



Ian: You've obviously seen the film, The Boy in The Striped Pyjamas. What did you think of it when you saw it?

Eva: I liked it very very much, because in my opinion it was very authentic, probably little things didn't happen quite like, and it wasn't in that camp in particular, there was in Auschwitz, but I thought it was very well done. It was so...the actors portrayed the mentality and the way they behaved and somehow it was like I had written it. I felt very strongly about it.

Ian: When you watched it, how far did it bring back your own memories?

Eva: My memories are there, especially as I talk about it now the whole time. So the memories are there, to me it was, I know that German, I felt I know them and I realised what they were talking about and why they were talking like they did. It wasn't memories because memories are there, it was just a different way of looking at it that I hadn't thought about.

Ian: Could you tell us a bit about your own experience?

Eva: I was fifteen when the Germans took us away unexpectedly and until then life was pretty hard for the previous ten years and there was a lot of trouble with anti-Semitism. I don't think in the place where I lived, anti-Semitism was a word, it was just Jew-hater, Jewhatred and they did make us feel...it was very difficult. But you know, as long as you've got your parents and you're a child nothing is as tragic as when you are on your own. Anyhow, we went from there in 1944 to another town where they collected all the surrounding villages and then after three weeks, we went to Auschwitz and we were in this cattle car and the situation started to be very very bleak. It was horrendous, terrible, there's no words and when we got there, they separated us, my mother and my brothers were on the right, I went on the left, and at the time my father also went to the left which was for living and for killing. And I was very very very shocked and I can't even find the speech, very bewildered, I didn't know what was happening to me, I'd never been separated from my mother and I was 15. Today 15 is an adult but those days, you know 70 years ago, 15 was a child, a real child. I don't even know, frightened, bewildered, miserable, you know, a feeling that I'd never experienced





before so you become like an animal. They shout "go left, go right," and I kept on shouting "Mummy, mummy where are you?" And then the second in command were the people who were employed by the German employers said 'You be quiet because if they don't like your voice, you will be killed' and I said 'You're talking such rubbish, what do you mean killed?' And you know the chimneys are burning and the smell is terrible and you don't know where you are, actually it was night when we arrived so that didn't help. Night and cold. And then we were taken to the so-called bars and at the bars we were stripped and we were shaved and we were given some clothes and life became more hell. From then on we were working in different places on camp, we were selected out by the healthiest and the youngest and the ones which looked like they could do work and we were taken to a certain camp, we used to walk there, called Canada, it was a nickname, it was a camp literally next to one of the crematoriums and there we were selected to do certain jobs and one of the jobs was, my job was, to collect clothes from the first entrance to the crematorium where the people got undressed. We took their clothes into barracks and we sorted them out and life was hard I mean, I know I repeat this word but I can't find any other word. We had to get up at 3o'clock and stand for hours until they had counted us and then we had a piece of bread and a bowl of soup and we had to work on that. Now, it was called Canada because the clothes we were sorting sometimes we found valuables, diamonds and gold which were no use to us but there was sometimes a bit of food in it, in one of the pockets of one of the cases, the cases were taken away straight away to different departments, so they called it Canada because we were rich, we had this extra little bit of food occasionally.

And it sounds like it was a normal thing to do that kind of work and see thousands of people going into there and knowing it was some kind of a crematorium and they get killed and you hear the noise and the screams and the children crying. And it was not that it didn't bother us, we didn't quite consciously know what was happening, partly because I was a child." We were standing outside the crematorium and there was a queue and I recognised my grandmother and I went up to her, which was the most dangerous thing I've done in my life and she said to me "where is your mother?" She was worried about her daughter because my mother was an only daughter, I said "don't worry grandma, you just go in there and she will be with you" Now I could never get over how I could say that but





that should show the abnormality of our lives that I really and truly at the time was relieved and grateful that my mother wasn't alive, that she didn't have to go through this terrible thing. Also, we kind of knew that the people working in the crematorium or near the crematorium could not get out of there because they wouldn't let us get out of there because they don't want witnesses. It just happened that we were evacuated earlier than they could dispose of us and that was nine months after I worked there and then one day they said anybody who is fit to walk should stand here and anyone who can't should stay in the barracks, we didn't know why, those who were lucky enough to stay, the Russians came in January and they were freed in January. And I had to walk, we had to walk, a lot of us, very few stayed alive, it was called a death march, we started walking from camp to camp and each camp rejected us because it was too full. On the way, every minute somebody else was shot. If you slowed down the German guards shot them because they didn't want to be held back, they were as afraid as we were, there was no food, there was snow, once we stopped at a farm with a potato field and that was our main meal for a long time and eventually I got to a little German town which wasn't a camp, it was a military barracks and this military barracks gave us some barracks to stay in and in each room there were about 60 of us, the first thing we did in the morning was got rid of the bodies because hardly anybody survived. There were lice and there was hunger and everything and that went on for a few months until May, I think we were there for 4 months. I think in my group of a thousand about 13 or 14 of us survived.

Then I was found on the pile of the dead and somebody who picked me up to make room to get into the barracks felt my pulse and said that I was still alive, a Russian doctor and they took me to hospital and fed me for three weeks. Then we had to hitchhike back because the Russians didn't have an organised way of getting rid of us so they said, you can do whatever you like, you can loot, then you can go wherever you want so we had a bit of trouble with them too and then slowly we hitchhiked as far as the Czech border somewhere in a town that I can't remember the name of. There were some buses and anybody who could speak Czech could get on these buses to go as afar as Prague, now, my town was once occupied by Czechs when I was a child, until was about 10 or 11 at school I learnt Czech so I spoke to them and they took us to Prague and Prague was one of those collecting places, everybody who heard about Prague went





there to wait for their relations and so I spent quite a few weeks, or a few months there, I don't even know, and then I was very ill and found out that my father had not come back, he had died somebody told me. So I was on my own and I was trying to get back to my hometown, I went as far as Budapest and hitchhiked on trains and wagons and I found some relations, they were very good to me, they took me in and I lived there for three and a half years and then I went to Switzerland and there I got married. This is the short of it, the minimum I can make it.

Ian: We've already had thousands of children watching The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas. If there was one message you would want to get across to them, what would that be?

Eva: The only message I can tell you is that if you are a child and you've got no prejudices about nations and enemies -and these children in the film were not told, one was suffering and the other one wasn't but they didn't know, they were innocent -and they had this comradeship and it just shows that children are innocent. If you don't spoil their minds and if you keep that friendship, it's good to take it with you and remember that friends can survive. You should always remember the other person and they show us, these two kids show us, that friendship and human feelings which have not been spoilt by the outside world, is very very important.

Ian: Why do you think it's very important to remember the Holocaust and what happened?

Eva: I think that people should know what happened because it shouldn't have happened before, if definitely... the longer you can keep it alive, I mean now really there are very few of us left who can still say, I was there and I've seen it and I felt it and I know it but if we give it over to them and the longer we remember, maybe it will help not to repeat it again. You can't prevent wars, you can't prevent enemies but in this kind of way which is the most brutal way I think, shouldn't happen again and I think it does help, that's my opinion, that's why I take groups, lots of groups to Auschwitz and show them and talk to them. I hope that this will prevent something sometime somewhere, that's my opinion.





Ian: How do young people react when you go on one of these trips to Auschwitz?

Eva: I have never seen such a reaction. These kids are so taken in by it and so I have real pleasure doing it for them. They are vacant to reality, these kids, we had it very good up until now, it's fantastic you know, freedom and education and homes and they kind of dwell in it, they belong to it and they can know about what happened and they can carry it on further and remember it. I think it's very important, I really take pleasure in doing it.

Ian: And do you think it's important that films like The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas keep getting made?

Eva: Yes I think so. I personally think so but of course it effects on me because I've seen it and I lived it and I want everybody to know it and see it. Those people who've never heard of it, never seen it, maybe they get affected by it there and then, do they take anything away from it? I don't know, I hope so, there must be some effect on them that human beings can change and they can help each other. I believe in it, I loved the film, I really did, I felt that I knew that fellow, I did meet him once, I did see him once the fellow was who was portrayed, Heinz and I knew their mentalities of not telling their wives and to me it's very very real. I don't know if that could have happened that a boy from the camp met a German boy every day but it could have happened because they did live there, but it's alright, it's a film, it's a bit dramatised but it portrays the reality, that's my opinion.