

## Lydia Wolfe

Wartime Experience: Camp Survivor

Lydia was suffering from Alzheimer's at the time she was photographed. This text as written by Elizabeth Larsen Wolfe, her daughter.

Lydia Weinhaber was born in Krakow, Poland, on May 3, 1912. She earned a Master's degree in Education and taught Polish literature, which was rare for a Polish woman of her time. When the war broke out, she was emotionally devastated because she was a Polish patriot. She still tells the story of how a Catholic priest befriended her as she walked by the church each day. He saw a spark of intelligence in her and decided to help her become educated by loaning her books that she would otherwise have no access to. Each time she returned a book, he loaned her another, and she was able to get through school this way.

She married Leon Buiwa, a lawyer, in 1939 just before the war. They never had children. Lydia and her two half-brothers, Nat and Meyer, were corralled into a Polish ghetto where her brothers worked in Schindler's factory. However, they were not well-connected enough and were unable to buy their way onto Schindler's list. Lydia's husband, Leon, because of his education and knowledge of the village people, was assigned a clerical job keeping track of the Jews for the Nazis. He saved Meyer's life and risked his own by persuading his boss to take Meyer off a train headed to a death camp.

Lydia's two brothers were eventually sent to Plaszow camp. Lydia was sent to Auschwitz. Leon managed to get papers to go to Switzerland, but told his friend the Block Meister about it, who went to Schindler. Schindler sent Nazi guards to have Leon shot. At least Lydia had the bitter consolation of knowing her husband's fate at outset.

Lydia had a serious defect, one leg was quite a bit shorter than the other, and she limped terribly. She miraculously passed the selection at Auschwitz and carved a niche for herself in the munitions factory. She was never tattooed, and neither was her second husband, David. Perhaps this was because they came in the beginning before there were so many prisoners that tattooing was instituted, and that maybe this early arrival gave them some sort of advantage in terms of entrenching themselves. Marvin's attempts to have questions about the war answered by his parents over the years were largely met with uncomfortable silence or stern evasion, and now that Lydia has Alzheimer's disease, much of the history has been lost.

Lydia contracted tuberculosis during the war and was not in good health, but somehow survived. Her half-brother, Nat, nearly died, and his brother, Meyer, had to carry him out of the camp and spoon-feed him soup. Then Nat told him he wouldn't believe the war was over until he saw a chicken, so ostensibly to keep his moral up and encourage him to live, Meyer went to a nearby farm and openly took a chicken and a loaf of bread, telling the farmer he wouldn't hurt him.

Meanwhile, Lydia's husband-to-be, David, was suffering through his last days as prisoner. Although he spent the bulk of his time at Auschwitz like Lydia, apparently, he was transferred around at the end of the war.

Below is a short text which David wrote which he only shared with his family shortly before his death in September 1994.

It is August 1944. I am in a concentration camp: Krakow-Plaszow, Poland. The place of my work is called "Ernia". The reason I am here is because I am a Jew, and I wasn't fortunate enough to be born in the United States. I cannot think of any other reason to be sent to a concentration camp. I was neither an enemy of the German people, nor did I represent any threat to their security, nor was I a menace to any society.

There are rumors being spread that the Germans are losing the war and that the Russians are moving westward.