

SILVIA GROHS-MARTIN

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Silvia Grohs-Martin, daughter of Berthold and Adrienne, was born on October 1, 1918, in Vienna, Austria-Hungary (now Vienna, Austria). She had a twin

sister, Elfriede, and an older sister, Kate. Her father was a furniture maker who had a factory and a storefront. Silvia was sick as a child and spent a lot of time in and out of the hospital. She was also a child actress and was able to play small children for a long time (due to her small, sickly stature). Silvia was not raised with any religion. The family did not attend synagogue and they secularly celebrated Christmas. When she was seven years old, her father died; it was only when her father was buried in a Jewish cemetery that Silvia realized her family was Jewish.

When she was a teenager, Silvia studied acting. She was cast as a lead in a movie but lost her job when the production company learned she was Jewish. In March 1938—the same day as the Anschluss—Silvia left Austria for Switzerland, where she had a contract to be in a play for six weeks. She continued to travel throughout Europe and perform in plays. While in Amsterdam, Silvia performed in a Jewish theatre for Jewish audiences. This continued until the theatre was converted into a deportation center.

Silvia became involved in underground resistance and helped deliver Jewish children to safe hiding places. She had to hide a few times. In May 1943, while trying to escape to safety, Silvia was arrested. She was sent to Mechelen, a concentration camp in Belgium. She remained there until August 1943, when she was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in Nazi-occupied Poland. From there, she was deported to Ravensbrück, a concentration camp in Germany. While at Ravensbrück, she was forced to do manual labor, to

sing for her captors, and to work in a Siemens factory. Towards the end of the war, she was interrogated in an underground bunker at Ravensbrück. The Nazis believed Silvia knew about German resistance, and they were willing to torture her for three months to find out what they believed she knew. In April 1945, Silvia was among several hundred female prisoners handed over to the Swedish Red Cross. She was taken to a hospital in Copenhagen, and then went to Sweden. She returned to Amsterdam, where her sister Kate lived.

Silvia immigrated to New York. She was married and divorced twice and had two stepchildren. In the late 1940s, she gave a written statement that was used at a war crimes trial. She eventually settled in Los Angeles, where she took up acting again. This interview was conducted on February 9, 1995, in Los Angeles, California.