

**Deloitte.**The Cambridge Union Society  
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Cambridge, CB2 1UBEmail : [pressofficer@cus.org](mailto:pressofficer@cus.org)**PRESS RELEASE – 02.02.15****Eva Clarke**

On Holocaust Memorial Day, the Cambridge Union welcomed Eva Clarke to speak, in conjunction with the Holocaust Educational Trust. Eva was born on the 29th April 1945 in the Austrian concentration camp Mauthausen, just three days before the camp was liberated by the American armed forces, and came to share her incredible story as a Holocaust survivor.

She began by describing her family's heritage and how her German-Jewish father, Bernd Nathan, left Berlin for Prague to try and avoid the rise of fascism in his home country. He met Eva's mother, Anka, during his time in what is now the Czech Republic.

At this point various rules and regulations were imposed on Jewish people, such as the banning of inter-faith marriages, attendance at the theatre or concert halls, and even from shopping at particular times of day. They were also forced to wear a yellow star whenever they went out in public.

Eva's parents received a card in the post that asked them to report to a warehouse in Prague, close to a railway station, bringing warm clothes and some pots and pans. After three days of waiting, they were marched to the railway station and travelled to Terezin.

At Terezin Eva's parents were given work; her mother Anka was placed in charge of distributing food, and often worried about trying to feed the fifteen members of her close family who were also in the camp. Terezin was mainly a transit camp, but Eva's parents were able to stay there for three years. Yet at the end of September in 1944, Eva's father was sent to Auschwitz. Anka volunteered to go with him, thinking that they had survived three years and could carry on; however, as eyewitnesses later would tell Anka, Bernd was shot a few days before the Russians liberated the camp.

Eva's mother fell pregnant at Terezin, and Eva reported a candid moment when she asked her mother how she managed to become pregnant; Anka reportedly said that she and Bernd found comfort whenever and wherever they could, "and to hell with the consequences". When the pregnancy was uncovered, Anka was forced to sign a document agreeing to give up the baby to "euthanasia" when it was born. Eva's brother died a month or so after his birth of pneumonia, a sad fact that Eva acknowledged saved Anka's life; for if she had arrived at Auschwitz with a baby, she would have immediately been sent to the gas chambers.

This was because "selection" occurred upon arrival at Auschwitz, which separated those who were capable of work and those who were not. Anka was deemed fit to work and was then sent to showers, had her head shaved and was tattooed with a number, before being sent to a crowded hut. Eva described how prisoners were forced to survive on a liquid in the morning, such as coffee, a liquid in the evening, such as soup, and possibly a bread roll or some potato peelings in between. Many people died of starvation as a result.

Anka was sent to an armaments factory to work, which was hugely infested with bed bugs, a source of joy to the prisoners as it meant there was food, warmth and no nearby gas chambers. At the beginning of April 1945, the Nazis began to try and empty the camps of all living witnesses; Anka was evacuated on a coal truck on a three-week journey through the countryside. At this point Anka described herself as looking like a "scarcely living pregnant skeleton" and weighed just five stone.

The truck arrived at Mauthausen; Anka was so shocked at seeing the name of the camp, now with the knowledge of what kind of place Mauthausen was, that she went into labour. Remarkably, the Nazis allowed a doctor to attend to Anka and Eva was delivered safely, weighing just three pounds.

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The two reasons for Anka and Eva's survival was that on the 28th, the gas chambers were bombed and thus disused, or that they had run out of gas. The American forces liberated the camp three days later, and when Anka was strong enough to travel she was repatriated to Prague. She described the experience as the worst of her three and a half years in the concentration camps, as the realization of how many members of her family had died hit her. Fortunately, one of Anka's cousins had survived. Anka was able to live with the remains of her family for three and a half years.

Anka remarried in 1948, marrying a Czech man who worked for the British RAF who had returned to Prague to find his family. They left for Britain, as the Communist forces now threatened Prague. Eva concluded her story with a poignant "four generations" photo of her mother, herself, her two sons, and their three children.

Eva spoke about how she wanted her story to help remember and commemorate what happened during the Holocaust, but also to look to other genocides such as Cambodia and Rwanda in the hope of countering the racism that helps to engender such atrocities.

A student asked whether Anka ever had any "relapses" as she dealt with what happened after the war; Eva replied that Anka's pragmatism and optimism helped her to get over her experiences.

When asked what she thinks of "the Germans", Eva said that her mother probably would not have spoken to a German person of her generation but stressed that she would have borne no ill-will towards Germans of a younger generation. Eva emphasised that it was important not to stereotype anyone based on nationality, whilst saying that if you continued to hate and be bitter, you could never "move on with your life".

Eva spoke about her visits to concentration camps, including Auschwitz, as part of her work with the Holocaust Educational Trust; she described a candid comment by her mother when she was preparing for another trip. When Anka questioned her about going again, and Eva replied that she felt it was her "duty" and part of her job, Anka replied "once was enough for me".

Another student asked how Eva felt about how memories should be conserved in the future when there are no more living Holocaust survivors. She replied that filming survivors is a large way in which this is happening, as Stephen Spielberg began a video witness testimony project as he filmed Schindler's List, and that written testimony also exists. Eva also described how the children of survivors are also crucial in relating the memories of their parents.

**By Sarah Sheard**  
Deputy Head of Press, Lent 2015

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