

-TITLE-GRETA ZETLEY
-I_DATE-JANUARY 19, 1986
-SOURCE-DALLAS MEMORIAL CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-1 1/2 HOUR
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-
1:00:30 Greta was born on July 31, 1927 in Bielefeld, Germany. She had one brother who was killed in Buchenwald. Her father was a business man, and her mother a homemaker. In the beginning, Greta had no problems.

1:05:00 When talking about her childhood, Greta stresses how "normal" it was. She was six years old when Hitler came to power in 1933.

1:06:30 Greta shows a picture of her burnt synagogue after Kristallnacht, 1938. The next day, her teacher told her that she could not go to the German school anymore. She remembers life becoming a little bit harder. She was 11 years old.

1:09:25 Although there were certain stores the Jews were not allowed in, Greta still went in them because she was young. In 1940, Jews had to start wearing the Star of David. But Greta and her friends would take off the Star, they took chances.

1:10:15 One day, Greta and her friends were walking and carrying the Star in their hands and they were stopped by two SS men who told them that they were sorry but they had to wear it.

1:11:25 In 1938, the SS knocked on the door of her family's home and took away her father, who returned 4 weeks later. The German Jews that Greta knew were not used to SS ways, they had always lived normal lives. Many tried to escape as things progressed and a number succeeded.

1:12:00 Relatives of Greta's family in Lima, Texas sent them papers so that they could leave, but the quotas were filled and they could not get out. Greta and her brother could have gone to Israel, but she did not want to because she would have had to leave her parents behind.

1:12:15 Greta and her family were forced out of their home and into a new house with a number of Jews. In November of 1941, a

notice was placed announcing that there was going to be a relocation for work and an order that they were to be ready on December 10.

1:13:20 On December 10, 1,000 Jews gathered at the designated place and were not allowed to leave. None of them expected that the Germans would kill them. The Jews were proud of who they were and they never thought that the end would be death.

1:14:25 Greta remembers how hard it was that her friendships were cut off overnight. The SS took everything away from them, jewelry, valuables, etc. But Greta said she was too young for those material losses to make too big of an impression.

1:16:00 Greta said her parents talked about going to the U.S., but the children were never part of the discussions. Some of her friends went to America, but not her and her family. She thinks her father thought that everything would be back to normal again and that there was no reason to leave.

1:17:45 Greta's parents tried to make life as normal as possible for her and her brother. She does not know how her or anyone's parents' could survive, seeing what was happening to their families. She believes things were much worse for her parents than for her, and does not think she could have done what they did.

1:18:25 Every day Greta knew that she could live or die- she had a very strong will to live.

1:19:25 In 1941, the Jews were told that they were going to leave town. They were put on a train in HannuKah(ph) and travelled for three days, given nothing to eat or drink. Some people gave Greta's family things to eat since they had brought nothing with them.

1:20:15 The people got off the train in Riga, Latvia, where there was snow on the ground, making it very cold and difficult to walk. They were forced into a Ghetto surrounded by barbed wire.

1:20:45 The rooms they found in the Ghetto had food left on the tables, the ovens still warm and clothes lying about. There was blood in the streets and on the snow, and they realized that the SS had killed the people who had just lived there in order to make room for them. The Jews were terrified and in shock.

1:21:25 Greta remembers being scared, but trying and wanting to survive. She was only 14, but she said she was the only one who realized that you had to do everything possible to stay alive, because the Germans wanted the Jews dead.

1:22:10 Every week people were selected to live or die. Greta always spoke for her family, saying they were all healthy and able to work. Her father had completely given up when they first got to the Ghetto when he realized what was happening to them. He was no

longer the provider. He despaired because he realized he could have hidden them in Germany or escaped, and now all was lost.

1:24:45 Transports came regularly into the Ghetto. The newcomers asked questions about their families, and although those already in the Ghetto knew that they were being killed, they lied about it.

1:25:20 Greta says that the useless were killed right off. She remembers having to steal in order to survive. She worked so hard and did so much every day. She would work in the fields and work for the army repairing mountains of shoes. One day a German told her that she had not done enough and he was going to kill her. Greta told him that she had done what she was supposed to do, and he let her go. She says she spoke up to him and for some reason he let her go.

1:26:20 Greta remembers working in a big room with lots of salami and stealing some for her family. She stole when she worked in the fields because there was never enough food and water. She knew she would have been shot if she had been found stealing. Greta remembers her mother coming into the Ghetto after a day of work and a German SS woman finding something on her and beating her. She said it was unbelievable.

1:27:40 Greta's brother was sent away to another camp for 6 months and came back very sick, frostbitten, and not as strong as she, who was a year younger than he.

1:28:35 Greta's hair was cut in the concentration camp and she remembers keeping some of it and giving it to her mother to wear in the front of her scarf so that she did not look as old. There was no getting sick in the camp, for once you did, that was the end. She got sick once, but went to work anyway, so everything turned out fine.

1:30:15 In August 1945 Greta came back from work one day and her father and brother were not there. They told her that her father had died- she did not know whether he had died on his own or they had killed him. But life has to go on, she says, and she went back to work the next day, as on any other day.

1:31:15 Greta will never forget one day when they returned to the camp after a day of work. They heard crying as soon as they walked in the gates- everyone that had remained in the concentration camp that day had been killed- only those at work had survived. Greta was not sure how they had been killed- possibly by firing squads or gas in wagons. She did not understand how the Germans could do that.

1:32:10 The Jews were then taken to a new place in Riga. They had frozen potatoes and watery soup and very few pieces of bread once a week. They had to bring in food themselves from the field and steal sweaters from the army, in order to exchange them for food.

1:34:10 Greta remembers there being Polish Jews in the camp who would try to hide their children in cloth bags and try to smuggle them out of the Ghetto. Most times they were caught and shot on the spot.

1:36:35 Greta wishes that she could remember more about those days. She does remember having a small patch where she grew tomatoes and cabbage and that no Jew ever stole from it, even though they were all terribly hungry.

1:37:45 Greta worked sometimes in Kaiserwald in apartments in the city. The people who lived in the city knew of the conditions in which the Jews were forced to live and watched them surrounded by rifles as they walked in the streets. Greta stole whatever she could without anyone noticing.

1:38:45 Greta wondered back then that if she did survive if she would be a normal person again and be able to go into a store and not steal. This was a big worry to her, to live again as a normal person.

1:40:55 Most of the time Greta's mother was with her. They did not speak about the life in the camp, they simply did things and did not talk about them. Every day they went to work and at night came back to the Ghetto (later, to the concentration camp).

1:42:38 It was 1944 and the Russians were coming closer to Riga, the Germans had to do something with the Jews, but they did not know what to do. Finally they locked them up and took them to a big German boat and gave them new uniforms. Greta had thread and shaped her mother's uniform to fit her. Her brother was also on the ship.

1:44:10 When the ship landed in Danzig, they were made to walk a very small plank to the land. She was afraid her mother would not make it, but she did. They saw her brother then for the last time. He was taken to Buchenwald and killed in April 1945. She and her mother were liberated on March 10, 1945, before he was murdered.

1:45:30 The Jews were forced to walk from Danzig to the concentration camp Stutthof, which was terrible. They had very little food and in the mornings and at night there were selections. She and her mother were there for one month.

1:46:35 While in the camp, Greta did not have a number tattooed on her arm, but rather had one on her uniform. She did have to wear the Star of David. One day they made a mark on her arm, so she thought she had been selected for extermination. But in the end, nothing came of it.

1:47:40 Once Greta remembers fighting to get to her mother and being beaten and beaten- but she kept at it and they opened the

gate, she thinks because she would not give up and because she did not care what they did to her. She recalls so many others throwing themselves against the fences and killing themselves so they would not have to live anymore.

1:49:15 In August or September of 1944, they were sent to a place with big streets and houses where it was very cold and terrible, a place called Plowick(ph?). During the day they would wear their light clothes and at night they would get wet and have to wear the same things again the next day and freeze. She does not know how any of them survived the terrible conditions, nor why they were not killed outright by the Germans.

1:50:45 One day the Jews were told that the Russians were getting closer- the front was approaching. This news gave them hope of survival. They were kept in the camp until February and then were moved somewhere new- though they were not made to work. There were very few buildings and no one there to take care of them; it was very cold and there was very little food. They could hear machine guns and planes day and night.

1:52:10 The Jews were taken on their last march about a month later. Many of the people could not make it and died trying. Greta helped her mother through the very tough journey.

1:53:10 On the day they were liberated, two Russian tanks rolled into town and the soldiers shot every single German watching over the Jews. That night, Greta did not do anything, and the next morning she had some food. 80% of the people died after liberation from shock, the food or something else. Greta laid on the floor for three or four days and her mother brought her whatever food she could find.

1:55:10 After a few days or weeks, the Jews walked towards Russian territory because they were afraid the Germans would come back. She remembers the Russians being very nice. It was Passover 1945 and the Russians did a celebration for 25-30 of the Jews- Greta remembers it being wonderful.

1:58:20 A few weeks/months later, Greta and her mother went to Germany to see if any of their family was still alive. They found records that stated they had been resettled in Riga.

She and her mother stayed for four years in Germany and then moved to the U.S. She has kept in touch with very few people from home because there were too many bad memories.

2:05:45 Greta has forgotten so much about the Holocaust years, which makes her feel very bad. She remembers most just wanting to survive during those four years. She remembers feeling terror only at the times of selection and when she was sick and tried to work.

2:09:50 She does not know how she made it through the things she

did- maybe God helped her, she does not really know.

2:13:15 Greta says that what she lost during those years in the camps simply was that- those years. She does not miss them today because she has everything she could ever ask for- the best country in the world, her mother, and husband and children. She does not feel bad about those lost years.

2:17:15 Greta remembers feeling no respect for the German soldiers, knowing they only had power because they had the guns, but that they were no better than she was. She would not let them make her feel worthless.

2:21:00 Greta feels guilty because so very few German Jews survived, and because those that did die have been almost forgotten. She thinks that she should have done something more about it, to keep them in the memory of the world.

2:23:50 Greta, through it all, never felt that she could not make it.

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