

Sally Wolkoff

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Interviewer: Just like you saw you husband, that's what we're going to talk about. A little bit of the pre-war life in Poland.

Sally Wolkoff: I was very young, of course when the, I was 19 years old, 18 when the war started. The day when it started, I was in the street walking with a friend of mine. And the sirens were on and we started running and we knew right away, the planes overhead, and we knew the war started.

Interviewer: Had you heard any rumors before that things were gonna happen?

Sally Wolkoff: Yes, but we didn't know that it's going to be that close and so fast, because the war didn't last too long in Poland. After five days, the war was over. And the German used to, came in with their tanks. And that's when they, it started with us when they... We were hiding and they were killing people. It was right away just pitiful. It was the beginning of New Year's at the Jewish community. They were catching the Jews and they cut their beards and they will told them to clean the streets. It was right away so impossible. We were just not people anymore. We were just scared, scared like animals.

Interviewer: Where was your family at this time?

Sally Wolkoff: We were all together. We were nine kids.

Interviewer: Nine children.

Sally Wolkoff: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Wow. Nine of you.

Sally Wolkoff: I was the second one.

Interviewer: Second, youngest or oldest?

Sally Wolkoff: No, the oldest.

Interviewer: Oh.

Sally Wolkoff: We were all together until it was time to go into the ghetto. We did the best that we could. In fact, my brother planted some vegetables in the garden, so we could have some food. It wasn't too bad until they sent us to large ghetto and it started. We came to the ghetto and we saw bad people walking around. We knew that this is our end. But then everything was again, they started sending us to work. Each one received another... I was working in a ladies' clothes factory and my father had a job and everybody got a little something to... We didn't get paid but we got food for working. Every week we had a, we could go to the grocery and get so much for each person in the family. It wasn't, never enough because people drink a lot to fill themselves up because they were hungry. So, all you saw was swollen people walking around in the streets. And this was about two years like that. From '42 til '44.

Interviewer: Then from there?

Sally Wolkoff: They sent us to Auschwitz.

Interviewer: Your family was together until that moment?

Sally Wolkoff: One brother got killed going from Pabianice to Lochow, to Lodz . They asked for people who would like to help with the kids or do something good, so he was about two years younger... he was about 16 years old and he wanted to help out, so they took quite a few men to help. And then they found out that they all got shot and killed together with the old people. They were supposed to be helping. That's when we lost my brother. We came to Lodz.

Interviewer: He volunteered?

Sally Wolkoff: He volunteered. Then when we came to Lodz, we were one less in the family. And then, when they sent us to Auschwitz, we were still together but then they separated us. I never saw my mother and the sisters anymore.

Interviewer: Who survived?

Sally Wolkoff: Four sisters and a brother. My brother survived in Sweden. He got sick in Bergen-Belsen and they sent him to a hospital in Sweden. And the four sisters, we were together in camp - all four of us.

Interviewer: All four of you were together in Auschwitz?

Sally Wolkoff: No, we didn't stay long in Auschwitz. They send us--

Interviewer: You went to Mauthausen?

Sally Wolkoff: No. They send us to Freiburg, that's in Bayern, near Munich. There was a resort. They were manufacturing airplanes. We all worked in the airplane factory.

Interviewer: How do you think you survived?

Sally Wolkoff: I was very lucky. My sister and I received the job in the office. They asked me if I know how to read and write, and I said yes and then he said where is your sister? I told, well, now it's... He was a very mean, mean guy, the way he asked me. And then he said where is your sister, so I told him my sister is right over there. And I thought, well, this is the time when he wants to do something, kill us or... But then he took us, we walked after him for about a mile and he said, here, you will be here and this is your job and we were for nine months sitting there in that office. The soldiers and the people who worked on the airplanes came in. We gave them the plans. Like they needed the plan, how to make this or we - they gave us the number and we look to where the number is. We worked for nine months there.

Interviewer: Were you treated any differently?

Sally Wolkoff: No, no. We were just like the other girls but we had like, my other two sisters were working during the night and they were working with the airplanes. They were building their airplanes. So, we stayed there until about April the 12th in Freiburg which was a lot of places where the war was over but they took us and put us on cattle cars, again, trains.

Interviewer: Tell me about that. Tell me about the train with your sisters.

Sally Wolkoff: Again, we were separated. I was just with one sister on the wagon.

Interviewer: The sister you were in the office with?

Sally Wolkoff: Yes. The 12th til we got to Mauthausen. In Mauthausen, it was just pitiful. It must have been close to the end of the war when we got to Mauthausen. There were corpses all over, just laying. It's just impossible to explain to you. Dead people were laying, one on top of the other. It must have been close because we didn't see too many Germans there. We got there during the night and there was food. I think the Red Cross had food prepared for us. And everybody was grabbing and eating and everybody got sick because we were all hungry. And I got sick too. Typhoid.

Interviewer: Did you go to a DP camp or did you go to the hospital also?

Sally Wolkoff: No. My daddy always said during the war, he said, "Whenever we are separated, when the war was over, whoever lives through it, let's meet in the same city where we lived before the war." So, we all went back and we stayed there just about two months. And Henry came back and that's when he asked me to marry him.

Interviewer: How soon after he came home were you two engaged?

Sally Wolkoff: He asked me the first day he came home. It was about two weeks after we got married. And it was a wedding that I'll never forget.

Interviewer: Why?

Sally Wolkoff: Just a few friends were, you know, together. We said well... And there was one guy that he said, he can be our Rabbi and he married us. And then we went straight to...

Interviewer: You what?

Interviewee: I wasn't the Rabbi.

Sally Wolkoff: So, right after that we went to Germany because we hope to come to the United States. And we did just a few months later. I had an uncle in New York.

Interviewer: You know, I know asked this indirectly a few minutes ago and Henry shared with us, probably the same thing you're going to share but I find it... Personally, I find it just beautiful, the way that you two can communicate and recover and heal--

Sally Wolkoff: Yes.

Interviewer: --without really having to talk to each other, just being there. And the bonding I think is really amazing. How do you cope with the memories? What do you do when they come to you at night and during the day? How do you explain the pain to yourself?

Sally Wolkoff: I cry a lot.

Interviewer: What do you cry for most?

Sally Wolkoff: My family. We were a beautiful family. Always together. My parents were young people. They were killed when they were 46 years old. We're a very happy family. We sang. And then when it started with the war and every time somebody was missing, and I didn't see my mother or my two little sisters and my brothers, two brothers. And I think about them a lot because they were so young and beautiful and, why it should have been that way. It's sad. And they still don't like us. What?

Interviewer: When you think about your family--?

Sally Wolkoff: I have wonderful memories about my family. We were a happy, beautiful family. Henry met them too.

Interviewer: Do you have children?

Sally Wolkoff: The war messed up... Huh?

Interviewer: Do you have children?

Sally Wolkoff: I have two daughters.

Interviewer: Two daughters.

Sally Wolkoff: And three grandchildren.

Interviewer: Three grandchildren.

Sally Wolkoff: Wonderful kids.

Interviewer: Do you think you were able to recreate some of the magic from your own families?

Sally Wolkoff: I think so. I think so. Everybody tells me what wonderful kids I have. And that makes me happy.

Interviewer: That's wonderful. Well, Sally, I know how difficult this was for you and I'm so glad you came out to talk to us.

Sally Wolkoff: Thank you.