USHMM

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CTR.
0000 (The video is of a lecture she is giving to a class.) She asks how could the victimizers get away with victimizing when so many onlookers were around? We need to find out how much the onlookers knew, how much they pretended not to know, what were the penalties for not acting, and what happened to those who did ac~ to help?

0170 She has recently received a letter from a relative, saying that there is a movement of sorts in Europe to deny that the Holocaust had ever happened. She feels that this is even more prevalent in America. She thinks it is related to the fact that most of the survivors have died by this time. She wonders why the revisionists don't wait ten more years, when all of them are gone, so no one could stand up and prove the revisionists wrong. She points out that these revisionists put survivors on the defensive; they have to defend the fact that the Holocaust ever happened.

0375 She relates a story from a book by Alexander Dornot, Holocaust Kinqdom. Isaac Schiffer, a Jewish historian in the Warsaw Ghetto with Dornot, remarked that if anyone were able to survive the Ghetto, they would be forced to explain that it had ever happened.

0440 She was liberated by the British from Bergen-Belsen. Shortly afterward, she had a discussion with a British officer, who asked her why she was in the camp. She answered that it was because she was Jewish. He said he understood that, but what had she done. She feels there was a propaganda campaign that convinced the world that the Jews had done something that justified putting them into camps. This campaign led people to believe that people weren't put in just for being Jewish. It also led to people like herself to wonder if they had indeed done something wrong.

0571 She comes from Western Poland, from Radom. Her town was overrun a week after the initial German invasion of Poland. The gradualness of the takeover of Eastern Europe by the Germans, and the gradual way in which repressive measures were added on, made the victimization seem much more normal to the Jews. The Germans also had help from history. The Eastern European Jews had a long history of repression and harassment. Her parents wanted to protect her and her brother from it, so they went to Jewish day school. Later, her brother went to a private high school.

0860 There were only three Jewish boys in the whole school. One day, during training in the ROTC equivalent they had there, one of the non-Jewish boys wrote "you dirty Jew" on the back of her brother's belt. The next day, her brother beat the boy up, running the risk of being beaten up by a gang in retaliation. The Jews of Poland were used to this kind of harassment. They didn't worry or fret about it because it was normal; they expected it.

0975 The Germans played on this, and instituted even more radical

measures. The first laws were harassment. One law forbid them to walk on the sidewalk, because they were Untermenschen. The Jews received smaller rations than the rest of the Poles. This lead to serious hardship. The Jewish people's philosophy throughout this was that they had to tolerate it -- it was a war, and things would be tough. They were used to such treatment. In World War I, it had been the Russians who persecuted them, and the Germans who had protected them. Her parents were convinced that the Germans couldn't be all that bad. They thought it was the young Nazis who were bad, but the older Germans were still good people, who were being forced to do what they were told. This attitude of complacency and acceptance became the Jews undoing.

1140 There was no recent historical precedent that something so bad was going to happen to the Jews. They were prepared for hunger, for disease, for harassment. They weren't ready for mass murder.

1190 Q: Were the camps running at this time?

A: Already there was Dachau, Buchenwald and other German camps set up for German political prisoners. But she was in Poland. The Polish felt that as a conquered country, they had their rights under the Geneva Conventions. Auschwitz was set up in 1940 in secrecy, originally for hostages. It didn~t become a big camp until 1942. Her father was arrested in mid-1942 and went to Auschwitz. In February, 1942, Jewish leaders from her area were arrested and went to Auschwitz. Telegrams started arriving that they had died in Auschwitz. Her father was arrested with several hundred others, and a few weeks later, telegrams started arriving again. But Auschwitz didn't become a death camp until 1943.

1370 Up until Spring to Summer of 1942, when the mass deportations to the death camps that were open at that time began, the screws of oppression were gradually tightened on the Jews.

1410 Question from the audience about the solidarity of the Jews.

A: She refers to the history of the Germans Jews when the Nazis came into power. The German Jewish population was small and very divided. She feels that their attitude was everyone for himself. Half of the 500,000 to 600,000 German Jews probably emigrated. The Polish Jews were politically divided very few times, and tended to unite when a decision was made. The Polish Jews didn't have the option to emigrate. In the 1930's, there was no war, no warning to try to leave. After the invasion, they were surrounded by the front. The only choice in the beginning was to go to the USSR or to Eastern Poland. When Eastern Poland was overrun in 1941,

1645 most of those who had run there were caught by the Germans. A few had gone deep into Russia or had been shipped by the Russians to Siberia. There they had a very tough life, but they were able

to survive. Otherwise, the Polish Jews were trapped. Some individuals were able to individually escape via Switzerland and

other countries. But there were three million Poles, 1.5 million of which were living in poverty, and the rest were not well off. They didn't have the resources to plan or execute a plan to escape. Switzerland was turning away many of those who made it that far. The gradual process of increased repression culminated in ghettoization, which was completed in Western Poland by Spring 1941. The ghettos meant extreme crowding, and horrible sanitary conditions. It was an unacceptable situation, except the Jews had been acclimated by the previous year and a half, and by their whole history. She feels that if you were to interview both Jews and non-Jews in a similar situation, you would find an above average level of optimism. Without optimism, they wouldn't have been able to make it. Those who simply gave up died. It took physical exertion to live from day to day. There is the question of resistance: many believe the Jews didn~t fight their fates. Was this true7 She uses Poland as an example, because the largest number of Jews exterminated were Polish Jews. Could the Jews have stopped it? The gradual process had destroyed them economically. It was brutal, but they became used to it. They didn't have jobs anymore. The men couldn~t feed their families. The rationing was strict. This had begun in 1939, when the Nazis took over.

2073 On a Friday in 1939, the Germans invaded. On Wednesday, the people had to register. The Jews got their ID cards with the word "Jew" stamped across them, and got their ration cards. Everything that belonged to the Jews was expropriated, all of their businesses taken over. There were some exceptions. Radom was an industrial area. One of the industries was a tannery, owned and run by Jews. The Germans couldn't run it alone; they needed the Jews to run it. But the Jews were forced labor. In addition to having no jobs, Jews would be taken hostage, and the Jewish community would have to ransom them. This took any money that they did have to buy extra food on the black market. The Germans also took all their valuables, and were plundering their houses.

Q: Was the German condition of the Jews intentional?

A: She can't help but think so. They hadn't decided at first to use the gas chambers. The ghettos were supposed to be the end of the Jews through disease, starvation and suicide. It wasn't until the January 1941 Bunzei Conference that the gas chambers were decided upon.

2273 It may have been part of a plan. Even before the war, there were experiments using gas on German mentally ill people. In late 1941, einstatzkommandos were employed in Eastern Europe for mass firing squad style executions. The Bunzei Conference was an outcome of the fact that the people in the ghettos were dying fast enough. She's never seen writing on how the Jews survived in the ghettos. Some would risk their lives to smuggle in food. But more important was the need to create a sense of normalcy in order for

the people to live. She was still in school when the war broke out. In the ghetto, she and other students would meet with teachers to continue their studies. She studied English, even

though this was punishable by death. She also studied Hebrew. those who pretended there was a future were able to have hope, to go on. In the Warsaw ghetto, musicians would play music on the street. She even attended trade classes, and learned to sew. The Jews didn't just lay down and die. They survived because they wanted to.

2543 They defied everything done to them. They defied everything done to minimize their survival.

Q: Where you aware of the Final Solution?

A: The ghettos were filled by April 1941. The mass deportations didn't start until 1942. No one expected a civilized country to indulge in mass murder. They didn~t really know. They were isolated. They did hear rumor from the Jewish underground. Alexander Dornot came to the Radom Ghetto when the Warsaw Ghetto inhabitants were transferred there after the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. At that point, there were only 2000 of the original 30,000 people left in the Radom Ghetto -- the rest had been deported. It was from these new prisoners that Radom heard about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Otherwise, there was no communication, no access to those in other ghettos. She characterizes Jewish resistance as valid form of resistance, even though it wasn't armed resistance. Their resistance was that of continuing to desire to live and to defy what was being done to them. This defiance intensified as the Jews went into Bergen-Belsen and other camps. In such places as those camps, it became a fallacy to hope that someday you would get out.

2913 Q: When did the reality strike you that there was no hope?

A: The rumors were always positive, to help the people try to survive. There was no information about the political situation. Those who did forced labor for the Germans were occasionally able to read the headlines of a newspaper. The Jews would always read the news as being good for the Jews. She specifically cites hearing of Italy's withdrawal from the Axis. They lived from good news to good news, creating the good news. She can't remember ever thinking she would die, but she does remember consciously preventing herself from hoping she might live. There were certain milestones.

3043 In July 1944, Radom was suddenly evacuated. This was the worse thing that could happen. Any march was a death march. They had no food, they were already physically debilitated. They could have been easily killed by a few machine guns. They were on the death march for three days. Many were killed. But Radom was being evacuated because the Germans were running from the Russians. They heard rumors of Nazi officers running from the battles in bare

feet. This gave the Jews hope. Her mother would say, "We will survive.' She didn't mean that the two of them necessarily would make it, but the Jews would outlive the Nazis' attempts to kill them all. They were kept in a prison for a week after the march,

then loaded into trains and taken to Auschwitz. Those who didn't get sent directly to the gas chambers had a second chance. She was in Auschwitz for six months. And then they left Auschwitz, an inconceivable thing. She doesn't know why she, nor her mother, were not sent to the gas chambers. She refers to an Elie Wiesel story, in which a prisoner asks a German guard about the randomness of the choosing who will live and who will die. The guard says it is because they know they will get them all in the end, so what does it matter. Wiesel's story was meant to emphasize the inhumanity of the situation -- if we don't get you today, we'll get you tomorrow. The prisoners were not people, but objects. For some, this inhuman randomness was enough to cause them to give up hope. But not for others. Her mother was once let go during a deportation round-up in Radom Ghetto. Her brother thanked the Nazi who let her go. The Nazi said not to thank him -- when he had control of so many lives, what does one mean to him, he said. She sees this as the greatest tragedy of the victimizer. The Germans became such routine killers, that it meant nothing to them. She doesn't know how they taught the Germans to be killers. She wonders if they didn't just give them a lot of alcohol.

3300 Q: In a different situation, could the Jews have been the guards, and the Germans the prisoners:

A: She'd like to think not. She thinks there is no precedent for this. She cites proof. She was liberated from Bergen-Belsen on April 14, 1945; many camps were liberated earlier. The war ended on May 8, 1945. In the time between their liberations and the end of the war, the prisoners could have done whatever they liked to their former guards and the German people, and the Russians and the British would have looked the other way. The Jews did nothing -- they took no acts of revenge.

Q: How did the Germans know who was Jewish and who wasn't?

A: They made very sure they'd know. After the invasion, everybody in Poland had to register. They bad to bring a birth certificate to prove their identity. Then, and today, all birth certificates in Europe, and all birth certificates in the United States until the 1950's, listed religion. If the person didn't provide a birth certificate, they received no ration card. Because they knew the religion from the birth certificates, they could give the Jews ID cards that were a different color and stamped "Jew." This continued until December 1939, when all Jews had to begin wearing an identifying arm band or patch. They could take it off, but if they were caught, it was punishable by death. Some survived by getting fake papers, but this required the help of a non-Jew.

3503 At Yad Vashem, there is a grove a trees dedicated to non-Jews

who helped Jews survive. There is a plaque on each tree. There are some Polish names, but considering the number of Jews in Poland, there are very few. Many Poles did help the Jews, in exchange for money, which she can't condemn. But many more Poles collaborated with the Germans. This was also true in France, in

Holland, everywhere else. The notable exception is Denmark. But everywhere there were collaborators. In many places, the local people would join the auxiliary of the SS. There were no Polish guards in any of the camps, but the Polish police did help in the roundups.

TAPE 2
2715 This was probably because the Germans had problems with the Poles. The Poles never had a collaborating government. But the Poles, individually and collectively, could be counted upon more than any others to point out Jews to the Germans.

0120 In the camp, all prisoners were in the same boat. There was more anger from the Poles and the Ukrainians. She did make friends with a couple of non-Jewish Poles, but in general, the Poles hated the Jews. They did help the Jews sometimes, but there were times they could have helped more, particularly with armed uprisings, like the one in the Warsaw Ghetto. There was also an ultra-nationalist Polish resistance that would kill any Jews that fell into its hands.

0255 Q: How did you explain all this to your children?

A: She never sat them down and gave them a lecture, but she would bring it up whenever it was appropriate. When they were young, she didn't tell them about the atrocities, but she would bring up family -- she would describe those family relations that had died in the Holocaust. As they got older, they heard about the atrocities. Her daughter first heard about them in the 10th Grade. She thinks her children, as Americans, feel very removed from the Holocaust. They understand it theoretically, not as an actual event. They don't associate it with her. Her daughter went with her when she went to visit Poland. They went to was the Warsaw Ghetto, to the Jewish cemetery, to other Jewish buildings. Then for one day, they went to Radom. She showed her daughter around, and was very upset. Suddenly her daughter told her that she wasn't the person she was describing. Then they went to Auschwitz, and her daughter made the same comment. She realized her daughter was right -- she's detached herself from the experience, and so has her children. She's had to do it so that she can use the experience positively to sensitize other people to it. She's not the same, physically pitiful person who left Bergen-Belsen.

0655 Q: Do you ever have nightmares?

A: Not now, but she did right after she was liberated. Her life was ambivalent at that point. She didn't know if she could pick up the pieces. After the liberation, there was a feeling of

euphoria. No one thought about the possibility of the Germans gaining the upper hand.

Question about the Jewish collaborators.

A: There were no real Jewish collaborators. There were some who worked as functionaries in the camp. They didn't do the dirty work of the Germans, so they were never tried as war criminals. There was a sort of social tribunal to decide what to do with them. There was a social attitude of ostracism. In Israel, she thinks that was a collective court ruling that was less than completely damning. She thinks of the woman who was in charge of their barrack who ladled out the soup. She would never mix it up, so that they could get some of the rutabagas or whatever was on the bottom. She was very angry, and even yelled at the woman one time, which was not very smart. She decided she would completely ostracize this woman when she was liberated. But now she thinks how glad she is that she was never offered that job. She doesn't know if she could have resisted it -- the chance to get extra food, to give extra food to her friends. The job wa dangerous. Those who worked for the Nazis were often killed by the Nazis.

1045 The Germans didn't want the collaborators, the functionaries, to live. She doesn't know what she would have done, if she had been offered such a job. (A question is asked about the Auschwitz symphony.) She doesn't know how the musicians were chosen.

1160 Q: What was your job at Auschwitz?

A: Most of the time, she worked in a workshop where they mended the clothes after they were taken off by the prisoners as they entered Auschwitz. This was good, because it was indoors during the fall and winter. In Radom she worked in an arms factory. She worked on a machine. It wasn't very hard, but very boring. But boredom was dangerous, because you could make mistakes, and any mistakes branded you a saboteur.

Q: Was there anything positive that came out of you experiences?

A: As a victim, no. Anything that was positive came from a low level of humanity, that it would be sad to judge them by this. For example, after the death march, they were transported to Auschwitz in open railway cars. There was just enough room to stand up. They would take turns standing at the edge of the car so they could rest their backs. They stopped in Grossrosen, because the Germans were looking for a place to put them. Everything was in chaos. There was one guard at the station. She saw him walking past her towards the locomotive. She asked him for some water -- she doesn't know what processed her to do that. He didn't even stop; he kept walking to the front of the train.

1425 Sometime later, she saw him walking back from the locomotive.

As he walked along, he seemed to be looking up at the cars for someone. She identified herself. He gave her a canteen full of warm water and a slice of bread. This was like a lifesaver. She shared it with her mother and some other people in the car. In normal life, if a person were to refuse to give someone a glass of water, it would be considered rude. But in that situation, the soldier's act was heroic. It is important to remember that in the

worst of situations there are still human beings. But this is not enough to make up for it all. In another example, she says her brother was working in a labor camp. A guard was pushing and beating her brother to work harder. He finally turned to the guard and yelled that he was working as fast as he could and couldn't possibly work any harder. The guard yelled at him for a while, but let him go. The next day, the guard shoved a paper bag in her brother's hand. Her brother didn't want it; the guard insisted he take it. It wa a sandwich. It was a nonvocal way to apologize. The guard brought her brother sandwiches other times, too.

1665 There is some hope for humanity, but if those traits aren't exercised, which they weren't during the Holocaust. Most people will probably have to be victims or victimizers. She doesn't think that the Germans were inherently evil by birth or by upbringing. She thinks any nationality has the potential to do the same thing, given the situation.

Q: What about the Polish people?

A: She didn't have much exposure to the Poles being nice to them, except on the death march, when villagers would bring them hot soup when they stopped for the night. She didn't have any personal positive or negative experiences with the Poles. On one occasion, a Polish woman did intentionally put her life in danger. In the arms factory, free Poles worked alongside the Jewish prisoners. One woman taunted her for her education. This woman was very uneducated, very low class. Their overseer was a Ukrainian, and their director was an ethnic German, Mr. Adler. After an argument, the woman went to the Ukrainian. He soon came and told her that Mr. Adler wanted to see her. The other prisoners seemed to be saying goodbye to her as she walked to his office. She got there. He spoke in Polish to her.

2085 He said that he heard that she said the Russians would show the Germans and the Poles when they got there. She told him that she would never have said something that stupid even if she thought it, which she didn't. She then told him how great the Germans were in her estimation. He let her go. The Polish woman had known exactly what to say to get her in trouble. The woman was very surprised to see her come back, not even beaten.

2085 She describes these incidents as less than reassuring about the brotherhood of mankind. When she was liberated, she was sure that she would never go back to Poland. Until 1976, she thought she'd never even go to visit, but she changed her mind. While

there, she spoke Polish so well, even though she hadn't spoken it much since the war, the Poles thought she was a Pole, and that her daughter, who spoke English, was visiting her. She remembers feeling very glad that she was an American, not a Pole.

2245 Q: What would be your approach to being a teacher about the Holocaust?

A: It depends on the students age. It would be easier to approach older students. She would find it hard to deal with the conformity of students, of their willingness to go along with things they don't like in order to be popular. She feels this carries over into your whole life. People become citizens not of their countries or cities, but of their own social groups. She remembers once having a study group at her house. One woman was a person she didn't know well. This woman began making distorted comments about blacks in Minneapolis. She was very displeased with the remarks, but no one spoke against her. She felt uncomfortable as hostess speaking up, but finally told the woman how distasteful she found the remarks. Then the rest of the guests chimed in. She feels this proves the necessity of there being at least one person with the strength of conviction to say they're not going to stand for certain things.

2445 If a teacher can get a student to stand up, he's been successful. She relates the plot from a 1960's film, The Nave, in which a teacher of a class on Germany conducted an experiment. He got the students to form a cell. Within two weeks, they were holding closed meetings and beating on the two students that refused to join the cell. He had to stop the experiment after two weeks because it was too successful. She thinks we live in a pluralistic society that forms homogenous cells. She characterizes society in the majority as bystanders. People will stand by as a person is beat up, not trying to help, or drive by an accident without helping. She once witnessed an accident, stopped, and offered to be a witness. The man seemed truly surprised. She feels America is not much different from the European societies that stood back and watched the Jews be killed. It's a lot easier to not get involved, to turn off your conscience by closing your eyes.

2650 She was once asked in a lecture about the probability that the Germans really didn't know what was going on. She explained about the proximity of the camps to the cities, of the publicness of the death marches and movements of prisoners. Then a German immigrant told a story. She recalled being a young girl in Germany, and looking out the window. She saw men dressed in striped uniforms, marching, guarded by soldiers with guns and German shepards. She asked her mother who the prisoners were. The mother pulled the shade and told the girl it was none of her business. This sort of thing, this feeling of things not being our business must be guarded against, because some day it will be our business.

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