

HANKA KENT  
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Hanka was born in 1930 in Chelm, Poland, the site of many Sholem Aleichem stories. She grew up in a lower middle-class but happy childhood. She shares many memories of growing up in the shtetl with no electricity, no indoor plumbing, etc. and surrounded by very antisemitic Poles. She speaks of special memories of Shabbat.

Hanka remembers the 1939 bombings and she went with her parents, Gerson and Mincha, to a smaller village to wait out the war. When the Russians took over the area she remembers life as being pleasant. The people even wanted the Germans to come so that they could get rid of Poles who wanted only to kill Jews. But slowly changes came with store closings, new rules and the ghetto was established.

One day her father was taken and never returned. She hid in a basement with her mother and sister, Feigele, but when her mother went out to get food she was shot. She took her sister and ran to their grandparents, but no one was left in the village. Hanka hid with a family and worked as their maid when they went to work. One day an SS man killed her 18-month-old sister with poison, telling Hanka that the whole ghetto was being sent to Majdanek and she would have a better chance at survival if she was alone.

Hanka hid and went with a group of workers to Majdanek where she worked at menial labor. She was sent to several camps, including one where she worked 12 hour shifts in a munitions factory. At Częstochowa she met Salla and Frieda, two sisters from Warsaw who became like her older sisters. They were all sent then to Bergen-Belsen, which she describes as a horror. She witnessed cannibalization, standing hours in the lineup and starvations. They never knew when they were sent to shower if they were going to get water or gas.

She was sent with Salla and Frieda to a camp in Germany. She says by this time she didn't feel like she had any human qualities left. She worked in the kitchen there, and once was able to smuggle two potatoes to Frieda who was very ill. Frieda stated that they saved her life. At the end of the war they were marched towards Dachau. They hid in the forest and then saw dead German soldiers and realized that war was over. They were taken in by a German family and fed. She then went to Leipzig and Turkheim. Hanka got very ill from typhoid, but she survived without any medicine and with the help of Salla and Frieda who visited her in the hospital.

Salla and Frieda eventually found their husband and fiancé in Stuttgart. Hanka followed them and was able to stay at the UN Glouster House for Orphans. She initially wanted to go to Palestine, but ended up going to the United States. She states she has never come to terms with what happened to her and her family.