

The Southern Institute  
For Education and Research  
at  
Tulane University

Presents

STORIES OF  
HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS  
IN NEW ORLEANS

DORA NIEDERMAN

DORA NIEDERMAN WAS BORN IN THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA. HER REGION WAS ANNEXED IN 1939 BY HUNGARY, HITLER'S ALLY. IN 1944, THE NAZIS OCCUPIED HUNGARIAN TERRITORY AND, WITH LOCAL COLLABORATORS, DEPORTED THE JEWS TO AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU DEATH CAMP IN NAZI-OCCUPIED POLAND.

DORA WAS ELEVEN [SIXTEEN] WHEN SHE ARRIVED AT AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU. SHE SURVIVED MANY 'SELECTIONS' BY NAZI DOCTOR JOSEF MENGELE. WITH GIRLS FROM HER VILLAGE, DORA WAS LATER SENT TO STUTTHOF DEATH CAMP IN POLAND. SHE WAS 'LIBERATED' BY SOVIET TROOPS IN MAY

1945.

THIS INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY THE  
SOUTHERN INSTITUTE'S PLATER ROBINSON.

PR (Plater Robinson, interviewer)

DN (Dora Niederman)

PR So the Jewish people of Hungary were deported to Auschwitz in 1944. But for four years, the war had been going on and the destruction of the Jewish people had been going on. Did you know about it?

DN No, I was too young. Maybe the older people did, but they never talked about it, or I never remember them saying anything about it. Only one thing, I mean, nobody came telling us. We were a small town, between the hills, and nobody came there to tell us how some things were. Maybe in the bigger cities they did know. But we never knew nothing about it 'till the Hungarians came in 1944 [1939] and they start beating. I remember they took my stepfather out and for two days he never came home. And, you know, we were very orthodox people. He had a beard. He had *payot*. And when he came home he was all beaten up, and they shaved his beard off, and they took his *payot* off. We didn't even know who the man was when he walked in the house. His voice we recognized, by his voice. They beat him for no reason

PR And these were Hungarian police.

DN Hungarian police.

PR Collaborating with the Nazis.

*PHOTOGRAPH OF GERMAN SOLDIER SHOOTING MAN ON  
KNEELING ON THE EDGE OF A DITCH AS SOLDIERS WATCH*

DN With the Nazis. And they said, I remember my mother spoke very good Hungarian, because [of] the First World War, and he did, too. And they told them, “Don’t think that these are same Hungarians or Germans what was here during the First World War.”

PR It was a different breed.

DN It was a different breed, and a different people. “So don’t welcome us. You Jews don’t welcome us. Because you’ll be sorry you’re welcoming us.”

PR And people hitherto who had been friends no longer were?

DN Some were, but not too many. They were afraid. Because they were afraid for the Germans and the Hungarians. I never told you that: we had a teacher. He was a very nice teacher. And when they came in, Hungarians came in, and they said he was a spy and they shot him, and left him in our river and he was laying there for maybe two or three weeks in the river. And he was all blown up. And his parents came to pick him up and they wouldn’t let them, they didn’t let the parents pick him up. They say, “See, this is what is going to happen to you if you help the Jewish people.”

PR So they ruled by terror.

DN By terror. So they were terrified. They were really, it wasn’t so much anti-Semitism. We were friends, but they were afraid it’s gonna happen to them or their children.

*MAP OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA ZOOMING IN ON SIGHET*

PR When the Germans arrive, it's Passover.

DN Yeah, it was our Passover holiday. And just as, the last day of Passover. They came in one night. We was all sleeping, and they woke us up in the middle of the night and they made us get up. And just leave the house just like we were, in night gowns. They let us finally put dress on, and our shoes. And they took us to the ghettos. And we stayed there maybe a month.

PR In the ghetto.

DN In the ghetto. With no food. With no clothes, but they didn't let us take anything with us. And then one night they came in the ghettos. They had surrounded the Jewish section. They put them all in the same neighborhood. And so everybody [non-Jews] opened the door for the Jewish people and whatever they had, they shared with us, and then they came one night and they gathered everybody and put us on horse and buggies and took us to trains. And on the trains they must have put in about fifty people in one train. One of those cattle, put the cows, the cattles...

*PHOTOGRAPH OF INSIDE 'CATTLE CAR' ZOOMING IN ON THE WINDOW*

PR Cattle cars.

DN With no food, with no water. With little bitty windows just to look out. The windows were with iron so you couldn't even, if you wanted to push somebody out you couldn't through the windows. And then we rode about three days.

PR Three days.

DN Three days.

PR Over the mountains.

DN Over the mountains.

PR To Poland.

DN To Poland. And we could look out, that's all. You couldn't sleep. You couldn't sit. You couldn't use the bathroom. It was undescrivable.

*PHOTOGRAPH OF 'RAMP' AT BIRKENAU-AUSCHWITZ-  
BIRKENAU*

IN 1982, THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS AFTER 'LIBERATION' OF DEATH  
CAMP.

450,000 JEWS FROM HUNGARIAN TERRITORY WERE MURDERED  
HERE IN 1944.

DN But we didn't know where we got in at first. Because they had a big sign,  
'Work makes your life sweet.' That's what it said in German.

*PHOTOGRAPHS OF PEOPLE ARRIVING AT THE DEATH CAMPS  
ZOOMING OUT OF THE STATION TOWER*

We got up and they took us inside, when we got into Auschwitz, and there was  
Gestapos with the guns, shepherds, with dogs.

*PHOTOGRAPH OF CROWD SPILLING OUT OF THE CATTLE  
CARS*

*PHOTOGRAPH OF THE CHILDREN WITH THEIR FAMILY  
STANDING BESIDE THE CATTLE CAR*

*PHOTOGRAPH OF PEOPLE STANDING IN TWO LINES AFTER  
SELECTION*

And they start making a 'selection.' The older people and the children they put on one side. The other people they put on another side. And I was only twelve years old, not quite twelve years old. And I was there with my aunt, my daddy's sister, and I wanted to go with them. And a German came over. He yanked me. He says, "You have to go to work." I said, "No, I don't want to go. I want to go with you." She said, "No, you go to work, and maybe you will help us, to help your aunt and the children. You go to work." So I went to the other side. I didn't know anything. We're going to be gassed or killed or anything. We didn't know nothing.

*PHOTOGRAPHS OF JEWS BEFORE THE 'SELECTION' ZOOMING  
IN ON THE LITTLE GIRLS*

PR So the 'selection.' The old and very young were sent directly to the camp.

DN Sent directly to the death camp.

PR And those who were young and had the possibility of working...

DN Had the possibility of working, they took to the left. And then the other ones were on the right, the parents, the children, they took them to the right side.

PR So this was the last time you saw your aunt.

DN This was the last time I saw my family. And they start taking us to one side. They took them to other side. And as we were walking down the streets to go into the camps, for it was outside when we came in, and people had striped clothes like from the camps. They gave everybody those kind of clothes.

*PHOTOGRAPH OF ROLL CALL AS MALE PRISONERS IN STRIPED UNIFORMS STAND AT ATTENTION*

PR Prisoners.

DN Prisoners. And they start hollering at us to give them food. To throw everything we have to them. And we thought those people are crazy. They taking us to a crazy house. I mean, what's going on here? We didn't know ourselves where they taking us. Where they taking our parents? The children?

*PHOTOGRAPH OF SMOKE AND MEN THROWING THE BODIES INTO THE FIRE*

It was a horrible smell. Like ashes. Like tar. Even today if I go some place, I can't smell tar. It makes me deathly sick. And they told us, "You see right there? There is your parents now. They're burning them. Killing them. Gassing them. And they're all burned. There won't be nothing of them," and we couldn't believe that.

PR You could you see the chimney?

DN The chimney burned all that day, twenty-four hours a day. You could see the smoke and smell the smoke always, and they told us that, there are the chimneys where our parents are burned, our sisters, and brothers. My whole family, and it was horrible. You couldn't do nothing because Auschwitz was wired, electric wiring, all around electric wiring. And a lot of people throw themselves on the wires.

## *PHOTOGRAPH OF BARBED WIRE*

### *PHOTOGRAPH OF DEAD MAN LYING BY THE WIRE*

I saw two girls throw themselves on the wires, and got instantly burned. And they took them off and they were dead.

PR They committed suicide.

DN Suicide. It's very hard. It's a hard thing to see, and to live through, but you were young and you were with other young people. I met the girls. I met other six girls. And we stayed together the whole time.

PR They were from your village?

DN They were from the village. Here's another thing. When we got into Auschwitz, when they took us to give us a bath, and they gave us the striped clothes, they shaved all our hair off, all your hair.

### *PHOTOGRAPH OF ROLL CALL WITH WOMEN AND THEIR SHAVED HEADS*

And so when we came out we didn't recognize each other. We were calling each other's names, because I mean here you went in with long hair, young. Here I'm coming out with no hair on my head. So we finally found each other. So we wind up we were eight girls from the same village. And we stayed through the whole time. And Mengele every morning.

PR Mengele being the SS doctor.

DN Mengele the SS doctor. Every, every morning and every night he came.



And he was as close to me and to all of us like you are. And he had a little stick. And you went this way or this way. And he always counted.

### *PHOTOGRAPH OF MENGELE*

PR What did he look like?

DN He was short man, chubby, round face. And always had that stick in his hand.

PR A baton.

DN Wherever he went, he went with that. He never went without it.

### *PHOTOGRAPH OF AERIAL VIEW OF BIRKENAU EXTERMINATION MAP ZOOMING IN ON GAS CHAMBERS IV AND V*

When we were in Auschwitz, we could hear the Allies, English, coming to bomb. Every day. Every day they were bombing. Dropping bombs. Dropping bombs. And every night we used to hold each other in our hands and we pray, "Please God, throw a bomb on us. Please let us not be suffering no more. Just throw one bomb and we all be gone." But it never happened. We could see the planes almost flying during the day when we were outside, but they never, never dropped a bomb on us.

### *PHOTOGRAPH INSIDE PRISONER BARRACKS*

PR Dora, what was day to day existence like at Auschwitz?

DN We had about twenty-five girls sleeping in one bed.

## *PHOTOGRAPH OF PRISONER'S BEDS*

In those beds. And when one turned, we all had to turn. One couldn't turn without the other 'cause it was like herrings pressed together. In the morning, we got up and they gave us a little bit water to wash your face. No bath. And then we had to go outside in the *appel*.

PR The roll call.

DN The roll call. We had to go outside and they kept us two or three hours out there. And it was cold, and we were all naked. Again, every time we had a roll call we had to be no clothes. We had to leave the clothes inside. And then Mengele came again. And Mengele kept on looking at us. And always Mengele. And we stayed two or three hours, and if he didn't like the way we stand or whatever you did, it was start all over again. All over again.

## *PHOTOGRAPH OF TOILETS AT BIRKENAU*

We went back in the barracks. We went through for a little water. Had to look for the bathroom. In a little hole. Then they gave you a little soup. Water really, not soup, it was water. Then they gave you a little piece of bread, this big, with the soup. That was our lunch. Again came out for roll calls. Then we had to stay in the lines till about five, or six o'clock in the evening. Mengele every morning. I must have been at there about three, four months, at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Auschwitz. He came in and we were all naked. And I had a rash. I don't know from food or from not eating, or God knows what. He took me out and he send me to the 'hospital.' They had a 'hospital' in that same place but further down. So I got separated from the girls, and I really didn't know what to do. So I was there maybe two days in the 'hospital.' And the nurse came over to me, because it looks like I was the more better off than the rest of them. She says, "Here's the bucket. Take this bucket and go and dump them out," because they couldn't go out, "and bring the bucket back." I went outside,

and I looked around, and it was evening time. I left the buckets right there. I didn't dump them. I didn't do anything. I just picked up and went to the barracks where my friends were. And I stayed with them. And this was after the *appell* already, so they didn't count the people no more. In the middle of night they came in, and they woke us up, and they told us they evacuating us to another camp.

PR You told me that that night when you left the hospital at Auschwitz and went back to the barracks and reunited with your girlfriends, you told me that "It was not time for me to die."

DN It wasn't. That true. Otherwise I would have been in the hospital if it would have been that time. It was something told me 'go,' and I just went, and that night they took us to Stutthoff.

### *PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUTTHOF CAMP IN 1990*

#### STUTHOFF IN 1992, FORTY-SEVEN YEARS AFTER 'LIBERATION' OF CAMP.

#### SIXTY-FIVE THOUSAND JEWS AND NON-JEWS WERE KILLED HERE BETWEEN 1939 AND 1945.

DN We arrived at Stutthoff. The same thing: the SS with the guns, with the dogs. Where we going to go? We didn't even know where we were. Where we going to run away? But still they brought the dogs.

### *PHOTOGRAPH OF TOWER IN STUTTHOF CAMP*

They brought us in the camp in a big, big building and they left us there. With no food, with no water.

## *PHOTOGRAPH OF HUMAN SKULL AND JAW*

We just had luck to survive. Don't know how, but we did survive. Then one Sunday morning we all got up. They had camp fixed up beautifully: flowers, water. They had gave us food. And we didn't know what happened. We thought we got liberated. I mean, they told us to take a bath. We went outside and we couldn't believe all the water, all the, it wasn't much food, but it was food. Before we didn't see no food. They gave us to eat, and they gave us the tables to sit down. And later in years we figured it out: that it must have been the Red Cross came. They [Germans] must have told the Red Cross how beautiful they treat us. The Red Cross came. And they must have fixed up the camp for them [Red Cross] to show how nicely they treat us.

PR And then there was the time when...

DN The time came they taking people to another camp. And we got there and there was a lot of farmers looking for workers, and they start counting people. They came by us and they count five and left five and we started screaming, but there were two others girls we didn't know even and they came and said, "Let's say we're ten sisters," because we only two sisters ourselves and we had three sisters from our home and two sisters .

PR And so there were ten girls and you wanted to stay together.

DN Ten girls. And we wanted to stay together. And we started crying, "Why! You told us not going to separate us. And why do you separate us now? We're ten sisters." So this man walks over and says, "I'll take the ten sisters."

PR The German farmer.

DN The German farmer. He says, "It don't make any difference. I need ten people. I'll take them." So he took us home. He really was the nicest...he

brought us life back. We stayed there about two, three months. He fed us good. We slept in the barn. On the bottom was horses and we slept on top. We had two big beds. We were five and five in each bed. And every night they locked us in. They were afraid we going to run somehow, run away. And every morning they woke us up, we got dressed, we went down and had breakfast. A beautiful breakfast. He always fixed us nice food. He was the nicest person you ever wanted to be with.

PR In this time of cruelty there were some good people.

DN He was very good to us. Thanks to him today I think the ones who have survived, today living because of that.

PR But the SS came back.

DN They came and told him he has to bring us back. Because, you see, the winter started. And the fields started getting frozen. And we couldn't work in the fields and then the war started getting closer, and the Russians were getting nearer. So they didn't want to leave us there. So he came upstairs, brought us bread, brought each of us three big loaves of bread. And said, "I want you to take this with you all. I know you going to be hungry so you have something." And he gave us raw carrots and he start crying. He says, "I'm sorry. I tried everything in this world. I even told them I'll pay my money if they let you all stay." And they said, "No, we cannot. They have to come back." And he told us, he never told this to nobody, but his wife was Jewish.

PR And she had died before the war.

DN She died at birth. He had a three year old boy. And the little boy, she died when she gave birth to the child. And he told us his wife was Jewish. He cried. He said, "I'm sorry. I'm very sorry I have to make you go back. I know where you all going back." So we got back to Stutthoff. Oh it was horrible. Hunger,

lice. Everything you wanted to imagine, they had there. From there they took us...the war was getting closer and closer. They kept on taking us to one camp, further down, further in Poland, deeper in Poland, deeper in Poland.

PR And the Russians were getting closer.

DN And the Russians were getting closer. And then we got to a town, somewhere, I don't know where in Poland, because I didn't know anything about Poland, and we ran away from the group. We knocked on some man's door and his wife. He let us in. We spoke very good Ukraine. And we told him we from Ukrainian girls, we were from concentration camps. Would he help us? The war is getting closer. And he helped us. He took us in, and he kept us, and he told us, and we prayed, you know, the Christian prayers. We use to pray every Sunday. He didn't want us to go to church. He didn't want his people in town to know he was hiding somebody. But he brought us food. We stayed upstairs. He gave us pots to use, you know, we had to do our 'business.' And at night one of us would go down, too, and put, dump them in the bathroom, but all day long we stayed upstairs, very quietly, and we stayed there. And we could see the war, you know, hear the war was getting nearer and nearer. And then the Russians came in.

PR You told me 'they weren't so pleasant either'.

DN No, they wasn't pleasant. They were horrible. The man had double wall where you hide people, or hide food. That's where he hid us. The Russians came in and was raping everybody. They were first line [troops], first line, they came in. They were horrible people, and then we were there, and one man came in, a Russian. Came in and he happened to speak 'Jewish' [Yiddish], and he asked us are we Jewish? We told him yes. He said he'd appreciate it very much we not stay there. Because they don't know today the Russians, tomorrow could come back the Germans. He said, "I know what you all went through. Just leave this place." So we went down and we told the [Polish] people that we were born

Jewish and we thanked them very much for being so nice to us and taking us in.

PR The Polish farmer knew?

DN The Polish farmer, he said to us that he knew we were Jewish.

IN 1946, ONE YEAR AFTER WORLD WAR II, DORA MOVED TO A  
'DISPLACED PERSONS' CAMP IN ITALY. THERE SHE MET HER  
FUTURE HUSBAND ISAAC NIEDERMAN, A HOLOCAUST  
SURVIVOR FROM ROMANIA.

BEFORE GOING TO ITALY, DORA WENT TO BUDAPEST, THE  
HUNGARIAN CAPITAL, IN SEARCH OF RELATIVES. SHE  
LEARNED THAT THREE STEPSISTERS AND A BROTHER HAD  
SURVIVED AND WERE LIVING IN THE CITY.

And I was going down see where they lived, in middle of street, and I saw this man coming. That man was my brother but I didn't recognize him. And he didn't recognize me either. He was going to their house. But he was going faster and I was going slower. And when I got in the house there was my brother sitting. We both start crying, that we passed each other on the street and we didn't even know who we were. This what the Germans did to us. I had no hair. Must have weighed maybe fifty pounds. He was still so skinny, too. So I stayed with... with my stepsisters, I stayed with them. And from there, the middle stepsister, she's in Israel, we went home. We decided to go back home. Maybe we find somebody living, you never knew

PR To the village.

DN To the village where we lived. And she, we got home. Our house was completely destroyed. We had no windows, no doors. The people was very nice to us, they said they would fix the house, and they gonna do this to us, and this

and that to help us, but we didn't want to stay no more, we figured this is not a life, we had a life before, but this is not a life to stay. So we went another little town, and my mother had a sister living there, my aunt, and her two children came back, also from Auschwitz, and they got home, their neighbor watched their house, there was nothing missing out of their house at all. And we got there, we found each other, we slept the night with them, and the next day we told them all goodbye.

PR So you went to Italy.

DN We went, and when we arrived in Italy, we stayed in the camp. But it was a,

PR 'Displaced Persons' camp.

DN 'Displaced Persons' camp, that's when I met husband.

### *PHOTOGRAPH OF DORA AS A BRIDE*

PR Isaac.

DN Isaac.

PR And you and Isaac were married

DN Two years later we got married.

### *PHOTOGRAPH OF THE COUPLE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AT THEIR WEDDING ZOOMING IN ON THE COUPLE*

PR September 3, 1948.

DN 1948.



PR So you arrived in New Orleans.

DN We arrived in New Orleans May 17, 1950.

*PHOTOGRAPH OF THE COUPLE SMILING IN NEW ORLEANS*

PR For many years the subject of the Holocaust was not discussed.

DN It was not discussed. We couldn't discuss. None of us did. Because it was very hard, very painful, it was very, very painful for us to talk because you don't want to bring back all the old memories. Because when I, I can't watch any movies from the Holocaust, I cannot watch at all. Because if I do, I wake up in the middle of the night screaming.

*PHOTOGRAPH OF DAVID DUKE DURING HIS CAMPAIGN*

PR But then there came a time when you decided to speak out

DN It happened [David] Duke kept on hollering on TV, "Not such a thing as the Holocaust. It's a hoax. It's not true, it's not true." So all of us live here in New Orleans, most of the Holocaust survivors, decide to come out and talk about it, not to let him be the right person, because we were there. We suffered for being Jewish or being Holocaust survivor. He doesn't know what that means. What does he know talking about Holocaust. He doesn't know anything about it. Because he wants to become a big shot, become a senator, or whatever. It's not right to do that.

*PHOTOGRAPH OF DORA AT A SCHOOL ZOOMING IN ON DORA AND STUDENT*

*ACADIANA HIGH SCHOOL*

## *LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA*

PR And many times, Dora, you and I have traveled throughout Louisiana schools speaking to students.

DN I wanted them to learn not to be anti-Semitic, and to realize every person is equal. I want to tell them another thing: to remember they have parents.

### *PHOTOGRAPH OF DORA HUGGING A STUDENT*

I was too young. I lost my parents, and I had to struggle on my own to live. When they go home at night, to tell their parents how much they love them, and to hug them and kiss them. When they go to school or to work to tell them same thing again, "We love you."

PR Can it happen again?

DN I'm afraid it may. I hope not. All over the world wherever you go, there is killing, killing, killing. It's terrible. People should live together as people.

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