

When God Looked Down and Wept
Alex Scharf Oral History

Minutes	Summary
0.0-2.0	Scrolling screen with summary of Holocaust and a brief biography of Alex Scharf
2.0-5.0	For 30 years, he didn't talk about the Holocaust—it was too painful and he didn't think the world cared. The Holocaust did not happen in a vacuum. Jews have been persecuted for 1000s of years and were conditioned to accept discrimination
5.0-10.0	Hitler didn't expel the Jews—they might come back—and he Didn't convert them, because they might reconvert. When you Killed them, they didn't come back. Never was the enemy so Demonic, and will be it will be forever remembered as an attempt To annihilate a people. The Holocaust began for the Jews in Jan 1933; a campaign began to convince people that Jews are to blame for their problems. There were strong propaganda efforts; the Nuremberg Laws were passed in 1935 which restricted civil rights. Doctors and teachers were fired and the first deportations started as Polish Jews in Germany were sent back to Poland. German Jews thought they were safe because they were good, loyal Germans.
10.0-15.0	Hitler considered Jews a separate race—Mr. Scharf disagrees and Says they are a national and religious entity but not a race. Hitler wanted Europe to be Judenrein. The German nation was promised grandeur. In November 1938, a young German Jew in Paris, Herschel Grynszpan found out that his parents were being deported to Poland. He bought a gun, went to the German embassy and shot a lower German official, named Ernst vom Rath, who died two days later. The Germans decided to punish all the Jews and organized pogroms for November 9, 1938 against the Jews of Germany, known as Kristallnacht.
15.0-20.0	They broke windows, beat 200 people to death, arrested 30,000 and 300 synagogues were torched. He was born in Solatvina, Czechoslovakia to religious parents, the fourth child of eight. He was five in 1933 and did not understand, but he kept hearing the name “Adolf Hitler” in connection with the Jews. By the age of 10, he knew that Hitler meant disaster for the Jews and heard about Kristallnacht. He heard that many committed suicide. In 1939, the war broke out and Germany occupied Poland with its 3 million Jews. The resettlement phase began and Jews were put in restricted areas which became the ghettos.

- 20.0-25.0 Hitler's ghettos were not only restricted areas but were places where he concentrated Jews for deportation. The word ghettos was a deceit—Jews had been in ghettos in the Middle Ages, but this time it was really just a cover for deportation. In Warsaw, the small ghetto held 500,000 Jews and conditions were terrible, with starvation and death. Ghettos didn't last very long and soon they started emptying the ghetto, claiming deportation again. Jews weren't told why or where they were going. Each ghetto had a Judenrat, who were told what the Germans needed for work and then were told that they needed people for resettlement.
- 25.0-30.0 The Judenrat had to pick those who were to be resettled and in doing so became collaborators. Even though to refuse would be a threat to their lives, Mr. Scharf does not believe they should have given the Germans the names. At first, the Jews did not know where they were going—it turns out they were going to Treblinka—to the first gas chambers. When those in the ghetto found out what was happening, the head of the Judenrat committed suicide. By 1943, only 70,000 Jews were left in the Warsaw ghetto and they uprose, which lasted for 3 weeks until the ghetto was destroyed. As a contrast, they lasted as long in this suicide mission as it took the German army to cross Poland.
- 30.0-35.0 In Russia, 1941, another 2 million Jews were in occupied territory. The Einsatzgruppen were 3,000 men whose job was to round up Jews, put them into trucks, took them into fields, gave them shovels to dig pits, forced them to undress and stand around the pit, and then machine gunned them.
- 35.0-40.0 They decided that this was inefficient as it was too slow, messy, and was a waste of bullets. They held the Wannasee Conference outside Berlin to come up with the Final Solution with which all Jews will be liquidated. Scientists produced Zyklon B, with which you could kill as many as you could put into a room. Auschwitz was built to be a death factory.

Part II

- 40.0-45.0 He was in Hungary where close to 1 million Jews were intact for a majority of the war. They didn't know the details, but they knew that nothing good was happening. Germany was allied with Hungary, so all information was censored. Hungary restricted the civil rights of Jews but did not hand them over to the Germans. Hungary was occupied in spring 1944 and "the sun stopped shining." On March 17, 1944, Mr. Scharf was away at school with his younger brother when the school was dissolved and all Jewish

activities ceased. They went home for several weeks and then the Solatvina ghetto was created and lasted a few weeks. Then half of the ghetto was sent on one transport, and, a few days later, Mr. Scharf and his family left on another transport.

- 45.0-50.0 He remembers seeing the first transport leave, with people crying and screaming. He saw the town's rabbi in captivity with this group and will never forget the image. Four days later, in May 1944, it was his turn. The train was 50-60 cars long and it was all Hungarian police, who crammed 50-60 people per car. They were given 2 buckets, one for the bathroom and one for fresh water. They didn't know how long the trip would be or where they were going and thought they were being resettled. His trip lasted for three days and three nights and it felt like they were in a prison cage.
- 50.0-55.0 New guards demanded money for the fresh water and then jewelry. He doesn't remember a word about what people talked about on the train, but his sister told him about a conversation she had with their father upon their arrival at Auschwitz. His father said that he knew that they would become slaves but that in the end God would help them. They arrived on his 50th birthday. Upon arrival, first prisoners came towards the train, then soldiers surround the train. They opened doors to each boxcar and shouted orders to get off and to leave everything.
- 55.0-60.0 The first few people off the train were beaten for no reason. It was chaotic and men and women were separated. He never saw his mother or three sisters get off the train and never got to say goodbye. He saw the selection and wondered how they were decided. Most were sent to the left, and it seemed to occur very fast. He decided he wanted to go to the left.
- 60.0-65.0 When the soldiers tried to separate a woman from her baby, she pleaded to stay with it—the soldiers let the woman go to the gas chamber with her baby. Mengele asked Mr. Scharf a question in German. He didn't know German, but he understood the question because he knew English and said that he was eighteen and was pointed to the right. He was almost 16 at the time, and said that the lie was purely by instinct. His father did not make it, nor did his younger brother. He was processed that afternoon: showered with soap for 2 minutes. They were directed to go out the opposite door and were given their uniform—a striped jacket, pants, and a cap and wooden soled shoes—no underwear, toothbrush, etc. They were considered inferior, and so they didn't need anything

extra. Their body hair was removed and they did not have anything to eat or drink the first day.

65.0-70.0

The Germans told them the water was not safe, so they did not drink any. 500 males went into the barrack, and they knew that everyone else went to the other side. Only one member of his family, a cousin, was with him in the barrack. The cousin did not survive the war. He was at Auschwitz for three weeks total and got an education on how to survive. He was walking with a friend from the ghetto, Isaak, through the gypsy camp. A man called them over and turned out to be a barrack elder and took them into his little office. He asked them where his parents are, and they said that they went to the other camp on the other side. He told them that there was not another camp but that Auschwitz is a death camp and their families were gassed within two hours.

70.0-75.0

Chimneys meant not that they were burning belongings but were burning people and this had a stench that permeated for miles. They don't have any parents and need to concentrate on survival. The man told them that the children's blocks are only temporary in case the Red Cross or the press comes in and asks about the children. Mengele was in charge of the two blocks. The only chance of survival was to be shipped out. They did not cry or react at this news because they were in shock. They also found out about the Sonderkommando.

75.0-80.0

The Sonderkommando helped the prisoners shave their hair, helped them undress, and took them to huge rooms with fake showers where they packed them in, closed the door, and put the Zyklon B in, which killed people in 10-15 minutes. When it was all quiet, they opened the doors and the corpses fell out and the Sonderkommando had to bring the corpses to the ovens. They were kept separately from the rest of the camp so that they could not talk. The Sonderkommando didn't last long and fresh people were brought in frequently. One member of the Sonderkommando told a woman that she would be gassed, and she screamed, but no one else believed her. German officers took her away from the others, who went to the gas chambers, and tortured her until she revealed who told her this information. The man was thrown into the ovens without being killed first.

Part III

80.0-85.0

After three weeks in the kinderblocken, he got the chance to be shipped out. During the afternoon appel, the soldiers shouted that everyone over 18 should raise their hands and everybody did. The

next day they brought doctors to the barracks looking for healthy, older boys to go to a labor camp—they needed 53. He was one of the 53 as was his friend Isaak. They left that day to another barracks and then to Austria on a train to Mauthausen, which had five satellite camps.

- 85.0-90.0 The camp was the largest in Austria and was on top of a mountain. Mauthausen had a quarry with slave labor. He was given the number 74989 and was told this was a terrible camp, but he figured that he came from Auschwitz and this couldn't be worse. He did not stay in Mauthausen but was sent to the satellite camp of Melk, located on the Danube river. He stayed with Isaak. Melk was not a death camp but a labor camp. It was also on top of a hill (the camp was, the town is in a valley). There were 10,000 prisoners, equally mixed of Jews, French resistance, and Russian soldiers, and there was no discrimination. They worked building tunnels outside the camp 8-10 miles away by train, working in three shifts with jackhammers, building an underground city. When they were done, the civilians would come in and manufacture armaments.
- 90.0-95.0 They were frequently beaten and he remembers being hit in the head but did not move. Between 60-100 people died each day, depending on the season, from starvation, etc. Each day they had a calorie deficit and were always hungry and tired. People who died were envied because they did not have to work anymore.
- 95.0-100.0 There was no health care. In summer 1944, a boy escaped and was brought back. He was forced to yell "Hooray, I am back!" and was hanged. Even if you managed to escape, you were still in hostile territory and still had your prisoner uniform on. In late summer 1944, he was almost beaten to death because the Germans accused him of attempting to escape. In barrack #5, a Romanian doctor slept under him and got the new arrivals together and told them they are slowly being starved. He told them that they will all die, but the war might end soon enough for a few.
- 100.0-105.0 He told them to conserve all the energy they could: when they came back from work, don't walk around, don't work if no one is watching you. This could make a big difference. He took Dr. Adler's advice seriously. He stopped working in the tunnels if no one was watching. At camp, you didn't get a chance to rest and were always fatigued. He made himself a hiding place during the night shift in the tunnel so he could sleep a few more hours. One morning, he overslept.
- 105.0-110.0 The whistle blew that the night shift was over and while they were

counting the workers they found that he was missing. The kommandant was notified and said that the night shift couldn't leave and the morning shift couldn't start. He woke up around 9:30 am and knew the shift was over. The kapo found him and while everyone was beating him, he passed out. After the beating, his health and mental state went downhill. Dr. Adler tried to help him, but his friends gave up on him and he gave up on himself. Miraculously, though, he started to recover and was still around for spring 1945.

110.0-115.0

Melk was in Austria and the Russians were pushing towards Vienna. They stopped going to work. The kommandant announced that they would be in danger and that for their safety, the camp is being evacuated. This time, they left by food, spent a few days on the road with barely anything to eat. They marched in groups of one hundred and those who could not keep going were shot. People didn't mind because they didn't want to go on in a world where this sort of thing happens. They went through the town of Wetz, and he remembers attacking a grocery bag that a woman was carrying. He also ate daisies and dandelions and snails. The Germans told them to go into a forest, and instead of being shot, in the forest was a small camp where conditions were astonishing even for them.

115.0-120.0

Outside each barracks was a pile of corpses, the camp was Gunskirchen. The war ended May 8th, and they arrived the previous Saturday. On Wednesday May 6th he was hit in the spine with a rifle butt and couldn't move. The guards disappeared and small groups began leaving. He was liberated on May 8th when the Americans came. He spent 6 weeks in the hospital and was brought back to health, though many others died after liberation. He still had the job of putting his life back together and starting again. The aftermath still goes on.