

HOLOCAUST INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN SCHLANGER

Sid Bolkosky interviewing

THIS TRANSCRIPT HAS MANY PHONETIC SPELLINGS (MISSPELLINGS) AND IS NOT VERIFIED. Zero Counter for reference (NO TIME CODE)

Born in Czechoslovakia.

No audio until 3:21

His family were horse traders. Great grandfather got permission to buy land for his services to the Austrian Hungarian empire. They were upper middle class. There were synagogues on town. His father was not very religious services, the kids never went to Hebrew school. Had teacher come to the house. Were assimilated Jews. Half the population was like the. The rest Hasidic and orthodox. There was a movie theater in town owned by Jewish family. Jewish family owned the flour mill. There was anti-Semitism. It wasn't out in the open until 1938. Father strong believer in the Austro-Hungarian empire, considered Martin a communist because he believed in democracy. The Massaryk government disapproved of anti-Semitism. Life was difficult at home because he had political differences with his father. Father hoped empire would be restored.

10:09

He was 10 years old when there was a civil war in Spain, and then the Italian fascists invaded Ethiopia. Read about it in the newspapers. had a friend in school with whom he talked politics at the age of 12. martin joined a leftist Zionist group, wanted to go to Palestine. Father didn't want to hear it. Rest of family were neutral.

12:20

Remembers when the allies sold out Czechoslovakia in Munich in 1938. He hated the allies for that. They did it because of alliance with USSR and France, feared Communist influence, greater danger to capitalism than Nazism. Things changed. Slovakia became independent state in 1939. The country no longer democratic, run by Catholic hierarchy. In Hungary anti-Jewish legislation was introduced. Old quota laws still in effect and extended to Slovakia when Hungary took over. Father didn't lose his land until 1943.

16:33

Martin quit school, there was no purpose. Learned a trade. From then on it was open anti-Semitism. Most businesses taken away from Jews. The friend who was a believer in democracy became a fascist. Some stayed friend others turned against them. His school pal didn't want to be his friend immediately after the change. No curfews until 1944 when the Germans came.

18:53

In 1942, he went to Budapest because anti-Semitism in his home

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town. At that time Jews could move freely. He worked in a factory. Brother was in Soviet Union. First he went to Siberia suspected of being a German spy. Joined the Russian army when war broke out, wound up in Poland at the end.

21:00

Family encouraged him to leave home. Father was very disappointed by event in 1938-39. After he moved to Budapest he never saw his parents again. But didn't know that when he left. They were deported to Auschwitz. Found out about it from his brother.

24:00

The German armies marched in and started to round up Jews and took them to concentration camps. The yellow star was introduced, but he never wore one. Right away he got false I.D. through connections. Was living as a non-Jew but kept the same job, and bosses knew he had false I.D.

25:24

There was a raid on his building one night, residents screened, produced I.D., but told to pull his pants off, and he was caught. He was taken to a camp and then to a railroad station and to Auschwitz. At that time, he hadn't heard about Wallenberg. Hungarian police rounded them up. They were brutal.

27:27

There were about 80 people to a cattle car without food, water, lavatory facilities. As soon as train left the station, the agonizing thirst of the children began. Their cries and the cries of the mothers drove them crazy. They traveled for two days and nights.

28:32

People had to go to the bathroom wherever they were. The old people died. It was a relief when the doors were opened. Prisoners in striped uniforms ordered them to step out and line up in a row. Saw high barb wire fences with high voltage. On left side of track brick building with several chimneys, smoke rising to the sky from an open pit. Was told he was at Auschwitz/Birkenau concentration camp. he had never heard of it before. Had heard of Dachau and Buchenwald, but never of Auschwitz.

31:08

Had no idea what was going on there until a few days later. Old people and children were sent to the right, others to the right upon arrival. Later he asked, prisoner answered somewhat cynically that they went up the chimneys. had heard stories before but he didn't believe them until he was taken to Auschwitz. After a while, he got used to it "as long as it is not me".

33:47

Upon arrival they were sent to a bathhouse, given showers, and

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haircut from top to bottom. Striped uniforms distributed and given wooden-soled shoes. Next day they were tattooed, Martin was A 9556. They stayed in Auschwitz/Birkenau, then transferred to the main administration camp. Birkenau was the extermination camp, administration was in Auschwitz town, and there were about 35 or 40 satellite camps. Above the gate "Arbeit macht frei". Stayed there a few days, then on to satellite camp.

36:13

There were appells 5 times a day at Auschwitz. Saw beating by the Kapos. They were prisoners with authority. Martin was beaten because he was too slow getting into the bunk. Witnessed suicides at Birkenau. People were terrified, didn't know what was going on. Were told by veteran prisoners what was going on.

39:04

In Budapest Martin had worked in a machine shop and at Birkenau he said he was a smith. In the satellite camp there were 2500 prisoners. Most of them were on construction projects, supplying power for I.G. Farber. Martin worked in the coal mines at first. In the mine he got a job as switch man, but got injury on eye, taken to infirmary, stayed there for a while, then went to construction project building power plant for Farber built by Siemens. There were civilian engineers, in the coal mines too. They were quite nice, helped him with food.

42:20

In camp they had nothing for breakfast, for lunch they had turnip soup, for supper, a slice sausage, half a pound of bread and a slice of margarine. Worked in the summer 13-14 hours a day.

44:15

After he was released from hospital, worked on construction outside in the fall, Was cold, wrapped a blanket under his striped suit, was found out, and he was beaten and damaged his kidney. Went to work with his injuries. He bled for a while, urinated. Beating injuries led to partial paralysis on the left side after the war. Worked until January 1944. High suicide rate especially among intellectuals.

48:39

They constantly hungry and thought of ways to get more food. Most people did not survive more than ten weeks.

39:42

Musulman were living skeletons, had given up, and they were useless for work. Sent to Auschwitz for extermination. Mengele picked out the human skeletons during appell. They were always able to replenish the labor forces from the transports.

50:52

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There was no possibility of escapes, but they were some. Didn't enter Martins' mind. Witnessed hangings of caught escapees. Some Russian prisoners did escape and were never caught.

52:12

Around the middle of January 1945, the Soviets were getting close to their camp. Camp was near main road, and they saw the retreating German army. They were sent on a death march to Germany.

53:12

Those who didn't have the strength to march were shot. Dead put on wagon and then buried. Then they filled up the wagon again. Wagons made never-ending red lines in the white snow.

54:16

Found somebody he knew on the wagon. He wasn't quite dead. Says he gets emotional when recalling those wagons. He couldn't do or say anything to the friend, just pushed the wagon. If he had helped he would have wound up on the wagon.

56:55

He doesn't remember the names of the SS guys. One had a habit of killing for no reason at all. When they came back to the camp he was standing at the gate and hitting people as they came in. On the march they were guarded by old soldiers of the Home guard.

TAPE 2

59:32

Once a man smuggled vegetables into the camp in his pant. As he walked through the gate, they started to fall out. Martin doesn't remember if he was punished. People were punished for trying to steal food from the kitchen, beaten.

1:01:20

People were getting dysentery from the water. At night there were drums, during day they went to outside latrines. On the job there was a Scheissmeister (shitmaster) who would chase people out of the latrines after a few minutes. The Scheissmeister was a Greek Jew.

1:03:15

His eye injury was treated by a Jewish doctor who was also a prisoner.

1:03:55

On the march they only stopped to bury the dead. Waded in deep snow day and night. Couldn't walk on the road reserved for the retreating armies. Walked for 3 days and 3 nights, but had rest in barn after the second day of the march. They started out 3500 prisoners, when they arrived at the barn probably no more than 2000 were still living. Barn so crowded that sleeping was not possible. Prisoners were killing each other for a little more

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space. The next morning there were about 200 dead prisoners. They were stripped naked for clothing for other prisoners to wear. it was a bitterly cold winter. Once in three days they received a bowl of food from the Red Cross, that was all the food they got.

1:06:58

Russian army so close. Bombardment, they were forced to run. More people shot in the back of the neck. Perhaps 1000 arrived at Blachhammer??? The last day, they had no time to bury the dead.

1:08:31

Martin never thought that the Germans would just run off and abandon them. Thought they would kill them all first. When they arrived at Blachhammer, it had been evacuated. Camp was empty of its 50,000 inmates. They were directed to barracks. An hour later, there was noise outside, he went to see. People were running out of the food warehouse with bread. Germans started to machine gun everyone. He wanted to get some bread, and did, walked out with three loaves of bread. Noticed friend on the ground dying of bullet wound. Didn't stop, shooting was going on.

1:11:51

There were no real friendships in the camps. Everybody was for himself. Survive. There was no sharing of food. Martin took the loaves back to the barracks and ate as much as he could. Nobody knew he had the bread. They would have killed him to get some of the bread.

1:13:19

The following morning the Germans gone. The camp was surrounded by Russians, it was said. But it wasn't so. Germans came back in the middle of the night, chased everybody out on the road again. Martin didn't go. It was dark, there was an artillery door between the Russians and the Germans. Bombs were falling in the camp. Martin hid under the bed, didn't go. Spent the night there. The following morning he looked around, no more Germans. Found some Slovakian Jews in the bunker. Got dysentery from eating snow on the road. Two days later saw truck full of soldiers, thought it was Russians, but it was Germans. It passed by. He went back to the bunker and told the guys that the Germans were still there. Later he went back to the main road, saw two soldiers, they were Russians. He asked them for food. Martin received some wine and bread. The day after, Martin started on a march back home, ca. 600 kilometers. He started out on foot, first day he walked 8 miles, arrived in an empty village. Saw one house with smoke coming out of the chimney. Forced his way in, fell asleep on the floor. Later a Russian with a submachine gun was standing over him. Told Russian he came from concentration camp. Russian chased old lady out of bed, and had her make a bed for him.

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1:20:43

Knew already that his parent were dead. In the barracks inmates talked about home, what they ate. They always talked about food.

1:21:32

Russian soldier stopped a truck going each. Martin on open truck for 100 kilometers in the middle of winter. Slept in a bakery that night. Started out on foot. Stopped by Russian lady soldier, didn't have any. Had to walk back to. Was put on army truck to Krachow, arrived around January 20. When people saw striped uniform, people surrounded him, they had never seen a free man from a concentration camp. Went to restaurant, people refused to receive pay. Stayed in Crackow for 4-5 days. He was sick. He ate all his meals at restaurant. Arrived at Plasciow, Put on army truck again, found a Jewish family in the next town he came to, slept there. Next morning went to railroad station. Train took him to small village, then walked 8 kilometers to Krasna?, saw Czech soldiers. They asked him for his name, and Martin was told that their sergeant was called Schlanger. He went to the barracks, but no Schlanger there. Two days later his brother walked in.

1:26:02

At first they were very happy. They were very close, even though brother was non-political. Then they talked about the family. Brother didn't know anything. The sister survived with the partisans in the mountains in Slovakia, another sister survived in Budapest. They didn't know it then. Then he went back to their home town. Found nothing there. Moved in with some Jews there. No family, just single boys who had survived in the mountains. Martin was the first one from the camps.

1;29:52

Old friends, who had turned fascist, wanted to extend friendships again. Martin didn't want to. At first all he wanted to think about was food. Saw a doctor for his many conditions. Old leftists came to see him, they were nice.

1:32:13

Martin survived by luck. Was being helped by Poles and Czechs. Also had a stone will to survive. It was nothing but luck.

1:33:15

Has dreams about being in the camps, caught, brought back to camp. Has those dreams quite often. Still has dreams about the wagons and the barn. Thinks about how nice life was in democratic Czechoslovakia.

1:36:17

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His condition kept getting worse, was hospitalized at end of 1945 with stricture. Had no thought of materials thing, wanted food and a place to eat. Soon though, he started and ran a hardware business until 1949 when it was nationalized. Decided to leave the country and come to the US. Came to Detroit. Became US citizen in November 1954.

1:38:49

Has been back to Europe a couple of times. Brother is still in Czechoslovakia. Went to a trial in 1970 for compensation from the German government.
Got masters from Wayne State in economics.

1:42:31

He felt hatred for Germans. At time of liberation he would have killed Germans indiscriminately if he had had power. When he went back for suit in 1970, he felt hostility to Germans. He was surprised that people were nice and helpful. No longer had the same hostile feelings. Couldn't understand that they were the same Germans that caused him so much pain.

Talks about Hitler and his rise and reflects on why the Germans changed.

1:47:15

Has 2 grown daughters. Older daughter in California. Younger daughter graduated from Wayne State. Both working for graduate degrees now.

1:26:27

People should never let themselves be indoctrinated with hatred for their fellow man.