

**Brenner, Felicia**  
**RG-50.031\*0008**  
**Interview on July 22, 1990**  
**One Videocassette**

### **Abstract**

Felicia Brenner was born on June 18, 1925 in Łódź, Poland. She was one of seven children from a well-to-do family. Her father was a businessman and her mother stayed home to take care of the children. Felicia went to a private Hebrew school, although her education was cut short when the war broke out. She was fourteen years old at the time. She does not remember experiencing any instances of anti-Semitism before the Nazis came, but she did notice unrest in the Jewish people. The first instance of anti-Semitism that Felicia remembers is when their domestic helper, who was not Jewish, left their household. Felicia was forced to move into the Łódź ghetto with her mother, father, and younger brother. One of her sisters had fled to Kraków, one of her brothers went to Poland, and two of her brothers had gone to Białystok. Felicia's first job in the ghetto was making boots. Food was very scarce. Felicia felt responsible for her parents, and would try to bring home extra soup to give to them. The Nazis began to close down sections of the ghetto for deportations. When they were going to close down the street Felicia's family lived on, they snuck over to an uncle's house on another street. One day while waiting in line for vegetables, Felicia saw a sign calling for the liquidation of the ghetto. Her younger brother had been deported to Buchenwald by them. The Germans also posted signs that they were only taking the young people to work camps, not the old. Felicia hid under a wardrobe because she feared that if she were deported, her parents would starve. When she came out of hiding, she found out that her parents had been deported so she ran to the courtyard, and got on the last cattle car. She found her mother with the help of a German officer and they eventually arrived at Auschwitz. Her mother was sent to the gas chamber. Felicia remembers hearing her father call her and her mother's names, but she never answered him. She was in Auschwitz for a short time and then transferred to Bergen-Belsen. Conditions were very tough there, and there was little food. Felicia was then transferred to Salzwedel which was liberated around Passover by the Americans. She is the only survivor in her family, and no one had died from natural causes. Felicia never went back to Poland, because she heard about the people murdering the Jewish people who were coming back to find family and claim their property. She is very bitter towards people and lost her faith in humanity and God. What hurts her most of all is that some of those who committed these atrocities were never punished.

### **Time Coded Notes**

- 00:00:00 Felicia Brenner was born on June 18, 1925 in Łódź, Poland. She remembers her home life as nice and charming. She came from a well-to-do family. Her father was a businessman. There were seven children in the family. She remembers holiday and Shabbat celebrations. It was a way of life that she does not have anymore. Her mother stayed home and took care of the children. Felicia was the only survivor in her family and no one in her family had died from natural causes.
- 00:02:00 Her most cherished memory is of her mother, although she cannot talk about it too well. She remembers her mother lighting the candles on Friday night and how beautiful Felicia thought her hands were.

- 00:02:36 She went to a private Hebrew school, but her education was cut short by the war. She was fourteen when the war broke out. One of the first changes she noticed was unrest in the Jewish people. Her last vacation was spent at her sister's house in Kraków and when she was coming home she had to stand separately from the others. When Felicia arrived in Łódź, the Germans looked at the faces of the passengers because the Jewish people stood out with their dark hair and so on. Most Jews at home were scared. It was October 1939.
- 00:04:07 Her family lived in an apartment in the city and there was not much talk about moving to a ghetto. A lot of people were scared and tried to leave. Two of Felicia's brothers left and her father's business was closed so there was no income. She remembers a sense of restlessness and fear and her father crying when her brothers left.
- 00:05:25 Felicia was afraid when she first saw the Nazis. She did not remember any instances of anti-Semitism before the Nazis because she went to a private Hebrew school. Later on, the non-Jewish domestic helper whom her family had employed left. This was the first symptom of anti-Semitism that she encountered. She first felt persecution when her family was moved to the Litzmannstadt [Łódź] ghetto. They had to go back and forth and carried their few possessions by hand. Eventually, the family was enclosed in the ghetto.
- 00:07:26 Her first job in the ghetto was making German boots. Felicia was fourteen at the time and she had ten and eleven year old kids working under her. Food was scarce. One Passover, there was one frozen potato for four people. By that time, most of her family had dispersed. Felicia, her younger brother, and her parents were in the ghetto. One sister was in Kraków and one brother went to Poland. Mostly they just tried to go where they thought they would survive. Felicia felt responsible for her parents and would bring additional soup to give to her mother. Her work was a long distance from home and she became very thin. There was a curfew which she sometimes missed because it was a long walk. Felicia would see her mother waiting for her and worrying, so she tried to get home as fast as she could.
- 00:10:03 The Nazis began to close sections of the ghetto and take away the young and old people. Felicia knew it was going to happen to people living on her street. Her parents were considered old by the Germans so, when it got dark, they sneaked over to another street where the Germans had previously been and slept at an uncle's house. Next door, Felicia heard screaming, yelling, and crying. She found out the next day that the Nazis had come to that house and asked for the children. The father was hiding, but the mother was not. The mother hid one boy and gave away the girl. The girl was screaming, but the mother just put her hat on and handed the child to the Germans. When the father came out of hiding and asked where the girl was, the mother explained what had happened and he began to scream.
- 00:12:00 The years in the ghetto were hard, but the family survived. Felicia had typhus at one point. By that time, her younger brother had been deported. He was two years younger than Felicia and about sixteen at the time. One day, she was standing in a line waiting to be handed vegetables when she saw people dispersing because a sign to liquidate the ghetto was posted. The Germans put up signs saying that the young

people were going to work camps, not the old people, so there was no need to be afraid. Felicia went into hiding because she was afraid that if she were deported her parents would starve. Her mother and father went to the courtyard while Felicia hid under a wardrobe and covered herself with clothes. After a while, she heard people coming back and she thought it was her parents. She saw that there were other people, asking her if she was ashamed of herself because the Nazis took her parents. Felicia ran to the courtyard and saw one last wagon going to the railroads and got on it.

- 00:14:45 The wagons stopped and Felicia got out and saw the other cattle cars, but she did not know in which one her mother was. She asked a German officer to help her find her mother. They found her and Felicia got in the wagon and another man got out. It was August at that time, so it was very hot. She was very happy to be with her mother. There was no place to sit in the cattle car, so Felicia sat on the floor and supported her mother with her back. During the trip it rained and people tried to get water using whatever they could. Finally the train stopped and when the doors opened Felicia saw the Auschwitz barracks.
- 00:16:50 The prisoners tried to grab suitcases from the passengers on the train. Felicia held her mother by her arm and they moved closer to the gate. When they reached the gate, a soldier told Felicia that she was young and could walk, but her mother was old and was going to get transportation. Felicia remembers thinking that they would do that and let go of her mother's arm. She then thought, "My God, what have I done?" She turned around to grab her mother again, but a soldier motioned to her to continue walking. Felicia could not see her mother anymore because of the crowd, but she knew she would never see her again. She saw her father and he was calling out to her and her mother, but she did not answer.
- 00:18:15 Felicia was in Auschwitz for a short time. There were so many people there that she never was a tattooed. She was numb after losing her mother, after suffering with her for so long and liberation was so close. She felt responsible that she betrayed her mother. After two weeks, she was sent to Bergen-Belsen and does not know how she was selected.
- 00:20:07 She was at Bergen-Belsen until the beginning of winter. The living conditions were primitive. They lived in tents in the woods and food was so scarce that Felicia was always with her head down trying to find something to eat, but there was only wood and glass around. The starvation was unbearable. People were eating corpses. There was no protection from the weather.
- 00:21:15 Felicia did not have much interaction with the guards in Bergen-Belsen. They were mostly German. Her only contact with them was when they brought the little food they did in a wagon. The inmates would lick the wagon trying to get all of the food out of it. They were in the woods, so there were no other people around. Felicia was later transferred to Salzwedel, which was an ammunition factory.
- 00:22:00 In Salzwedel, Felicia was surrounded by German people and had more contact with them. She and other women went to a garbage pit to try and find rotten potatoes and peels. Felicia was near sighted and did not see an SS woman watching her. She was

kicked around a lot and passed out because she stole the peels. Most of the guards in Salzwedel were SS women. Some women were from Slovakia. Felicia remembers that in Auschwitz the women who had cut her hair were Czech.

- 00:23:24 She hoped and knew that it would end and that the United States would help. While in the ghetto, Felicia's mother would remind her that the United States helped in World War I. After losing her family, she did not care. While in Auschwitz she heard Russian bombs and just wanted them to kill the Nazis, whether she died or not. She wanted the Nazis to suffer the way they made the Jewish people suffer.
- 00:24:24 Liberation came around Passover. One day, the gates of the camp were opened and the German SS were gone. The inmates ran into the streets and found out that the American Army had taken Salzwedel. Felicia was put in the hospital because she had pleurisy.
- 00:25:15 During the war while in the camp, German children would spit on the inmates and call them dirty Jews. Felicia remembers them being small children, between five and eight years old. After the war, they came back and waved white flags. She called them hypocrites and believed they knew exactly what was going on. Felicia thinks the Germans are notorious liars who killed innocent people.
- 00:26:30 In the first days of liberation, the Americans told the inmates to take whatever they wanted from the stores. There were more German civilians in the stores than Jewish people. Felicia went into a jewelry store that was so crowded that she just took a knife and walked out. She had to ask people for directions back to the camp and the people would point the camp out to her. They knew exactly where the camp was. The Americans eventually burned the camp down. Then, the Americans sent the inmates to another zone under British control, and then another zone under Russian control. Then Felicia was sent to Salzheim, a displaced persons camp.
- 00:27:42 Felicia never went home because she heard stories about the Polish people killing the Jews who returned looking for family or who tried to claim property. She tried to trace her family and found that her little brother, who was in the ghetto with her, died of starvation in Buchenwald. Her oldest sister, who had a baby, was gassed. Another sister and her youngest brother were shot when the Germans found them hiding. Her two brothers who went to Białystok disappeared. She had witnessed the fate of her mother and father.
- 00:29:46 Felicia is still very bitter towards the Nazis, and the world as a whole, the United States, and the people and countries who abandoned the Jewish people. She thinks often about how the Jewish people gave them civilization, the Ten Commandments, their Jesus, and what else could they want? She believes people must watch for any symptom of anti-Semitism and be on guard. Felicia had lost faith in the human race and in God. She does not understand why God would let this happen to innocent people and children. She thought he must have lost the battle with the Devil and Hitler, the Devil incarnate. Hitler's followers had to be the Devil's disciples. Felicia believes the Jews are crucified repeatedly and is very bitter and very sad. Mad dogs were allowed to do what they did and have not been punished yet. This is what hurts her the most.