

HOLOCAUST INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN ADLER

Sid Bolkosky interviewing 7/13/89

NOTE: This transcript includes phonetic spellings (misspellings). Also, counter is not minutes and seconds.

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Born Martin Adler, 1929. There were 4 children. Later in 1944, his mother had a child 3 or 4 days before being transported to Auschwitz. His mother was one of 5. All were married with children. On his father's side there were also many siblings; his father was one of eight. Many had children. He lists his parents names.

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He describes his grandparents and names them. Then he tells where all were from. In the extended family, about 70. Out of all of them, there are about 6 or 7 survivors. They were a very religious family.

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He remembers prayers from childhood. He recites them. They went to both religious school and secular school. Went to school at 6Am. Studied until 8 or 9 at night. Aim in life was to give an education to children. You were in school all week long. Until Friday until 2PM. Friday night to synagogue. Went back to study Saturday afternoon. That was our life. "I was in school 7 days a week." There was discipline.

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Polomo (?) is the town. He thinks there were perhaps 500 Jewish family. He's not certain. Maybe 300. He would say the town was 40 or 50% Jewish. There were 2 synagogues.

722

His life was interrupted when the war started. He remembers that in those days if you studied and were learned, he could get a girl and wouldn't have to work too hard. His father was able to study after the marriage. They also had a general store. All Jewish property was confiscated when Martin was young. His father was on the Russian front. He thinks the Hungarians came in 1938.

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Martin remembers it vaguely. Martin did not speak Hungarian. His parents did. Martin spoke Yiddish.

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The first changes Martin remembers was when all the men were taken into the Czech army. Beards were shaven. Uniforms. He remembers watching his father leave. It was 1941 that the laws were made.

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About half the town were taken across the border to Poland. Martin was only 12. He knows all this from hearsay. The people were taken to a region in Poland. Labor battalions were also there. They wore civilian clothes with an arm band. They were an auxiliary to the army. They would tell horror stories about this. All the labor battalions followed the army or preceded the army. His father left in 1941 and returned in 1943. He remembers how hard it was. A card from his father asked that she feed the children well. His mother cried because, what could she feed them?

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Martin was the oldest. He made the best he could. He still went to school, even though Jews were segregated from gentiles.

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He was the man of the family, a friend told them. Now you'll have to help. He doesn't see it as any big deal. He helped his mother out and he didn't mind. In the two years, the rationing got worse.

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They weren't starving. They kept a garden. There was still cohesiveness, self-help.

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When his father returned, he never talked to Martin about his experience. Martin was glad to see him. Those were different times from today. Martin was in danger when he left, but upon his return, the problems weren't over. 1943.

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Martin could go places with him. Play games.

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One change that took place with Martin was that his Mother insisted that he go to Yeshiva. She was pregnant. It was very important to her that he keep studying Jewish. There wasn't room for him at his uncle's. Martin ended up staying at a boarding house in a cold room. Many women were nice enough to give him lunch here and there. Friday afternoon he went back to his uncle and then sleeping in dormitory. For Martin, it was a big change.

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One day a week he was trained as a laborer. The Jewish boys were taught how to be laborers.

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When he went home, he didn't get good instructions. He didn't know about S.S. etc. He walked about 2 or 3 miles to his house. He overpaid for the trip home.

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One of his brothers was with an aunt. No one greeted him. He was balled out. Then they debated about his hair. It was depression. Everyone was sad. His mother said, "why do they have to take us anywhere. Why don't they kill us here?" He remembers his mother talking about the Russians and communism. When Martin came home in March, the deportations started. The yellow stars had to be sewn on a certain way. It was not a question of "if" it was a question of "when?" Then they came with a big drum and they announced "by tomorrow morning, 6Am all Jewish people have to be in front of their gates with their belongings, and you can only take so much with you. The next morning they were lined up in front of their homes.

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Martin was not confused. He knew it was serious. His mother was crying and crying. He finally cried when it came. He felt good to be grieving with her. They walked to city hall and they gave up their jewelry. They were body searched. This was 1944. They collected us from our homes.

2394

All Jewish houses had to be emptied. All were marched to city hall by Hungarian gendarmes for search and giving up valuables. Most of the people of wealth had much earlier been interrogated and tortured until they handed over all their wealth. They collaborated with them. Hungarian government wanted to make peace with the Allies.

2498

At City Hall if you only had what you were allowed, you went to the synagogue from there. It was early May. Synagogue and courtyard were full. They were sitting there, camping, like it was a rock concert, for 3 days, until all the Jews from surrounding villages were there. Then they put them on trucks and took them to a little village. The villagers came and took the Jewish houses, and the Jews were jammed several families to each little house in the village. You slept outside because the weather was not bad. Once a day there was soup from the soup kitchen. This was a ghetto. His mother was still pregnant. She hadn't had the baby yet.

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Then they loaded all the people in the ghetto into trains. They had been watching trains go through every day loaded with people. They didn't really know what was happening with the trains that went by. At night it was cramped. They were just waiting, but they didn't know what for. He wasn't frightened because he didn't know what was going to happen and they knew that it would happen to all of them.

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They expected to be massacred at anytime. They were waiting for their own deaths. They didn't know what was happening. When they came, you would have to come. No matter what. If you didn't go fast, you were shot. The way to the train was littered with bodies. You went half-naked if you were half-naked. The grownups took out their prayer books and they actually said their last rites. There were machine guns on tops of the boxcars. They thought they were going to be killed then. There was no talking. "If I had one month for every dead body I've seen, I'd live along time."

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He had only seen his grandmother dead before. He didn't think that dying was the ultimate. He'd heard about those atrocities. Martin felt good that he wasn't shot. His whole family went to the train. To the field by the train. Everyone was wondering what was to happen next?

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Now they said, get into the cars. Jammed them in. They locked the doors and that was it. Then the train stood for 4 or 5 hours before it started moving.

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Everyone was in a stupor. Jammed on top of each other. There was one bucket of water. They were allowed 2 or 3 spoonfuls. They were there together. His mother had just given birth. Martin was 14. He remembers that when his little sister was born in 1936, it was joy. he doesn't remember how he got told about his mother having the baby there, but the baby didn't live. They knew what it meant to have an infant. Who could have survived. Whoever killed the baby did him or her a favor. He doesn't know. Every boxcar had dead people when it got to Auschwitz.

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These people are terrible the Nazis. They are educated. It's premeditated. These Jews were exterminated. The Germans will have to live with what they did to us.

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Boxcars were dark. Moans and groans. Martin was 14 and didn't want to relieve himself in there. No one talked. He looked through a slit and saw mountains. One person said "I think we're in Poland." They made one stop and dumped the bucket. One time they stopped and the guards yelled "throw out your valuables so you can all live. If any of you have anything, you will all be killed.

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No fiction writer could come up with what they did to us.

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Martin thinks they were in the boxcar for 3 days. When they arrived, they saw people in striped uniforms, they figured out they were human. Finally it was their turn to be unloaded. When they opened the cars, each time, it got worse and worse. Schnell, Raus Ruas. Able bodied men separate and women and children separate. The guys that processed them were inmates and the sonderkommando. The only words he remembers his mother saying to his father on the whole trip (he didn't even know where she was in the boxcar). "You go with Martin and I'll go with the others." Later he saw women marching with no hair and he looked for his mother. His brother and sister went with his mother and he went with his father, with the group of men.

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One of the guys getting people together 5 abreast asked his father how old Martin was and when he replied 124, he said, tell them he's 16. He told his father to say he was 38 instead of 44. Martin had extra clothes on so he looked bigger. Story of Mengele. Looked like they were buying horses. So they passed together into a big hall. They cut their hair and they undressed. They shaved their public hair. They were all naked without hair. Again a barber comes toward him and his father. He says go over to the wall because an assessor is coming in and you're going to lose your son. Another selection was made and the children and the old were sent out.

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They were really taken out to be killed. They were taken to a real shower. Alternates from very hot to ice cold. Moved the sweat about. Two buckets with chlorine were poured over you. Then you were told take your belt and shoes and leave your clothes. They gave you the uniform - shirt pants, jacket, union suit.

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Then people changed clothes with one another because they didn't fit. They weren't tattooing people then. They were interrogated. They were registered and they were marched to a barracks. Each man got a blanket and they went to shelves in the barracks. There was space between the boards. One blanket was on the bottom.

3702

A few hours later they came in and asked for children under 16 to step forward to go to school. His father leaned down and said, "why don't you go out and go to school and after the war, we will meet." Martin said he wanted to stay with his father. He imagines that those who left dies, but he doesn't know. This was at 2AM.

3752

No food for three days. One bowl for five people. It was not a

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liquid, not a solid. 3 or 5 gulps per person. You cannot gulp it because it's too thick. What's in it, he doesn't know. Later some black liquid they called coffee. A few days later, they were marched to a train that took them to Buchenwald. This train was totally different.

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There are two SS watching each doorway. There are two benches. You had to get against the wall and people were marched in against you. Martin was first on train, so he was against the wall, squashed. Then the SS guy called him over to him and Martin climbed over and got some space. Martin thinks the S.S. was trying to be kind. Martin didn't know where his father was. All Martin remembers was this that his father said at Auschwitz, "you know Martin they say, you see those chimneys, that's where they say your mother, your brothers and your sisters were burnt."

3916

At Buchenwald, Martin's father suggested he be a blacksmith. Martin became a burlap sewer. At Buchenwald, they were registered and tattooed, 550050. From Buchenwald to Dorer(ph) they went by truck.

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Martin didn't think about what had become of his family because there were always other priorities. When you worked, you had to work hard. You were beaten. So you had to worry always. The shoes might get stolen at night. You were on the go 24 hours a day. At night in the barracks, you had to get your spot, that your shoes were hidden, your bread. Before you fell asleep, they already woke you up.

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People prayed. Once they got to Dorer, he rarely saw his father, because he worked days and his father nights. Martin tried to see him as they marched past one another. They just nodded. Even that was a risk. In Dorer, he saw his father one Sunday for 5 minutes. The dialogue was, "if you gonna last this week, you're gonna do real good, because you look real pale." His father gave Martin a little piece of bread.

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You had to know what you were doing and pay attention. Martin described the appels. In Dorer, he was shot over there at 11pm at night trying to escape. Maybe he was in Dorer the most 3 weeks.

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They counted twice a day. At night and morning. You could only be won work detail, in hospital, or dead. Unless you were trying to escape. Before they count you, the blockelder, a Czech set you up--lined you up with little ones in front and taller ones in

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back. Thus it's easier for the SS. The dead were lined up with their heads at the end of our feet. They were sorted out like chess pieces. A guy came up and said, "you're from ----, do you know a guy named Adler that they shot today?" Then another guy takes over the conversation and says, "you idiot, that's the kid's father." They comfort him a little bit. That was the end of it. Martin didn't think about it. He had to try to stay alive. He didn't find out the exact circumstances. Martin thinks that his father might have been lucky to be shot instead of dying some other way. He doesn't know.

4299

Back to the transport to Dorer. Went by trucks. An SS man on tail gate. They were packed again, but it was summer and they had some air. He didn't know what it was. At Dorer, beatings with clubs, games. People were beaten to death, cleaned latrines by hand. Barracks were just straw. All night they shone a searchlight on them.

4372

His first job at Dorer was help carry sections of barracks. He was only 14. The other 3 carried it. He couldn't even reach it. The kapo or SS could have beaten him but didn't. They gave everyone a number, wheelbarrow, and a pick. A guy started beating him about to kill him.

4444

He was beaten almost to death. Martin didn't understand what to do. He carried cement. One time a Russian was insubordinate and for that they punished all Russians. Every 10th man got a flogging. All Russians with soft jobs lost their soft jobs. Then somehow Martin was picked by the SS to work in the clothing depot. Within a few days, he wasn't happy with any of them except Martin, so he was safe. Sorting clothes, cutting things off. Put on paint on back of coat. Martin was privileged. He had one of the best jobs you could get. Martin could come to the appel with a good pair of shoes and trade it with another prisoner. He got things for it. Martin was a little safer than most. He was there almost a year.

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Traded Salami. This was 1945. Dorer was a terrible camp. But Martin was a clothes sorter. "I mean sorting clothes wasn't digging ditches in the rain." Martin was lucky.

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Boxcars to Belsen. Martin was only there for two days before liberation. No food. Martin doesn't think he would have lived longer. He was very weak.

"Not only did they practice cannibalism in those boxcars from Dorer to Belsen, they even started while they were still alive.

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People started to nibble on people's ears while they were still alive. That's how hungry they were. So all in all, I'm pretty lucky."

4658

In Dorer they knew they were going to Belsen. They heard about the selections. Martin pinched his cheeks really hard so they would be pink. But it was all disorganized at the end, so there weren't organized at Belsen. "You seen one you've seen em all." More dead in the boxcar. They made a deal to liberate Belsen he thinks. There was an assessment by a British officer and the German said, "you're not under us, you're under the British, you're free." People cheered, they took revenge. Belsen had every nationality. Martin and his group were in an army barrack. Those who were able were sent to a town. They waited until the war was over though.

4798

From Cella, they went back to Czechoslovakia, then to Hungary. They stayed in camps along the way, in schools or synagogues. Came to his town. Someone told him he should go to Bucharest. Trains were going back to Siberia with German soldiers, POWs, locked up in trains like they had been. Martin didn't expect to find anyone from his family.

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He wouldn't mind seeing where he came from again. Maybe go back to school. Martin never has final plans. Martin had no one. He was alone. He was truly an orphan. Bonifide. In Bucharest, there were lots of kids like him, many younger. They were trying to send them toe Palestine. Martin ended up in Austria. They told him go back to where you came from.

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In Italy they got into UN Refugee Organization. They survived. they had a little food. Compared to the camps, it was luxury.

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All this time he wanted to go to Israel. You had to be ready on a moment's notice. Until '47, they tried to smuggle into Israel. Then if you went, you'd end up in Cyprus concentration camp. So he registered to go to America. He went to France, thought about going to Canada. So he thought about Australia. His number came up to go to America. So, in France, he learns this, and he didn't care where he went. Late 1947, Martin flew to Rome, took a train to Naples, met a former friend named Jack and they came to NY and then to Cleveland to an orphanage. They monitored the kids. There was a family in Detroit that wanted to take them in. Jack and Martin went there. They both went to other families later.

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Martin had terrible nightmares. He still does, but not so often. He never thought about it in the daytime, but at night he woke people up. Terrible. He went to hospital. They said we can operate and make you forget everything including family, everything. He said he would leave things they way they were.

54131

Dreams of selections. Machine gunning. Doesn't think about it during the day. He doesn't think of the suffering. He thinks of the obliteration. "What did these people do?" It's just unbelievable. They died from the age of 1 day to their teens, to their 20s their 30s. They didn't give them the dignity to die a peaceful death. Terrible things. Gas vans. Burying alive. Fiction couldn't come up with that. So I have a few nightmares.

5200

What chance would this person have, or that, he thinks sometimes. You think about it, but you have daily joys. He has a wonderful family. He has a wonderful baby. "Ok, see I'm the same as everyone and I'm different from everyone." He became a grandfather and his son-in-laws parents became grandparents. His little brother or sister died such a terrible death. Then he talks about welfare. He dedicates the tape to those who perished, those who survived and suffered, and to his immediate family, especially his little granddaughter. He sings to her, he says a prayer.

5336

"I am not bitter, but I am very very sad that people could do this to other human beings." He talks about how they could be parents. If this tape helps one person, I have accomplished something. He lists all those who died for nothing. Wherever you are, pray for us, pray for humanity.