

Death, Fear, and Sadness

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February 25, 2020

Word count 950

In 1933, Adolf Hitler came to power and began one of the most devastating events on our earth known as the Holocaust. The Holocaust was an event that left an estimated six million men, women, and children dead. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, about 1.5 million Jewish children were killed in the Holocaust, and tens of thousands of other children, who were “Gypsy” or had a disability, were also killed. The Holocaust brought pain to many children just because of their religious beliefs or their disabilities. One of the few people to survive was Nechama Shneerson, a woman who went through the Holocaust as a young girl in Kovno, Lithuania.

Nechama Shneerson went through many trials that caused her much heartache, devastation, confusion, and sadness. Her story began on May 29, 1929 in Kovno, Lithuania, in a small house with her family of six. She had three sisters, two older and one younger. In the summer of 1941, the Germans occupied Lithuania, this meant that Nechama was in the war zone. When the invasion of Kovno began, Nechama was just returning from a summer camp when her sister came to pick her up. As they were running home through the streets of Kovno, bombs were dropping all around them. They made it home, but soon after they arrived, her parents decided to run, but quickly learned there was nowhere to escape. They were forced into a place called the Seventh Fort. This was a terrible place; the men were separated from the women, all were forced to go to the bathroom in groups and dig holes. Young women were taken by guards at night and raped, and many who were taken did not return. Luckily, no one in Nechama’s family experienced those horrors. They were at the fort for seven days, but then were sent home because a ghetto was being built for them. Once her entire family made it out of the Seventh Fort, they were forced to enter the Kovno ghetto.

Within the Kovno ghetto, Nechama witnessed an event that was completely horrific. Nazi men came into the Kovno ghetto, bursting into home after home in search of children under the age of ten. This left Nechama safe because she was just over 11 years old, but her younger sister was 8, meaning

that she was in serious danger. Nechama's family tried to hide her youngest sister, but she was quickly found. She kicked, screamed, and eventually the guard threw her off. Nechama quickly grabbed her sister and ran out the back door. This undoubtedly saved her sister's life. Eventually, they were able to come back, and Nechama witnessed a truly petrifying sight. Babies were being ripped out of their mother's arms and ferociously thrown into trucks by their legs. If mothers refused to let go of their babies, dogs would be released on them. Children were being taken and just tossed into trucks if they looked to be under ten years old. The sight was simply appalling. According to "Holocaust Survivor Nechama Schneerson Testimony Survivor," Nechama said, "this sight actually destroyed me." These words convey how truly sickening it was as this sight brought Nechama so much pain and just recalling the situation brought her nearly to tears.

The Russians began to invade Lithuania in 1944. This resulted in the Germans fleeing the ghetto and bringing many of the people with them. Nechama's family made the choice to stay and hid in their basement with a few other families. Eventually, a German soldier broke into their house and was yelling about how if they didn't leave they would be blown up. At this point, her sister was in the back of the house and was unaware of the situation at hand as they had no way to alert her. Nechama's family decided that it would be a good idea to leave their house because they thought it would be a faster, better way to die from shooting instead of fire. They left the house and later found out that it was blown up with her sister inside. The rest of her family was then put on cattle cars and sent off to Slutthof, a concentration camp. The train made many stops, including one where Mr. Schneerson was forced to get off, only to never be seen again.

I can only imagine being in Nechama's place, forced to watch innocent children who were just like you and me, being carelessly tossed into the back of trucks. Knowing this is heart-breaking to me. I think about people I know being tossed into trucks because of their different beliefs and how absolutely crazy that seems. The reality is that this did happen to people. I see the Holocaust as the most dehumanizing event to have ever occurred on the earth and it was entirely avoidable. I think that it should have ended sooner, but preferably, it shouldn't have happened at all.

After surviving the Holocaust, Nechama had the opportunity move to Israel and join their army. While she was in the army she met her husband, Gabriel Schneorson. They then had a daughter and immigrated to America. Knowing this helps us realize that even though the Holocaust was a devastating event, many people made it out, and did not let their past hold them back. The Holocaust was a horrific event that is a shameful time in our history. It affected many men, women, and children, and brought fear, suffering, and sadness to all who were involved. These people are inspiring and their stories are heroic as they have been through a devastating catastrophe, but because of that they live every day to the very fullest.

Works Cited

“Holocaust Survivor Nechama Schneorson Testimony Segment.” USC Shoah Foundation, USC Shoah Foundation, n.d. *Youtube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV-HZE28BHs>. Accessed 19

February 2020.