

TITLE-PAULA DASH
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SOURCE-HOLOCAUST EYEWITNESS PROJECT OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

00 Paula Dash was born in Lodz, Poland. Lodz was the second largest city in Poland. Of the total population of 700,000, one third were Jews. The day the war started she heard a radio news broadcast announcing the invasion.

01 Lodz is close to the German border. In a few days the Germans were there. They came on motorcycles, tanks and jeeps. The Germans used tall soldiers (6'and taller) to occupy a city so as to appear more scary.

02 Right away the Germans started rounding up Jews and sending them away. Most did not return, but the few that did came home after having been severely beaten; they were bleeding from their eyes, mouths and ears and had swollen faces.

03 The Jews feared the Nazis. They Germans would burst into homes and shoot some people right on the spot. New laws were being enacted; Jews could not use public transportation, could not walk on the sidewalk, etc.

04 Jews had to turn in their valuables; furs, jewelry, radios. Kripo (Kriminal Polizei), the criminal police, investigated if it was suspected that people were hiding valuables. In some cases clothes were sent back to the families with a note saying that the person committed suicide. The families knew better.

05 Jews had to wear a star. They were moved into the ghetto, which was set up in the slum area. Her family of 6 people was assigned a room 12' by 14'. They took only some clothes, blankets and cook ware. The Nazis closed the ghetto by surrounding it with barbed wire and guards.

06 There was no running water. People had to walk blocks for water and wait in lines.

07 The people were given rations every 10 days; one eighth of a loaf of bread (round loaves), some yellow sugar, 2 or 3 potatoes, and some salt. People ate the bread right away and then had no bread for the next 9 days. People started to die from hunger.

08 This was called "ghetto sickness." Faces would swell and they would develop bags under the eyes. The ankles would swell and then the swelling would move upward. People who got this and went to bed never survived because the swelling would continue until it reached the heart.

09 Her father, who had been a healthy man, died of starvation at the age of 52. This was in 1942. Families were no longer intact. Her sister was caught on the street and deported to Treblinka. The sister had been 17 when she was gassed. Her brother was 18 when he was deported to Auschwitz and then to Buchenwald. He was shot during the Death March 2 days before the liberation.

10 There were now 3 people left in her family. Every family had members missing. One day the Nazis came into the hospital and threw the patients out of the windows to their deaths. There was a "sea of blood" which the rains eventually washed away.

11 They hung Jews in the street so everyone could see it and then left them hanging there for weeks. In the winter of 1943 people were dying from cold and hunger. Rations had been cut; there were no more potatoes, only the potato peels but they were soon unavailable. There were daily deportations.

12 The people in the ghetto found out what had happened to those that were deported. As the people were being off-loaded from the cattle wagons they could see what was happening to those who were already on the grounds. They could see the Jews were being shot in the back of the head. Those that had paper and pencil wrote this information down and stuck the paper into cracks in the walls of the wagon. When the wagons were returned to the ghetto to be cleaned, the notes were found and the word was spread.

13 The Jews had suspected mass killings and this confirmed their suspicions. Also, special squads of workers had to take the clothes off the corpses. These clothes were sent back to the ghetto to be sorted. Back at the ghetto some of these clothes were recognized. The clothes were still drenched in blood. They were being executed in Chelmno, about 60 kilometers north of Lodz.

14 One day there was a Kinder Aktion (children's action). The Nazis went into the apartments and demanded the children. The mothers and fathers handed their children over. The children were put into a canvas-covered truck until the trucks were filled.

15 The Germans said that bullets were too expensive for a Jewish child, so they burned them alive. In 1944 the Nazis began dissolving the ghetto. The Jews knew what that meant.

16 August, 1944; Paula, her youngest brother, and her mother were taken in cattle wagons that were crowded, stuffy and filled with people crying, fainting and dying. They had no food or water. They did not know where they were going. At 2:00 in the morning they arrived at Auschwitz (Birkenau).

17 As the doors opened the men and women were separated. Children were taken away from their mothers and given to older women. They walked through the entrance gate and had a selection by Mengele. Her mother was sent to the gas and Paula was now alone.

18 She was taken to a shower and to have her hair shaven. People did not recognize each other because they stopped looking like humans. They had to walk naked in front of the Nazis. She was given a number but not a tattoo. The Germans had decided it was not longer worthwhile to tattoo Jews who were going to be killed soon anyway.

19 She was given a dress that had belonged to some dead woman. Only one layer of clothing and no shoes. They had to run to the

barracks where they slept on raw boards with 14 girls on a bunk. They had no blankets. Nobody could sleep and some died overnight.

20 The dead were taken away by special squads who worked day and night on this job. Paula described how they were allowed to use the (bathroom) latrine; they had to line up until there were about 100 people and then they were taken to wait with hundreds of others for their turn. They were subject to beatings en route.

21 The gas chambers worked around the clock. One afternoon Paula was sent to the ovens and told to undress. She was made to wait all afternoon and overnight to be gassed in the morning. They saw the smoke. They could not think.

22 The women guards told them that in the morning they would be smoking out of this chimney. The night was cold (this was in September). The morning came and there was a miracle; somewhere in a labor camp there was a demand for 300 women. The Germans had to round up 700 women from whom they would take 300. Here all the women were young.

23 The Germans checked everyone for rashes, blemishes, a full mouth of teeth, etc. Paula was among the 300 selected. Again she was given clothes from the dead and put onto a cattle car. She was sent to Bremen where she was to do hard labor. They slept 2 in a bunk, 15 bunks in a room with sand on the floor. She carried bricks and poles and dug ditches.

24 The Nazis had been ordered to kill several Jews a day, which they did. They woke at 4:00 a.m. and were taken by truck to work. At night they were given a piece of bread and some watery soup. There was no other food. She was there until February, 1945. As the Allies advanced the prisoners were evacuated.

25 The order came from Himmler that surrender was not allowed and no prisoner was to be handed over alive. They were taken east, away from the Allies. This was the Death march. She was marched for 2 weeks to Bergen-Belsen (this was the end of March, 1945). The guards that had brought them disappeared and other guards held them.

26 There was heavy bombardment and the only light came from exploding shells. Hundreds of people were crammed into a dark barrack and were screaming. People were stepping on each other.

27 Some were lying on the floor and could not get up. Some stood on one leg because there was no place to put down their other foot. The people were screaming and the Nazis poured boiling water on them to quiet them down.

28 It worked; almost half the people died instantly. In the morning she went outside and saw "mountains and mountains and mountains" of dead bodies. Some had deteriorated and some had green pus coming out of the bodies...some bodies had no eyes. There were some girls sitting by the dead bodies. She went over (with some others) to talk to them to find out how long they had been at the camp.

29 They had only been there a short time (2 or 3 months) and they had come from other camps. In Bergen-Belsen everyone gets poisoned by being with the dead bodies. Typhus was rampant and terminal under the circumstances. The girls told Paula that here you don't work...here you die. There were mountains of dead everywhere ...lice... and an overpowering stench.

30 Every day the dead were pulled from the barracks. The prisoners were dying slowly. More transports were coming in day and night. There was no food, no water and no place to sleep. She felt "100% inhuman." They wore rags and had no shoes and no hair. They did not look like normal people. One day they noticed the Nazi were wearing white bands on their sleeves but the prisoners did not know what it meant.

31 Every change was perceived by the Jews as a threat to them. The Allies were coming. The Nazi did not want to leave any trace of their atrocities so they made the prisoners dig a big hole to bury the corpses. They also used bulldozers.

32 This was the mass grave. She saw it being dug. The Nazis gave the male prisoners strings/rags to tie to the arm, leg, or neck of a corpse to drag the bodies to the grave. Then they had to untie the string and use it again and again.

33 There were lines and lines of "living dead" dragging "dead dead." There was not much difference between them. Paula said she did not think anyone could believe that this happened in the 20th Century. She saw some men prisoners cut open the bodies and eat the insides.

34 One of these men was then kicked and beaten to death. His body was dragged to the pit and dumped. Some that were dragged to the grave were still alive and could have been saved. As this happened she got ill with stomach pain, vomiting and dizziness. She could not stand. She had typhus.

35 She climbed into a nearby construction pit (and waited to die). Her friends pulled her out. She was feverish and they had to pull her out. Four friends saved her. That was April 14, 1945. On April 15 they were liberated by the British. She could not believe it and thought the Nazis were playing some trick, until she heard the announcement in Yiddish and English.

36 Then she believed it. She could talk much more "for years and years" and would still never finish....

37 She has a towel that she had with her in the camp. She was sent to work cleaning bombed out houses (Bremen camp) and she found a piece of curtain in a deserted basement. She hid that cloth in her bosom and the Nazis never found it even though they frisked her daily.

38 She used it as a towel to wash her eyes in the morning. After liberation she used it as a table cloth in the camp where she lived in the soldiers' quarters.

39 She also has a piece of soap made out of Jewish fat. A German guard told her what it was.

40 WRITTEN SUMMARY: maiden name; Garfinkel, born 12/3/20 Was in the Lodz ghetto from 1940-1944 and came to the US June 1, 1951.
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