

Title - Sophie Nathan
I - Date - March 17, 1992
Source - CHS/Atlanta
Sound Quality - Excellent
Image Quality - Excellent
Duration - 90 minutes
Languages - English
Geographic Name -
Personal Name -
Corporate Name -
Notes - Summary from unauthenticated transcript. All information from interviewee, without correction.

Contents: - Sophie describes her experiences before the war, in the ghetto at Rica (ph), and in various camps after the ghetto leading to her liberation.

Tape 1

Childhood - 1945

00:00 Sophie was born on November 7, 1921 in Emery (ph), Germany. Sophie describes her family as a middle class family, which consisted of her father who was a merchant, her mother, her sister, and herself. Before the war she wanted to be a child's nurse, requiring a year of home economics after 6 years of high school. Her parents sent her to Colon (ph), but the only school open for home economics was in Berlin and she was not allowed to go.

03:00 Sophie describes her parents education as at the 'gymnasium' level. Her family was conservative, they kept a kosher home, and a strong Jewish identity was instilled in the family. Sophie remembers having a lot of contact with non- Jews through her father's business ("as a middle man") and thought school (a Catholic girls school). After 1933, in high school, the Hitler youth got stronger and most of Sophie's Catholic friends drew away from her and no longer spoke to her. She thinks about 30 families - 100 people - were Jews, and a definite minority. yet before 1933, Sophie had not felt any particular anti-semitism.

06:00 Sophie's family was accustomed to having household help, but in 1935 the effects of the Neurenburg Laws prohibited them from having household help. She also remembers 1939 when Hitler had all Jewish stores broken into and destroyed. After she graduated high

school 1938, Sophie wanted to continue her education but she couldn't because she was Jewish. Instead she went to Colon (ph), and her father was still able to go about his business. After Kristallnacht, her father was put in prison in Dahar (ph) to prevent him from advising two single women about their businesses. They took the women's business away anyway, and then took her father's license.

09:00 May 1939, Sophie returned home where she worked at a home taking care of Jewish children. She stayed there until 1941 when her parents got their papers to be deported. She recalls at time of Kristallnacht, she was in Colon (ph) and her uncles there left and went over the border. The first people started to leave in 1936, including her husband's family. Sophie wanted to go to Israel but her father wouldn't let her.

12:00 Sophie remembers her father's belief that he had spent his whole life in Emery (ph), and so no one would harm him now. The quota to go to America was too high for them to leave anyway.. The war started in 1939 while she was in Colon (ph) and closer to the Polish border. She describes bombs falling and how they turned a basement into sleeping quarters for the children. it was like a big camp, and they had no contact with non-jews. Her parents were helped by their neighbors (non-jews) through a common window.

15:00 1941, Sophie returned to Emery (ph) because her parents were to be transported to Riga and she wanted to stay with her family. They had received the notification and they were allowed only one suitcase weighing no more than 40 lbs., groceries, and a bedrug (ph). By December 10, 1941 they were out of their home, went to the railway station to the gathering places - Dusseldorf (ph). Arrived by train in Riga on December 14, 1941.

18:00 Sophie's family was only given 3-4 weeks to prepare to Riga (ph), and they didn't know where they were going or what was ahead of them. They were only let off the train to get water, there was no food, and they never saw their suitcases or groceries again. When they arrived in Riga, there were ss dogs, and the officers gave the older people the choice to get on a bus to go to the ghetto. her father stayed with the family, and they walked for 1-2 hours to the ghetto behind barbed wire fences.

21:00 They were assigned to houses of about 13 people, with one room & a kitchen with a pot of potatoes and tea on the stove.

They had found out that the Latvian Jews, ten days earlier, had been put in a synagogue and burned. Within the ghetto, there was a street separating the Latvian Jews from the German Jews. The first transport that had arrived was from Koln, the second from Kassel, and she was part of the third transport from Dusseldorf. Each contained about 1000 people. All they were given to eat was a slice of bread, frozen fish heads and frozen potatoes - "everything was frozen. Sophie and her sister's first work assignment was to collect and sort all of the clothes of the Latvian Jews. They started to steal the clothing because they could exchange it for food.

24:00 Her parents stood outside for hours without work, her father became sick (his toes froze) and he was put in the hospital where there was no medication. (Sophie is crying) In May 1942 her father passed away, she says he died a natural death. There was a teacher from Koln who tried to keep up a school, where they went at night and studied. They did have services in the house, they said Kaddish, they couldn't sit Shiva, but there was always a minyan.

27:00 Sophie spoke of a hospitals, there were nurses and doctors but there was no medication. In October 1942 the Latvians tried an uprising, but they were unsuccessful and the Germans killed almost the entire Latvian police force. The Latvians were very prepared, they had an underground hospital with food and medication because they had contact with Latvian non-Jews since they spoke the language. other than that there was no resistance, where would you have gone? There was also a Jewish counsel who Sophie thinks was appointed by the Germans, and because they were under control of the ss they were no very helpful to the Jews. They were responsible for meeting the quota of workers for the work commandoes. The workers were glad to get out of the ghetto.

30:00 She shovelled snow on the railroads and the Latvians would give them bread. In 1942 she worked for the German army preparing beach houses for the officers. 1942-43 Sophie lived outside the ghetto keeping house for Latvian Jewish people who mad boots and fur coats for the ss. Because these Jews had a trade the ss wanted to keep them alive so they lived in apartments and had more food.

33:00 Sophie tells of how a lot of young women lived with ss men in order to have food and not be sent to Stutthof. All they knew of Stutthof and Auschwitz was that they were worse than what they

had. When Allies invaded France, their heads were shaved and they had to wear prison clothes so that if they tried to escape they would stand out. (she learned this in retrospect). The only thing they noticed about the outside world was in Liebock (ph) when the Russians came closer there were air attacks. In 1948, they asked people to volunteer to leave to go to a 'fishing village'. In this way they transported people out under the false belief that they were going to a fishing village where they were promised to always have enough food, and food was all they were concerned about.

36:00 Sophie does not remember any mass transports out of the ghetto, although there were transports that never reached the ghetto, and there were hangings in the ghetto. November 2, 1942 they took all old people and children always, but sophie, her mother, and her sister were all working for the army. November 6, 1942 families were separated, men from women, into barracks, and now all Jews were together.

39:00 there were no religious ceremonies and no Seder held within the ghetto. The Germans knew when Yom Kippur came alone and made work even harder, they also had hangings on Shabaas. People caught with food or trying to escape were hanged, and they were forced to walk by the hangings on their way back from work. Sophie spoke again of how in 1944 their heads were shaved, they wore prison clothes, were never tattooed. September 1944 she and her mother and sister were sent to Liebock(ph).

42:00 (Sophie begins reading her notes) She remembers how deep down they thought they would survived and that was what kept them going. She felt the older generation was much stronger than her generation. In Liebock she was loading wagons with army clothes. They slept double in beds of straw with a coat thrown over the straw.

45:00 In the July - October 1943 she was sent into peat moss fields with 20-30 other women where they got the peat moss out of the swamp and let it dry - it was used to heat the homes. When she returned they had selected. (crying) Her mother knew the German soldier and told him "this is my daughter" and he said "O.K. stay with your mother", and that saved her. Sophie says the goal was to stay with your family.

48:00 While she was working for the army, a doctor came into the barracks to make selections and at the time her mother was in the

hospital because she had trouble with her leg. The same soldier accompanied the ss doctor, and when he was about to select her mother the soldier told him she was one of his best workers and that he needed her. There were some decent people.

51:00 Soldiers would give them chocolate for energy. Sophie provides the names of her father, George; her mother, Thia(ph); and her sister, Amy (ph). The group of people she worked with supported each other, and they developed a very strong bond.

54:00 Sophie's mother was very sick shortly before liberation, and one woman wouldn't help. There were no births in the ghetto, and girls that were pregnant had abortions, which Sophie thinks were forced. There weren't any suicides that she knew of either. Evenings of music were provided and encouraged under ss supervision. it was the job of the German Jewish police to search for 'contraband', some pretended to search, and some DID search.

57:00 Sophie speaks of how she didn't know about Auschwitz until after her liberation. They shot people in Riga, there were mass graves and a prison outside of the ghetto, but no one was allowed to talk about it. There weren't any non-Jews in the ghetto. Sophie does not feel that her religious beliefs changed, she says she always knew someone had to be up there. Her beliefs were even stronger afterwards because she felt someone wanted them to get out. All she knew about the transports was that there were buses going out and that there was gas. She did not know about the ovens in Treblinka, and only found out in Sweden after her liberation.

1:00:00 February 1945 Sophie, her mother and her sister were transported in the hull of a boat from Lebock (ph) to Humburg where they were locked in a one room prison. There was no room to sleep, they would gather wooden chairs to sleep on. They were there until the middle of April, when they marched about 100 km. to another camp.

TAPE 2

0:00:00 The camp was near the city Kiel, it was fairly large, and they were there for two weeks. Sophie considered it the worst camp they had been to, they had nothing to eat except water soup and a piece of bread, they had no way of keeping clean, and they were made to walk on blankets full of lice. Her Mother got sick, and because it was towards the end of the war there was no medication, had her mother been there for one more week she would have died. Sophie remembers that the Sunday morning her father died they were trying to bury him, but once they had gotten anything together he was gone. There was a cemetery in the ghetto, and that is supposedly where he was.

0:03:00 Sophie suffered no medical problems, but her mother has a large scare on her leg from a wheel of a cart; she also has a scar on her hand. Sophie was not aware of any medical experiments in the ghetto. Her worst experience was in Liebock, during the air attacks they were forced to go into bunkers and the officers would make the older people sit at the entrance of the bunker. One time they told her mother to take the first sit, but she said she was going with her girls, and as it turned out a bomb fell on the first seat.

0:06:00 She recall trying to steal eggs with a friend but they heard there was going to be a search and they hid the eggs. People tried to escape but no one ever made it. She relayed a story about a girl and her fiance who tried to escape, and both were killed. Edwards Rashman(ph), Commandant in the ghetto for a while, she remembers him strutting through the ghetto and everyone would disappear because they never knew if he was going to pick them. The Kauser (ph) took his place and was there until the end of the ghetto. Still, they were not aware of the war coming to an end, just knew the Russians were getting closer. They heard the bombs and they didn't understand why they never hit the prison.

0:09:00 Sophie describes how she felt at the time of her liberation. The night before (may 1), they were all told to remove their prison clothes and to put on other clothes. The next day they were told to stand in formation, they saw the white trucks with crosses and had only heard of the trucks as being gas chambers so they thought it was all over. The Danish Red Cross people told them they were to be liberated, so she felt she didn't have a choice. They took the trucks to the Danish border, they were made

to shower, and put on a train to Copenhagen. Still there was a feeling of disbelief. They were told not to say they were originally Jews from Germany. She mentions Carl Bernadadt (ph) and Hemler.

0:12:00 She was put on a got to Copenhagen with her mother and sister and they were served coffee - food was very important. Landed on Friday evening in Marmery (ph) and were welcomed by Swedes with first hot chocolate she had in a very long time. Joint Distribution or the Swedish Jewish community put beds in a school, and they were under a doctors care while in Sweden.

0:15:00 They had guarded the addresses of their relatives in Sweden the entire time, and gave them to people on the Joint Distribution who told them they would telegram her relatives. The telegram was never sent, but Sophie met the daughter of Barlberg (ph) (a German Jewish Philanthropist) and asked her if she knew her aunt and uncle. Barlberg knew them and got in touch with them for Sophie. Sophie's uncle then got in touch with them personally, and visited them at their second location (a spa) in Sweden.

0:18:00 Consult found jobs for Sophie and her sister in Stockholm as maids for a Jewish Family. Her mother's cousins couldn't afford the affidavits to get them all into the U.S., and they didn't make enough money as maids. her fathers side then paid for the affidavits, and her mothers family paid for the fare. Sophie, her mother, and sister arrived in America in April 1946.

0:20:00 Because of the flares that were sent up to see where they were bombing, Sophie still can't watch fireworks. She wants to have nothing to do with Germany or the Germans. She did go to Germany once, and says that was big mistake. She never talks about experience of the war because unless you have really lived through it, it is very hard for the next person to understand which is why there is such a strong bond among survivors and why they still keep in touch.

0:24:00 Her mother received widow's rent and disability as reparation, but Sophie wanted nothing for the Germans. She does feel a strong bond toward Israel and does support a home for retarded children but she does not want to live there, although she would like to visit again.

0:27:00 sophie says there are certain days that bring back

memories, and she wanted to do the interview for the next generation.