

1 INTERVIEW WITH: LOLA SWEDE

2 INTERVIEWER:

3 DATE:

4 PLACE: Buffalo, N.Y.

5 TRANSCRIBER: Jan Elvee

6

7

8 THE INTERVIEWER: Q. Your name?

9 A. My name is Lola Swede.

10 Q. Would you spell that, please?

11 A. S-w-e-d-e.

12 Q. Where do you live now?

13 A. I live in Buffalo, New York.

14 Q. If you can, would you be able to tell us what
15 happened during the war when you knew something was wrong,
16 the very beginning? When was the first time you knew that
17 something was wrong? Where were you living and what were you
18 doing?

19 A. Well, the Germans came in 1939, September I think
20 seven or so, the beginning of September. It was right away
21 we knew something was very, very wrong.

22 Q. Where were you living at the time?

23 A. I was living in Lodz Poland.

24 Q. What were you doing?

25 A. I was a student. School, public school. Sixth

1 grade. And within weeks, they sent us right away to work. I
2 couldn't continue school.

3 Q. Who sent you to work?

4 A. Well, it was the Germans. I had to go to work to a
5 factory. And since then I was doing labor work.

6 Q. Who else in your family was affected at the time?

7 A. The whole family were. Nine children. My parents.

8 Q. Were you the oldest?

9 A. No. I was -- let's see. I was the sixth. I had
10 three younger sisters. Eight sisters, one brother.

11 Q. Where were you during the time of the war?

12 A. I was four years in Lodz ghetto. When they were
13 liquidating the ghetto, I was sent to Auschwitz. I was ten
14 days in Auschwitz. I was lucky in this way.

15 From Auschwitz they sent us to Bergen-Belsen. It
16 was a trip of eight days, eight nights. No food. No water.
17 200 girls. And this was a miracle because all 200 girls
18 survived under those conditions.

19 Q. How do you know that?

20 A. Because we were altogether in one train.

21 Q. You mean you survived the train ride?

22 A. The train ride, the 200 girls.

23 Q. What happened then?

24 A. Bergen-Belsen. They took us to a camp.

25 Q. Do you know which one?

1 A. Well, Bergen-Belsen. We were in Bergen-Belsen for
2 six weeks. And then they sent us to a camp called
3 Zous-fa-del. There we worked in a munition factory, all the
4 200 girls together.

5 Six months later we were liberated by the American
6 Army.

7 A. What do you remember specifically about being in
8 the camps?

9 A. The ghetto was horrible. Just every day. Every
10 second of the minute.

11 Q. Can you describe what a day was like for you?

12 A. A day was 100 years. Hunger, cold, hard work, fear.

13 Q. What kind of work did you do?

14 A. Different things.

15 Q. Like what?

16 A. I had the factories. I was for example at one time
17 working in like sewing little dresses for children and
18 another camp factory I was working making corsets. Different
19 kinds of work.

20 Q. Were you near any family members during this time?

21 A. We were altogether in the ghetto. The Germans came
22 in to send out some Jews to the death camps that were hiding
23 and were successful to hide all the time whenever they came
24 in. But toward the end, there was no way. They sent us out
25 to Auschwitz.

1 When we came to Auschwitz, I was convinced, because
2 everybody was crying and screaming, I was convinced -- I told
3 the girls, "We probably died and this is hell." That was my
4 opinion. I was convinced.

5 They took us to -- the train ride, we arrived to
6 Auschwitz. I was sent to the right side. We didn't know at
7 that time what that meant, but now we knew.

8 I came with my mother and three younger sisters and
9 three older than myself. Three oldest survived. The fourth
10 survived to work. And my mother and my three younger sisters
11 went to the left and I never saw them again.

12 They took us to our beds, shaved our heads,
13 stripped us naked. It was horrible, just plain horrible.

14 Q. Do you remember anything specific, any one day, one
15 hour, one relationship you had with someone?

16 A. The first night was a horror night. This was in
17 Auschwitz. The whole barrack woke up screaming. Everyone.

18 Q. Everyone had nightmares?

19 A. It was a horrible nightmare. Maybe one started to
20 scream and we all followed. We didn't know what happened.

21 Q. Do you think people knew what was going to happen?

22 A. We knew and we didn't know exactly. We knew it was
23 very bad. The smoke coming out of the chimney and the music
24 was playing.

25 Q. Did you think you were going to die?

1 A. We were afraid, yes. But to hold onto life like
2 very strongly. We wanted to live.

3 Q. Were you physically ill at the time? Can you
4 describe what your symptoms were?

5 A. I wasn't physically ill but I was very weak, tired,
6 hungry.

7 The first night when we came in Auschwitz, they
8 located us in a barrack. They put us in a barrack without a
9 roof. It was raining and pouring. And this barrack was
10 filled up with water. And we had to stand all night like
11 this. And we just thought that was the end of us then.

12 During these ten days in Auschwitz, about three
13 times, we had to stand naked outside, all of us. And the
14 German soldiers were inspecting our bodies, if we were fit
15 for work. So I was lucky with my sisters. I almost couldn't
16 make it but God was with me.

17 Q. So you felt humiliated at that particular
18 experience?

19 A. Of course. The shame was more than the hunger, the
20 physical pain. The mental pain.

21 Q. How old were you at the time?

22 A. At this time I was 19 years already. 18 years.

23 Q. What happened after they inspected you?

24 A. A few times. And then one time after inspection
25 they sent us to a different place and they sent us to work.

1 That's when they took 200 strong girls. They sent us out
2 from Auschwitz.

3 Coming out from the gate there was a man working
4 very hard -- I'll never forget this until the rest of my life,
5 my days -- and he was pounding on some stones. And he said,
6 "Girls, you're very lucky that you're leaving this horrible
7 place."

8 They put us in the train: three boxcars for 200
9 girls. Eight days, eight nights. No water.

10 Q. No water, no facilities, nothing?

11 A. No facilites. And we just -- it was, this was
12 probably -- it looked to us like maybe the end, maybe they
13 wanted to kill us this way.

14 Q. Slow torture?

15 A. Yes, it was slow torture.

16 Q. Do you remember anything about the eight days on
17 the train, what people said to each, what they looked like,
18 if people cried?

19 A. Yes. Yes. We were singing songs. I remember there
20 were four sisters and a mother who were singing "My Yiddish
21 Mama" and all were crying. And those four girls and the
22 mother survived. I survived. My sisters too. I mean the
23 whole thing, the holocaust.

24 Q. Did you sleep during that time?

25 A. Of course we slept but it was -- you mean in the

1 train.

2 Q. In the train.

3 A. Yes. Sleep or up awake. Of course. Doesn't
4 matter to them we had no air. Nobody bothered to open up the
5 door for us.

6 Finally after eight days, we arrived in
7 Bergen-Belsen. They opened the top of the doors and they
8 were very surprised that everybody was alive. They said --

9 Q. A miracle?

10 A. They said, "Is everybody alive?"

11 What are you going to ask me now?

12 Q. Either you want to continue to talking about your
13 experiences or what's happening for you here.

14 A. I can talk about here now. Being here -- I am
15 very, very emotional about being here. I had moments, I went
16 back like 40 years in history. I had moments yesterday,
17 Monday night especially, like I was back with my sisters and
18 my parents. I could see them and feel them.

19 It is very painful for me. But yet I have to come
20 back to reality now and I'm very happy I met those girls who
21 were liberated together. Somebody told me about one person
22 is here.

23 Q. How did that happen?

24 A. I have a friend. She lives in Buffalo with me. We
25 were talking -- maybe she told me where she was in Germany

1 after the liberation and she mentioned a name. I said, "I
2 know this girl." And she said, this girl, the one who told
3 me about her, is here too.

4 And she pointed her out to me. I walked up to her
5 and said, "Do you know me?" She said, No, I don't. Who
6 are you? I told her. I said I was liberated from
7 Zaus-fa-del and somebody told me you were in Zaus-fa-del too.

8 And she showed me a whole group of girls. And we
9 didn't recognize each other but we started to talk and it was
10 quite a sight.

11 Q. I'm sure that was very emotional for you.

12 A. Very. But I'm very happy to see those girls. I'm
13 now very active with the Hadassah. We have a survivors'
14 group in Buffalo. I'm the president of it.

15 Q. What's the name of the group?

16 A. Ima. Ima means mother in Hebrew. We're raising
17 money to support orphans in Israel. And we also raise money
18 for Israel bonds. \$50,000, our little group. I'm very proud
19 of it.

20 Q. So your experiences haven't ended for you? You've
21 continued by continuing the legacy?

22 A. Exactly.

23 Q. So it is important for you to do this?

24 A. Very important. Especially for children because I
25 was a child. I lost three sisters. They were just children.

1 To Auschwitz. That's why we support children in Israel.

2 Q. Do you think you'll maintain friendships with the
3 women you met here?

4 A. We are trying to set up a reunion every year. We
5 tried to figure out how and where.

6 Q. In your life now, do you relate to survivors around
7 you? Do you live near any survivors?

8 A. Yes. This group called Ima is composed of mostly
9 survivors and we are raising money. We are very close, like
10 a family, in Buffalo, New York.

11 Q. Can you tell us about your family now?

12 A. Yes. I'm happily married for 37 years.

13 Q. You met your husband after the war?

14 A. I met my husband four weeks after the war. His
15 name is David Swede.

16 Q. What was your name before?

17 A. Lola Lipshitz. I have four daughters: Renata,
18 Helen, Sary and Marcy. I have two grandsons.

19 Q. Do your children know about your experiences?

20 A. They know, but I don't talk about it like I'm
21 talking now. Just once in awhile they would ask me a
22 question. And then all of a sudden I tell them I have to
23 stop right now because I'm getting sick. They know already.
24 So once in awhile we talk just for awhile.

25 Q. How did you find out about the gas chambers?

1 A. When we came to Auschwitz, those inmates in
2 Auschwitz showed us the smoke coming out of big huge torches.
3 And they showed us. You know what this is. I said no. This
4 is our future. That's where we all go.

5 And we heard the music playing and they told us
6 while they throw the Jews in the gas chambers, music is
7 playing. But we didn't believe it. We just thought it was
8 stories. Soon we find out because they were taking away our
9 friends and they disappeared.

10 Q. So you knew they were dead?

11 A. In Auschwitz we find out, yes.

12 Q. Can you remember anything you felt, any particular
13 feeling? Was it disbelief? Was it futility? What did you
14 feel?

15 A. What I felt in Auschwitz? I was convinced I'm in
16 hell. I knew I didn't deserve it. I couldn't believe it. I
17 really was convinced at that time that we all died and this
18 is hell.

19 Q. Did you know it was because you were Jewish?

20 A. Oh, yes. I was in the ghetto because I was Jewish.
21 That's the only reason.

22 Q. How did you feel about that?

23 A. Humiliated. Unreasonable.

24 Q. Were you angry?

25 A. Angry. Very angry. I couldn't understand why.

1 I never had my period until one month after the war
2 and I was 19. I was hemorrhaging for two years: heavy
3 periods. My pregnancy was -- I don't know -- normal. That
4 was my first pregnancy.

5 Q. When were you pregnant?

6 A. Two years after I was married. Two and a half
7 years later my daughter was born.

8 Q. What year was this?

9 A. 1948. I was hemorrhaging after delivery. They
10 took me back. I was very sick. My second child was
11 delivered by cesarean section. Result of the whole thing and
12 I had three cesearian sections. So I had to have --

13 Q. Did you know about women who were pregnant in the
14 camps or in the ghetto and what happened to them?

15 A. I knew of a woman who was pregnant in Zous-fa-del.
16 I was told and I saw her too because I was sick. I had an
17 accident in the camp and they took me -- there was a little
18 hospital and she was there.

19 They took out the baby. She was pregnant. They
20 took out the baby in parts like experimental. And this was
21 so terrible, we couldn't stay next to her bed. What happened
22 to her, I don't know.

23 Q. Did you know of any abortions that women gave to
24 each other or that doctors performed?

25 A. No.

1 In the ghetto we had little groups -- since I
2 couldn't finish school, all the books were available to us.
3 We formed like a little cultural group. We were studying
4 together after work whenever we had a little time not to fall
5 behind completely with our education. We did what we could.
6 And we read a lot, whatever we could find.

7 I don't have any friends from the ghetto. So far I
8 didn't find anybody except for today this girl. I knew her
9 from school. That's the first contact I made. I used to go
10 to school with her together. That's the first time since
11 1939 that I find a person who I knew before the war.

12 I would love to escape but there was nowhere. My
13 sister had a girlfriend -- I don't remember her last name but
14 her first name was Lola. She tried to escape and she was
15 shot on the spot.

16 Q. Did you see that?

17 A. Yes. She was a gorgeous girl. I remember her
18 braids. I remember her well.

19 Q. So you knew that it was better for you not to try
20 that?

21 A. I couldn't. We were very watched. We couldn't.

22 Q. There were no feelings of relief?

23 A. Never. Never. Always sad, depressed, hungry, cold.
24 We didn't see any future but we were just hoping. We just
25 think to have a little bit hope.

1 Q. So when you were liberated, was it difficult for
2 you to experience good feelings again?

3 A. Yes. No, it wasn't. We did -- I'm speaking for
4 myself. I adjusted very fast. It was hard, particularly I
5 was looking like, hoping that I find my mother. I missed my
6 mother so. And I would walk in the street and turn around
7 hoping that's her. We knew, I knew that I wouldn't see her.
8 I say we because I was with my three other sisters. But it
9 was just an empty dream.

10 Q. Are your three sisters alive now?

11 A. Unfortunately, one of my sisters died eight years
12 ago. And the other two are still alive.

13 Q. You keep in touch with them?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. So you're able to hold some of those memories of
16 your mother through your sisters?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. What happened to your father?

19 A. He died in the ghetto. My brother died of hunger,
20 starvation.

21 Q. Did you know about it at the time? Did you see?

22 A. Yes. Starvation he died and brother died of
23 starvation. One of my sisters died of starvation. And three
24 younger sisters, they were sent with my mother to the gas
25 chambers.

1 Q. (Inaudible.)

2 A. Not me. Except for the soldier for the Gestapo and
3 SS.

4 Q. You didn't see the way non-Jews were treated?

5 A. No. I couldn't say.

6 Q. What about the children? Did you see what happened
7 to children?

8 A. In the ghetto, I knew the children were the first
9 ones to go if they came directly. SS came into the ghetto to
10 take people out that were hiding the children. Some were
11 successful. They were always hiding the littlest, smallest
12 sisters until they liquidated the ghetto. They couldn't do
13 anything about it anymore.

14 When I came to Auschwitz, there were two soldiers
15 after we got out of the train. He sent me to the left side.
16 I didn't know where he's sending me. The other soldier
17 called me back. He asked me my age. I knew I had to lie
18 about my age. I knew too young is not good to be. I told
19 him 19 years old. He asked me if this is the wahr heit, yes,
20 the truth. So he sent me to the right side. I don't know
21 why but that was how it was.

22 Q. So you think if you didn't lie about your age you
23 might not be alive?

24 A. That's right.

25 Q. How do you feel about that?

1 A. I don't know. Sometimes I ask why I survived. How
2 come my sisters didn't survive and/or other children. I
3 don't know.

4 Q. What made you think at the moment to lie? What
5 made you do that?

6 A. Instinct. We knew. Experience, instinct.

7 Q. Did you have any experience of the Judenrot? Did
8 you have any contact with anyone in the Judenrot?

9 A. Where?

10 Q. In the ghetto.

11 A. We had our ge-mi-na, like little government. But
12 run by the Jews.

13 Q. You have no memories of that?

14 A. I don't know what you mean. Maybe they were under
15 orders. We had Jewish police. Ma-kov-sky was our leader.
16 Some say he was senile but he wasn't. In fact I was working
17 for him. Ma-kof-sky was our leader maybe a year. A little
18 bit over a year.

19 Q. Did you feel like --

20 A. No choice. If I don't have a gun and somebody puts
21 a gun on my head, I have to do what I'm told.

22 And besides, when they send us out from the Lodz
23 ghetto, we weren't told where we're going. They told us to
24 take all the possessions. We're going to work. We took our
25 pictures, whatever we still had. We brought it to Auschwitz

1 as then (inaudible).

2 Q. When you were liberated, where did you go first?

3 A. We stayed in the mountains. From there to
4 Bergen-Belsen.

5 Q. You were with your sisters?

6 A. One sister to the other hoping we could find
7 somebody. It was a very confusion. We didn't know where to
8 go.

9 Q. How did you finally come to America?

10 A. We came to America in 1955.

11 Q. So where were you before?

12 A. I was in Israel first. And then we came back to
13 Europe from Israel and then we came here.

14 Q. Why did you choose to come here? Was it a choice?

15 A. No. We just -- I thought the climate was very hot
16 for me. I couldn't --

17 Q. In Israel?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. But you do have strong feelings about Israel?

20 A. I support -- I love Israel. And I'm working for
21 Israel. I raise money for Israel. I buy Israel bonds.

22 Q. Do you go back occasionally?

23 A. Yes. Three years ago the whole family was there.
24 And we're hoping to make another trip. Pray for Israel.

25 Q. Do you speak about the holocaust often to family or

1 friends? Do you read about it? Is it in your life now?

2 A. I refuse to read about it. I can't.

3 Q. It is too painful for you?

4 A. It is too painful. Stories to tell. I don't read
5 about it too much.

6 Q. So coming here was very difficult for you?

7 A. Yes. Yes. I went back 40 years in history.

8 Q. Are you glad that you came?

9 A. I'm very glad. I found a cousin.

10 Q. That's wonderful.

11 A. I found a cousin. I knew of her existence but I
12 didn't see her. First time in my life I saw her. They used
13 to live in France and we used to live in Poland and here we
14 met. She lives in Washington.

15 Q. So you're pleased that you're here? It was
16 successful for you?

17 A. Yes. The reunion today was wonderful.

18 Q. What happened? What did you all do? Just laugh
19 and talk?

20 A. We cried. We laughed. We kissed and we hugged.
21 And we didn't recognize each other but after talking and
22 looking -- (inaudible).

23 Q. How many women were there?

24 A. Maybe twelve, fifteen, I don't know. We didn't
25 count.

1 Q. You've exchanged addresses?

2 A. We're going to (inaudible.)

3 Q. Don't lose each other.

4 A. Never again.

5 Q. Never again. It was wonderful talking to you.

6 A. Thank you.

7 (End of tape.)

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