

TITLE- EVA SCHLESINGER  
DATE- JANUARY 10, 1991  
SOURCE- ONE GENERATION AFTER (BOSTON)  
RESTRICTIONS-  
SOUND QUALITY- GOOD  
IMAGE QUALITY-  
DURATION- 2 HOURS 2 MINUTES  
LANGUAGES-  
KEY SEGMENT-  
GEOGRAPHIC NAME-  
PERSONAL NAME-  
CORPORATE NAME-  
KEY WORDS-  
NOTES-

00:00 For many years after the war she did not speak about the camps. She heard Elie Wiesel encourage survivors to talk.

00:01 Since she has seen there are now books denying that the Holocaust ever happened, she now feels an obligation to speak. She is from Debretsan, Hungary. This was the 3rd largest city in Hungary.

00:02 There were about 15,000 Jews. There were many Jews in Hungary. Her mother's name was Bertha and her father, Arnold, was a wine/liquor merchant. He was among the first to lose his business.

00:03 It was about 3 years before they were deported. In the meantime, an acquaintance, a non-Jew, gave her father a job as a bookkeeper.

00:04 She had 4 younger brothers (Gyula, Karman, Erwin and Tibor).

00:05 She also has an older sister. On March 19, 1944, the Germans came into Hungary. Shortly after that her brother was Bar Mitzvah.

00:06 The family was not wealthy. She went to a Jewish (Orthodox) and then to a middle school, then to a Convent school.

00:07 She was very observant but she went to a Convent school. It was a fine, private school and the Nuns let her attend until she finished, even after they were prohibited from taking in new Jewish students.

00:08 She went to the Convent school on Saturdays even though she did not write or carry books. After, the Nuns would send her to synagogue.

00:09 Her building housed 37 Jewish and 7 non-Jewish families. It had a big yard and was centrally located.

- 00:10        After the Germans arrived they were moved to the ghetto. Her former house was used as a hospital for German soldiers.
- 00:11        Her maternal grandparents were in their 80's when they were deported. Her paternal grandparents died before the war.
- 00:12        Herschel was her grandfather's name. Her parents did not give the children Jewish names to help minimize anti-Jewish attacks.
- 00:13        Her parents were modern, religious people. She had a big family. Her mother had 7 siblings. She lost 35 cousins in the Holocaust.
- 00:14        On holidays the family got together and was very close. Seders used to last until 2:00 a.m. They would invite non-observant Jews to join them.
- 00:15        She met a former, non-Jewish neighbor after the war and this neighbor remembers how the family set the table for Shabbat and the Seders.
- 00:16        She had Jewish and non-Jewish friends. The Hungarian people helped the Germans deport the Jews. Not all the Hungarian people would have helped the Germans.
- 00:17        Her father was born after WWI and he said Hungary was anti-Semitic, but she never noticed it. She had no basis for comparison.
- 00:18        Her father spoke German since he was born on the Austro-Hungarian border. He wanted the kids to speak German and that later saved her life.
- 00:19        She went to Jewish school six days a week but most of her Jewish education came from home. At the Convent she had separate Jewish classes.
- 00:20        She did not want to learn Yiddish. She wanted to be a good Hungarian.
- 00:21        Her mother went to school until she was 14. Generally women did not work outside the home.
- 00:22        Every family sent their children to learn a trade and she learned to sew. In those days, everyone wore custom made clothes.
- 00:23        She went to a school that would allow her to learn from the best but she had to work for no pay. She was able to find a good job working with fine clothes in the US.
- 00:24        Most girls worked in the family business or were dressmakers. Her own mother worked in the family business when her children were older.

00:25 Before the Depression her family had a large wine business which they lost. Later her father rebuilt it on a smaller scale.

00:26 Jews were the merchant/middle class in Hungary. Religious Jews would not wear off-the-rack clothes.

00:27 As a child the family had a live-in maid, a wash (laundry) woman, and someone else to clean the windows. 00:28 During the war her mother washed by hand. She also did draperies, needlepoint, etc, for the family.

00:29 When Eva was sent to Auschwitz they were allowed one knapsack. Her mother made her sack from the tapestries.

00:30 For the last family seder they had Polish guests (husband, wife and children). The children mentioned that the grandparents were shot at the border. 00:31 She had no idea of what was happening in Poland. She had only heard something about the poor Polish Jews had no kosher beef.

00:32 Two Czech boys were sent to Hungary after their sisters were taken by the Germans. When the boys arrived her mother took care of them since they were in bad shape, with lice, etc.

00:33 There were laws against Jews. IN 1938-39 her father had already been sent to a work camp. Jewish boys were taken with Hungarian soldiers to Russia and they all died there. The older men did menial work.

00:34 While her father was away her mother ran the business for a few months.

00:35 One wealthy Jewish man came to her mother and offered to help her save the business. No amount of money could save the business.

00:36 The business was lost in 1941, after one year's notice. They were not allowed to sell it they just had to leave it. It was during this time that Eva learned sewing.

00:37 Her brothers were in school and her older sister had already finished.

00:38 Her father worked illegally doing the bookkeeping. Food was available. Later butter and bread were rationed.

00:39 Eva stopped school in 1939. She a job in a salon sewing and she did extra work privately.

00:40 Her parents did not want to take her money. They did take her money and used it to buy her a custom- made wall/dresser unit so she could have it when she got married.

00:41 Her mother borrowed some money but repaid it. The wall unit was ultimately given to the man who hired her father as a bookkeeper.

00:42 A German came to evict them to the ghetto. They had one room with wet walls and the conditions were very unhealthy.

00:43 Her mother took some things from the apartment to the ghetto. Jews were being sent to work at a brick factory.

00:44 In her city every woman was examined by a Hungarian midwife. Her mother begged the midwife not to touch the daughters.

00:45 The women were taken to an open field. The women were only half dressed and the German soldiers lifted their breasts to make sure nobody tried to hide a diamond there. They wanted to be sure that nobody took anything out of the country.

00:46 People were sent to the brick factory for 3 weeks. People did not think conditions could be worse. They were even using money for toilet paper. They were controlled by Hungarian overseers and were beaten and hungry.

00:47 The people were pushed into wagons for transport. At one town the people begged for water because it was June and they were crowded in the wagon. There was water but the Hungarians would not give it unless they got a raincoat. Eva had the only raincoat but before she gave it away she wrote her name in it. Everyone shared the water.

00:48 At the next town the Hungarians traded water for an umbrella. The woman who had the umbrella did not want to give it up since it was her last possession.

00:49 The Hungarians told her she would not need it where she was going. She gave up the umbrella.

00:50 In Czechoslovakia the Germans took over. Since her father spoke German they made him responsible for the 75 people in her transport wagon. If anyone was missing he would be responsible. One Czech man, who had escaped into Hungary, was with them.

00:51 This man somehow got his hands on a hatchet. She could see he was planning to escape. He tried to escape but there were Germans on top of the train and they caught him.

00:52 They arrived at Auschwitz at 2:00 a.m. on Saturday. They were met with a glaring light. Her father stood at the doorway.

00:53 There was a Jewish man in the striped uniform by the door and her father asked him where they were and what was that uniform he wore.

00:54 The man's response was that he (the father) would too wear the same shroud. Her father turned and said that the Jewish man said they were to be killed. Each train had thousands of people.

00:55 Prior to the transports from Hungary, the rail lines at Auschwitz had been extended closer to the gas chambers. The prisoner (with whom her father had spoken) stopped her and told her not to go with her mother. That saved her life.

00:56 A maximum of perhaps 10% could be saved from a transport. Her sister was on a different transport. They met later by luck. Some of her mother's cousins were there and they shared their bread.

00:57 She did not want to take it but they said that after the war she could repay them with challah. They were glad their mothers were not with them because the conditions were so crowded.

00:58 There was a woman there from her city who had a 3 year old child. The child was given to the woman's mother.

00:59 A Polish woman Kapo came and told them what happened to their families. The girls did not want to believe it.

00:60 The sky was red. She always tried to survive 1 hour because she felt her parents could not take it if she didn't survive. They had no water. German Gypsies were sent to dig in the ground for water.

01:01 They drank that dirty water and washed with it. Typhus broke out. There was a sick house and Eva would go there to see the Hungarian Jewish woman doctor. The doctor was her mother's age and Eva sought to be with her.

01:02 Twice a day there was a roll call where 15,000 girls were counted. The Germans would go by with their guard dogs.

01:03 She would try to sit until the Germans came by and then she would jump up. One day she went to see the doctor but the doctor chased her away. She did not know why the doctor was being so mean.

01:04 Dr. Mengele was in the doorway. He did not take her but the others there were gassed. The doctor saved her.

01:05 As they left she heard music being played. She saw the music corps and 2 of them were her schoolmates. She learned later that they were also gassed.

01:06 Soon after she learned her sister was also in Auschwitz. The women were regularly taken to the bath house. About 1000 were taken at a time but they had clothes for only about 800 so some

women had nothing to wear.

01:07 One day a man threw her a dress with a piece of bread in the pocket. En route to the bathhouse an acquaintance told her that her sister was also there.

01:08 She was able to get her way to her sister. When her sister first saw her she thought Eva was her younger brother (because she had no hair and had shrunken in size).

01:09 300 Hungarian girls were taken to a work camp. She was as skinny as a skeleton. Bombs were already falling near Auschwitz but the crematoria were not bombed.

01:10 At night they made the selection and she was selected for the work camp. She assumes that in the dark nobody noticed how skinny she was.

01:11 They marched to a new camp and lined up. She was pulled out by a German civilian and told she was too thin to work. He chose her to work with him because she spoke German. He gave her an apple which she shared with her sister.

01:12 Every day that old man brought her a sandwich and a piece of fruit. He also arranged for Eva and her sister to eat it in the toilet (so nobody would see that she had the food).

01:13 Even after the old man got sick he arranged for her to continue to get some food.

01:14 To show her appreciation she made him a Christmas gift made from clothing and blanket scraps. Once she asked a German for a mirror. He offered to bring it to her if she would tell the Russians that he had been good to her. She declined.

01:15 The Allies were approaching Weisswasser camp near Gorlitz in Upper Silesia. It used to be a factory that made beautiful crystal.

01:16 They made glass bulbs there. The men blew the glass and the women cut it and did the wiring.

01:17 She was transported to another camp in northern Germany but there was no work. They went through Hamburg and were transported out by train just before the station was bombed.

01:18 Sometimes they marched and sometimes they were transported by train. There was not much work and they were beaten a lot.

01:19 In what she refers to as "the good camp" she took a piece of apron to make a kerchief for her head. She was beaten for this. She did not have very much hair.

01:20 She arrived in Bergen-Belsen in April, 1945. At first they were disoriented and wandered into the German officers' area. Then they were turned around and went into the camp.

01:21 Conditions in the camp were bad and lice-infested. They were not given food. They were only there for a few days. She was sick when her sister came to tell her they were free. The Nazis had fled.

01:22 The German guards put on white armbands and left the prisoners in the care of Hungarian guards. Some of the girls who were screaming that they were free were shot by these guards.

01:23 That was her liberation. They went back into the barrack since it was too dangerous outside.

01:24 The British put a plaque in Bergen-Belsen stating that it had been liberated by the 2nd British Army on April 15, 1945. 10,000 unburied bodies were found and even after the liberation another 13,000 died from illness.

01:25 A Hebrew plaque shows that 30,000 died in Bergen-Belsen. She herself was sent to a hospital. Luckily they were liberated 3 weeks before the end of the war.

01:26 She does not believe that any of them would have survived another 3 weeks. Near the camp there was food. The British brought them food and even shared their own rations.

01:27 In 1946 she met her husband. He had heard that his parents had survived and was going from camp to camp looking for them. He met Eva during this search.

01:28 Her husband-to-be went to Belgium to find a brother. They corresponded for a year.

01:29 She met a German who promised to take her over the border. He started to take her but changed his mind. He did take her far enough for her to meet with a smuggler.

01:30 This second German did not know she was Jewish. He was very anti-Semitic. They passed the site of the Battle of the Bulge.

01:31 They ignored the warning signs and went over the mine fields.

01:32 After they were safely in Belgium she let the man know she was Jewish. He was flabbergasted.

01:33 She had no papers but Carl (her husband) did. The guards thought they were married and let them pass. In Brussels they were told to report to the authorities and tell them the truth.

01:34 She reported that a German brought her over and was paid a pound of coffee. They let her stay but told her she could not work. They worked illegally because they needed to live. They said they planned to emigrate.

01:35 Both Eva and Carl went to work in Boston almost immediately. They had a relative in New York who made papers for them, and a friend in Boston.

01:36 After liberation she did not know what to do. Her sister told her to go to the hospital. Even after liberation people around her were still dying. She was ill with typhus.

01:37 British and German doctors treated her. She had lost the use of her legs. She was glad when she regained their use so she could work the pedals on a sewing machine.

01:38 At liberation she weighed about 60 pounds. She was taken to a better section of the camp and she was able to work.

01:39 They were not paid except in cigarette rations. She did not smoke so she traded her rations for gold. When she wanted to get married they did not have any money.

01:40 Someone in Brussels asked her to make clothes for them since they were going to the US. These people were well-to-do. They made Eva a wedding and let her wear their own daughter's wedding dress, which they allowed her to alter.

01:41 Invited guests brought gifts and gave them some money. With that they could rent an apartment.

01:42 Carl did not even have the money to buy her flowers. She took a broach she had in order to have it melted down. That would not work since the broach was gold plated wax.

01:43 She then took a gold bracelet (she got from trading her cigarette rations) and that was melted down so they could get wedding rings.

01:44 Years later she learned the rings were not really gold. The jeweler gyped her.

01:45 They were married on a Sunday and she began working the next day. Three years later she was still getting more work than she could handle.

01:46 Her sister married one of the British liberators and he took her to England. Later her sister came to the US too.

01:47 She has told her children her story and they help her prepare for speaking engagements.

01:48 She heard Professor Weimar once when he spoke about how the Americans were begged to bomb the tracks to Auschwitz.

01:49 One telegram came to the State Department on June 24, 1944. She was deported on June 26, 1944. The State Department knew.

01:50 A Hungarian Jew initiated negotiations with Eichmann for Jews. In Turkey the Jewish man tried to get something to trade for Jews.

01:51 He was spied on and arrested.

01:52 One of her aunts was sent to a different camp and she survived with her 8 children ranging in age from 1 to 18.

01:53 After the war they went back to Hungary to their home. They left Hungary in 1956 after the Hungarian Revolution. They left illegally to Vienna. Her aunt went to the US.

01:54 Others went to Israel. Eva is disillusioned as to why the Americans would not even bomb the tracks to Auschwitz. She heard former Secretary of State (during WWII) McCloy when he was at Harvard.

01:55 Many Hungarian Jews never saw the camp since they went straight to the gas. When Wallenberg came to rescue Jews, she had already been taken.

01:56 One of her cousins managed to get to Budapest and she thought he was lucky. He was shot into the Danube (like in the movie "The Music Box") and that is how he died.

01:57 She had an aunt already in Palestine but she was not able to bring her 3 oldest children who were over 18 years old. Those 3 died. The aunt also tried to send her papers but she had already been deported.

01:58 Photo; Eva's mother had sent a family portrait to an aunt in Haifa. She arrived in Auschwitz on July 1, 1944 (the date is on the photo).

01:59 Her father did not think Hungarian Jews would be taken since there had been a successful invasion at Normandy. He was wrong.

02:00 She has a photo of herself standing by the plaque in Bergen-Belsen. (Photo taken on a trip back to Hungary).

02:01        She has a photo of the monument in Bergen-Belsen that was set up the 30,000 Jews that died there.

02:02        She found the graves of her paternal grandparents in Hungary. These are the only graves of her family that she has.  
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