

Jeffrey Sorgen

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Mira Kimmelman 2016 - Holocaust Memories Film Archive Project

Mira: I was born on 17th of September 1923, in the suburb of Danzig, called ["Supput."][00:28] Had many friends, loved the place where we lived. It was a happy experience. It was a happy life, a normal childhood.

A lot of our German friends were all ardent socialists. When the Nazis came to power, all this changed. They were scared, they grow into the party, and for the Jews, life became unbearable.

Interviewer: You and your family were sent to Warsaw within a very short time. Why were you sent there?

Mira: They were asking people -- whoever has relatives in a city in Poland, if they want to go to these relatives, they can go. So that's why we went to Warsaw where my mother's oldest sister lived.

Interviewer: You and your family escaped from Warsaw to Tomaszow. Tell us what it was like to try and get on a train to get from Warsaw to Tomaszow.

Mira: At that time we as Jews were forced, first of all, to wear the white arm bands with the blue Star of David on our right arms. We were prohibited to go out after certain hours. There was a curfew, a very strict curfew. To travel out of Warsaw as Jews was impossible. So we removed our armbands and decided to walk to the station separately, in case one is caught, that we are not all as a family. And that's what we did. We walked early in the morning to the station in bitter cold weather.

Interviewer: And you lived there for eight months, until December 1940. Then the ghetto was established.

Mira: We were lucky we lived in one tiny room. Other people had to live two and three families to every room. There were terrible restrictions in the ghetto. No education for Jewish children, no library, no concerts, no performances. Outside of the ghetto, we still had a newspaper, we could listen to the radio. Once we got into the ghetto, we lived on rumors.

There were three bloody nights in April. The first night, they went after the people that were politically involved, who were in the Polish army, or were in some organizations. The second night, they went after the intellectuals. And the third night, they just at random used people that they wanted to liquidate. They took them out of their homes in the middle of the night, and in the gutters in front of the house, they were shot.

Interviewer: On July 27th, 1944, you were told that you would be sent to Auschwitz.

Mira: Correct.

Interviewer: Were you aware at that time that D-Day had already happened in Western Europe, June 6th, with the invasion of the British and the Americans in Normandy?

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Mira: We did not know anything at all. Nothing at all. We only knew that the Russian army is getting closer and they told us "we are sending you back west so you wouldn't fall into the hands of the Communists." Yeah. That time, there were only the three of us left of the family. Out of the 23 members, there were only three left.

When we were separated at the gates of Auschwitz, men went in one direction, women in another, and then there was another direction where children and older people went. We were completely oblivious of it. We had no idea what that stretch, what it meant. It was evening. It was twilight. And we could see the smoke, and we could smell a terrible smell.

And a young couple was leading us towards the bathhouse, and she said to me "you know, you remind me of my sister, you look like my sister, are you hungry? Would you like a piece of bread?" and she gave me a piece of bread. And then I asked her -- what is the smoke? What is the smell? -- it's the first time I heard about the crematorium, and about the gas chambers.

Well, the first thing we had to do is leave everything we had behind. Everything was taken from us. And then we were saved by SS men, not women, head and body, and we were chased into the showers.

The second day, in Auschwitz, we were all lined up, and in alphabetical order as our names were, we were tattooed, we stopped having name, we had the number.

Interviewer: And then came the terrible time on January 19th, 1945, when you began the death march.

Mira: Correct. 65,000 prisoners were at that time on that death march, taken out of Auschwitz, We were among them. And we had to travel now in open coal cars, open coal cars, 100 to a car. Sitting, not even stretching the leg, not able to move, in cold weather, in snow. Snow was our food. That's all we had to eat. And we traveled through Bohemia, from ["Ardhausen"] [06:49] to Dachau, from Dachau up north to Nordhausen. And then the women that were left, to Bergen-Belsen. Three weeks in open coal cars.

Interviewer: You saw tremendous death and destruction in the camp there.

Mira: It was not a death camp. It had one small crematorium, but there were mountains of dead bodies. In front of the camp, and throughout the camp, they couldn't burn them fast enough. And nobody could bury them. Everything was frozen.

As we entered the camp, the prisoners were so anxious to know if there's anybody who knew their family. So they asked, where are you from? What is your name? And when I said to one woman, I am from Danzig, she said, oh, we have here from Danzig, a couple of the kitchen who was in charge of kitchen and she gave me her name. I knew that woman. She was in the same organization, Em Habanim, as I was. I knew her. I remembered her. After two days I decided, I am going to ask her if she could find some work for me. Lived... Working in the kitchen meant life. You had extra food. I came up to her and I said, you lived in

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Danzig and I lived in Danzig, and I remember you from our organization, and I mentioned even the name of our leader. She looked at me and said, I never saw you, I don't remember you, I cannot help you.

Interviewer: When were you liberated?

Mira: April 15th, 1945.

Interviewer: And by whom?

Mira: 2nd British Army. But it was not happy day. It was not. We were so weak, we were so hungry. We were sick. And we were alone. All we were thinking of is, who is alive? Who are we going to find?

At that time I was together with another girl from Danzig, Anne Marie. We became very friendly, and I said to her, the first thing I want to do, I want to wash my hair. We felt so dirty, there was no water anymore ever. So we went to the camp part where the SS women were living, and there I found the basin and some water, and I washed my hair. I didn't look for money. I didn't look for anything. I wanted to be clean.

It was not until June of 1945, already three months after liberation, that working for the British Red Cross, somebody approached me and said, I have a note with your name from somebody who is looking for his children. My father was writing notes with my name and my brother's name, hoping that somebody would recognize the name and maybe know where I am. So I knew my father survived.

Sometimes I say, did I live through it? Was it really true? Did I go through these years?

And it seems that it was a dream, it was a dream.