

Questions to Consider When Viewing Video

1. Where was Sylvia born? What is her city known as today?
2. What country occupied her city before the Nazis? What did the Nazis do to the Jews immediately after occupying the city?
3. How did the other Jews find out what had happened to those who had disappeared?
4. Describe the ghetto to which Sylvia's family was sent. For what reasons was one able to leave the ghetto?
5. Why did Sylvia go with her little sister across from the ghetto? What happened to her little sister?
6. What happened to Sylvia and her family when their ghetto was closed down?
7. Why doesn't Sylvia have any pictures of her family?
8. When the transport of Jews arrived in Stutthof, what happened to all of the men on the transport?
9. What was Sylvia's last job in the concentration camp?
10. Why does Sylvia question why she survived?
11. How did Sylvia meet her husband? How were his experiences during the Holocaust similar to hers?
12. Why didn't she want to tell her own children of her experiences? What situation changed her mind?

Holocaust Survivor

Sylvia Distel Malcmacher

Filmed on May 17, 2007



*"I would give anything
to have a picture of my family."*

- Sylvia Malcmacher

Face to Face
A Holocaust Education Program at
Congregation Shaarey Tikvah
Beachwood, Ohio

Sylvia Distel Malcmacher was born in Vilna, Poland, in 1926. Her family included her parents, a younger sister, and an older sister.

In June, 1941, the Nazis occupied Vilna. They randomly rounded up Jews, took them to the nearby Ponary Forest, shot them point blank, and threw the bodies into ditches. Before being shot, the Jews were forced to dig their own graves. Some people pretended they were dead, dug themselves out of the mass of bodies after all was quiet, and ran back to town.

In October, 1941, the Nazis created the Vilna ghetto. They forced as many Jews into the ghetto as they could fit. Those who did not fit were murdered in the Ponary Forest. In the ghetto, people died of starvation and sickness. Sylvia's father worked outside of the ghetto building roads.

One day, all young children were ordered to report to a hospital outside of the ghetto "to see a doctor for an examination." Sylvia offered to take her little sister and bring her back. As Sylvia stood in line behind her sister an officer sent her sister to an "examination room" and told Sylvia to return to the ghetto. She never saw her sister again. All of the children who had gone to the "medical examination" were taken to the forest and shot.

In September, 1943, the Vilna ghetto was liquidated, and more residents were executed in the forest. Sylvia's family was taken by cattle car to Kaiserwald. After a short time in Kaiserwald,

Sylvia's family was moved to Stutthof. As soon as they arrived, Sylvia's father was taken away, and she never saw him again.

At Stutthof, inmates died of typhus and starvation. Every few hours, there was an *appell* (roll call). Inmates were forced to stand for hours in all kinds of weather to be counted. One day, a German guard selected some girls to be taken to Muhldorf. Sylvia was selected; her mother and sister were not.

At Muhldorf, Sylvia dug tunnels for ammunition. She washed German soldiers' clothing and hung the clothes outside to dry in freezing weather. Sylvia's hands froze; she still suffers from this affliction. They were given one piece of bread to eat a day. Sylvia learned to make the one piece of bread last all day by breaking off small pieces.

Americans liberated the camp on May 5, 1945. When soldiers announced on the loudspeaker that the prisoners were "free," Sylvia did not know what this meant to her. She did not know where to go or what to do. Eventually she went to Feldafing Displaced Persons (DP) Camp, where she learned that her mother and sister had died of typhus at Stutthof.

Sylvia met her husband at the DP camp and married him there in 1946. Sylvia and her husband immigrated to the United States in 1949.