

-TITLE-HANNAH BEER
-I_DATE-APRIL 7 1987
-SOURCE-EMORY UNIVERSITY - ATLANTA
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-POOR
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-DURATION-1:21:25
-LANGUAGES-
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-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
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1:00 Hannah Beer was born May 31, 1925 in a small town in Czechoslovakia. She was an only child when the war began. At the time her father was a businessman who imported and exported food of all types. Hannah compares herself to her mother, a housewife, named Erin Shiffle. Her family lived alone until her grandfather and aunt moved in around the second month into the war.

5:00 In describing her living conditions at the start of the war Hannah told the interviewer that she did not have her own room or her own bed. She lived in the living room. Though the apartment was small, they felt safer if the family stayed together.

7:48 Hannah was interested in fashion. She had planned to attend college with a major in fashion design, but was not able to complete the college preparatory courses that she had begun because of the onset of the war. She recalls September first as being the date she and the other Jewish girls were forced to leave school.

8:45 There were not many Jewish students in the school even before the war began. hannah studied Latin, German, and other basic core courses such as math and history.

10:36 Hannah's family was Jewish, but not very strict. They did not celebrate Shabbat. Though they did maintain friendships with the Jewish people only. She and her mother participated in Zionist organizations where they sang songs, and held debates. She had no contact at all with non-Jewish students her own age.

10:55 At the age of thirteen Hannah began to work for a dressmaker, but was forced to leave school and quit her job at seventeen. She was forbidden the use of public beaches and lakes. She was forced to give up her valuables. Many of her friends' fathers were taken away, and she witnessed many other families being taken to other concentration camps such as Dachau.

12:25 Hannah was well aware of what was going on, but did not comprehend the great extent of the tragedy. She discussed the option of leaving with friends and family but it was too late; she says her family would not separate from her unless they thought it was absolutely necessary: Originally she was supposed to have gone to Switzerland, but her family was "not happy about it", so she decided to stay.

12:58 When the interviewer asked "Who came and took these people away?" Hannah replied that the Germans, probably were responsible. Her relationship with her non-Jewish neighbors did not change, for she had never had a relationship with them. She reiterated that she had no non-Jewish friends, except for her father's business associates.

14:20 Hannah spoke of her father's brother who had been in the US since the age of eighteen and how they had asked for help from both he and their cousins in England. Though they had agreed to help as much as they could, no affidavit was obtained.

16:00 "Were there other orders besides restrictions from beaches?" the interviewer questioned Hannah told of how the Germans took over the "forbidden land", the land along the perimeter of the German border, where Jews had lived prior to the war. Jews had to take in other Jewish families, sometimes three to four extra people. She cannot remember many other restrictions besides those which effected her life in school. She was only sixteen or seventeen at the time. She would frequently argue with her family about wearing the Jewish star that all Jews were required to wear she was accused once for not wearing her star, although she had been wearing it and was called and ridiculed about it. She does not know how they got her name, but figured that the Nazi's simply wanted to set an example for the rest of the families in the area. Nothing ever resulted from the acquisition, but it frightened her terribly.

20:06 How long did you stay in the house after the Nazis came? Her family stayed in their home until 1942, the Nazis arrived in 1939--a few years.

20:22 Why did you leave in 1942? Her family was asked to leave by Jewish officials appointed by the Nazi's to tell/order the family to vacate.

21:24 When were you sent to (the camp) ? Hannah recalls being taken from her home in 1942; she was allowed to bring her clothes, a little bit of dry food (specific amounts of things), and was forced to leave everything else. She had no money. Her family had been able to give some of their jewelry to a non-Jewish neighbors. though not much was ever recovered.

23:11 They were taken to an army barracks in Berkenstadt (ph), in southern Bohemia.

24:23 "Describe the condition on the train:" Hannah and her family were first brought to a German grammar school for one or two nights. She remembers the conditions as being horrible, but it was only a waiting place. The conditions on the train were not unusual, but the people knew they were not free anymore. No one knew what was going to happen. He family was able to travel together in an average train car.

26:45 "Life in the Ghetto?" She recalls that at first in the Ghetto there were no schools to attend. Later a school was organized for younger kids. but not for her age group. These kids were housed together in a small shelter and separated form their families.

27:32 "What did she do in the Ghetto?" Hannah made and repaired German uniforms from the battlefield as well as repairing old German clothing. Within the first few months her father died in the Ghetto of pneumonia. She and her family slept on the floor, and received little if any medical treatment. The family was attended by the Jewish doctor who was not provided with enough medication to prevent her father's death. Her father was 35 when he died.

29:41 Hannah said she was some where around 17, when her father died. Her mother, at that time, was an attendant in a kitchen where they had tickets that were marked according to their food ration.

30:23 "Describe your living Conditions." She recalls that women were separated from the men. Later it was opened up, but at first families could not sleep together. One mattress was next to another, and fifty people slept in the same room. Later they lived in smaller rooms with six other people.

32:28 "Working conditions" Hannah claims that she never actually dealt with Germans themselves, but rather with appointed Jews. She worked six to eight hours each day and said that the work was tedious, but not difficult.

33:25 "Was there any resistance in the Ghettos?" Hannah recalls that there were attempts made many times, but she was never involved. There were not many German soldiers in the Ghettos, but there were Czechoslovakia police.

34:57 After the first year, every week transports would arrive from Europe, and the people were able to buy clothing and mustard from the incomers as well as from stores that had been set up specifically for the Jewish prisoners. These places were made to look normal, so visitors would have a good impression, "people were treated well publicly, but they suffered inside and were mistreated in private". No one knew how little they ate, so outsiders were given the impression that their life was not to difficult.

37:22 "Did you suffer inside?" Hannah claims to have been badly frightened only a few times. She worried about her mother when her father was gone. In October of 1944 people had to leave; when her mother left, Hannah had volunteered to go, but was not allowed to because she was needed to work. She doesn't know where her mother went and has never heard from her again.

40:11 At the time of her mother selection and departure, Hannah herself had gotten as far as the train, but was pushed aside at the last minute because she was young and they found that they needed her. Very few people knew where they were going. She had no contacts outside and no clue of what was going to happen to either her mother or herself.

41:25 "Was there a cultural life inside the Ghetto?" We tried to maintain a "normal look" on the outside. The Ghetto life included classical music performances, coffee houses, comedians, many concerts. The people found it beneficial to lead as normal as a life as they could so that they could forget the conditions they were living in.

42:30 Did people work outside of the Ghetto? She remembers that some families had vegetable gardens outside of the Ghetto. The Jewish inside appointed leaders to organize the people and their activities. Many did not want to cooperate with Germans, but would listen to the Jewish government within the Ghetto.

45:05 How was illness treated in the Ghetto. Many died from basic illnesses like the flu because of the lack of medical treatment given to the ill. Children could not be born so that if a women were to have become pregnant, an abortion was done immediately. When Hannah was eighteen years old a Hepatitis epidemic spread through the Ghetto. Hannah herself was hospitalized for three months. While in the hospital she remembers being attended to by many Jewish doctors and nurses, but because they had no medication to treat her symptoms, they were simply there for support and reassurance.

49:00 Hannah said that she was not aware of the existence of the death camps. Her life would have been worse if she had known of their existence. She always had hope. Her friends talked a lot about getting out, and they knew they would.

50:40 She claimed to have had no help from anybody outside of the Ghetto. There were no religious ceremonies performed in the three years that she was held captive, although there were Rabbis inside the Ghetto. The people tried to remain kosher and follow the rules of the doctrine, but the Bar Mitzvah or wedding were allowed.

51:51 First sign of the war coming to an end: Hannah heard rumors about the war's end. She heard sirens near the camp and hoped for the best.

52:49 "What was your worst experience while in the camp?" Hannah remembers being sent into the fields with the rest of the Jews in the Ghetto and being lined up into rows so that they could be counted. No one knew if they were going to be shot then, or let go. After many hours of standing everyone was sent back to the Ghetto and life returned to normal.

53:40 "Were there any good experiences?" No. "How long did you remain there?" January 1942 to May 1945, three years.

54:00 "Where were the rumors coming from?" The rumors were not coming from outside, it was the attitudes of soldiers and police that clued the people.

55:20 "How were you liberated?" "We woke up one morning and heard the Russians coming. We danced and sang. All of a sudden we were free and we didn't know what to do with it." They were organized there, and she didn't know what to do, where to go, or how to change. No one knew if it was true, and if they should leave? When the Russians took over they were told to begin to move..

57:43 "Did the Russians provide medical help?" It has been so long since that experience that Hannah doesn't know if medical help was provided, and was unsure if food was provided. "How long did most stay after they were freed?" She remembers that they stayed for approximately 2 weeks because people were fearful of leaving and had no homes to return to.

58:30 "Then where did you go?" She went with friends and drove off on the back of a truck to Prague. She had no money, nothing to eat and no shelter. She went to organization set up for jews. She wanted to go to her hometown, but wasn't allowed to cross from the Russian side to her home which was occupied by Americans.

10:0:50 "What was your physical condition at the time of liberation?" Hannah stated sarcastically that her condition was good enough for someone who had been in a camp for three and a half years without decent nourishment. She didn't think much about it though. She hoped to see her mother, but no one from her family returned. She tried to make a life for herself, and contacted relatives in the U.S. and in England.

1:02:15 "Your emotional state during liberation?" Emotionally Hannah remembers feeling "numb".

1:00 "Did she ever make it back to her hometown?" Hannah has made it back to her hometown, and considers herself privileged to have been able to do so.

1:00:58 No one ever heard from her mother and nothing was ever discovered about where she had been sent.

2:25 After she arrived at her hometown, how long did she stay there?

She remained there from November 1946 to May of 1949. She knew she would eventually go to live with her uncle in the U.S.

4:00 Hannah doesn't know what happened to her aunt either, but she was able to recover some of her property, her jewelry and miraculously a few old photographs.

5:22 "How were treated when you returned?"
When she went back to her apartment after the war and got the pictures and books that were left, people were amazed to see her. She asked the Germans to return her property, I suspect she is speaking of the townspeople, but they would not return it. They said it belonged to them because she had left it for so long.

6:35 The government would not return Hannah's property, her home or her belongings to her. The Germans returned the Jewish populations property to the Czechoslovakian government, but not to the people who had once lived there.

7:12 Hannah went to England from November 1946 to May 19-- , and then moved to the United States (New Jersey) where she met her husband.

8:16 Did she ever talk about her war experiences with family or friends? Yes, her family wanted to know everything about her experience. She has two daughters, aged 29 and 32. Their reactions to their mother's experiences is one of curiosity; they wanted to know all about their mother's experiences and where their parents were from. They did not like to discuss their parents' reaction or emotional experiences, only factual details.

9:29 Did she ever talk about her experiences with non-Jews? She did at times, but these discussions differed from discussions with Jews. Their reactions were similar to "Oh, really", accompanied by rolling eyes. They had no understanding because they couldn't imagine what her experience means to her and all Jews. They did, however, believe that she had survived these experiences.

10:26 How do you feel about being a Jew? She felt that being a Jew resulted in unfair treatment. Did it change your practices? No, she replied that her family was never very religious; they learned Hebrew and Kosher traditions, but were not rally strict with the doctrine. The experience didn't change her feelings about God.

11:56 She applied for aid, and received money for war reparations for each day she spent in a camp. Hannah claims that the Germans did so much harm to so many people that not any amount of money can make up for what they did. The money is the least that the government could do.

13:12 "Did you return to Europe since the war?" Hannah has not returned to avoid depressing or moving situations. She never

watches programs on the Holocaust. She feels she's been through it, and these programs are for others to watch and learn from. She feels she has learned enough. She wants all people to learn about the Holocaust and learn from it. For her children, she wants them to learn and they too, are interested in learning about the Holocaust.

16:22 Hannah wants to concentrate on her family today and not her past.

16:40 "In your opinion is another Holocaust possible?" Hannah would have never believed that the first would be possible. She doesn't imagine a Holocaust occurring in the U.S., but perhaps in other parts of the world. She feels the U.S. has too much of a diverse population for another Holocaust to occur, but strongly believes that the U.S. could have done more for the Jews in the past and hopes that they would react differently in the future.

18:25 "Is the existence of Israel important?" She feels Israel's existence is very important. Jews even in the U.S. need Israel as a free state.

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