

CESIA KINGSTON
RG-50.005.0032. (recorded 1983 in LA)

Cesia was born in 1926 in Lodz, Poland into a middle-class family with 4 children. She led a sheltered life. The Germans quickly took over Lodz in 1939 and the restrictions against the Jews started. Soon they were ordered into the ghetto and lived in one room. The ghetto had 160,000 Jews. Until 1941 life was almost normal and she was able to go to school. Jews weren't allowed radios but her father managed to listen to one in a friend's home. The family were Zionists.

Cesia told a story of her mother and younger sister Hadassah almost being put on trains but the mother bribed the SS officer with a fake promise of a jewel and they were released. Cesia worked first in a leather factory and then a paper factory. There she met Rumkowski, the leader of the Jews in Lodz and he was able to send her to work in a bakery for a week so she could eat and get food for her family. She did not resent Rumkowski because somebody had to do what he did.

There was an epidemic of typhus and scarlet fever that killed 1/4 of the population in the ghetto. The people were so hungry that many volunteered to go to Auschwitz thinking that it was a labor camp. At the end of 1944 her father was picked up and sent away on a train. Soon after the Germans came to their apartment and made the family, including the bedridden grandmother, go to the train station. The trip to Auschwitz took 5-6 days standing in the cattle car with no food. Half the people were dead on arrival. Arriving at Auschwitz they saw bright lights and hear screaming. One woman told her mother to give away Hadassah so she could be picked for the work side, but she refused. Cesia's mother went with Hadassah and her brother to the gas chamber. Hadassah was not yet four years old.

Cesia and her sister were stripped and shaved, a terrible experience for a young girl, and were sent to barracks where they couldn't lay down. Sometimes they were not given food for several days for no reason, there were selections every day. Cesia and her sister stayed in Auschwitz six weeks. She said people there were surprisingly compassionate.

A group including Cesia and her sister were sent to the forest and then left in the rain for 24 hours and many died. They then went to Stutthof which she said was living hell. They were marched outside at 4 am and had to wait to be counted until 9. She described some ways they were able to keep their humanity. In December 1944 they were sent on a march. Cesia was ill and her sister gave Cesia her shoes; the sister later got gangrene of the toes which had to be amputated. From the march they were put on a boat which was put on the water with hole in it so that all would drown. Cesia and her sister managed to leave the boat with her sister and 2 others. They came to an international labor camp run by the Germans which didn't have Jews, and they pretended to be Polish Christians. They had some close calls, but the Russians liberated them in March 1945. They revealed to a Russian Jewish soldier that they were Jewish, and they were the first Jews encountered by the Russians.

Cesia and her sister got back to Lodz in April 1945 and found their brother. There were about 800 Jews left in Lodz. The Poles were still so antisemitic, that after the pogrom in Kielce in summer 1946, the family walked to Czechoslovakia and then Germany. Cesia got married in December 1945 and eventually had 2 children. She says she believed that she survived only through luck. She still hates the Poles and Germans.