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WORRY. A Jewish Deaf, Blind Survivor Shares Her Story

Documentary

Transcript

Oh, please I pray never again such a war like World War. I detest it.

(Title frames)

(Maps with text)

In 1938, I saw people moving from Germany. They were Jewish people frightened by Hitler's Nazism and the killings. They were moving to Poland because of fear.

I asked my teacher because I was worried, I asked, "Do you think there will be a bad war, that Nazi Germany will invade us?" "That is nonsense," the teacher responded.

Yet, later in 1939 the war began! In looking out the window I saw a Nazi motorcade come through out town with a big flag with a Nazi symbol on it.

(Interviewer: A swastika?)

Yes, that. I saw it and was so sad and disgusted. I told my father go and hide. He knew from the past that they would come through and gather up the men to work and those who were too lazy were killed. My father didn't want to work for them so he ran away to hide. My grandfather just said, "ah, I'll stay put." It was too late anyways. So he hugged me. My grandfather said "No" so they shot him. Me, I escaped. I saw the first shot and as I ran I heard and felt a total of six shots.

What are you going to do? It was very sad. We had to bury him in the yard at home. We could not go to the cemetery to bury him. So he was there at home with some flowers to mark the site. I would see it and be reminded of him being there and feel so upset / revolted knowing he was there.

(The GHETTO)

(map of ghettos in Poland with text)

We had armbands.

(interviewer: describe them and the color)

They had a star of David on them. It was made of two triangles.

(Interviewer: What color?)

White with yellow and blue. Some people would take off their armbands to sneak out to buy and sell goods – dealing on the black market you know. This was a way to get money or goods secretly.

(Round up photo)

The war continued. The Nazis wrecked havoc. They ordered my father to forced labor. They ordered him to help, delivering different food, a variety of jobs such as working this crank. I asked my mother, “where is father? I want to see him” and she said, “you know he has new work on a farm, tending the garden.” So nose-ye-me I went off to see him. When I spotted him, he was drenched in sweat covering his face. “My beloved father.” He was laboring to turn this crank and when he saw me he gave off a big smile, wiped his brow and checked the water gage to see how much more he had to pump. The level was still far too low.

It was terribly hard work to turn the crank – they worked in two-men shifts every two hours. It was so tiring. So my father smiled called me over to give it a try, “come on, come on.” He signed. The two of us tried to turn it together and I saw how difficult it was. I was too tired and weak to do this type of work.

My work was doing wash. I had to help out by doing laundry in large tubs. We were on our needs scrubbing with washboards. All day long. My fingers swelled up. The soap was rough and abrasive (sharp). Very bad. In those days we had no gloves to use. All of use women suffered this same problem – the swelling, splitting fingers. My mother worried. My father worked in an area that had some butter left over and he would steal it and have me use it on my hands like a balm. It did improve things. This comforted and softened my hands. We’d coat them in butter and wrap them in cloth and keep them like that for a bit.

(birth of esther)

We were working with coal. I saw the birth and I thought, “in the future I do NOT want to get married and have a baby.” It looked horrible. Like a baby chick. It looked like a chicken really, all wrapped with a cord that had to be cut. I saw this and thought - no I do not want to have such a thing in me. It was all coaxed with the sack. I was really too young to see such things. I kept thinking – in the future I do NOT want to have a baby. Luckily for me when I DID have a child it was different. I gave birth in a hospital. That is much better.

It was a very bad situation with my sister. We swaddled her up and tried to comfort her. She didn’t even get a bath to clean her up. It would have to wait til we got home. My mother wanted to go back to the ghetto, we were in the labor camp at the time, so she slipped the baby into a bag as if carrying food. My father went with her and told me to stay in the camp working. They said they were going to see my grandmother, which was a lie just so they could get home to clean up the baby. My grandmother did take care of her until 1943 when my

mother asked a woman to take care of my sister. The woman accepted and cared for her for a few month but in June she changed her mind. My sister was so quiet (because she was Deaf) that the woman thought she was worthless and put her out on the street.

A boy was skating and her my sister crying. It was raining at the time. He called over an officer, a Nazi policeman. When he saw my sister, he thought what a lovely beautiful little girl and wrapped her up in his coat and brought her to a Catholic orphanage run by nuns and left her there.

Later that night the woman went looking for my sister and couldn't find her. The next morning she to tell us. I saw her while I was watering some of the garden. The woman gestured "tell your mother to come over here." So tapped my mother and pointed out the woman. My mother approached and the woman spoke to her. My mother was in shock this happened. The woman said, "I'm sorry" again and again.

My mom was shocked and stunned. I tried to comfort her and keep her quiet because Nazis were all around. We had to go back about our work. My mother was suffering. She told my father and he was so sorry this happened. Later my father told a woman farmer, a friend of his, about it. She said, "don't worry, I will look for the baby." She went to the Nun's house and entered saying "Hello, I would like to visit and see the many children here. May I?" The nun said "yes, fine." She accepted and went in looking until she spotted my sister with her curly hair as my father had already described it to her. The woman though, "That's right, that's the right child." She was very sweet and quiet.

(HIDING PLACES –three photos with text)

There was a wall of a bathroom, when the door opened it would cover a board. You had to enter by scooting into it on your back. It wasn't a good spot. I only hid there once. It was very uncomfortable and hard to get out of. I had to sit tight in there.

(interviewer: all day)

Yes, all day. It was pitch dark in there. There was absolutely NO light.

(interviewer: Food?)

NOTHING. NOTHING

(Interview: Toilet?)

NONE

All I could do was be still, quiet and sleep.

I just sat and was quiet. I could feel sound, people searching, pounding and stomping. I felt this bang, bang, bang. I was very scared!

I will never forget this. Them searching. It was so exhausting. The banging on doors – Goodness!

There was a stove with brick and cooking utensils and shelving and cupboards – we removed them all but kept for later. We built steps down once that was down then we worked on the flooring. First we took a big door and put it on the floor with a layer of cloth on top of it. Then sand to make a hard and firm surface and finally carpet. All of this was so when they stamped on the above floor they would not hear anything below them. (then we put the cupboard back up)

My father made a false wall. He put in a cupboard to hang things from, there was a rolling pin for bread. It was moved to cover the door. We had a bench with pails and water glasses and we'd carefully move the unit and 14 people would slip into the hiding place. We had to be quiet back there. Later one day we heard them searching around, we waited all night quietly. Once my mother's curiosity got the best of her and she peaked out of the roofing to see. I asked – "tell me what's going on." She said, "shh, be quiet." Outside people were being shoved around, crying, it was very scary. We waited. Finally after three days my father came and said we were safe to come out so we all climbed out. I was curious what had happened to our neighbor as so many were gone. I saw a little girl sitting sad and quiet. I called my mother over, "Look at this girl sad and scared hiding."

We moved this big amour and saw this small frightened girl. "where are your parents?" She said, "my parents were taken OUT." What are you going to do? She was such a cute girl, three years old with a big bow in her hair and a blue outfit and blue eyes. So sweet.

Once it happened my father was worried thinking my mother and I had been taken to the trains so he came running calling out our names, "where is Leah, Where is Dora?" No one answered his call. They were all quiet crushed all together. One man happened to hear my father, we were actually hiding in his house at the time, so he said, "Yes, I know them well. My nieces." He lied for us.

Oh the trains were horrible, such crowding. Some people did jump, breaking their faces and bones. They jumped to avoid being sent to be gassed.

(The Slave Labor Camp)

They overlooked my young age. They thought I was 18. My mother lied and said I was 18 so they accepted me for work. It was exhausting. It was easy to get sick. In this camp we had a red tag on the front and the back of our clothing. The number was in black ink like NUMBER R-87. There were many people in line before me. We wore the same clothes everyday same same same. We had to leave all our other clothes in the ghetto. Two layers of clothing – to keep warm during the winter but in the summer it was so hot. We had only a little food. I became very THIN. Before I had been fat but shrunk down to nothing. My mother was sick.

(picture of roll call appels)

It was frightening. It was a bad idea to be in the front. I was always in the back, last. There were rows of five. Lines upon lines. Men and women were in different formations. There were no children at all. NONE.

People would tug on me so I knew when my name was called. They'd pull on my sleeve and I'd know. Different women would helped me when my mother happened to be out somewhere else.

They all knew and I stayed quiet. They helped me. It was wonderful.

(picture of women sewing shoveling hay, and gathering potatoes)

We worked in the garden. Some times when it rained, we'd help with the potatoes. We'd have to clean up the potatoes, removing all the dirt. There was a group of four women who helped do this. It was tiring. Sometimes I was sick. Once I had a high fever and laid down to sleep. When it was time to go back to home to the barracks, my mother woke me up and felt that I was hot with fever. She told me to drink and drink and drink. Then we started walking back as a group and arrived to the camp and I feel onto the bed. Again, I noticed my mother heard things and went to the window so I went to look with her and we saw people running into a building to hide. They had planned it. I knew there were about 500 people in there. I thought, "mom, maybe we should join them." She replied, "No, no." She had been told that they would come and drop down gas in a pipe. I had thought it was for ventilation but really they planned to drop down a gas canister and then seal it off so that all inside died.

(Interviewer: this was in the camp?)

Yes, yes in the camp. That building was really a hospital. Many people hid in this infirmary, they bribed their way in thinking it would be safer. The hush money did them no good, in the end they were killed.

(Pix of watch tower)

Here and there they kept selecting people - witting us down to almost thing until the last day in the camp - July 22. We had heard a rumor and after work duty we returned home and saw people looking so sad standing around and there was a full appel, all the names were read off the list and when the said the name for me, someone tugged on my pants and I raise my hand and played calm. At night in secret some people cut the fence and decided to escape. Some stood up and were shot. You really had to crawl.

At the fence with other people, the man in front cut the fence then I was behind my father and held onto the back of his shirt. When my father jumped, I jumped squirmed after him. My mother did the same with Sylvia and I was last. It happened there was a person behind me who was pulling on me and I had to shake him off to get away. I heard that some people when they got up and were signaled not to – it was too late. They would be shot. Luckily we exited in the other direction. Our side out was better. Their side of escape was no good.

(Pix of two bodies at a fence)

(THE FINAL HIDING PLACE)

At night my father went to the spot to make a hiding place. It was a very small parameter in which me, my mother, and my father would have to lay. It was very shallow with a covering over us. There was the chicken crates. Sand to disguise our covering and sacks of bird feed. We had to stay there laying. We couldn't go out. The woman of the house would come every night to give us news. She'd come at night so no one would see us and she would remove the covering and tell us what was happening then cover us back up and we would remain like that all day. We would eat once a day and it was a meal of POTATOES – for the three of us. Potatoes every day – the same POTATOES. (sigh of disgust)

You know a woman's period. What do you think we did during this time? What did my mother and I do during menstruation? We would take the sacks, you know s –

(Interviewer: Sacks)

Yes, like you get potatoes in a sack from the store. We would take these sacks and cut them into strips and save them and wash them and lay them out to dry. We'd wash them in cold water the woman would bring us at night and we'd wash these sack strips after use and lay them out to dry. It was fine. No problem. We had no cotton or cloth to use, just these sacks which we had to save and reuse. We'd have the strips, lay them out, roll them up. This went on for 8 month. We had to put up with this until we were safe.

(interviewer: You laid flat on the floor)

Yes laid flat. Some times id ask my mother, "I notice when the woman opens the door you two are talking – what about?" So my mother with etch it out on my arm to tell me the news.

(Interviewer: Make lines on your arm?)

Yes, she would write the outline of letters into my hand. This is how she would tell me the news. This is how I got information, of course it was in Polish writing, which I know. Sometimes she would do it on my back - the same method.

One day the farm woman told us a friend had informed her that the Russians would soon be arriving. We said – "Really we want to..." She said, "Wait, wait and see. There are still battles. The Nazis are still around." The farmer could see them about. My father said wait but we wanted to get out so badly. I was so sick and fed up with this hiding. For 8 and a half month just staying there waiting.

When we finally got out after the war it was hard to walk again. Such pain in our feet. I still have pain sometimes and I have to soak them in hot water and finally they feel better. It was so hard we had to crawl we had stayed laying for so long.

We went to one city where the red cross was to help people. Many soldiers whose eyes and ears had been damaged. We were helping and they had run out of water so I was skipping. The snow had finished and the sun was shining. I was skipping in the boots they had given me since my shoes had been ruined when we had to hide in a flooded basement before. All the seams had split open and they were painful so they gave me these new boots, which I thought were just dandy and fine. I was skipping along to get the water from a well when I saw a reflection in the water of a person standing over me. I looked up in shock and thought "Nazi" I threw the bucket of water and ran. I looked back and saw the boy getting his own bucket of water and carrying it away. He stopped dead and raised both his hands up when a Russian policeman pointed a rifle at him demanding to know who he was.

The boy spoke POLISH! So a Polish woman was called over, "come, you speak Polish tell us what he is saying." He said, "I am a 14 years old." I was shocked. He was so TALL. I mistook him for a Nazi. He said, "No." See when a Nazi died, he took off the Nazis clothes to wear for himself. Understand? I told him, "You go off with the Russian policeman now and change." When he came back in nice clothing is clapped!

We could still bombing and fighting going on. We were frightened but my parents very much wanted to go and get my sister back. My mother really wanted to get my sister so both my parents went to the Nun's orphanage and the woman, the maid who was cleaning up there met them and said "what do you want?" My

mother replied that they were looking for my sister, Luba. The woman replied, "She is not here." They had changed her name to the Catholic name Luba – that's what they called my sister. The woman said, "she is not here." My mother asked, "where is she?" "Some person has adopted the baby." My mother was so shocked. That is not right. They need our signature to do that. That is not right. They called a policeman and the three of them went to the home that had adopted my sister. There was a baby sitter there. The "foster" parents were not home. So took my sister and brought her home. She was very sweet and quiet. She was 15 month old. The last time I had seen her was when she was 4 month old – we had gone 14 month without seeing her. I comforted her. She was very quiet. Oh she was THIN! She had not been well cared for. She did get enough to eat. We had to teach her all over again how to eat food. All over again! She had the same thing – milk, milk, milk so her stomach could get used to it.

My mother was worried and went to the doctors who checked her out. They said you must start all over again from milk to baby food and build it up. As time went on she got better.

(Interviewer: Could she walk?)

NO, NO.

It happened the Russians asked me to help in the kitchen peeling potatoes along with my mother. My mother couldn't do the work as she was sickly and had to tend to my baby sister so I would go alone. I worked along side the other women but I was not comfortable with it. The Russian woman was always scolding me to peel faster. I would take my time at a slow pace. I had a hard time putting up with it because many Russian soldiers would come in and approach me again and again

And I'd escape. I told my mother – "I'm not comfortable. The Russians coming to hug me so much. What should I do?"

(interviewer: How did they bother you?)

They would hug me wanting love, sex you know. I didn't want that. I was too young.

(Interviewer: They'd touch you?)

They'd grab and hug me and play with my hair. Tugging on it. Not nice. They'd catch me in a WAR HOLD. I'd back up then push them away. The Russians would hold me like such and I'd push them away. Different men would bother me again and again. I was young at this time. It was in 1944, I was 17 no 16 and a half. Not even 17 yet.

(The New Journey)

We all lined up and they read off our names. We boarded at night. The boat was very slow moving due to bad weather. A down because down pour of rain. We had to stop because we got frozen in the ice. We waited until sun up the next day to melt the ice. Finally, it started to break up. The sailors broke it up with sticks and we were about to go on our way. It was hard and slow going.

Many people were sick. I went above deck to look around. It was a very nice and cool day. I saw boats passing us near England. Women slept in A and the men slept below us. My father would come to the A area to visit us, yes. For my sister it was hard. She couldn't walk yet so my father would lift her up, pat her and walk around. I didn't hold her. I didn't want to due to how unstable the ship was. I didn't want to drop her. I was young. I would play with a ball and make things, pretending. And my sister would grab at them and throw them away from me.

I saw a baby crying. The baby's mother was sick and the baby was in a pram (carriage), which would roll due to the ship's motion. I got some string and tied it in place so it would stay put. A man who was cleaning, a sailor said, "Good job, good." It had been rolling loose before. The baby was crying and the woman was so sick.

I got up and I saw LIBERTY and the skyline – I gazed over it. We were quite a distance still. We had to wait until 7:30 then the police, FBI and shuttled us with a small boat to a cafeteria area. They called out our names starting with A, reading them off in alphabetical order. It was LATE at night by the time we were finally able to arrive. My sister slept on the floor.

Fred said, "please may I have your address in Colorado." So I gave it to him; even though I did not know why he wanted it. He didn't say. Later I got a letter in Polish. I read it then I gave it to my father. He checked it – reading it slowly. He thought about it carefully and decided we would go to NYC to visit my Uncle Morris. My father and I would go in June, in the summer. There we met my husband. He brought me a bouquet of roses. Beautiful. I thanked him and my cousin removed all the paper and put them in a vase. We met with each other and had a good chat.

I asked about his parents being gone. He said, "Sadly, I am all alone. I have no brothers or sisters." So sad. We continued to visit. (I remember we had arrived on Tuesday and chatted. Again on Wednesday we met and went out. I told him, "Come to Colorado so you can meet my mother. I would like to show you Colorado." He said, "OK. In August." "Fine," I said. So after our one week vacation was finished, my father and I returned home.

My father told my mother, "I am so happy, such a nice man. He can speak German well. Very easy to talk with. Great, Great. I like him very much." So we crossed our fingers and waited. Later, Fred came and we got engaged!

(Interviewer: What a surprise!)

Engaged and decided on November for the wedding. It was a fast courtship.

(Interviewer: How did Fred's parents die?)

Hunger. There was no food, no medicine. His father died first in February. His body froze. They did not have properly clothing as they had sold most of it thinking the war would be short. The war went on and on – they thought it would just be temporary. Body was cold, starvation, he died. Then Fred's mom died 6 month later on August 13. What can you do?

(Interviewer: From starvation also?)

Yes, hunger – there was nothing. It was so hard. Fred told me stories of the camps, many people dying, the gassing, he had to clean up, do brick work. One time it was freezing yet Fred kept warm inside. The Nazis noticed and beat him so badly. 25 times – broken knee, elbow - it was very bad.

What I mean is Fred had many layers of clothing on because he wanted to keep warm. He stole the clothing off of the deceased. It was a mistake because the Nazis noticed. They patted his back and felt it was too thick. They made him undress and they punished him with a severe beating.

(Interviewer: You had three children together?)

Yes, three children, nine grand children and 5 great grandchildren.

I was so fearful, many times. Sometimes I still feel – I hear stories that Nazis are still around in hiding and we don't know it. So I'm very cautious.

(Interviewer: Now in the U.S. you are safe but still afraid...)

Yes, safe but some people are still Nazis – they keep it quiet and we don't know. PLEASE NO MORE.

(Interviewer: Yes)

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