

RG-50.569*0031
Peter Wortsman Collection
DINA STRASSBERG
1975/05/08

Henry,
Please find attached the time-codes notes on the interview with Dina Strassberg.
I think I heard that she mentioned that her last name is spelled with two –s.
To be continued ...
Thanks,
Christian

Interview with DINA STRASSBERG
English
RG-50.569*0031
Tape 1, Side A

In this interview, conducted by Peter Wortsman, Dina Strassberg talks about life in a ghetto in occupied Poland, her experience in a forced labor camp, and the struggle of survival in the concentration camp of Auschwitz. In addition, she describes her return to Poland after liberation and the long process of immigration to Palestine.

000 – 085

Family background

She was born in Chechov, Galicia; a third of the population was Jewish; the Jewish community was well developed there; they had Jewish hospitals; she went to a Hebrew High School; the Jews were represented in the City Council; mentions the professions Jews worked in; discusses the official status of Jews in the professional life in Poland; comments on the occasional attacks on Jews, friendships in school and life in an exclusively Jewish environment.

086 – 270

The ghetto

She focuses on the invasion of Poland; remembers an incident in which the Jewish men were taken to a basement and they were found decapitated the next day; analyzes the question of what the Jewish population knew about their subsequent fate; remembers an incident in which Jews were deported to her town from Germany and how the population helped them with housing and clothes; analyzes the optimism of Polish Jews; discusses her family's fate after the German invasion, the ghettoization, the transports from the ghetto, her work in a camp outside of the ghetto; recalls a story in which her mother and her sister were asked to get food ration cards, entered a building and never came back; analyzes the manipulation of Jews by the German system, the psychological approach of making people believe in the good.

271 – 590

Forced labor in Sepinka and survival in Auschwitz

Comments on her first impression of Auschwitz, the manipulation by music, nice gardens, loans, the hospital and the doctors; discusses the argument of “we did not know anything” by the German population after the liberation; speaks about the cruel forced labor camp in Sepinka before she was sent to Auschwitz; remembers killings and torture methods there; focuses on forced labor as a way to break people physically and psychologically; describes how they had to carry stones back and forth the whole day and how they had to dig trenches; remembers an incident in which the old people were taken to the woods and shot there; describes the deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau and arrival in Auschwitz, the selection, the humiliation, and how their hair was cut and how they got their prisoner clothes and tattoos; analyzes the feeling of hopelessness, humiliation, isolation, and the useful argument of “sharing the same fate” with other people.

Tape 1, Side B

000 – 085

Survival in Auschwitz

She explains the food rations they were supposed to get; talks about how in 1943 she was sent to the Musterlager in Auschwitz after 3 or 4 weeks in Birkenau; describes how the Nazis arranged the “show camp” as a very nice place for prisoners to impress the Red Cross; she was sent to the munitions manufactory then; comments on the 12-hour shift work and the different food there; remembers an incident in which she worked on a press machine and spoiled one plate, was accused of sabotage and had her hair cut in front of other prisoners and guards; analyzes the fact that she was not killed then.

086 – 145

Death march and liberation

She comments on the evacuation of Auschwitz; the death march; remembers the killing of people during the march and the arrival in Ravensbrück after 3 weeks; stayed in Ravensbrück for 3 weeks under terrible conditions; they were taken to Mecklenburg/Neustadt Rebe where there was a small camp; they had to dig trenches

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there; analyzes the Germans' behavior at the end of the war; remembers an incident in which the Germans offered cigarettes to the prisoners and apologized for "small talk"; Remembers hearing noise of airplanes which bombed the surroundings; they saw white flags everywhere; the Germans escaped from the camps carrying things with them; discusses how they opened the gates and were free then and how the entire village of Neustadt was empty; all the Germans had left; describes how they opened a food store of the camp and started eating; comments on the arrival of the Americans who gave chocolate and cigarettes to the prisoners.

146 – 270 [end of recording]

Life after the liberation

She spent some time in Germany and left for Poland then; she was the only one left from 6 children of her family; she discusses life for the former prisoners in Poland and her bad experience with the population after her return; talks about new pogroms against Jews in Chechov; she left for Krakow then where more Jews were and life was safer and more organized; they started organization of a kibbutz; mentions the Jewish brigade for aliyah who came to help them to organize food and emigration; comments on the work of JOINT UNRRA, which helped the prisoners with clothes, food, and medicine; she lived in Italy then for 6 months; describes learning Hebrew there and the social and cultural life; the Jewish soldiers came and invited them to go to Genoa and then to Palestine; she remembers an incident in which she was part of a group of thousands of people who waited in Genoa on a ship for weeks to go to Palestine; they organized a hunger strike then; **Laschky**, the secretary of the Labor Party in Rome, came to talk to them; he helped them to get certificates to leave for Palestine in May 1946; in Israel she spent time in Haifa and moved to her current residence in Hadera then.