

EVA SCHLESINGER  
RG-50.243.0033 (recorded Boston 1991)

Eva was born in Debretsán, Hungary, the third largest city with about 15,000 Jews. Her father was a merchant until the laws forbade Jewish businesses. At that point a non-Jewish friend gave him a job as a bookkeeper. Eva had one older sister and 4 younger brothers. The family lived well and she describes her schooling, holiday celebrations, neighborhood and daily life. Her father taught all the children German, which ended up saving her life. Eva was trained to sew custom made clothing. When the laws against the Jews came in 1938-39 her father was already sent to a work camp. The Jews were put into a ghetto in town and Eva describes the lack of food and frequent beatings by Hungarian soldiers.

The family was sent in a cattle car to Auschwitz. There was no water, and along the way Eva traded her raincoat for water and another person traded her umbrella. When they got to Auschwitz one of the prisoners told her not to go with her mother and it saved her life. She describes life in the camp. She was selected for a work camp with 300 other women and her sister was included. Her mother and brothers went to the gas chamber immediately. Eva was told that the Germans had shortened the road from the train to the gas chambers so that Hungarians could be disposed of more quickly.

An elderly German civilian at the work camp befriended her and brought her food every day, which she shared with her sister, whom she had met by chance in Auschwitz. The Americans were closing in, so they were marched or put on trains to other camps. The group went to Bergen-Belsen, which Eva described as the first camp where she acquired lice. She describes terrible conditions. All in all, about 30,000 Jews died in Bergen-Belsen. The camp was liberated 3 weeks before the end of the war. Eva said she would never have survived another 3 weeks. As it was, at liberation she had typhoid and weighed 60 pounds.

Eva met her husband when he came in search of his parents. He left for Belgium and she was smuggled over a mine field to Belgium while she pretended to be a gentile. It took three years, but they finally were able to come to the United States and settled in Boston where they had a friend. Later her sister and her British husband also came to the US.

Eva said that she didn't speak about her experiences until she heard Elie Wiesel tell the survivors that they had to talk about their experiences. She still can't understand why the Americans didn't drop bombs on Auschwitz.