

Schwartzman, Marie
August 12, 1994
RG-50.106*0009

:30

Marie Schwartzman was born in Paris August 21, 1925.

Marie's father, Avram, had come from Cedzyna Poland to Paris when he had joined the army. He stayed in Paris and became a clothes designer. Her mother, Toba, also from Cedzyna, joined him with oldest daughter in 1922.

Parents kept a traditional Jewish home, although her father was not religious

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins remained in Poland.

2:10

Marie had four sisters and two brothers. She was the second oldest.

3:23

The family lived in a mixed neighborhood.

Marie had Jewish and non-Jewish friends. She began public school when she was three years old and was in the lycee when France was occupied by Germany. She could not stay in school. Her teachers were very fond of her. After she left, the principal would come every day to see if there was any news about her.

6:07

Marie's school day started at 8:30 in the morning. She came home for lunch, and then went back until 6 pm.

She also took piano lessons and art classes. Her art teacher thought she had talent.

6:56

The family had no religious training and rarely went to synagogue. There were very few synagogues in Paris.

7:53

In high school (lycee) she remembers Germans coming into Paris. Her father was in the French army, and her mother and seven children were alone. In August 1941, SS and French gendarmes arrested Marie's father, and in 1942, French gendarmes arrested mother and children.

10:07

When Nazis came into Paris, Jews had curfews and had to stand in line for food. Children were not allowed to go to school. Father's business was taken over right away.

Marie was 15 years old. Her older sister was in medical school. Her father told Marie that she had to provide for the family. We were hungry much of the time. Friends brought some food.

The day her father was arrested, her mother said, "the world turned over." She adored her husband.

"I loved him very much," said Marie.

14:05

Marie worked anywhere she could find a job. She pressed men's heavy clothes, baby sat, and did some commercial art work. Her mother had no emotional strength and stayed in bed. Marie became strongest family member and worked with her little sister.

15:39

One day someone came over and warned them that they would be rounded up on July 4. They went to Marie's art teacher's house for three months. When they came home, Suzanne and one sister were picked up. The next morning, the rest of the family was picked up. They were all told to bring their most precious possessions.

17:42

They were all sent to Drancy for three months. Drancy had been a barracks for soldiers. As they were leaving their home, some of their non-Jewish neighbors were smiling.

"I never had hatred because I believed hate would destroy me, and I wouldn't be able to fight."

20:33

At Drancy they waited for deportation. Jewish families who had one or two children had a better chance to run away and go to Spain or Portugal. But with seven children it was not possible.

"We just sat around waiting and watching all the trains coming in and out."

21:50

When they were put on train, Marie and her two sisters were in one car, but the rest of the family was in another car. Marie describes terrible conditions in railroad cars. For three days and nights there was no water or toilets.

"It was a horrible time."

22:36

When they arrived in Auschwitz, Marie was pulled away from her family. She tried to climb on truck but was pulled away by her hair. She never saw her family again.

26:32

Marie was taken with women in their thirties to a big room in Birkenau. She remembers getting her period, and when she asked a guard to help her, the guard threw her against the wall.

Everyone was tattooed, made to undress, and then shaved all over by French men.

They had to take cold showers, and each woman was given one uniform. All of their belongings were taken away. They slept in barracks with three tiers and had a blanket and a pot to use for food and toilet. Many people were stealing.

“To this day I still don’t sleep.”

“The first two weeks were a horror. We had no water so we froze our urine to suck on. Everyone had dysentery.”

“I wanted to kill myself and went to an electric fence. A German soldier saw me and shot me in the foot, which soon became infected.”

34:09

In February 1942 Marie was assigned for a few months to Block 25 where people undressed before going into the crematorium. Two older women, Tony and Matilda, became her camp mothers. One of the prisoners, a Dr. Rose, offered to treat Marie’s foot in exchange for food.

38:17

Marie talks about knowing that her family had died in gas chamber and kept thinking about how her little brother had reacted.

39:10

Marie was then picked to work in a gentile hospital for three months. Patients were communists, underground members, and Poles. “There were no medicines. We just had to make try and make people a little more comfortable.”

41:54

From fall 1942 until spring of 1943, Marie was assigned to pick potatoes and sort good ones for soldiers and bad ones for prisoners. She also had to put heavy stones on soaked roads. She had no scarf or shoes. Anyone who did not work hard was whipped or bitten by dogs. They had to sing German songs on way back from work or they were beaten. She still has marks on her back.

Marie also had her hair cut off by Jewish barbers to prevent lice and typhus and to avoid unwanted attention from the guards. “It was not good to look pretty in a camp.”

Marie attributes her survival to Tony and Matilda who brought her food, found a scarf and shoes for her, and looked after her.

49:39

In March/April 1944, Marie was assigned to a crematorium in Brezinka where 500,000 Hungarian Jews were being sent. Her job was to go through all of the prisoners' possessions after they died and pack clothes and jewelry in boxes for Germans. Marie was so ashamed about what she did that she never told anyone.

Marie lived next door to the crematorium. All the workers were given clean, single beds and enough food so that they would not rebel. They also knew they would ultimately die because Germans wanted no witnesses.

Marie describes how everyday for six months transports came from Hungary. She also remembers seeing Eichman and others looking into gas chambers and laughing. "They were monsters."

She cried day and night and kept thinking of her family. She knew she had no one left. She also had lost contact with Tony and Matilda.

57:00

"You keep going from one day to the next. I also think I was just lucky and that it wasn't my time to die."

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:20

Marie returns to describing her work in the crematoriums, sorting clothes and jewelry, and making packages to send to Germany. Marie worked 10-12 hours, standing all the time.

There were five crematoriums and five big rooms. "All day the yelling and screaming did not stop."

5:12

Marie saw Tony in Birkenau when she had to have a tooth extracted.

7:25

"Anyone who tried to escape was hanged in front of everyone."

8:53

As war was ending, Germans did not want to be liberated by Russians so they made all the prisoners walk for three days and then put women in open cattle trains where many died.

They went to Ravensbruck from January to February 1945.

“It was unbelievable. It was the worst place I ever saw in my life. This was where women were being experimented on.”

Many women were still alive but had no hands, no feet, and even no tongues. Many were French women who had been in the underground. After the end of the war, they were placed in sanitariums because they would never be able to take care of themselves.

17:20

Many years later, when Marie was living in Philadelphia, she was asked to speak to a clinical psychology class at St. Josephs College. When she started describing her experiences and said there had never been anything like this systematic, organized Holocaust, the professor stated that history was full of holocausts.

17:35

Marie never talked to anyone for years after she was liberated. “No one would believe it.”

22:04

Marie describes how she ultimately came to America.

From February to May 1, 1945, Marie was sent to a small labor camp where they did nothing. Any bread that was available was given to German soldiers escaping the Russians.

On May 1st, the Germans started walking all of the prisoners. On May 6th they knew that the Americans had come, but the Russians got to their camp first.

The Russians put them into a military camp, gave them potatoes and rice, and warned women not to leave camp because they would be raped by Mongolians.

Finally after three weeks, Marie went on a French military train to Paris. She knew she had no one there, except Toby, whose husband and child had survived.

Marie was put into a sanitarium for 18 months to recover her health.

26:59

An American uncle contacted her and sponsored her. She arrived in Philadelphia in May 1949 and stayed with her uncle for a year. Her uncle was not very nice and blamed her parents for not getting out before the war started.

29:32

In Philadelphia she married an American man who she met in France after the war. They have lived in Philadelphia for 44 years and have a son and daughter.

31:23

She had told her children about her experiences but did not want them to feel pity for her. However, her daughter does not want to keep hearing her story and does not want her children to even know the story. When her grandson asked her about the number on her arm, her daughter said “some other time.” Her son is more sensitive.

33:04

Marie has left money in her will to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum for educating children. “This is very important for me.”
She does get some reparation, but hates having to go to the German embassy every year.

37:33

“Some things I don’t want to talk about. It’s just too hard. I just can’t forget my family, and it is difficult not to have anyone to talk with except when I go back to Paris and visit some of my friends from the camps or some of my childhood friends who remember my family.”

40:52

“I hope my grandchildren will be sensitive and learn what went on and not be blinded by their parents.”

41:42

Marie ends by remembering what a doctor told her when she went to have her tattoo removed. He discouraged her by saying that it was like a “diamond” that should be left for her grandchildren.

Time-Coded Notes Version 2

SCHWARTZMAN, Marie

RG-50.106*0009

Interview on August 12, 1994

Two Audiocassettes

Abstract

Marie Schwartzman was born in Paris on August 21, 1925. She was the second of seven children, with four sisters and two brothers. She was raised in a traditional but not religious home. Marie went to schools with mostly non-Jewish students and experienced no anti-Semitism. Her father was in the French Army and arrested when he came home in 1941. He went to a camp and his business was immediately closed. He left Marie in charge of the family.

The rest of the family was deported in 1942. First Marie and her sister were picked up during the day and later that night the Germans came back and got the rest of the family. They stayed in Drancy for three months, where living conditions were not bad, and then were deported to Auschwitz. The family became separated. Marie was taken to Birkenau where she received a tattoo. The inmates received a blanket and a pot, for both eating and bathroom. The inmates drank their urine because there was little water. When they became sick, they were quarantined. Marie tried to kill herself by running into the electric fence, but a German soldier shot her in the foot before she could reach it. The wound became infected and she was taken to another barrack for treatment. She met Tony, her camp mother, who protected her. Marie's job was to load half-dead prisoners onto trucks to be taken to the gas chambers. In April 1944, Marie was taken to Brzezinka where 500,000 Hungarian Jews were arriving. She worked in the crematorium from April to January. She was the youngest of the group. The workers there had clean sheets and all the food they wanted so that they would not revolt.

In January 1945, Auschwitz was evacuated and Marie was marched to Wodzisław and then to Ravensbrück, where they stayed until February. In Ravensbrück, the Germans performed experiments, including amputations, on the women.

Marie was very sick but made her way back to Paris, arriving on May 19, 1945. She stayed in a sanatorium for 18 months. There she received a letter from an uncle in Philadelphia. He asked her to come to America, which she did in May 1949.

Marie married and had children. She did not want to tell her children about her past, and says that was a great mistake. Now the children do not want to hear her history, and neither does her husband. Marie hopes that her grandchildren will grow up to be sensitive about the past. She has willed most of her money to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum to educate people about the past. She says she deserves that. She says also that she is proud to be Jewish.

Tape 1, Side A

- 00:00 Marie Zosnika Schwartzman was born in Paris, France on August 21, 1925. Her father, Avram, was a clothes designer from Czechów, Poland. Her mother, Tovah, was also from Czechów. Marie was the second of seven children, four sisters and two brothers. She was raised in a traditional home, but not a religious one. Her parents had come to Paris in 1922.
- 00:37 The schools Marie went to had mostly non-Jewish students. She had no problems with anti-Semitism. School started at 8:30 AM and went until 6:00 PM. Marie played the piano and did some artwork. She did not go to synagogue. The Germans marched in during 1940. Her father was in the French Army, and was arrested when he came home in August 1941. He was arrested by an SS man and French police. The rest of the family was arrested in 1942 by the French police. Marie's art teacher wanted to hide them in his house outside of Paris. But they did not want to stay there all of the time.
- 01:30 One day they came home, and were arrested.
- 01:50 The government took over Marie's father's business right away. She had to find all kinds of work. Her sister was in medical school. Their non-Jewish friends did not bring them food. They had to stand in line for milk and eggs, and saved stamps to send to their father who was already in a camp.
- 02:15 Marie was very sad when her father was taken away. He entrusted her with taking care of the family. She looked for, and found, all kinds of work. Her younger sister also helped. She worked, and helped feed the family.
- 02:36 The family was told to hide because children and women were going to be picked up the next day. They went to the art teacher's home where they stayed for three months. They came back on a Sunday, and Marie and her sisters were picked up the next day.
- 02:43 There was time to hide her little sister, but the Germans came back at night and took the rest of the family and they were reunited in the morning. They were taken to Drancy and stayed there for three months.
- 03:02 Sleeping conditions were not bad. There were bunk beds, showers, and toilets. They had taken jewelry, furs, and other precious things with them

for trading purposes. Their non-Jewish neighbors had been outside, watching and smiling. It did bother Marie, but she chose to ignore it.

- 03:30 People with fewer children had a better chance to escape by crossing the border. Spain accepted people, who then went to Portugal, and then to the United States.
- 03:56 After three months, the family was told that they were going to work at some commune. There were told to line up five in a row. Five of the eight family members went into one train car, and three into the next one. The family members got separated.
- 04:10 That was terrible for Marie. When the train stopped at times, people tried to escape but were immediately shot. It took three days and nights to get to Auschwitz. Marie tried to climb into the same truck her family was in, but she was pulled off and was separated from them.
- 04:25 They had been in the cattle cars for the three days, and had no toilets, water, or light. People were trying to cut holes in the floor of the car to escape. They did not realize the danger as they were very naïve.
- 05:00 Marie was in a group of women who were marched into Birkenau. They were put into a room and, at that moment, Marie got her period. She asked one of the SS women for something to use, and the woman sent her bouncing off the wall on the other side of the room. That ended her period for the duration of her stay there. They were tattooed.
- 05:50 They had a hot bath, a cold shower, and received their uniforms. The next day, they went to work. They slept on bunk beds three levels high. They got a blanket and a pot which served all their needs, including eating and bathroom use. There were no bathrooms. Belongings like shoes were stolen if taken off at night, so people slept in them.
- 06:03 They drank their own urine because there was no water. They got sick, so they were quarantined. Marie wanted to kill herself, so she headed for the electric fence. A German shot at her foot to stop her. The wound got infected.

Tape 1, Side B

- 06:28 Marie was taken to Block 25 and met Tony, who became her camp mother. Tony fought to save her from the crematorium. Marie considered herself lucky to end up working in Block 25, which received the half-dead prisoners. The job was to undress them and load them onto trucks bound for the gas chambers. Marie's foot was badly infected. An inmate named Doctor Rose was willing to help her, but wanted her food rations in return. They had to stand at *appell* for three hours each day. Block 25 was

closed. A Jewish hospital was established for about one to three months. Then, Marie worked in the non-Jewish hospital for a while.

- 07:43 They could not help cure the people, but they made them feel a little more comfortable. They slept in the hospital with the sick. Tony and Matilda, a Jewish Palestinian woman, stayed with Marie and watched her all the time. They were about 40 years old. The non-Jewish hospital was also closed. They ended up working in different commandos, such as the potato commando. She started work at 8:00 AM, from fall 1942 to spring 1943. They also built roads with stones.
- 08:29 Marie did not have shoes because she had lost them. To avoid having more lice, she kept cutting her hair very short. She still has marks on her neck from being beaten and attacked by dogs, which happened when one did not work fast enough building the roads. Her two women friends were helping her by keeping her warm and feeding her with stolen food.
- 08:57 The women had to be careful to avoid looking pretty. The Germans liked to find pretty girls. They cleaned them up and sent them to a home. Moula, a Bulgarian woman prisoner, worked as an interpreter. She also worked with the Polish underground prisoners as an interpreter. One day, she escaped. Walking back from a commando job, they had to sing German songs. One time when they were walking back, she told Marie to meet her someplace. She wanted to help Marie, to let her have a few good months.
- 09:16 In March or April 1944, Moula told her that she would go to Brzezinka, the gas chambers and the crematorium, the place where 500,000 Hungarian Jews would be coming in. The job was to separate clothing and jewelry, and package it to be sent to Germany. The men did the other, terrible job.
- 09:42 It was awful. Marie's bed was under the wooden platform where the gassed bodies were placed before they were thrown into the crematoria. Some bodies were still moving. It made her wonder if this happened to her family too. It was horrible. Marie was ashamed to be part of this machinery. This group was always killed off after a while. The Germans did not want witnesses to these actions. In the meantime, they slept there on clean bedding with as much food as they wanted. The Germans meant to keep them happy and not feel like revolting. Every day another transport came in. The children's screaming and crying was unbearable, day after day. Within six months, 500,000 people were sent through this process. They were all prepared to die at any time.
- 10:34 Eichmann was a monster along with the rest. They looked into the gas chambers and laughed. One group of men working in that area revolted.

They were killed, and another group was selected to gas and burn people. Marie worked there from April to January. Her physical health was okay, but her mental health was terrible.

10:50 She was the youngest of the group. She does not know what helped keep her going. Perhaps it was the hope of eating some good food, seeing victory in the end, or seeing vengeance. Marie could not take revenge.

Tape 2, Side A

00:00 Marie's work with the clothing consisted of packing them into bundles, and placing them on a truck bound for a train going to Germany. There were five crematoria. Each one had a large room for sorting the huge amount of clothing. Everyone had brought their best clothing and jewelry with them. There was a night shift and a day shift, and they switched every two weeks. They had their own bed with clean sheets. They wore uniforms and had showers. Men turned on the water for them. By that time, they did not care about being seen nude.

00:55 A non-Jewish prisoner dentist used pliers to remove Marie's aching tooth. They never brushed their teeth because there was no equipment for that. When she went back to her former barracks to have her tooth pulled, Marie saw some of her old inmates. They did not believe the stories she told them about Brzezinka.

The SS did not want to be found by the Russians, so in January 1945, forced marches began. After three days and three nights, they arrived in Wodzisław (Loslau). They were placed in cattle cars. All of Auschwitz was being evacuated. Then they arrived in Ravensbrück. They stayed there until February. The Germans performed experiments on the women.

01:50 They were very happy to be shipped out of there to a small camp, Malchow. In Ravensbrück, they had been put into a room with dead people and slept in the same room as them. They were sent a little farther away from there where the experiments on women were being done. They were awful.

02:10 There were people with half of their stomachs removed, one eye missing, hands and feet missing. After liberation, these people were sent to sanatoriums. Many of them were French. Marie stayed there for about three weeks. What she saw there was the most cruel and terrible thing ever.

02:34 St. Josephs University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania invited Marie to talk to their clinical psychology department. She mentioned that she has never read about anything this cruel in the history of the world. The students

disagreed with her, and said that there were always holocausts. Marie agreed that there were other cruel happenings, but nothing as organized and well planned as this.

02:55 What she saw in Ravensbrück was so awful. At age 19, she knew that the world would not be able to believe the horrors. She cried all the time. In the next camp, which was very small, they did not do anything. On May 1, 1945, they started walking again. When Marie refused to walk, a German soldier told her to go on because the Americans were already here. The Russians locked them in a military camp. They gave them rice and potatoes, which did not kill them like milk, butter, and chocolate would have.

4:08 Marie was quite sick, but made her way through Holland to Belgium and then to Paris where she arrived on May 19, 1945. She went to stay with Tony, who had found her husband and child. She was taken right away to a sanatorium, where she stayed for 18 months. Marie could not believe that she was free. She received a letter from an uncle who invited her to come to America. She arrived in Philadelphia in May 1949 and joined her uncle. The family was not very nice. Marie met an American from Philadelphia in Paris, and they were married soon after meeting.

Tape 2, Side B

06:10 Marie did not want to share her experiences with her children. That was a great mistake. Now her children do not want to hear about her story. "My daughter especially does not want her children to know anything about my past." Marie is proud of being Jewish. In their will, they are leaving most of their money to the Holocaust Museum to educate the public about the past. She feels that she deserves it.

07:17 Marie's husband did not want to hear about her history either. So, she talked about these things only when she went back to Paris and met her prisoner friends. She hopes that her grandchildren will grow up to be sensitive to their past, unlike their parents. She had tried to erase the number on her arm with mud. She was thinking of having it removed after liberation, but the doctor suggested she leave it as a heritage to her grandchildren.