

-TITLE-VERA HOENIG
-I_DATE-
-SOURCE-FORT WAYNE JEWISH FEDERATION
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-1 HOUR
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

0:01 Vera was born in Vienna, Austria, on July 28, 1925 and raised by her grandmother due to her parents divorce. Her father lived in Italy and her mother remarried and lived in Budapest, Hungary. She went to school in Vienna until she was 10, then left with her grandmother to be with her father in Italy in 1935. Vera acknowledges that there was some anti-Semitism in school but she remembers having a very nice childhood. The product of a mixed marriage (her maternal grandmother was christian), she celebrated both Christian and Jewish holidays and had many friends of both religions.

2:21 Neither Vera nor her father had Italian citizenship (they both had Yugoslavian passports) so when all foreign Jews were denied export permits for their businesses, her father moved to the border of Yugoslavia and Vera was sent to school in Verona. She remained there until 1939 when Mussolini declared that Jewish children could no longer attend school, then transferred to a school in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. In 1941, when the Germans bombarded Belgrade, her father took her to her grandmother in Vukova(ph).

5:09 Vera was notified that Jews couldn't return to school and was sent a diploma that indicated she'd finished Junior High. The German tanks invaded the town and her father fled. Vera remained with her grandmother, soon after, men were taken to camps and rules established for the women and children who remained; curfews were enforced, public places were restricted and jobs were lost. Women remained until 1942 and on Vera's 17th birthday, they were taken away to camp. The camp was not far from Vukowa(ph) in Osiek (ph) and it was a football camp. There were no barracks so they slept on the floor and her grandmother died there. When a government official came asking for documents belonging to children of mixed marriages, Vera produced hers which indicated that her mother was born a Christian.

10:56 Vera was then put in a transport (under Yugoslavian Govt.) and sent to Zagreb in a cattle wagon. There the Germans took over and Vera's name was called (because she was a half Jew) and she managed to get out of the wagon. She recalls her friends in the wagon being happy for her and throwing their food to her saying they wouldn't be needing it. She never heard from them again.

13:26 She was taken to a political jail and held there for a week without food. After they took mug shots of her in the middle of one night, she was put back on a train and returned to her old home in Vukova. She was taken in by relatives of her father who were spared because one of the sons was a doctor, who was needed by the German army.

15:22 In 1943, Vera decided to escape to her mother in Hungary but was abandoned by the man who took her and left on an island. It wasn't long before a boat of German soldiers with rifles aimed at her arrived and thinking she was a communist, they put her in jail. When their theory was disconfirmed, she was sent to her mother. Required to go to police every month, in the spring of '43 she was not allowed to leave. Instead she and the other Jews were taken to a camp, from which one could not escape.

19:35 The conditions of the camp, once an old dye factory for furs, weren't unpleasant, There was cold water and straw beds. The camp was only for foreign Jews and Vera was there for 2 months. The prisoners were searched internally, which Vera remembers as a very unpleasant experience, particularly since the examiners didn't wash their hands between examinations. Allowed to keep only their coats, the prisoners were then transferred to another camp, which was a brick factory. There were many people, there was no food or water and there was always a 4-5 hour wait for the one available latrine. Once a day they were taken to a reservoir where they could wash.

22:07 The German SS told them they'd be transported to a labor camp and rushed them out when they thought typhus might be spreading, but Vera and other half Jews were taken by the Hungarian police to a different camp call Shavah (ph) on the border of Austria via a Budapest jail. Vera then goes to a describe an incident that she completely blocked out of her mind until 2-3 years prior to the interview. Someone told her that she would be interrogated about Christianity and although she couldn't say prayers in Hungarian, she could in Italian. While she was being interrogated, some German soldiers found a family hiding under a huge pile of straw in a very same room. Somehow Vera wound up translating between the German commandant and the Hungarian one. Although she can't remember why, she also found herself telling the Hungarian that the Germans were not only taking Jews as prisoners but also gypsies, which upset him. Upon his questioning of the German about this, an argument erupted. When the German was ready to leave, her wanted to take Vera's group with him. At this point the Hungarian lined up two rows of his soldiers in front of them, preventing the Germans from touching the group. Vera did not remember this incident until recently.

30:05 Vera felt she was always being miraculously saved. She was returned to a jail in Budapest and they were lined up in a courtyard. It was announced that anyone under the age of 18 should step forward and when Vera didn't (truthfully), an officer told her to because she was too young. They were moved to a children's home under the auspice of the Swedish consulate on the outskirts of Budapest. Here, although they were supervised, they had good food and a fair amount of freedom. One day towards the end of 1944, Vera received a message from an aunt to leave and go to her mother's, which she did. Once there, she lived in hiding, always afraid to be caught.

32:32 During this time, there were bombardments every night, and one evening, a bomb landed right behind her. She remembers thinking she was about to die and was convinced her body was detaching itself from the rest of her, but the bomb was dismantled.

33:06 1944 - Hungarians were being moved to Ghettos. Her aunt and uncle who were among them never returned. In Vera's building, lived a Nazi (with his family) who was responsible for kicking the Jews out of the houses. When the Germans retreated, the Nazi's wife came to ask Vera's mother for Vera's documents and certificates, so she could assume her identity if she needed to. Vera's mother handed them over and Vera realized that people had known she was hiding but had said nothing. Not long after, the Russians came and liberated them, but people feared the Russians too.

36:45 Vera remembers a horrible incident she witnessed when walking to the pharmacy, one day. Some drunk Russians in a jeep were chasing a civilian on foot. They ran him over and killed him, and Vera says she just froze, and might have even fainted from the shock. This however was the end of the war for her. The Russians occupied all the way to Vienna and in order to leave one needed a Russian exit permit. Everyone wanted to come to America, and Vera received word from her father that she could come under preference quota as long as she was under 21. He was already in the States.

39: 00 After numerous and unsuccessful attempts to get a passport for a trip to the States, it was suggested to her that she should say she was going to Israel. She did and immediately received an international passport. When she finally received an exit permit, Austria refused to grant her a visa to pass through the country (having established a law that guaranteed those born there a place of refuge, they didn't want too many refugees). Italians gave her a visa and she was allowed to travel to Italy with no more than \$10. Relatives of hers in Italy agreed to pay for the ticket to the U.S. She remained in Italy for 2 years , until 1952, living in a quarter occupied by displaced persons. Once again made many unsuccessful attempts to leave and finally made it to New York, and to her father.

42:25 By the time she reached the States, Vera was in good health but had undergone medical supervision and operations while

in Italy. She says she doesn't find her experience hard to talk about or to recall but was surprised when she realized she had blocked out the entire memory of the interrogation. Nothing in particular sparked the resurfacing of the memory. She had recalled it one day while cooking. On the whole, she considers herself extremely lucky because relatively speaking, nothing too bad happened to her. Agreed to give interview because she believes it is her duty to give evidence. Hopes it helps prevent it from happening again, although thinks there's no guarantee that it won't.

47:08 Vera describes the difficulty she experienced when looking for a job. It seems she wasn't very qualified to do very much even after she studied and received degrees. She ended up working with many refugees, sowing. Vera says that although she is often pessimistic, she still trusts in people.

51:53 Vera thinks it is important to remember the Holocaust in the same way that we recall other historical events. She remembers that until Eichman's trial, many survivors repressed their memories and didn't share them with the next generation of their families. She thinks people were frightened to help the Jews, because it meant endangering their own lives, but sees that a change is taking place as people are willing to risk their lives for others. Although wars still exist, people don't want to see them take place, in her view, and the general attitude is much more humanitarian.

56:57 Vera talks about her marriage to Alex and the adoption of their daughter Judy, who is now 23 years old. She moved from New York to Fort Wayne when she got married, and is much happier there than she ever was in New York.

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