

RAY 1

When approaching a subject as devastating as the Holocaust, it is important to not only know the numbers or the particular events, but to examine the personal side of those involved. Often times History texts negate the personal aspects of the history which they shape, leaving out what makes and shapes the world in which we live.

By examining an individual's or a group's experiences we enable ourselves to become true students of the past. One such individual, who not only lived through such an event but also reaches out to those in hopes of avoiding the atrocities associated with her life, is Eleanor "Dicky" Weile (Ehrlich).

Eleanor Weile was born on June 6, 1922 in Berlin, Germany. She was the daughter and only child of two successful parents, whose religion happened to be Jewish (Reform Jews). Her mother, Tilla Froehlich, was the owner of a store, while her father, Julius Weile, was a traveling manufacturer's representative. As a young girl growing up in Berlin she was witness to the many Nazi parades which occurred. Of course as most do as a child, she "Heiled" with her childhood friend (whose family were Nazis) and others when Hitler passed by, not knowing what she was doing. On one occasion, after seeing a parade, she came in to her home singing a song (a Nazi anthem) and was slapped by her mother and told to go to her room. She at that time could not understand why she was told not to sing the song and was very upset.

With her father traveling abroad (in Europe), he was able to

RAY 2

get a different view of what was going on in Germany. It was April of 1933, when after a major boycott, he decided they were to move.

By May 18, 1933 they were living in Amsterdam. Her father had chosen Amsterdam not by a flip of a coin but by the fact that they had remained neutral and out of war for one hundred years (it was a safe-haven).

They were the only one's (in 1933) out of their family to relocate.

The rest of the family had their reasons for staying like: "We are Germans, only Jewish by religion" and "Hitler can't possibly succeed". As constricting emigration and immigration policies occurred, only a few relatives made it out by going to Cuba (around 1938-39).

On May 10, 1940 her father's "safe-haven" became occupied. When the German's arrived Ms. Weile is quick to point out, "they wanted to know where the bridge to England was", something she finds quite amusing about their ignorance. In Amsterdam, the Nazi's began their typical implementation of policies, one of which was a blackout of the territory. Of course the Germans had no way of finding their way around in these strange surroundings (especially in the dark), so they relied on the help of the locals. With the Dutch (and the many canals) came "inhospitableness" towards their occupiers. Ms. Weile remembers that the Dutch would guide the soldiers by their elbows towards their destination and when almost upon a canal, would stop and let go of the arms of the soldiers and off into the canal they would go. Also the Dutch showed their unappreciation of the

RAY 3

Germans with a 24 hour strike (no lights, gas, bus, trains, or factory work) in which the Germans responded with posters threatening to punish anyone involved in future strikes. In Holland, as was common in the day, when Prince Bernard (who was famous for wearing carnations) had a birthday, everyone wore carnations in his honor.

The Germans of course did not know what was going on at first and when they found out they decided that they would rip the carnations off of the lapels of those wearing one. Some Dutch protested and went as far as putting razors in their carnations, so when a soldier tried to rip their carnations, off they would mutilate their hands.

Of course the person doing such, would run for their lives and hope that they would not be caught.

Then came the passing out of stars (marked "Jood") in Holland.

The first day that they were to be handed out, the Germans ran out of stars. Little did they know that everyone, including Christian Dutchmen, were getting them. It even became common courtesy to tip one's hat when passing someone with a star. This also didn't help the Germans in distinguishing "Jews" from "non-Jews."

The Dutch according Ms. Weile, were the most tolerable people as a whole when it came to things such as religion. Although she admits to their being Nazis in Amsterdam too, she does make mention of the fact of those who played an active part in saving the lives of many children. She says that many babies were sent to the north, to farms and so forth, in attempts at saving their lives. There

RAY 4

were also many who hid Jews in the underground, risking their lives of course. Such acts when caught, would cause one to be taken to the town square, and in front of everyone (rounded up), they were executed.

As the many restrictions and orders took place, Ms. Weile was lucky because they went alphabetically, and with the last name Weile she was able to live "free" longer than some others. As a child in Amsterdam, she was able to keep her bicycle longer because of her last name. At one point, a Dutch policeman spotted her on the street with her bicycle (and the big red "J" stamped on her bicycle license) and told her that they (the Nazis) were going to be picking up more Jews that night for deportation. Of course she hurried home and escaped, for the time being, the camps. As progressive restrictions were imposed (no streetcar riding, no radio, no school, etc.), it was coming closer to her time to meet with the Gestapo VOLUNTARILY. Even though the Nazis had outlawed radio (A-Z progressively for the Jews) in order to keep them from hearing what was going on through BBC Radio and others, many still managed to find out what was going on from the "outside." Among the ways of doing this were building a radio into the sofa so the Gestapo could not easily find and take away your radio.

It was her time. She had received a letter (August 1942) requesting her VOLUNTARY arrival on the 25 at the Gestapo Headquarters in Amsterdam. But she still was not very concerned with it. Nine

RAY 5

times before the Gestapo had visited her home to take her away and had left without her. She still does not know exactly why. Perhaps it was because her father had served as a German in World War I. Perhaps it was just not her time. It was the night before her "voluntary" arrival at Gestapo Headquarters when she decided that her mouth hurt too bad and that she would have her tonsils taken out. Her father could not understand why she would wait until that moment to decide this. She could not understand her parents looks of despair. It was evening and at that time there was a curfew of eight in the evening to six in the morning (for Jews). It was already seven when she decided to leave. Her father wanted to go with her, but she refused to let him. She knew that he would be unable to get back home in time for curfew, thus jeopardizing his life. Upon arrival at the hospital, she was asked what she was doing there. She told them that she was there to have her tonsils removed. Luckily, she knew the name of the doctor who was considered to be the best in town. So as she was told to leave, she screamed his name, "Dr. Fernandez!." He heard the commotion and came out to see what was going on. The doctor then checked her out and told her that she should be operated on immediately. She was operated on and stayed in the hospital for twenty-one days. Well, the Gestapo didn't come looking for her after she missed her appointment, thus delaying her arrival at any camp further.

On the tenth time, her luck ran out. It was March 1943, the

RAY 6

Nazis were there. They grabbed her father, mother, and herself and were forced into trucks. It was horrifyingly quiet, for they knew that this may be the end. Luckily she was able to remain in contact with her mother till her death. Although she was too old for the children's barracks (one of which her mother was the head of), she did manage to sneak and see her. She did this by pretending she was doing something (work) she was told to by carrying paper and pencil in her hands.

It was March 23, 1943 when she arrived at her first camp, Herzogenbusch, a work camp in Holland in which she would learn to make radio tubes for V-1 and V-2 rockets. This was the place which would claim her mother to sickness on November 7, oddly her grandmother's birthday. This was perhaps an escape from the horrors which she may have faced.

From here, she would leave for Auschwitz, Poland in cattle cars "crammed like sardines." She arrived in Auschwitz on June 6, 1944, D-Day, and also her birthday. Ms. Weile recalls that that was a very "nice present," marking the slow collapse of the German Reich.

This was not to be her only or last move. Auschwitz, she later found out after the war, was to be her father's resting place. Although having been in World War I and fighting for the Germans, he, like other veterans who were promised special treatment at camps such as Theresienstadt, would not make it in the end. Auschwitz was also where she received her number (tattoo). No one dare let

RAY 7

the Germans see them cry while they were receiving their tattoo. It was no one's will but to not give the Germans this satisfaction.

Luckily though, she was "specialized labor," and would not stay here for long at all.

On June 10, 1944 she would be taken from Auschwitz, in cattle cars again, to a camp called Reichenbach (in Silesia). This is where she would learn, probably the most in terms of her own survival (mentally). Her ability as a worker allowed for her to be requested along with others by the Philips Factory for work. A job which she attributes her life to. Although they were helpless in a sense, they were also quick to annoy the Germans, who constantly referred to them as the "dumb Dutch." But they were not so dumb as they thought.

Ms. Weile recalls how every night at twelve they (the guards) would play the German National Anthem. Well, she along with others had night duty and among their jobs was pounding metal with hammers.

Of course she and others lay claim to the fact that "while we were there, they never heard the national anthem." It never occurred to the Germans that the hammering was conveniently picked up during this time as a form of protest.

Among the other forms of protest was their disobedience to German commands. While they were marching they would be told to sing, but they would whistle instead (and vice versa). This was one of the reasons they were referred to as the "dumb Dutch."

RAY 8

The most important protest, and perhaps the most life-saving was their continuous damaging of the radio tubes. Although they had to produce a certain amount daily and weekly, they managed to damage components, which are attributed with the fact that many of the V-1 and V-2 rockets landed in the ocean. This according to Weile, was done by everyone from one station to the next. This is also one of the protests that she remains most proud of.

Ms. Weile is soon to remember a lady whom she refers to as the "mouse." She describes her as a short woman (little more than four feet), who was so short that when they were lined up for roll call, she had to stand on a specially made bench to see everyone. One day, this guard, who thought she was too good to work on Sundays, was told she would have to do so. Well, she was mad and wanted to protest herself, so she brought her radio to the camp. Ms. Weile recalls that on Sundays "there was the most beautiful music being played on the radio." This was very strange but a most enjoyable act of rebellion by this guard. This same guard was sitting across from her one time when all of a sudden, she let out this huge sneeze.

Ms. Weile took this opportunity to say in Dutch, "drop dead" with a smile on her face. Of course, the guard assumed she said "bless you" in Dutch and replied "thank you" to her. This was one of the few gratifying moments of rebellion which enabled her to look back and smile on during her long stay in the camps.

Another guard which Ms. Weile remembers, was one of the "Swing

RAY 9

brothers." They got their name from the fact that they had been injured during the war and had each lost one of their legs. But even lacking one leg, these Germans remained in step (crutch, step...). One day in particular, she was caught laughing by a superior about this. She recalls that you will never forget what it feels like to look down the barrel of a gun. She was yelled at, yet remained calm, and when he was finished she proceeded to yell back saying that her father was in the war and had lost a finger and that she would never laugh at such a thing. Then the coffee break whistle went off, perhaps saving her life, and off the Germans went. She and a friend decided to go to the bathroom where she burst out laughing (caused by fear she believes). Then back to work she went, when she could feel someone peering at her. She turned around and a finger through a cracked door motioned for her to come. The guard, one of the "Swing brothers," placed his hand on her shoulder and told her that he believed her, but she should not tell his superior.

Reichenbach is also where Ms. Weile would meet Gerda Witteck, a German whom she remains grateful and in touch with today. Her husband, who was in the German Army, received more food than her so he sent her packets of bread and cigarettes during the war. Gerda was one of the few who risked their life so that the Jews could live.

One day, when the upper brass happened to be visiting, she was caught giving bread to a Jew. She was then chewed out by one of the Germans,

RAY
10

yet remained calm through the whole ordeal. When they were finished, she stood up (being a tall woman, nearly six feet) and proceeded to yell back claiming that they did not give her enough food, much less to give a Jew. The German then backed down. That same day she proceeded to turn around and give the bread to a Jew. Ms. Weile remained so grateful, that when she was freed and in America, she tried and finally tracked down Gerda through the Red Cross. She then started sending her gifts (food, scarfs, etc.) to show her appreciation of what she had done for her (risked her life). Later Ms. Weile and her late husband spent their own money and brought Gerda and her husband to America.

From Reichenbach she was moved to Langen Bilau on February 20, 1945. But the Russians were close, within 20 kilometers. So they were forced to move on foot in the winter (2000 people and 3000 cows), traveling for six days until they reached Trautenau in Czechoslovakia. On February 30, they were moved by train (coal cars) and arrived on March 3 in Minden, West Phalen (near Holland). (This camp along with Beensdorf and Ludwiglust were small outlying camps of Neuengamme.) This was a camp which was located in an old rock quarry and in which the Germans had placed stolen work equipment from Holland. The workers were able to recognize this equipment as their old equipment in Holland by markings that they had made.

From Minden (March 26), they were moved to Beensdorf (in cattle cars) arriving on April 2 and staying only two weeks. From here

RAY
11

they went to Bergen-Belsen, a camp which was more than full, and were not allowed entry. On April 16, they left for Ludwiglust. They were constantly on the move now because of the collapse of both fronts and the German Army priority of railways and work materials.

From Ludwiglust, Weile would make her last long journey. This was an eleven day/night trip to Hamburg (a trip that normally took 3-5 hours). During this period they went without water, had only three slices of bread, and were confined 261 to a railway car. Thirteen times they crossed a bridge that had been loaded with dynamite by the Germans back and forth. The engineer ended up running away because of the stress of the situation. One of the reasons for their long trip was that the bombing of Hamburg was going on.

Ms. Weile and the others were able to hear and see the city being bombed, perhaps a reason to fight that much longer. Upon arrival, this was where Weile and others were forced to dig tank traps meant for the Americans. Something that they did not want to do. This according to Weile, was the only time in which, for just a split second, she and her friend felt like giving up. But at that same moment they refused to let their frailties, weakness, and their situation kill them.

Soon it was over. It was May 4, 1945 when the Swedish Red Cross were at their camp to liberate them. She recalls that at first they did not want to believe it. It was too good to be true. They were then taken to Denmark and then on to Sweden where they were able

RAY
12

to bath (with soap and brushes, something they had not done in a long time). This was the end.

In 1948, Ms. Weile made her way to America. When asked what made a difference between survival and death, she answers a "will to live." She says that in order to make it you also "had to be able to turn your mind off." You could not allow negative thoughts to creep into your mind. But for her you could also not turn off your humor, converting it to bitterness would mean the end. She also comments that when she saw "Schindler's List": "I saw it in glorious color."

It is easy to forget what has happened in the past. But to allow your past to forget you could be devastating. A lesson learned by one should be a lesson learned by all. In Ms. Weile's case, a struggle learned by one can be survival and lesson won by all.

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