

Prospecting Through Anguish

By

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In May of 1944, Eva sat crouched with her knee pressed firmly against her chest. Immense horror fueled her rapid heartbeat as she heard ¹“When Jewish blood drips from our knives everything is going to get better,” being chanted from the streets. Their rhythmic marching shook the entire room. Since the Nazi’s seized Amsterdam, 15 year old Eva Schloss had witnessed countless Jews being killed in cold blood. Fear that she or her mother would suffer the same fate, she silenced her breathing. She peeked towards her mother, who was sitting against the door. As her mother opened her mouth to speak the door swung open causing her to fall out of the tight spaced room. Three large men dressed in all black, except for a red patch with a swastika symbol engraved on the left sleeve, stood over them. It was in that instance, she realized the people that had once opened their doors to her family were now the ones who had betrayed them. Before either of them could react, one of the soldiers grabbed her mother by her frail arm and forced her down the stairs. Eva was treated in the same manner as they were loaded onto a train where they were reunited with her brother and father, alongside hundreds of other Jews that had been captured.

After two years of being in hidden, Eva was almost relieved to be out of the cramped closet for longer than a few hours. The relief was short lived when she took in sights that encamped her. Men, women, and children alike were stuffed into the train cart like cattle. Many were sick and injured. She hoped to at the very least be reunited with her only friend, Anne, who lived in the same apartment block as her, but was saddened even more to know that Anne was not there and she’d have no one to confide in. When the train finally came to a halt and everyone was unloaded, no one could have possibly anticipated the horror that awaited them. The first order of command was that the men and women be separated. ¹“That was the last time we were together

as a family,” Eva says with a distant gaze. It never ceases to amaze enthusiasts how Eva, like many other Holocaust survivors, manage to maintain a monotonous composure as they share their horrific experiences.

Those who weren't killed in gas chambers were subjected to slow, mournful deaths. Every night, they slept on insect infested beds. They were hardly fed enough food to keep them alive. Basic living necessities and care were neglected. Waking up to see those behind her hadn't survived the night, Eva realized tomorrow was not a guarantee. ¹“I nearly gave up,” Eva shrugs, “But all of a sudden, I didn't want to. I wanted to experience life.” With the hope that one day she'd be reunited with her family, happy, far away from the suffering and devastation she was enduring every day, she fought through the maltreatment. For months she fought to stay alive until one day, after news broke out that Russian soldiers were coming, the Nazi Soldiers fled. Eva and her mother were two of the few inmates they left behind.

Unfortunately, Eva and her mother were informed that neither her brother nor father survived the ordeal. Bitterness sheltered in her heart as she questioned how the entire world could sit back as millions of people were being massacred. Eventually, Eva and her mother were reunited with Otto Frank, an old friend from the apartment block they lived on in Amsterdam. He spoke with a heavy heart as he told them that his wife and two daughters had been killed. He revealed to them his youngest daughter, Anne's diary. He was determined to publish it and carry on her legacy. Eva's mother became his partner in doing so. In the same sense, Otto became a father figure to Eva. She admits in Deb Bowen's book, *A Walk with Esther*, that she was a ²“very sad, difficult teenager, full of hatred and suspicion”. Through the journey of coping the loss of their families, the three managed to grow closer to one another. So much so that he was able to convince Eva to go back to school. He did not want Eva to cut herself short of the great life she could make for herself. Instead of allowing the horrific occurrence to be the end of their story, they pushed forward.

²Further along the road, Eva was able to go to London for a year to train in professional photography, where she met her husband, Zvi Schloss. To her surprise, Otto and her mother got married as well. ²Eva then went on to write four books, receive an Honorary Doctorate in Civil Law from the University of North Umbria in Newcastle, England. She also became a Trustee of the Anne Frank Educational Trust based in the United Kingdom and is a committed member of the Holocaust Education Committee. Today, those who've had the honor of meeting Eva acknowledge how she is a depiction of true peace, despite the hardships she's experienced.

Recently, I've had the privilege of being reunited with my mother after a year and a half of being separated. While she was rebuilding herself from the toxicity of her addiction and the trauma she'd endured over the years, I began to undergo trials of my own. Without proper guidance, I was continuously making mistakes that I was convinced I'd never be able to atone for. Resentment and self-pity consumed me in the worst ways imaginable. Yet, since coming to the farm, I've seen firsthand the transformation in her spirit and mind. To think that my mother could conquer every obstacle she was faced with and not be defined by the pain she suffered, my confidence was re-nourished. I now work alongside my mother as a leader in a program for women recovering from addictions, running from sex-trafficking, and suffering from mental illnesses. The same faith based rehabilitation program that undoubtable saved her life. Every day, these clients are in a constant battle with themselves, overcoming the demoralized labels that have torn them down and fueled their addictions. Through their growth, I've witnessed these women pour their hearts out and ask to be cleansed from the mud miscreants have drug them through.

Like my mom and Eva Schloss, these women refuse to let the pain they've endured harden their hearts. They refuse to let the losses they've mourned be a reason to give up. Their experiences and their stories will be used to encourage others and create compassionate, peace driven leaders, unlike Adolf Hitler. Instead, they will inspire leaders to see a brighter future. One with equity and equality. A future where you don't have to fear being targeted for being yourself.

¹*“EVA SCHLOSS - SURVIVING AUSCHWITZ” Interview with London Real. Sep 23, 2018.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1FTbZdDrs>

²*Bowen, Deb. “A Walk with Esther”. 2015 Never Forget Publishing*