

A TEST OF FAITH

SIMONE ARNOLD LIEBSTER SHARES HER HOLOCAUST SURVIVAL STORY

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His blue eyes are those of a demon, invoking evil that has surpassed that of anyone you have ever seen. You summon your friend to your side and whisper for her to quickly duck behind the bushes to keep the both of you safe from the man whose ruthless hate holds no exception, even for children, like you. The dread of that paralyzing moment of narrowly eluding Adolf Hitler himself seeps into your memory along with the fear that will steal away your childhood for years to come. If you were Simone Arnold Liebster, such a petrifying experience would

not merely serve as a nightmare, but as a piece of reality that unfolded early on in your life that will remain an eternal part of you.

Simone Arnold grew up an analytical, devout Christian of a major denomination born to Adolphe and Emma Arnold, who raised her in a modest cottage on the German-French border. Her life was dramatically altered when her mother began studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses when she was six years old, which her father took no liking to. He feared that his wife would leave the family religion to become a Jehovah's Witness, along with his only child. In a short period of time, close Bible examination led Simone and her entire family to the faith followed by Jehovah's Witnesses. When Simone turned nine, Adolf Hitler's armies invaded Poland, which brought hard times for the people of Germany, France, and of course, Poland. A ban was placed on Jehovah's Witnesses in France in October of 1939, which marked the beginning of a period of time in which freedom of speech, press, and assembly was illegal for them. 1935 brought the first concentration camps, to which people noncompliant to Nazi ways such as Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to forsake their beliefs were taken. In 1941, Simone's father was taken to a concentration camp, and in 1943, her mother was imprisoned as well. Simone was taken to an intolerant Nazi school, and transferred to a penitentiary home two years after. With this turn of events, Simone's fateful journey began.

"THERE ARE EVENTS IN LIFE THAT YOU CAN'T FORGET, THINGS THAT MAKE AN INDELIBLE IMPRESSION. I WILL NEVER FORGET THE TIME I LOOKED INTO THE EYES OF ADOLF HITLER."

THE INTERVIEW

Q: Of all the things you learned from your parents, which do you feel was the most valuable?

A: They had an insistence to build up my conscience. Everything was about that. They wanted me to ask myself, "Does that agree with what you learned before? Does that agree with what you decided to do? Does that agree with your feelings toward your responsibilities?" I learned just how to do that.

Q: What is the one thing you most want people to remember about you?

A: I want people to remember how I have lived close to God's law, especially the one about love and respect of neighbor. I never wanted to discriminate against anyone. It pays to do that because you have a good relationship with your neighbors, and you are at ease with your conscience. You grow up with true values. This is very important. The lesson is that no matter what – even as a child – you start living with those principles. I've heard people say that "Children do not have a conscience." My conscience was at work very early in life. It is in every person and can be worked on or it can be killed.



Simone when she was 17

**"YOU HAVE A GOOD
RELATIONSHIP WITH
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Simone speaking at a Holocaust conference

Q: Were you ever mentioned in a newspaper for being a Holocaust survivor?

A: With my husband Max, I have gone to more than 80 cities where we spoke to people. Every city had a paper and they covered events like that and journalists took pictures, not that we are looking for that. We are looking to give people some thoughts, not our faces.

Q: What is your earliest childhood memory?

A: It is very far back when I was about 30 months old. I can remember the whole setting. It was spring, and there were blue flowers high above and I had to climb up the hill to get them. But I had to go to the toilet. Our house was far down the hill. I got those flowers and what had to happen happened. Mom took me and didn't say a word. She put me on the fountain. It was March and cool out. She took a brush and brushed me, put diapers on me, and put me back in bed with a bottle of milk. "Since you are a baby, I have to treat you has a baby." So I was twice a baby.

Q: How is the world different today from when you were a child?

A: There is a big difference. The people in general were different. We were another generation. Our childhood was different. Children were calmer, polite, respectful. In school when we came to class, on the bulletin board we were to copy those pages until the teacher came. The only sound in the room was scratching on our paper. 25 were in the class and there was no talking and no supervision. I lived in a house with 8 apartments. The entrance had 8 nails in the wall. Each nail could hold a pot of milk. The milkman came at 5 am and would take the pot out and with it the money. The people paid for a pint or whatever size they needed. He put the milk in and took the money. The house was not closed and sometimes there were 8 pots of money. Nothing was stolen, the milkman didn't cheat. Today can you imagine that? Such a thing doesn't exist anymore. There was no TV. In the evenings, Father read newspapers or history books, mom would knit and I would play. I didn't understand much geometry or astronomy, but I learned many things sitting on the floor playing with my doll or my dog. Today children come in and watch TV. They need living pictures or they get restless. Today children cannot sit still. They get restless. Adults were respectful and would get up to let someone sit in a street car or hold the door for them.

"CHILDREN WERE CALMER, POLITE, RESPECTFUL."