

Sidney Simon

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Abstract

Sidney Simon (né Moishe Schmeel Shimonovicz), born May 22, 1925 in the small Transylvania village of Sapinka (Săpînța), Romania, describes his mother and his father (his name was Natan Natan). After he arrived in America, he changed his name to Sidney Simon. He had two brothers and four sisters. Sidney attended public school for one/half day and one/half day attended Hebrew School. When the Hungarians took over their village, the family moved to Satu Mare but there were no jobs there either so returned to Sapinka. His father was a cow and horse trader. His village became Hungarian during the war and was returned to Romania afterwards. He believes that the Hungarians turned over their Jews to the Nazis whereas the Romanians did not. Sidney saw people leaving in boxcars but did not understand what it meant. One day the family had to walk 10 kilometers to a ghetto where they remained one month. A Christian friend offered him his ID so that Sidney could hide like some friends but his father needed his help with the children. Sidney's mother had died two years earlier. Summer '44 the family was deported to Auschwitz where he was selected with his three younger sisters to go right. His father, brother and older sister went left to the gas chamber. After two weeks at Birkenau he was selected for work camp at Breslau which was reached by train. After nine months the Germans took Sidney and 500 prisoners for a march and along the way they had a choice to stay. Luckily, Sidney's brother-in-law did not permit him to remain as all those that stayed were shot. Then they were sent to Bergen-Belsen where they were liberated. He registered as Romanian and no one picked him up until he registered as Czech. He was taken to the Hungary/Czech border where he boarded a train for Budapest. There they registered at the Jewish Federation office and were placed in an empty school where he had a reunion with his uncle and sisters. Sidney married a fellow survivor from Czechoslovakia and they went to Prague to be with his aunt and uncle. When everyone left to escape the Communists, the couple along with their young daughter, Marjorie, ran to Paris. They were told it would take 10 to 15 years to get to the US so went to the UN committee in Germany who facilitated their immigration December 1949 to the US. Sidney has three daughters, grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Sidney started questioning whether there is a God when he was eight and completely lost his belief when he arrived at Auschwitz and saw the Nazis dragging his Rabbi. Nevertheless, he continues to help Jewish synagogues and causes.

Summary

00:00 Sidney Simon was born May 22, 1925 in a small Transylvania village of Sapinka, Romania as Moishe Schimel Shimonovicz (?). It was part of the Austro-Hungary Empire prior to '49 when Hungary lost the war. The Hungarians had joined up with Hitler who was an ally. During the war, the village became Hungarian for two years before he was

deported to Auschwitz. The Hungarians deported all the Jewish people to Auschwitz. Six million Jews were lost. The Romanians were also allies of Hitler but refused to do the same as regarded the Jews as their own citizens. They would form a camp but would not deport the Jews from Romania. Sidney's friends who hid survived. After the war, Romania got their share. Czechoslovakia went to Russia. After the war, his village became Romanian once again. His mother was lucky as she died two years before the deportation so his children and grandchildren can visit the grave. The cemetery is the only thing left in his village.

- 05:00 There was one school from the first to the fifth grade. The rich kids were sent to good schools in the big city. There were about a half dozen such children and they went to college. He had two brothers and four sisters. He was the fourth child, the first boy. There was Pero who was 15, Auchler, 2, Alter, Rose, Molly and Sophie who was 24, married and expecting and did not survive. Three sisters survived. He was the favorite child as he was born after the three girls. He went one/half day to public school and one/half day to Hebrew School. He only had off on Friday afternoon. He was at school from 6 AM to 9 PM. He was off Saturday and one/half day Sunday. His mother, Sophie, was smart. Her maiden name was Shimonovicz (?) which he took. His father's name was Natan Natan.
- 10:00 His mother wanted to move to the big city of Satu Mare as there were no jobs in the village. When the Hungarians took over the village, they took away the work permits from the stores. The long street in Sapinka went through the big city to another where Jews lived. Christians farmed the land on the side streets and worked the fields. The Jews were business oriented and had three synagogues. He learned a lot about the Jewish religion. There were about 100 Jewish families. His parents were born there. His grandparents and great-grandparents lived there. He knew one grandfather on his mother's side. The grandfather on his father's side passed away before he was born. His grandmother moved in with him. Her three sons lived in the US and sent them money. His mother had three brothers, two lived in Romania and were married. One has children in Cleveland. She had two sisters. They were not close to the father's family.
- 15:00 There were three families in the village who were substantial. His father married into a better family. He provided cows and horses for the farmers and some he sold to someone who smuggled them into Teesta (?), Czechoslovakia. He was a trader and was 32 when he was killed. All the boys attended Hebrew School where they learned to read the Bible and learned the history of the Jews. Sidney learned to read and write Hebrew. He could do the morning service by heart. He studied the Gomorrah where one set of Rabbis argued with another.
- 20:00 He was eight years old and read about being given an egg on a holiday and the Rabbis questioned whether to eat it or not. From noon to 5, he attended the Romanian public

school and Hebrew School from 6 AM to lunchtime. The family spoke Yiddish at home. When the Hungarians took over, the family spoke Hungarian. He questioned the Rabbi who could not answer him. Sidney concluded that he should become an Atheist. He believe there is no God because of what happened to the Jews and what is still happening. He lived his life and believed in God. The Rabbi had a line to God so if you could not get pregnant, you would ask his advice. The Nazis put the Rabbi on the ground and dragged him and he died a half hour later so Sidney concluded that there is no God.

25:00 He stopped going to Temple. He feels Jewish and likes all people. He has lots of Christian friends. He feels he is a good person and does not need to go to Synagogue to ask forgiveness. Sidney believes that being good is being religious. He thought the Hungarians worse than the Germans. The Hungarians told the Germans to take their Jews. There was an uprising in '56 and his wife lost her father. He feels they should not have to fight the Russians. He used to belong to the Men's Club which met at different cities with a guest speaker. He asked their Rabbi if there was a God and the Rabbi replied that God created the world and turned it over to the people to run it.

30:00 People are killing people. If God is around, he should help the people. Sidney started this questioning at age eight. Everyone knew everyone in Sepinka. At age 15, they moved to Satu Mare which was 80 kilometers away. His mother wanted to move. They sold their house and bought a new one. It was a larger town with educated people and good schooling. Eli Wiesel came from a town like that. His mother thought the children could get jobs but the Hungarians did not let them get permits so they returned. Sidney made a living there. They used a horse and buggy instead of a taxi. His father bought one when they moved. There was a day driver and a night driver. The drivers decided how much of the money they got paid to give his mother. They were stealing. He was 15 and wanted to be the night driver. Sidney was tall at 15 and had to learn the streets and how to speak Hungarian. He walked the town for two weeks and took the test for a permit and passed and became the night driver.

35:00 In the morning he gave the money to his mother, attended evening services and went to bed. Two Romanian officers asked to go to Dulia (?) and he did not know it meant a hooker. He asked an 18-year-old and learned where they are. The next day, he knocked on their door and asked if he brought a customer, could he get a cut. Now his 15-year-old grandson calls him a pimp. His mother knew what he did. Sidney's wife said they were doing well and he should go to the Korean War but was not accepted as he had over two children. They became citizens at the 3-story courthouse with an 18 foot Statue of Liberty. Sam Melca (?) signed his first paycheck. His children and grandchildren attended the ceremony. His story was written up in the newspaper. He has three daughters.

- 40:00 One is a lawyer and the other has an MA. They attended the best schools. He feels lucky that he was born with a good brain. The family moved back to their village after two years as it was cheaper to live there. His oldest sister got married. They took care of the grandmother. One brother bought a store. The village was part of Hungary when they returned. Before World War I, it was Austro-Hungary but Hungary lost the war and part of Romania and part became Czechoslovakia. Hungary was good with the Nazis during World War II so it was not occupied. Sidney worked in the forest with another boy. His mother died two years before they were deported. She had pain and the doctor said to use hot pads and go to the hospital.
- 45:00 It was an appendix infection and burst and she died a week later. She was about 50 years old and his father about 52. Sidney took care of his sisters when they came home from the concentration camp and paid for their weddings. One was a teenager and was sent to Switzerland where she met a German/Jew and migrated to Maryland and they got married. The other sister lives here. Sidney was in business and gave the husband a job and bought them a two-family home. The husband wanted a divorce and wanted half and Sidney would not give him a get.
- 50:00 Half the assets were \$15,000 and the Rabbi said Sidney should sign the get if he gets \$15,000. She remarried and the husband died. When they came to the US, Sidney took his mother's name. When he asked his uncle for money, he found out that he was not rich as he had thought. The uncle said he would help him if he takes his mother's name. Two of the uncle's sons worked for his business. He never wore a yellow star as it was only for laborers. The family rented a home in Sapinka.
- 55:00 His two young brothers and one sister lived there. His sister, Molly, was two years older than him and did the cooking. She now lives in Cleveland. They lived there until they were deported. He cut trees in the woods. He took jobs that no one wanted. Sidney saw people leaving in trains. There were no newspapers or radio so did not know what was going on. The religious people said that God was with them and nothing would happen. They set up a ghetto 10 kilometers away. They each took a suitcase and waited there for the train to Auschwitz. A Christian friend offered him his ID but his father wanted Sidney to go with them to help with the children.
- 60:00 He could have hidden on a farm as had long hair like the Christians. Some friends hid in Budapest with Christian papers. The Gentiles cried as the family left. They walked 10 kilometers and were placed in houses. The young girls slept in the attic to prevent the Hungarians from taking them. They were deported summer '44, the last ones to go. They met some Poles who had been in a concentration camp and had escaped so they knew of their existence. Sidney was in Breslau for nine months. The Hungarian police or gendarmes took them two towns away. They emptied two streets so the locals left and they entered. The family stayed one month and then placed in box cars. They were

placed together on the train. They had no idea of Auschwitz. Upon arrival, they heard, "Arous" (get out) and Dr. Mengele divided them as to who should live and who should die. He was 18 and those younger than him were placed to the left. He went right as he was allowed to live to work. Sidney did not know the meaning of right and left at the time. His father went to the left. An ambulance at selection was to fool them.

65:00 His brother went with his father. Sidney could have gone with them. His brother was 15. His father told him to take off his jacket to make him look younger so he would not have to work. All the girls went to the right except his 24-year-old sister went to the left. Her husband went with Sidney and saved him. They knew the war was ending as they were close to Poland. On a Friday, the chief Nazi told them to go to sleep with their clothes on. They awoke at 1 AM and lined up to leave as the Russians were attacking close by as they could hear the cannons. There were 1100 prisoners and the Germans would take half of them. The half that remained got liberated the next day by the Russians. Sidney's group left and he pushed the Nazi's baggage. At night they were put in horse stalls on farms and some prisoners died. In the morning they got a bowl and black coffee.

70:00 There were about 500 of them and they went through the forest and the Nazi gendarmes asked who would like to stay in the village. Sidney chose to stay and his brother-in-law took him by the hand to leave. The Nazis shot all those who stayed and their bodies were left in the woods. Others died along the road. They were mostly 40 or older. His friend's father died in his hands while the son walked in front and did not help his father. They were placed in box cars to Bergen-Belsen. They had been in Birkenau about two weeks. They were looking for skilled laborers such as plumbers or farmers. Sidney said he was a farmer and was sent on a train to Breslau, Germany. The Nazi in charge gave him a clean shirt and a bunk bed. He offered bread to whoever finds mice.

75:00 It was a good camp and problems started after they left the camp and walked. He did not know what was happening to Jews in other places. He met two young Jews who ran away from a concentration camp in occupied Poland because the Jews were getting killed there. He could not believe it. They were so religious that it could not happen to them. He saw box cars but did not know what it meant. He would have saved his two brothers by hiding them somewhere. A friend hid with a Christian family in Czechoslovakia and survived. Sidney arrived in Auschwitz and saw the 5-story chimney with smoke coming out but did not know what it was. People would have jumped the Germans and killed them if they knew. The bodies were burning and smoke came out. They were told to undress and take a shower. Sidney found out about his father, brothers and sister when he was liberated. He was in Breslau, a concentration camp. His brother-in-law, Alter Chaim Deutch saved him and became a survivor and moved to Israel. Sidney visited him there. In Auschwitz they were almost on top of each other. In the morning, they got a bowl of soup shared by six or seven people. They did not work, just waited. After two weeks, a request was made for plumbers, electricians and carpenters. The seven or eight

from his home town were farmers. It was summer '44 when he was in Auschwitz. They did not get a number on their arm, just a dog tag he gave to his sister. They slept on the floor and waited for the train to take them to Germany to work.

- 85:00 In Breslau they had clean bunks and the German gave them bread if they caught mice. After Sidney was liberated, he spoke to guys from different camps and his was the best. His friend was 40 kilometers from his camp and, by mistake, the Russians bombed it as thought it had German soldiers and the friend's brother got killed. Sidney was in the camp for 11 months. He got up in the morning and went to the yard where religious services were held which they remembered by heart. His work consisted of making an airplane from plywood. German families requested help with their gardens and about 10 to 12 prisoners went there with a guard. His guard was nice. He told the guard to get potatoes to cook and eat after Yom Kippur and each prisoner got one after fasting. The guard was Wehrmacht.
- 90:00 Half the camp died on the road and those who remained got liberated. The SS ran the camp. They found an old horse and the prisoners were told they could eat it for Christmas. One prisoner was a butcher and killed it and they cut it up and had a good dinner. It took the friend 10 years to get his brother's body to the US. Breslau was in Poland. It was annexed to Germany during the war and after the war, it returned to Poland. The prisoners were put on a train to Bergen-Belsen which was a huge camp for prisoners from many camps. The bread was poisoned on a Saturday that was to be given to the 60,000 prisoners the next day. The next morning the Germans had gone leaving the Hungarian soldiers. At one o'clock British tanks arrived and the Hungarians were told to guard the prisoners. Some of the prisoners were not Jewish. Some of the prisoners escaped through sewers into the town to get food but died as they were not used to it. The British gave them a little food at a time for a month as their stomachs had to get adjusted. They immediately set up hospitals to save as many people as possible.
- 95:00 After a month, they were placed in houses and found a place where survivors are taken home. They registered as Romanian and no one came for them as Romania did not kill any Jews. There were nine of them and he was the youngest. He decided they should register as Czech as noticed they picked up the Czech. Sidney, his friend and his cousin registered as Czech and the British took them in a truck to the Hungary/Czech border. They slept on the floor while waiting for the train. A girl requested help to get on the train as her sister had lost a leg. They agreed to help and three days later they were taken to Budapest. There they registered at the Jewish Federation office and were placed in an empty school. Soon his uncle arrived as he had gone daily to the Federation office and learned where he was. His uncle told him that his sisters and the uncle's sister are alive. The uncle lost his wife and child. The sisters arrived a week later and one went to Switzerland.

100:00 Sidney became the parents of his two remaining sisters. Once he visited Sapinka (?) but no one was there. His uncle married someone related to his first wife who had a granddaughter who Sidney married. They got married in Satu Mare. His wife was Czech and her parents and younger sister had died so the aunt was taking care of her. After liberation, Sidney learned what happened. He with two guys stole bikes. Sidney's oldest sister had been killed and Rose, the next eldest, did not get married. Molly got married and the youngest went to Switzerland. They lived a couple of years in Satu Mare. His aunt and uncle planned to go to the US. Sidney and his wife went to Prague to be with them.

105:00 His daughter, Marjorie, was born there. Everyone was leaving so they would not get caught with the Communists. They had a furnished apartment but decided to leave. He had friends in Paris so went there and registered to come to the US. It would take 10 to 15 years. He learned that in Peking, Germany in the American zone, there was a UN office for displaced persons. They went there and registered. He had three uncles and an aunt in the US so requested to go there and in three months, in December 1949 they went to the US. They were met by his mother's three brothers and sister. They were all sick on the boat as it was a stormy December. They arrived in Boston and took the train. His Uncle Al had worked in a chicken store for one and one-half years. On the train, his uncle suggested he change his name to Sidney as his son's name was Sidney and both were named after the same grandfather.

110:00 He also changed his last name from Natan to Simon. They rented an apartment for \$150 and only had \$100 left. He still owns the apartment. Sidney said he worked hard and took risks, built a lot and helped others. He stopped believing in God when he saw two Nazis in Auschwitz attack their Rabbi who was thought to be one with God. He was dragged from the box car onto the ground and felt this was wrong. As he lay in his camp bunkbed, he looked through the iron fence and saw a dog walking on the street but a Jew cannot. He felt that something was not right. Why would six million get killed? He was a synagogue goer. His children attended Hebrew School and learned a lot. How could God allow people be killed? At synagogue he asked forgiveness for sins that he did not commit. He stopped fasting.

115:00 His children agree with his beliefs. They are good children. The middle daughter belongs to a Temple in Sidonia, Arizona where she attends on Friday nights. He is proud of her. He helped build the Cleveland Synagogue by raising money and donating. There are many people who need to attend to get rid of their sins. He thinks the Federation is great and does what is needed to be done. He opened an endowment fund with over \$1 million at the Jewish Federation of Cleveland to train teachers to teach the Holocaust. "Facing History" is the name of the organization. He wants children in the US to get along with each other regardless of color and religion. They should not kill each other.

120:00 The teachers should teach the Holocaust as the survivors are dying. Mistakes were made by both Jews and Christians. They should live together. One group is not better than the other. Some have the mother's brain or the father's brain and they share it with society. He had black laborers work for him. On a cold day in Cleveland he saw a black man walking and hired him. His family lived in the South. He was the best laborer and grew with Sidney. He needed \$600 down payment for a house to bring his family so Sidney gave him the money and he brought up the family. Sidney's aunt was in the hospital and the nurse told her that her father worked for Sidney; that he lent him money and he remained while others returned to the South. Sidney feels lucky that he was born with a brain and a willingness to work. His wife got sick with throat cancer and passed away. He has three daughters, beautiful grandchildren and four great grandchildren, one boy and three girls. He is retired.

125:00 The grandchildren have a home. Monica lives with him and takes care of him. He gave her 10 lessons for long ball and five for short ball. His children like Monica and she likes them. The Hungarians were worse than the Nazis. The Romanians did not allow the Jews to be killed. The Hungarians should have been the same.

127:00