

Oral History Testimony

June06,1991

Name: Fanny Federman Date of Interview: September 07, 1989 Location of Interview: Pittsburgh

Fanny Federman was born on August 10, 1922 in Lokuch (ph?), Czechoslovakia.

1:00 I was the second child of a family that had sixteen children. I lived in a happy town. There were not too many jews.

2:00 We all lived comfortably befor Hitler. We trusted each other like we were brothers and sisters .

3:00 Catholics and Jews lived peacefully. My father worked at a mill. My mother stayed home to raise us. We were so happy. Our lives were straightforward: the boys went to the Yeshiva after their Bar Mitzvah.

4:00 The girls stayed at home, learned to cook and prepare for marriage. We had all been taught at the home, but after the boys' Bar Mitzvahs we never saw them at home.

5:00 But the girls did not need an education; we were going to have babies.

6:00 We did the milking of the cows, harvested the eggs, and did other household chores.

7:00 We also made some flour for people who brought their own grain to us.

8:00 I first began to experience Anti-Semitism in 1939.

9:00 In 1939 we began hearing about Hitler and his activities. This is when the trouble just began affecting us. Our friends became scared and did not want to associate with us anymore.

10:00 We began staying in our home. If you were not a citizen since World War I they [the Hungarian Army] would take you away and send you to Poland.

11:00 We were all frightened but we were still hoping for a change to occur.

12:00 My family was living on a scarce amount of food, but everyone in the town was. I was a teenager at this time.

13:00 The Hungarian Army didn't take my brothers because they were

too young to work. They didn't take my father because he had so many children.

14:00 We were a very religious family, every jewish family was at that time. I remember the worse happened after Pesach, sometime in May. They took us to Moonkash (ph?), a Ghetto. All the jews were forced to live together and work together, making bricks.

15:00 We took some belongings, but we thought our situation was purely temporary. There we lived basically outdoors.

16:00 They kept everyone together, they took us all to Auschwitz...packed us like we were animals.

17:00 We didn't understand what Auschwitz was. We thought it was just another workplace.

18:00 We knew we were prisoners. On the train, shipped like pigs... There were no toilets, no food....We were on the train for days.

19:00 We knew nothing except that the Germans didn't care if we died. If we disobeyed them we would be shot. We knew there was a problem but we did not know what we had done.

20:00 When we finally arrived in Auschwitz we were forced into lines. There was no time to stay with your family. I was alone in my line, but I had no idea that it would be the last time I would see my family in its entirety.

21:00 I think it was Mengele there..standing in front of me. He told the women and the babies to go into separate lines. He looked at our eyes in order to determine whether we could work. They promised us that we would see our families again.

22:00 I did not know anyone. They chose me to work. I was 20.

23:00 We went with the soldiers. They made us strip,if we did not comply we would be shot. They also shaved both the men and the women completely.

24:00 When the soldiers were finished, they took us to the showers. We cleaned ourselves and we were given a dress, It did not matter if the dress fit us. We then went to the barracks. We had one blanket for 12 people. I was cold.

25:00 Everyone was crying. We were there for two weeks. They took attendance daily. If someone was missing, we had to kneel on the ground (even if it was snowing or there was rain) till they were found. If someone was found sleeping, they would be shot dead on the spot.

26:00 No one could escape. People tried to commit suicide. If you touched the gate-you would be electrocuted by the shock. We received coffee and a bit of bread daily. We had no eating

utensils. We had no fork or knife to cut the bread for each other. We were forced to drink from the same cup. Even now, I have difficulty drinking from the same glass as someone. I remember those blistered mouths...

27:00 We had no toilets, just these large rooms...we had no privacy there either, a woman officer always went with us.

28:00 We were only allowed into the barracks when the count was accurate.

29:00 We knew they were killing us all off. We saw an entire barrack of gypsies exterminated. They just were not there the following morning. Women who were pregnant had to keep it a secret or they would be killed. They would often give birth in the barracks. The other women would choke the new baby to spare the mother's life. But the mother was never present in the room.

30:00 We knew there was a crematorium. There was always smoke. It had undoubtedly been going on since 1939. People from Holland had been brought there...

31:00 They killed entire barracks.

32:00 There was nothing any of us could do. We were naked. I recognized my sister's dress on another prisoner.

33:00 My sisters had been taken to Poland to work. I eventually found my three sisters across the camp.

34:00 But one day a man came from Breslow. He needed 2000 girls to work in one of his factories. He came to our camp and took me. I made sure to tell my sisters--so they wouldn't worry about me. I had no idea when I would be leaving. Everything was kept secret.

35:00 When they took the girls and me to the factory(in Reichenbach) they made us shower, gave us underclothes, a new dress. They were ashamed to have us go half-naked to work.

36:00 There, we got air. We had more freedom. They had shipped us by train. In the homes, where we stayed, we were 30 to a room; it was still better [than the camp]. They gave us food. There were men from local jails working in the factory as well. They worked the day shift, we worked the night shift. We slept during the day. We each had our own bed.

37:00 In Auschwitz we were doomed. Here we had a future.

38:00 In February we could see from our windows the Jews being shot.

39:00 Between February and March the Russians began bombing the factories. We were forced to march to Czechoslovakia. Those who couldn't walk were shot.

40:00 There, they asked for dressmakers. I wasn't one, but I told them I was. It was clean work. We had to make something for airplanes.

41:00 Back to the Marching....They marched the entire camp to Parshnitz (ph?), Czechoslovakia. . The Germans were making us, the girls, dig the trenches. Afterwards, they took us to Leibowitz (ph?), near the Sudetenland (ph?). The air was better there.

42:00 It was the ninth of May when we first could sense a change. They began giving us more food. The soldiers began cutting the barbed wire for gas masks.

43:00 One evening someone came and gave this speech. I think he was a Russian jew. He told us we would only have to stay one more night. They let us go and rob the factories in order to get clothing. The war had ended! We were all crying.

44:00 All of the German soldiers had disappeared. The Russian soldiers protected us. A Russian (jew?) told us that he would be giving us passports to facilitate our travels.

45:00 My friends (10 women) and I went home. It took us about two weeks. Everyplace was bombed. People, however, were happy...they gave us food.

46:00 I finally got to my town and the townspeople said that nobody, in my family, had returned. I felt dead at that moment.

47:00 I ended up going to Bucharest (ph?) for free. We went there because there was food and clothing being given out to refugees.

48:00 After that I went to my home but, once again, no one had returned. I went to live with some of my cousins. They had a huge hat factory. But things started to get bad; my cousins wanted to move to Russia.

49:00 My sisters, at this time, were sick with Typhus in Bergenbelsen (ph?). They soon heard that I was alive and they contacted me.

50:00 Because my cousins had been doing clandestine activities, I was arrested and put in jail for telling the guards that "I knew nothing". I said I was their maid. In prison (at Moonkat~h ph?) I cried, it was just like the camps.
r~U~4cc~

51:00 When I was free, my sisters and I traveled from Budapest to Czechoslovakia. We were the four oldest girls and we knew that the rest of our family had been killed in Auschwitz.

52:00 While we were in Budapest we were given jobs in a factory and were given an apartment to live in. But eventually we were sent home (Czechoslovakia).

53:00 We wanted to go to Germany from Czechoslovakia. In Germany Rabbis from other countries had arrived and were giving out advice on how to get to Israel.

54:00 I met my husband in Deiterdorf (ph?). At first I despised those who were getting married right away. But eventually I understood. I knew that I had to choose between going on with my life or dying inside. I decided to live.

55:00 The German people treated us so nice. Like nothing had happened. We were in Deiterdorf from 1947-1949. My Uncle got us papers to sponsor us. He told the Jewish Federaton that we could work and live in an apartment (which he would provide).

56:00 Interviewer asks what Fanny thinks now, looking back on her experience.

I feel that I am not normal now. My thyroid, my legs and stomach are always sick. Life goes on. I have children of my own now. I'm not angry. I cannot live in the past. If I did I would die. I'm still religious. I was raised that way--but everyone was at that timP. My three sisters are the same way.

57:00 I have never told my children my story. They read in books. They probably know more about the facts of the Holocaust than I do. I don't want them to be abnormal, like me.

58:00 My son in law's parents were concentration camp victims too. He and my daughter live in New York, he works for the United Jewish Federation.

59:00 My pain does not go away. You can't just swallow it. I believe there must be ain Israel. I remember the smoke of the crematorium.

60:00 Try to think of yourself being stripped, turpentine poured on your head... I would rather be dead... If they did not take you to Auschwitz you could not have had the same experience.

61:00 But life goes on. I did not want to marry but it was 1947. I only knew my husband four weeks. Now we have our children.