

HOLOCAUST INTERVIEW WITH SHARON WEISS

Sid Bolkosky interviewing

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00:00:24

Born in Romania 1929 in a small village.

1:11

Had a large family, seven children. Father was a wheat merchant.

3:55

Had beautiful family life. Not wealthy, religious. Father didn't have a beard. Very close-knit family. Everything centered around Judaism.

5:39

Their neighbors were non-Jews. Didn't have non-Jewish friends. Probably didn't have any friends outside the family. Only family had outside contacts.

6:54

She left the village when she was 8 or 9. Went to live with her aunt, uncle and her cousin. She volunteered to live with her aunt, but regretted leaving her family later. She benefited from better education and piano playing. Her male cousin was 8 years older than she. She called her aunt mother and later to her last name so they would stay together in the camps, but didn't, of course.

10:20

Town where she lived had population of 100,000 people of which 20% was Jewish. Her aunt and uncle belonged to a conservative shul. But their lives were not centered around religion as it was at home. They had a store that was kept open on Saturdays. Aunt went to the store, uncle to the synagogue.

12:35

When Hungarian came in, the schools were segregated in September 1940. She was in public school until then. Were kicked out of public school for being Jewish. A Jewish gymnasium was formed. Housed in three different buildings.

15:32

In the long run, segregation made for a happier atmosphere in the school.

16:22

In public schools they were called names, but she was so small that it didn't leave an impression.

16:56

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When the Hungarians came, her cousin a lawyer was no longer allowed to practice. Professors were banned. The cousin she grew up with, 20 or 21 at the time, was removed to a camp, later captured by the Russians and taken to Siberia. He survived.

18:59

At the time every Christian had a Jewish friend. Her aunt and uncle knew one of the justices in the city who helped them out until the time came when nobody could help. The Germans came into Hungary in 1944. businesses were shot down, schools closed, Jews had to wear the yellow star, and they were under curfew. It was a total change. Prior to the German's coming, they had had enough freedom to go to school, go to the synagogue, run their businesses. When the Germans came, everything came to a standstill. Section by section they were taken to a ghetto, which consisted of building with only a roof over them, really shed to dry bricks in.

21:49

Doesn't recall if they came to take them away in trucks. They were given a few days notice, she thinks. All Jews ended up in the ghetto. They improvised screens with sheets and blankets. There were no outside wall and a dirt floor. There was so kind of water system set up, but no facilities for bathing. It was their first taste of the cultured German people coming into the country. They came to the ghetto on May 5 and stayed for ca. 3 weeks.

24:52

They were told to pack their bags. She was on the third transport at the end of May. They were marched through the village to the train station. Had no idea what was going on. All of the Jews felt broken up. They had no proper food and clothing, and were called dirty Jews. Arrived at train station where there were cattle wagons. They were herded into the wagons. Sharon was 15 years old, she was crushed among about 100 people, old people, young people, children, and all frightened and fighting for air. They tried to ration their food, but nobody wanted to eat. No bathroom facilities. Trip to Auschwitz took 4 days. Tried to maintain modesty by creating a small bathroom corner, but things spilled all over the place. One day it rained, felt like a breath of life. Every morning, the doors were opened and they were questioned how many dead people they had. That was the only fresh air they got. All she remembers was that she was dazed by the lack of oxygen and being squashed. Before Auschwitz, they were told that their packages could not be taken along, so they should put a yellow star on them and write their names and address on them. But even the clothes on their backs were taken away from them.

31:23

After 4 days they arrived in Auschwitz. Sharon's first day there

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was a Friday. The first thing she saw was flames shooting out of a tower-like structure. It was the most frightening thing she had ever seen. She was sure she was going to be burned alive. Women told to separate, said good-bye to her uncle. As she and her aunt were going through the line, an SS man asked them their age, they were sent to the left. They were herded into a room full of SS men. It was in the middle of the night. They were told to disrobe. Sharon asked when the men would leave. Had to take off all their clothes. People could keep their shoes unless the SS men liked them. They were shaved all over, and then were herded into the showered to be disinfected. They were then given a dress, no shoes no underwear. Outside they were lined up. The Germans had a fixation with 5 in a row. They stood around for the longest time, and then marched to their barracks. Sharon couldn't understand how from one moment to the next, you could be reduced from a human being to a nothing--someone without a say--so in one's own fate. Was marched to C-Lager. It was morning by then. She had had no food or drink. She saw the barbed wire and she said to herself: Dear God, even if I had wings, I could not fly out of here. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but barbed wire.

33:05

Sharon's barrack was no. 17. The woman in charge was Vera Fischer, she was a veteran of the camp. She was nicely dressed, had been there for many years had made a position for herself and made a life for herself as she best knew how. She was Jewish. There were 1000 women already in the barracks, no room for the new arrivals. Sharon saw all the women staring at her. She thought she had been brought to an insane asylum when she saw all the shaved heads. There were bunk beds without mattresses. After a while, they got assigned to a bunk bed. They collapsed almost every night.

40:32

Men and women were their overseers, they came with a dog. After appell of two or three hours, they were dismissed, but if somebody had disappeared it took forever. The prisoners were counted over and over in the afternoon. It wasn't a human being that was missing, it was a number. The inmates kneeled for 6 to 7 hours until the missing person was found --dead in the bunk bed. Their routine consisted of standing on line being counted, or they were locked up in the barracks when transports came in. During that time they couldn't go to the latrines, made make-shit arrangements. Many people had dysentery, so conditions were subhuman. The barracks leaked, people were sick and cold and tired. People fainting in the hot suns during appels, or froze in the winter.

Took their rags and disinfected them, sometimes they ended up naked until the next disinfectant because their rags disappeared. The only clothes Sharon had for about two months was a large pair

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of underpants that she pulled up as high as they could go.

44:56

One night Sharon got up and went to the faucet in the washroom, she stumbled over a dead person. That made her give up cleanliness. She looked like a boy of ten with her hair shaved. She was selected into the children's group, barracks 8. But she escaped from that barracks, instinctively knowing that those too young were killed. When the Russians approached, there was the biggest selection ever. Dr. Mengele was there almost every day for a period of a few weeks. People had to strip naked, if the women didn't have a bust, it was certain death. Mengele was a tall, very good-looking man.

48:36

A very emaciated mother had a very beautiful little girl--like a little angel. Mengele threw the little girl away to one side, and the mother to the other side, selected for work. The mother kneeled down and kissed Mengele's boots. Mengele asked if she would like to stay with the child and pushed her away with his boot. The mother decided to go with her daughter.

49:56

There were constant selections. As the Germans were doing less and less well, they became frantic about eliminate as many Jews as possible. One could hear screams and cries in the night, and everybody knew that ultimately it was going to be his fate. Sharon had such determination to live. She couldn't eat the wood, she couldn't get it down. All the food she had was a slice of bread.

52:38

Sharon remembers an overseer called Grese. She was beautiful and inhuman, looked like Grace Kelly, immaculately groomed. Always wore gloves and had a dog. She was the cruelest person Sharon ever came across. On Yom Kippur the Germans made food that was edible and they spilled the food out, so the Jews, who fasted, couldn't eat it later on that night.

54:45

Sharon was in the C-Lager and in the back of the barracks there was a road. One day she and her aunt saw the uncle on the road. He told them that he was working sorting out clothes from the transports. One day, her aunt was very sick and she couldn't come to the fence to talk to the uncle. The uncle sometimes smuggled out a piece of clothing which he sold for bread. The bread he threw over the fence to Sharon and her aunt. One day her little piece of bread got caught on the barb wire. She stood looking longingly at the bread. An SS walked by; he stopped and asked who the bread belonged to. The SS man walked up to the fence and got it for her. An act of kindness.

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59:22

Harassment was a way of life, people stopped paying attention. They were beyond resignation and didn't care whether they lived or died, except deep down. It was that type of rebellion that kept them alive.

1:00:26

When they were bombed, they were jubilant. The bombs fell on Germans and Jews alike. It was a sign that somebody was out there trying to stop the madness.

1:01:20

She was in Auschwitz until October. Some men came into the camp to get workers. She was present at the selection for workers. The Germans knew that there was slavelabor. They were selected into groups--by then they knew what was going on, they could smell the gas, and the flesh burning in pits. She was selected to go to work. They were all brought out to the transports, and they heard the cries and laments of the people going to the gas chambers. They were marched into the AB Lager. They spent a night there half frozen to death awaiting transportation to another camp. People sat on the floor praying. When asked what they were doing, they said: We are sitting shiva for ourselves. We will be taken away. The next morning they were taken away never to be seen again.

1:07:26

Sharon was taken to another camp. Bombing was going on. They arrived in Altenburg. It was paradise in comparison. Rations were edible, but the catch was that they worked 12 hour shifts. It was better than Auschwitz. Thought they had escaped the death camp. But not so, those who couldn't make it were taken to Ravensbruck. Sat in bunkers when bombed, but they were glad somebody was doing something.

Worked as a tool and die maker. She did some kind of stamping. The older women did the harder work. They got a cup of soup and bread at the end of the day. They weren't beaten because they had to be useful for work. Deep down she never thought she would make it out alive.

1:13:23

She worked there until things started to fall apart. The Russians in the camp could come and go, were not behind barb wire. There were also gypsies there who cursed the Jews. In addition, there were Polish political prisoners.

1:15:03

Her aunt went to Altenburg with Sharon. Formerly a big woman, she became very gaunt. Sharon used to take her soup to her aunt in the infirmary, so she wouldn't go to the extermination camp. Sharon became the mother to her, and the aunt pulled through.

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They were both liberated by American troops. SS knew the end was near, some SS dressed in civilian clothes. The country side showed signs of war.

1:17:42

A group of men came to the camp from another camp--living corpses. When Sharon took a look at those men, her heart broke. All she saw was a skeleton with two eyes. The ravages of the inhumanity were evident in their bodies and the depth of their eyes. A devastating sight to Sharon. Still haunts her.

1:20:20

In April 1945, they were put on a march. They brought their plates with them. As they were marching, the Americans were bombing, not knowing who they were. They had no food or water for two days. They ate grass. Arrived in village. SS still with them, but began to disappear. Found themselves without guards. They saw a barn--perhaps 200 people. They were reduced to the will to survive. She couldn't even remember the name of her best friend in school. They went into the barn, heard a rumbling sound. When they peeked out, they saw beautiful young men in uniforms. In order not to be mistaken for enemies, they took out their white plates, and walked out of the barn with their white plates held high. They were full of lice, tired, dirty. The first one to greet them was a Jewish boy who talked to them in "Jewish". They stood there with their mouths open that an American knew Jewish. The feeling of liberation can't be compared to anything. The soldiers gave them food and tried to find them shelter. The Jewish boy found shabat candles to light Friday night. The first sign of becoming a human being was when a soldier found a warehouse of textiles, and Sharon's girl friend made them a skirt and blouse. Their hair started to grow in, and just before her 17th birthday the soldiers whistled at her. That marks the time when she was a human being and a female again.

1:31:26

Germans of the village where they stayed had to provide them with food. The Jews didn't know yet the extent of the German killing. They didn't even think about it then. Expected to go home and resume their lives. They came home to nothing and the Russians to contend with. Sharon's future husband was sent to a workcamp by the Russians for 6 months.

1:35:20

Of Sharon's immediate family, she lost her father, mother, 2 sisters, her brother, her uncles, her aunt, cousins. Too many people to bring up. She doesn't even know the full extent of the loss.

1:36:30

Has two grandchildren. Considers it a miracle that she lived to be a grandmother. Her children made it possible to go through

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the adversities after the war and come out of it smiling.

1:38:29

She was in the concentration camp with the interviewer's mother.  
That is why she consented to tell her story.