:29:13** The Germans burned all books, Torahs, and scrolls in the ghetto. Schools were closed. Elderly Jewish men were attacked and beaten. Their beards were torn off. Sally's brother was forced to cut their father's beard.
- 0:30:36** An SS officer had crush on Sally. He asked her to come to his room to polish his boots. She was 14 years old, but she convinced him to leave her alone. Told him that she came from a good family and was taught not to be alone with a man.
- 0:32:19** There were rumors that something was going to happen in the ghetto. The day before exile, Sally got a job for her sister. Sally's mother insisted that Sally's sister go. Food was meager soup. They were hungry, but as long as they worked, they were treated as workers.
- 0:34:06** Sally sorted and kept count of dishes, etc. She considered herself lucky because she was treated better. They started working at 8:00 a.m. but could wear their own clothing.
- 0:36:00** The warehouse was a huge storage area with shelves for supplies for all over Europe. Five girls slept in a bunk. The SS officer in charge ordered Sally to arrange the New Year's party. She refused and tried to escape. When the officer chased after her, she clung to another woman and tried to hide. The officer was so angry, hit the other woman. Sally ran and hid. He also had been told not to have relations with Jewish girls.
- 0:38:55** The next day after work them an SS officer took Sally and her girl friend to a his room and ordered them to clean it up. For ten days, he also ordered them to polish his shoes after work.
- 0:40:20** Supper was soup served in the living quarters. There was no lunch. At the end of day, they talked about politics and what would happen to their families. They had no contact with the outside world and no idea about the concentration camps.

- 0:41:51** September 2, 1942 they were told that families were going to be resettled. Sally got permission to see her parents. She wanted to remain with her parents, but her parents insisted that she go back. On September 2, lights were installed all over ghetto. Everyone knew they were going to be resettled.
- 0:43:30** Even though they were three to four miles away from the train station, they could hear screams and shrieks from the station.
- “Those masters of science and culture masterminded the final solution by building death factories, concentration camps, death mills, and crematoria. They took 28,000 Jews to Treblinka.”
- 0:46:05** In 1942 we knew where they were being taken, because one escapee told them where people were sent. We had almost immediate knowledge.
- 0:47:05** “I lost my parents, oldest brother, his wife and four children. They all went that night. We were hysterical. Only 2,000 out of 30,000 Jews were left. This was typical of every ghetto. All Jews from small towns were killed. Not one survived. Entire populations were sent to Treblinka and killed, including her aunts, uncles, and cousins. Sally could not even count how many relatives were killed.
- 0:49:55** In January of 1943, Germans issued regulations that Jews of the ghetto should register in order to go to Palestine. Her brothers did not register. One of Sally’s sisters escaped and saw two brothers taken to Treblinka. “I could not stop crying, but I just had to go on.”
- 0:53:20** Sally stayed at her job until the end of January. Everyone was sent back to the small ghetto. Daily she was ordered to dig up turf for heating homes. She remained in the ghetto until the middle of October. When the German-Russian pact was broken, Germans were winning. But when the tide turned, Germans were relocated to western Poland.
- 0:55:35** One-hundred thousand Jews were sent to Tarnipol. When Germans began to lose the war, all of the Jews in Tarnipol were shot, including Sally’s youngest brother.
- 0:56:43** In August of 1943. The German army retreated. The Germans were ordered to liquidate the remaining 1,000 Jews. The Jews were taken to open fields, including her brother, his wife, Rachel, and children. Separated into three groups and put in trucks.

- 0:58:36** Sally, her two sisters and a girl friend volunteered to go to Ostrowice because they knew someone there. They traveled for hours. The girls did not know what happened to anyone in Radom. All mothers and children were shot.
- 1:02:30** In June of 1944, Germans started liquidating all places of work as the Russians advanced. Three hundred women traveled in cattle trains to Auschwitz-Birkenau. When they arrived, women told they were going into shower and could only keep their shoes. Then they were put into an empty room. SS women told them what to do. Sally hid jewelry in her sanitary napkin.
- 1:06:30** Sally's girl friend's hair was shaved. She became hysterical, laughing and crying. Sally said she would go the electric barbed wire if they shaved her head. "I know I would have done it." A miracle: out of 300 women, 15 walked out with short haircuts, including Sally and her two sisters. Shaving hair off women's heads was so dehumanizing. The last thing that they took away was pride.
- 1:08:55** They were given used dresses of people who were killed. Then SS women tattooed them. It was very painful, because they used a ballpoint pen to puncture the skin. Later Sally had tattoo removed in Israel. Had some regrets because now she lectures in schools and in other places on the Holocaust. I show the scar but not the numbers."
- 1:11:30** All pictures were taken away by SS. "What I would have given to have those pictures." Sally wished she had put pictures in under soles of shoes. Women were put into a room that looked like a gas chamber, but they were given showers. Given cotton dresses "I still remember the print", but no underwear, bras, or stockings. Assigned to barrack with 1500 women. There were three levels of bunk beds, with 15 girls on each level.
- 1:13:36** Food was soup with potato peels, water, and one piece of bread. Called outside by numbers. If one person was missing, they would stand there for hours until person was found. Those days they did no work at all.
- 1:15:25** They were locked up in barracks (Blocksperr) and could not go to communal bathrooms. If caught they would be shot. By this time, it didn't matter if they were killed.
- 1:16:43** The day after they arrived in Auschwitz, a transport from Radom arrived including Sally's little niece, Rachel, and two sisters-in-law. One aunt and Rachel were killed. Children were randomly selected to go to a "Kinderheim" (children's house) where they were well taken care of

in the event that an inspection from the Red Cross were to come. Children were rotated in and out of the Kinderheim quite frequently.

- 1:19:19** The other sister-in-law had scarlet fever and went to infirmary. Dr. Mengel made the decisions even in infirmary. Sister-in-law remembers Dr. Mengel playing with a little girl, talking with her, giving her candy, and then sending her to crematorium. The sister-in-law came out of infirmary.
- Everyday there was a selection. Some were chosen for experiments, including twins. Everyday the skies were red from the crematoria, and every one could smell burning bodies for days.
- 1:22:48** At the end of December, they were told that they would go to work. They were taken in a cattle train to Gebhardsdorf (sub-camp of Gross-Rosen) of Sudetenland to work in an airplane parts factory. Sally became a welder. She worked from 8 to 5. "I became a wonderful welder and taught others."
- 1:25:30** A young Polish guy, hated Jews, but made over soles and heels on her shoes in secret and also gave her pieces of bread. "Why?"
- 1:26:42** In January of 1945, the girls could hear shooting. Ordered to walk in freezing cold and snow for three days and nights. Anyone who stopped was shot. They were given no food. They walked to another factory.
- 1:27:58** They were guarded by the SS. Lived in one little room with 35 people and kept hearing the shooting. The SS did not know what to do with us. Sally's sister and friend snuck out of camp at 4 a.m. They found private shack and sat inside not making a sound. At 8 a.m. three SS men opened the door, and took us back to the camp and said "don't you ever do that again."
- 1:32:08** Before long all the guards were gone and the Russians came in. They could not believe that they were alive. All they wanted was a loaf of bread. They were liberated but completely displaced. Sally and her sisters decided to go back to Radom. The transportation was free. They congregated in one section and heard that Poles killed some Jews. She and two sisters survived. Could not find any members of family.
- 1:34:52** They left Radom and went to Czechoslovakia, which was occupied by Russians. They volunteered as nurses' aides and were paid. They could not take it in Radom so they went to Prague. Where they bumped into someone from Radom who had lived across the street, from then. He said their brother was alive and working for the American forces in Dachau. The girls learned to speak Czech in three months. They went to Dachau to meet their brother.

- 1:37:57** Sally was reunited with her only surviving brother, Jack, in Dachau. He has since passed away. Sister Helen had two daughters; she passed away ten years ago. Other sister went to Israel, has two sons and a daughter.
- 1:39:06** Sally visited sister in Israel in 1953. Three sisters and one brother survived, they were very fortunate.
- 1:39:50** In 1957, everyone came to the United States. Niece is an outstanding doctor in reproductive endocrinology, one of only 100 board certified doctors in the world. One nephew makes documentaries.
- 1:41:30** Sally arrived in the United States January 13, 1947. Because she was under 18, she qualified for HIAS transport. She sailed on US Ernie Pyle. It was a very rough 13 day trip.
- 1:43:22** Sally's older sister, who had married a survivor, was already in the United States. Sally lived with her in Brooklyn. She found a job in a housedress factory as a floor girl. She cleaned 25 machines everyday. She could not speak word of English, so she registered in high school in Brooklyn. Everyday she learned 50 words. After three months, she could understand English.
- 1:47:27** She met a wonderful woman who was a CPA and a night high school teacher. She was one of 130 women who had a CPA. She advised Sally about what courses to take. Sally finished four years of high school in one and a half years.
- 1:48:39** Sally registered in Brooklyn College where she took accounting courses, and she got a job as a file clerk in an insurance agency, making \$32.00 a week. But she was bored, and after taking a test she was given a new responsibility doing "experience rating" at \$45.00 a week. She also took 64 credits and graduated after nine and a half years.
- 1:51:10** "I am very fortunate. I survived out of 6 million. I have two wonderful children. I am proud to be here." Thanks to her daughter Francine who spoke to her teacher about her mother, she talked to the daughter's class and told them her story. This was still the time when no one was talking about his or her Holocaust experiences.
- "I am very thankful to my daughter." Now these murderers are trying to erase the memory of the Holocaust, so whenever I am asked to speak, I never say no so that all of the suffering will not have been in vain.