

Susie Sherman – Video Testimony (3 clips)

Clip 1: “Waiting it Out”

My name is Susie Sherman. I was born in 1935 and my family was from the western third of Czechoslovakia – Karlsbad – now Karlovy Vary

The thinking was that Hitler was a clown. And the thinking people would not believe him and this would all go away. So the families, all of them, thought that if they traveled away from the Sudetenland toward the east, they could hide out and then go back to their good lives. But we were met with so much antisemitism and aggression along the Polish border that we weren’t safe there anymore.

Now um it’s 1939 and the families decide that they would pool their resources. ...

We weren’t safe in the small villages of Bardejov and Bradyabad so we decided to go to a cosmopolitan area – Prague. We rented a few rooms and all crammed in. The idea of the majority of the family was that we would wait this thing out.

CLIP 2: “Marbles”

My father made the decision – which is why I am here today – that his family of four would leave. The rest of the dear, dear family – for their own reasons – stayed.

My mother – against all rules – had sewn some jewelry in the lining of her long wool coat. And so when we entered Holland, uh we decided we would go into hiding because it wasn’t safe to live out in the open for a number of reasons. But she had this jewelry. And the jewelry was enough of a bartering thing for a Dutch lady to put us up in her attic.

We were found out and I don’t know how we were found out. But the NS Bayers – the traitors who reported directly to the Nazis came storming into the woman’s living room and said we know you are harboring Jews and saying all the horrible things about Jews: we lie, we steal we do terrible horrible awful things. And my sister understood what they were saying – she dropped marbles down on top of these NS Bayers heads and they – luckily, they stormed out saying they were gonna get reinforcements. And with that, we grabbed our belongings and left.

CLIP 3: "Living with the Lord and Lady"

My Dad had found out that if you could get to England in the next two weeks, you could enter England without a visa. And so we went to England. And we were taken in by the Lord and Lady Cottesloe.

And so this Lord and Lady had asked to take in a family with children from the Sudetenland and we became that family. They were wonderful to us. They wanted to adopt my sister and I in case something happened to my parents or if Hitler took over England, we would be their children, not my parents' children and that's how I got my middle name.

My middle name became Margaret after the princess of the day...

We changed from being normal rambunctious kids to doing whatever we were told and this elderly couple couldn't believe these two little girls who just sat and did what they were told. Because on our journeys we were always told to be quiet – don't let anybody notice you and don't complain. On our journeys, I developed whooping cough as a young child and I was supposed to act normal. You know, act like I was well and you know those were the things that just went on in the abrupt change in people's lives.

We stayed in England for four years. And then after waiting for four years, my dad gets this miraculous letter from America that his family could go to America.

CLIP 4: "Terezin"

But I think often of the dear family members who for their own reasons – stayed and met their deaths – all except one - in Auschwitz, Treblinka and Maly Trostenets.

The family that stayed in Prague, ... aunts, uncles, cousins, extended family, grandparents um were dragged to the ghetto concentration camp of Terezin – Theresienstadt and this ghetto was many evil things.

After the war, my dear Uncle Karl – he survived Terezin, he survived Auschwitz. He's going back to Terezin to try to find anybody he can possible find.

He enters, he finds no one. He finds another woman – Martha. She also had no one and the two of them decided to get married and start a new life.

And so my dad, by now we had been here about five years and my dad had enough money that he could be Uncle Karl's sponsor.

Karl and Martha came to America and they lived in California. My dear Uncle Karl died very shortly after coming here because he had been beaten over the head with a rifle and starved and his health was so impaired. But Martha lived to be almost a hundred. She had the last laugh. So when she died, my sister and I went to clean up her place. And we opened up these drawers and here were all these documents.

Pictures that were sketched in Terezin, documents, ration cards, permissions to be on the street, invitations from the ghetto to come to an evening – just the most incredible documents.