

## The Looming Shadow

It has been 77 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, the largest concentration camp of World War II. 1.1 million Jews were slaughtered there, and within the terror, turmoil, and torture, the scariest part of it all was the unknown. The unknown of when freedom would come, the unknown of ever seeing family again, the unknown of living another day – with no sight of hope, the unknown seeped through their souls and attempted to drag them further into despair. That was the reality that gripped so many during the Holocaust, and few lived to find answers to those unknowns. However, those who did survive were able to find hope again, and their stories show the world what true strength is. That is certainly the case for Hugo Schiller.

Hugo Schiller was born in Germany in 1931, and he was sent to a concentration camp at nine years old. He and his family were deported by truck and train to a facility in France, and he described it as “a sea of mud.” The living conditions were atrocious, and he consistently mentioned the presence of fear within himself and everyone around him. The place they stayed in was only a holding camp because the Germans needed time to construct the execution camps, so they didn’t know why they were there. It wasn’t public knowledge that Hitler planned to exterminate the Jews, and the main phrase that Schiller repeated in his interview was the sense of a “looming shadow.” They couldn’t quite see what was coming or what it would mean for them, but they could tell that something evil was on the horizon. They could feel the overwhelming darkness surrounding them, and it became harder to see the light. Schiller was one of the fortunate few that was able to leave the camp as a child. He was eventually able to make it to the United States and live with his aunt and uncle in Baltimore. Even though he escaped death, he implies that the shadow never left him, rather it changed into new forms. When he left Europe, he said the “shadow that was looming over me, was the fate of my family.” He didn’t discover until years later that his family was sent to Auschwitz and executed. Now he says the shadow he feels is the guilt of him having made it while others did not.

However, his story of tragedy has been able to produce light. He was able to start a family, and he can now share his experiences with the world. The shadows of his life still loom, but they aren’t as dark as they used to be and can now be used for good. It is important that the shadow never completely disappears, because then there would be no memory of it ever occurring. It is crucial that people listen to the experiences of these survivors, because as Schiller said, once the Holocaust “loses its horror, it creates a greater possibility of it happening again.”