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Interview with survivor Adele Schreiber in Stockholm

Summary

Adele Schreiber was born in Satu Mare in 1922, a Rumanian city at the time. Her mother committed suicide when she was eight months old so she grew up with her father and step mother. Her father was orthodox and very cultivated. Adele went to a Rumanian school and spoke Rumanian, at home they spoke Hungarian and German, the parents spoke Yiddish only when they didn't want her to understand. She was the only child and they lived in a mixed neighborhood. In 1944 the Jews in Satu Mare were forced into a ghetto from which all were later deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Adele survived and came with a boat to Sweden in July 1945. She never married and still lives in the same apartment building in a suburb to Stockholm that she moved into in 1948.

- Adele's family did not belong to the Hasidic group, on the contrary she said that she strongly disliked the Hasidic Rabbi, Teitelbaum, "may he burn in hell", he had prevented young Jews from leaving for Palestine since he thought they should stay and wait for Messiah.
- She turned away from religion and said she became an atheist already when she was 11, she had her eyes on the "West", on France and Great Britain. Her father didn't know and she participated in the religious ceremonies at home for example during Shabbat.
- Her friends in school were of mixed backgrounds, Hungarians, Saxons and Jews and she doesn't remember any antisemitism from her childhood.
- Her father had a friend who gave Adele a copy of Alice in Wonderland and she had that book under her arm when she was deported to Auschwitz. She was separated from her family when they were deported so she "was alone with Alice". At arrival it was of course taken from her.
- When all Jews were forced into the ghetto, Adele wanted to help and since she knew many languages she became an assistant of the Judenrat. Due to this she and her family were on the last train to Auschwitz.
- Adele was only in Auschwitz for a short time before some people came looking for "300 girls with long fingers" to work in a light bulb factory in Weisswasser, she and her friend Kati – who had been with her from Satu Mare – were the last two who were chosen. In Weisswasser, Adele chose to work in the smaller factory, the work was much heavier, but they were only 25 girls there so there was no fighting when they were given food.
- Towards the end of the war, Adele and Kati ended up in Bergen-Belsen, a "hell on earth" Adele called it, she and Kati slept outside in the corridor in order not to get sick and she avoided getting typhus. Adele was thus in a good physical condition when she arrived in Sweden in July 1945.
- Soon after arriving in Malmö in Sweden, Adele abandoned all thoughts of returning to Satu Mare, no one in her family was alive, the only thing she remembers not liking in Malmö was the sweet bread.
- She came to Lovön outside of Stockholm where people came looking for maids, so Adele started working as a maid for a Swedish lawyer and his family, she read the daily newspaper in the mornings before giving it to the wife in the house, that way she started learning Swedish, but she didn't want to stay a maid for the rest of her life.
- Since Adele knew many languages she went to a large book shop to apply for a job, the managing director was a well-known Swedish Jew, he said that they didn't have any available positions. He added that "he thought that it was good for her to work as a maid" which hurt a lot. She went straight to another book shop where she got a job.

- Adele is very critical of the Stockholm Jewish community, they never helped her with anything she said. Every year she received a letter saying that she could not become a member (until she became a citizen after eight years). This was fine, “but why didn’t they put in a little handwritten note saying that we were welcome to their events anyway”, Adele said. She never became a member, not until 2-3 years ago since she wanted to prepare for her funeral.
- When Adele wanted to study she asked the Jewish Community for financial help but they didn’t help her, instead she is very thankful to a woman “Gertrude” for giving her a loan of 3000 Swedish Crowns, “she saved me” Adele said and with the help of that money Adele studied to become a language teacher.
- Adele and Kati went to the Jewish Club, but she disliked their attitude “they were treating us as if we were these poor people, as if we were alphabets, we said good bye and never went again”.
- It was not that important to try to keep her Jewish identity, it was not an issue for her. When she was 25 years old and stood in front of her class as a teacher nobody knew what she had experienced, they knew she was from Rumania but everyone assumed that she had come to Sweden due to communism. She never spoke about her background since “I didn’t want them to feel sorry for me”, but her close friends knew. Many of the girls from Weisswasser has remained her friends in Sweden, “we are like sisters”, Adele said.
- She loves Israel and has distant cousins there, but “if I would go now I would have nothing to do in Tel Aviv, almost everyone is dead”. She had many close friends in Sweden too but many of them are also dead.