



Sylvia Katz

By: Stephanie Erdman



Early Life



- * Mrs. Sylvia Katz was born in Poland in 1927
- * She lived a simple and happy life with her parents and four siblings. She was in the middle of the five children
- * She was born and raised Jewish. Her family was religious and spoke Polish and Yiddish at home
- * Mrs. Katz and her family believed in God
- * She felt lucky because she had not experienced any anti-Semitism before the war
- * She had a good family and friends

Start of the War

- * When the war broke out, Mrs. Katz was 13 years old
- * She was the first of her family to be sent to a concentration camp in Poland in 1940
- * She was fortunate to be chosen for work, rather than go immediately to be gassed to death
- * Mrs. Katz worked in an ammunition factory measuring shells for guns
- * She was switched from job to job in the camp

Being Sent to the Gas Chambers

- * People had to line up once they arrived at the camps. The German soldiers would decide their fate – would they die or live? The weak were sent to the gas chambers on one side of the line and the strong were sent to work as slaves on the other side.
- * To make sure the prisoners would not panic about going to a gas chamber the soldiers told them that they were going to a shower
- * Little did they know, the Nazis disguised the showers as gas chambers killing all the people using Zyklon-B Pellets.
- * Some gas chambers could murder 2,000 people at once.



This picture is a gas chamber taken after liberation.

Life in the Camp

- * Life in the camp for Mrs. Katz was extremely difficult
- * There was a lack of food and clean water
- * She had to sleep in close living conditions
She slept in barracks and on brick beds
- * Mrs. Katz had to fight for her life every single day
- * She lived every day in fear that each day would be her last
- * While working in the camps, she suffered physically and emotionally
- * She witnessed the very traumatic murder of a baby ***impact moment #1*** as well as the death of her close friend



People were forced into small barracks and to sleep on brick beds with other people



People in the camps were always starving

Life in the camp continued

- * Mrs. Katz remembers being given a pair of shoes – which she says saved her life. The shoes were previously owned by a fellow-inmate who had been murdered
- * She wore the shoes for so long that she wore out the heels
- * There was a gold watch and rings in one of the shoes, sewn into the heel. She was able to use the gold to bargain for food
- * She said if she didn't have those shoes she doesn't think she would have survived the war. ***impact moment #2***
- * Mrs. Katz spent every day in the camps, living in fear, and worrying about the rest of her family

Life in the camp continued

- * While in the camps, Mrs. Katz was sick with Typhoid Fever
- * She became unconscious because her fever was so high
- * She remembers not even receiving a drink of water to help her when she wasn't well. She remembers that there was a lack of care for her
- * Mrs. Katz said "I don't know how I survived it"
- * Her cousin came to visit her while she was sick, but the doctors said her cousin must leave. After she recovered she never saw that cousin again
- * She spent five long years in the concentration camp

Poland → Germany

- * Mrs. Katz was evacuated from the camp in Poland and sent to a different camp in Germany. The Nazis feared that the Russians were getting too close, and that they would rescue all the survivors. The Nazis decided to evacuate everyone in the camp and send them to Germany
- * When they were evacuated they were crowded into cattle wagons like animals
- * The Nazis didn't provide any food or water for the Jewish people
- * She remembers having to walk over the dead bodies on the floor of the cattle cars
- * To this day, Mrs. Katz doesn't know how she survived the evacuation



In the wagons, people had to go in for days and days without any food or water. The wagons were very tightly packed, giving people barely any room to breath

Living in the camps in Germany

- * Mrs. Katz worked in a munitions factory in Germany
- * She remembers one day when American or British bombs were falling on them, and she went to hide in the basement
- * She said everyone in the basement was praying, that the bombs would hit them because they didn't want to live through any more pain. They were starving and they didn't want to suffer anymore. They wanted to die



Children were used for forced labor and made to work in dangerous conditions

Liberation

- * When the allies were getting close the camps, the Germans ordered all the survivors to walk so that the allies wouldn't be able save the survivors
- * Day and night, the survivors walked without food or water
- * Mrs. Katz saw war happen in front of her – fire, shooting, screaming and death
- * If someone stepped out of line the Germans shot them
- * She said, “it's hard to believe what a human being can do to another human being, -- its unbelievable”
- * All the survivors arrived at a field and were told by the German police to take off their identification badges
- * The Nazis and the S.S disappeared leaving the survivors standing by themselves, unsure of where they were

Liberation continued

- * Helicopters were flying over the field – they were taking pictures of the survivors
- * Mrs. Katz remembers that everyone looked like skeletons
- * She was liberated in Germany on April 27th 1945
- * She couldn't believe it
- * Allies showed the survivors where to go and took them to the nearest city
- * There they took all the sick people to a hospital – to help to get them better
- * Some people were so starved that they went to find food right away, stuffed themselves and died right after
- * The people who survived the war were in fragile condition.



Liberation Day!

After the War

- * After being liberated, Mrs. Katz decided to go back home to Poland to try and find her family
- * When she arrived at her home she realized she was the sole survivor of her family from Europe
- * Her neighbor (who was also the Mayor of the town) warned her to get out of Poland because Jews were still being killed as it was feared that the Jews would try and take their homes back
- * At 18 years old, Mrs. Katz was all alone and unsure of herself
- * She decided to go back to Germany

Living after the war

- * In Germany, Mrs. Katz worked at a jail as a guard to earn a living
- * She was all alone and had no one to give her any advice
- * She went to a DP camp. She was given a job as a sewer. She was also a telephone operator
- * Mrs. Katz was planning to go to Israel to live there because she had no where else to go
- * She met a man, in the DP camp who was a taylor and knew some distant family she had in Canada
- * She knew she had a few family members in Canada but didn't have any information about them
- * Mrs. Katz went to a lawyer to help find out more about them. The lawyer sent a letter to her family

Coming to Canada



- * Mrs. Katz's Canadian family wanted her to come and live with them in Canada, but the law said she was too old to come. She was 20 years old
- * The family helped Sylvia to change her name and age. She took on her deceased cousin's identity. The cousin had been living with her in the camp in Poland and had the same name as her. The only difference between the two girls was their ages
- * She received the necessary papers and came to Canada in 1947
- * In Canada, Mrs. Katz worked in a factory and went to night school to learn English

Newcomers to Canada After the War

- * After World War Two, people didn't know where to go or turn. People were left without families and had no home
- * Some people came as refugees to Canada to start a new life
- * Canada wanted to have a multicultural society and had the idea of the country serving as a melting pot.
- * The number of people admitted into Canada after the war skyrocketed.

Displaced Persons, Admitted to Canada, 1947-1953

1947-1948	14 250
1948-1949	50 610
1949-1950	33 197
1950-1951	24 911
1951-1952	41 016
1952-1953	1 713

A new beginning

- * Mrs. Katz went to a Purim party at a refugee club in Canada and met her future husband
- * His name was Mr. Katz. He had survived the war too
- * On June 25th 1947 She got married to Mr. Katz
- * They wanted to have babies as soon as possible because they had no other family
- * She had two children. One girl and one boy



Sylvia and her husband Mr. Katz on their wedding day.



Mrs. Katz's son on his Bar-Mitzvah day



Mrs. Katz's daughter

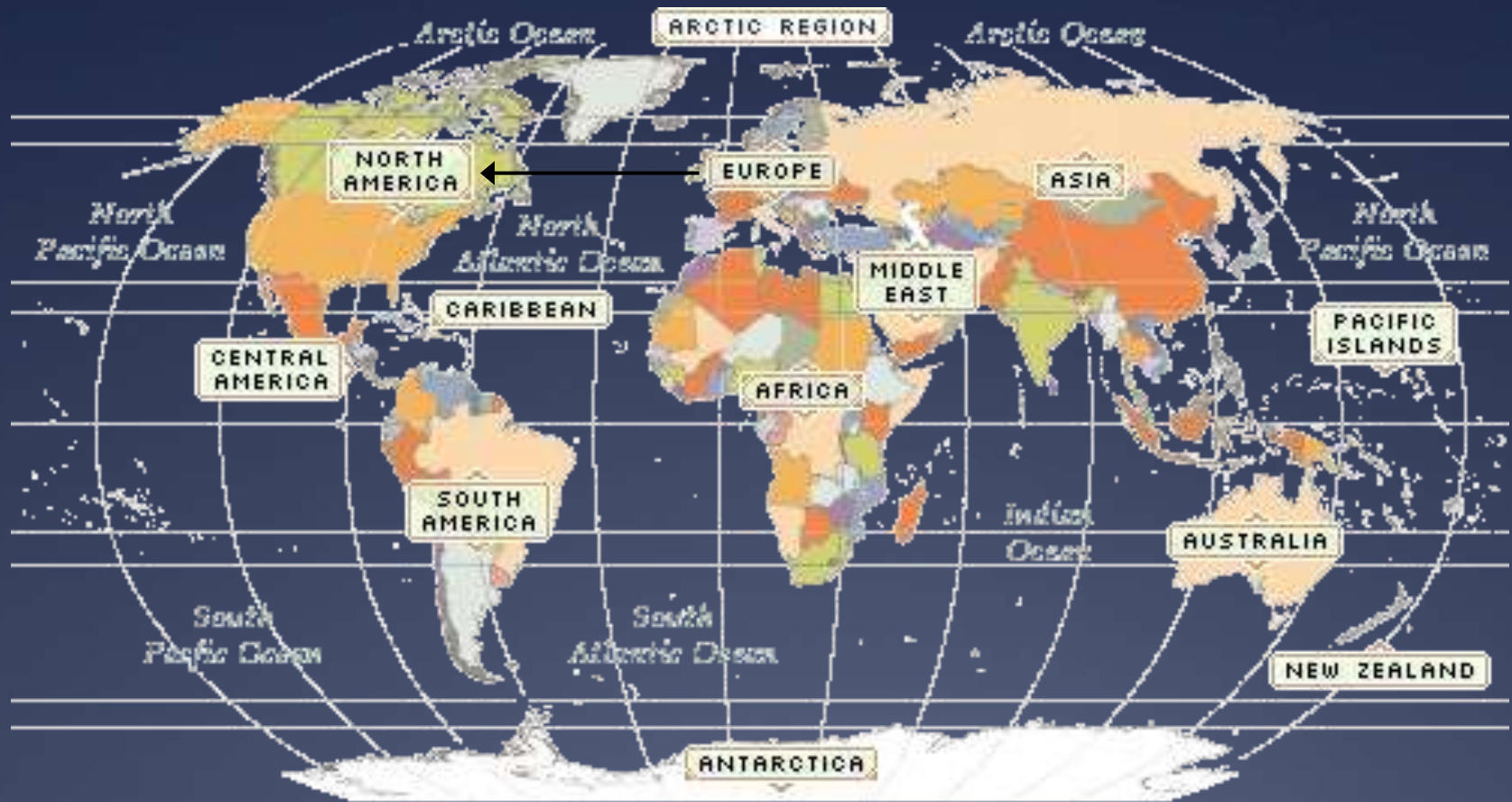
Life today

- * Mrs. Katz has five grandchildren



- * Although She lives a normal life, she still has significant problems.
- * No matter how hard she tries to erase the past, the scary and haunting memories are always be with her
- * Nearly 70 years after the holocaust, Mrs. Katz is impacted by it everyday of her life
- * Her fears and memories can never be erased
- * She probably cannot even express how much pain it has caused her.

Mrs. Katz's journey during the war years



Map View: Robinson Projection

Finding hope after the Holocaust

- * In the camps Mrs. Katz prayed to be killed
- * She and many other survivors were always starving and didn't want to suffer anymore
- * However after the war, Mrs. Katz came to the conclusion that God was always with her and kept an eye on her
- * She believes that God helped her survive the war

Importance of Oral History

- * Listening to Mrs. Katz share her heart-breaking story with me gave me a better understanding of the Holocaust. I find it extremely hard to believe how such a horrible human atrocity came to be. The pain and fear Hitler and the Nazis caused so many innocent people is something that can never be explained. Watching Mrs. Katz struggle to get the words out about her experience in the Holocaust, so many decades later, showed me firsthand, the enormous impact the Holocaust had on her – and many other survivors.
- * The painful memories of the Holocaust can never be erased. This pain stays with her forever.

Continuation

- * Everyone – regardless of race, religion or age can learn important lessons from the Oral History project and the Holocaust.
- * Perhaps the most significant reason to share the stories of the Holocaust is to ensure that history will never be repeated. Hearing first-hand accounts of survivors makes the experience of the Holocaust feel very real. Seeing the facial expressions and the body language of the survivors gives added insight into the Holocaust that could not be learned through reading a text book. Seeing the suffering of a survivor sends a very strong message, and helps people understand that the Holocaust can not be allowed to happen again, and we must all be responsible and do our part to make sure history is not repeated.
- * Hitler murdered 6 million innocent Jewish people, while the world stood by and watched. No one stood up for them, and helped them when they needed it the most. Everyone must learn the importance of standing up for what is right, even if it puts one in an uncomfortable position. If the world had stood up to Hitler and his army maybe the holocaust would have been stopped sooner, or never happened at all.
- * Oral history gives history a personal perspective and reinforces the importance of standing up and doing the right thing. Oral history provides a very powerful message. All the stories of the Holocaust must be shared and never forgotten.

Oral History based on Sylvia Katz

- * I can learn things from Mrs. Katz that textbooks can never teach me.
- * For example listening to Mrs. Katz's impact stories – like the baby being killed, which she witnessed, and her finding gold in her shoes that saved her life really gave me a better understanding about the holocaust and the daily traumas that she, and millions other like her suffered. If I read her story in a textbook I would not have understood the pain Mrs. Katz's suffered or made the human connection with her. Her story would simply have been that – an awful story. Listening to her made history real for me. I understand the pain and fear she is affected by everyday. I felt her emotions and saw her body language.
- * I know I will remember how much pain it caused her to share her story as she re-lived that awful period of her life. I will remember when she cried and when she broke down. I will never forget Mrs. Katz
- * I am grateful to her for sharing her story and teaching me and helping me to have a deeper understanding of the Holocaust.

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Thank-You!

