

# Eileen Silberzweig

By: Jess Kelly

# Background information & Prewar



- Eileen was born in 1934
- She grew up in Ukraine until she was taken away to the ghetto.
- Unfortunately, Eileen does not remember much before the war due to that fact that she was very young.

# First encounter with the Germans



- Eileen remembers the first time the Nazi's invaded Ukraine like it was yesterday.
- She says that they were very straight, as in very intimidating and appeared to be a unit.
- They came in large trucks and started rounding up people.
- Eileen's dad was a farmer and he didn't understand anything that was happening, like everyone else, and they were told to stay put in houses.



# Prewar news

- Due to the fact that Eileen lived in a small town she didn't know anything about the war.
- The town didn't have any radios so they were, for the most part, unaware of the war that was unfolding.

# Anti-semitism & events after invasion

- Even though Eileen claims there was anti-semitism, she says that she was unaware at the time.
- After the invasion, the Germans took the Jewish farms and all their animals so there was little food at the time.
- After a while, Eileen was put in a ghetto.
- In the ghetto, there was no education and Eileen had to go outside the ghetto to work. She would knit gloves or socks, anything the Germans wanted.



Hitler being photographed



Jews in their designated uniform during war



Famous concentration camp designed to look like a train station



Jewish children during holocaust



Jewish kids at concentration camp



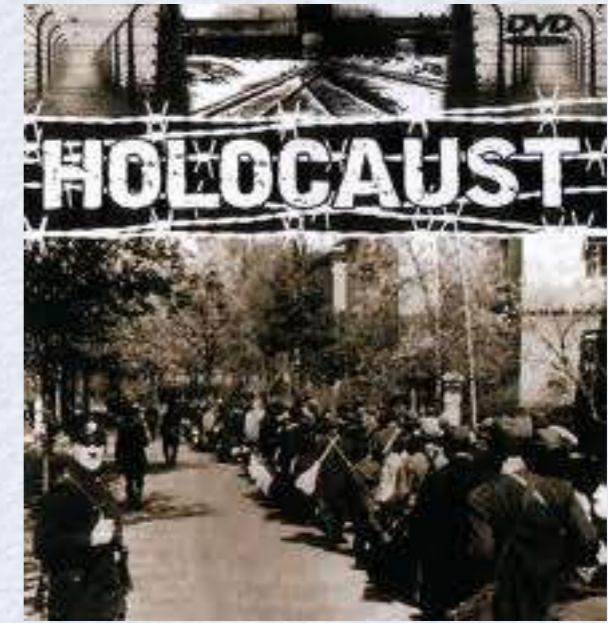
Another photo of Jews in their uniform



Sleeping arrangements in concentration camps



Another example of sleeping arrangements in concentration camps



Poster of the Holocaust



Jews trapped in Camps



Jewish children during war



Example of how many deaths there were at camps

# The ghetto



- When the Jews moved to the ghetto, the Germans took everything and put them in houses that were in the ghetto.
- In the Ghetto, Eileen lived with her father, her mother, and her younger sister. They never stayed in one ghetto, after one was eliminated they were sent to another. The Germans tried to keep many ghettos. In total Eileen had moved to about 6 ghettos.
- Eileen doesn't remember what the Germans gave the Jews to eat in the ghetto, but she does remember that a lot of people bought food outside the ghetto, such as butter, milk, potatoes.



## Inspiration & memories of family

- Eileen's parents gave her a lot of hope.
- Eileen's parents had no choice, they couldn't escape because they were surrounded so whatever her parents did she followed them.
- Her mother and sister died in the ghetto.
- She survived as well as her father.

# Clearest memory & guards at the camp

- Eileen was very young during the war. She didn't understand what was happening.
- Her clearest memory was running around and playing with other kids, just having a good time and being oblivious to the war.
- The guards at the camps didn't show any compassion. If you had work outside the camp, the guards used to pat you down before and after work.
- Due to the fact that Eileen was a child she was never punished.
- When Eileen wasn't knitting for the German army she would sweep the floors at the ghettos.



# End of war & liberation

- Eileen was lucky enough to not be sent on a death march. They were liberated in 1944 so Eileen was ten.
- The Russians liberated the camp that Eileen was at. She remembers that day very well. It was a nice sunny day and all the Jews waved to the Russians as they left and they waved back.
- Liberation was wonderful because before liberation Eileen was hiding in the woods with Jews, including her father, from the Germans. Once they eliminated the ghetto, the Jews ran into the woods to hide.
- At the time Eileen was with her family, approximately 40 people were hiding on the roof and the Germans came and check but couldn't find them. At night Eileen's father decided they should try and get out because the Germans were burning the buildings. There were police and Germans everywhere so whoever tried to pass got shot, but luckily Eileen's father ran first with Eileen holding on to his shirt and her mother and sister behind them, but they don't know what happened to the mother and sister.



# Liberation CON't

- Eileen still has a bullet in her back from trying to escape, she claims that when you get shot you don't feel anything. It took Eileen a whole day to realize she had been shot because of the dried blood on her clothes. Her father managed to barely miss a bullet in the back, it just grazed his shirt.
- After the escape, they were hiding in the ditches. There was water there so they managed to escape the fire the Germans spread trying to catch the Jews. That's where Eileen and her father waited for her mother, but she never came.



# Events after fleeing the ghetto

- Eileen stayed in the woods for a year after fleeing the ghetto. Her father knew a lot of people so he used to go into town and get food; some potatoes, bread. The neighbours were very nice.
- There was only Eileen, her father, her uncle, and another couple in the woods.



# mothers disappearance & religion

- After being finally free, Eileen and her father went back to their home town and waited for her mother for a year, but she never came back so they don't know what happened to her.
- Eileen always managed to keep a sense of hope, she looked up to adults, who seemed to always have hope.
- A lot of adults joined to fight against the Germans but her father was never accepted because he had a child.
- Eileen continued to pray and says the war didn't change her views on religion, she knew she was Jewish and that was it. She never thought of changing her religion. Even though she was always afraid and ashamed of being Jewish because she saw other kids having good times and going to school and because she was Jewish she couldn't.

# Reality of the holocaust & Immigration to canada



- Eileen says that the holocaust was tragic, she didn't understand much about anything because as she grew up all she saw was the war, it's all she knew.
- Running away and hiding from other people is how she survived growing up, until she came to Canada in 1948. She says it's a wonderful country. Eileen's father had brother's in Canada which is why they decided to come here. The brothers got in contact with each other when they found that the war was over, so Eileen and her father had hope to go to Canada.

# Post-traumatic stress & visiting home town

- When Eileen was younger she didn't suffer from the brutal reality of war, but as she's getting older she feels it more.
- Eileen has not visited her home town since the end of the war and doesn't want to even though a lot of people she knows went back.
- Many people from Eileen's town survived the holocaust.



# Understanding the holocaust

- Eileen thinks she's constantly being reminded about the holocaust.
- The war was a time when there was a lot of hate and that's all she can understand. She also claims since she's been in Canada, she hasn't experienced any hate.
- Before the interview, Eileen never spoke about the holocaust because she was ashamed, she was scared people wouldn't like her for what she is. At the beginning she used to dream about the war and those dreams were horrifying.

# Experiences during holocaust

- Eileen remembers when she was younger, while she was hiding in the woods, her father kept trying to join the resistance but he couldn't because he had a child. One night while Eileen was sleeping her father left and tried to join the resistance, but Eileen didn't know. There were a lot of wolves in the forest as well that were very hungry, surviving off of people who were dying in the woods. But luckily in the morning Eileen's father changed his mind and came back for her, if not she would of been eaten alive.

# Events after liberation

- The first thing Eileen did when she was liberated was find a home.
- She was free she could do anything she wanted.
- All her friends came back home and were reunited. People tried to get together and return to a normal life.

# “impact moments”

- The oral history project is a very important project because it allows us students to learn about the holocaust on a more personal level. We get to go learn about the holocaust through stories instead of a book. It also allows us to continue the stories of holocaust survivors.
- I got to learn a lot about the holocaust just by talking to Eileen. An impact moment while I was talking to Eileen was definitely when she told me she had never spoken about the holocaust before. I was astound that someone could go so long without talking about a huge part of their lives. I also felt honoured that she chose her first time to talk about the holocaust with me
- The oral history project isn't just another project, it gave me the opportunity to connect with another human who has been through so much pain and hopefully help her relieve some pain.



# Bibliography

- Pictures: All my pictures were obtained through google, unfortunately Eileen did not have any photos
- Essay: [http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/33d/projects/survivors/SurvivorPTSD\\_Andy05z.htm](http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/33d/projects/survivors/SurvivorPTSD_Andy05z.htm)

Thank-you for your time.