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Summary: Irene was raised in a middle class, non-practicing Jewish family. Her harsh experiences in the Lodz Ghetto and camps confirmed her present atheistic beliefs. She tells her story now because she feels it is her duty to speak for the dead.

Birth Information Irene was born in Lodz, Poland on July 13, 1928.

1:00 Preparation for interview.

2:00 Irene was born in Lodz, Poland. It was and is the second largest city in Poland. It's in western Poland, about 123 kilometers from Warsaw, but closer to Germany.

3:00 Lodz was an industrial city. Poland had little technology or industry so they invited Germans and German Jews to bring their technology. Their technology was in textiles. Most Jews lived in small villages around Lodz, but when the Industrial Revolution started, people came from all around.

4:00 Irene's family came from Konesh (ph), but she's quite sure her ancestors came from Germany.

5:00 The city was divided into three: 250,000 Jews, 250,000 Germans and the rest were Poles. Irene's father's name was Henry Gulder and, because of the name, she suspects he originally came from Holland.

6:00 Her father was a barber and had served twice in the Polish Army. Her family were great patriots of Poland.

7:00 Her father had a very large salon of mostly Jewish customers as they lived in a mostly Jewish neighborhood. They were middle class.

8:00 Her mother's family had been rich as her father was a cattleman. Her mother's name had been Regina Goldman.

9:00 Her mother's brother served in the Polish Army, too. Irene went to a progressive kindergarten.

10:00 Irene spent the religious holidays at her maternal grandfather's house. Irene's Parents were progressive and were "anti-clerical" which wasn't fashionable.

11:00 Her mother wanted her to be an emancipated woman. She had a sister, Sylvia, who was three years younger.

12:00 Irene went to a Polish school. The teachers were very educated and progressive. There were four Jewish girls in her class. The German girls found it difficult that she was not a Catholic.

13:00 Irene points out that Polish literature is filled with anti-Semitism with the Jews having an ugly image. Irene always felt different and said she'd never marry a Jew.

14:00 She spoke Polish and never understood Yiddish until the war.

15:00 Her parents were Polish Nationalists. Irene said that the anti-Semitism went in waves. The Jews and Germans owned all the factories and the Poles owned none. Her mother had been the cashier in her father's business.

16:00 In her early years, the most anti-Semitism she encountered was in literature.

17:00 She had a wonderful childhood and a very rich family life.

18:00 Irene had no Jewish education until she was in the Ghetto. Her family was very aware of Politics, however.

19:00 Her family thought Hitler was insane and wouldn't last. In 1938, German Jews of Polish parents were sent back to Poland-the "Green Border" they called it.

20:00 They all helped their People as best as they could. The dispossessed people had nothing and many died. The jewels went to Uruguay and they went to Auschwitz.

21:00 Irene's father was in the reserves of the Polish Army. Irene spent her summers in the country.

22:00 The last vacation was interrupted by the war. The Germans were in Poland. All the men had to leave right away because there was a rumor they'd be shot or taken. The men in her family left Lodz for Warsaw.

23:00 Women and children were left behind. There began to be shortage of food. After three weeks, the men came back.

24:00 Things changed. Schools reopened but the Jews couldn't return. The Germans started to do horrible things right away. They'd beat people and cut off beards. Her family thought of leaving but since the smuggler could only take them out one at a time, her mother said they must all stay together, so they stayed.

25:00 The Jews could no longer have radios and no communication from the outside. Irene now went to a Jewish school. In the bitter winter of 1940, the Lodz Ghetto was formed. The Germans came to their house. These happened to be fliers who actually acted ashamed when her mother welcomed them! Her mother said their lives were more important than things so when she opened her cupboards to them they left in embarrassment.

26:00 The other Germans took anything they wanted out of Poland. Her father's business lasted a while longer Irene still visited her non-Jewish friends after curfew.

27:00 Her friend's mother offered to keep Irene until after the war, but her mother wouldn't let them be separated. The Jews were totally unprotected by the law. The Ghetto where they had to go was in the worst part of the city. There were four people to a room.

28:00 There was no electricity and they used an outhouse. Rumkowski (ph) organized an industry to make uniforms for the soldiers.

29:00 There were deportations. They hadn't heard of concentration camps yet. Irene's mother remained optimistic. Irene had her tonsils removed in the Ghetto without anesthesia and there was no medication. Typhoid was around. After a while there was no school.

30:00 Irene was able to study with a brilliant cousin and she learned English. Her mother said she must keep learning to prepare for after the war. Irene feels that the gradual deterioration of life helped them to survive whereas the Czech Jews and others who came from normal lives and were thrown into those conditions had a harder time. An elegant Jew from Vienna just couldn't survive. Her brilliant cousin went to Auschwitz.

31:00 Irene says they tried to help each other. They had a small patch to grow vegetables in the Ghetto. They had no contact with the outside world. Irene remembers seeing her German girlfriend walking across the famous Ghetto bridge to work, but the girl refused to acknowledge her.

32:00 Irene relates that the Jewish policemen she saw in the Ghetto never kept anyone. They always waited in lines for food and they always talked Politics so somehow news was getting through. Her family felt Rumkowski was insane. Now they realized he drew up the lists for deportations.

33:00 - Her sister was at constant risk for deportation because she was the youngest. There was a deliberate psychological breaking down of people. There was the separation from other people by being in a Ghetto and if one person ran away, 250 could be shot. They did hear rumors of people being burned but they just couldn't believe even the Germans could be that bad. They thought that those that were deported were going to work in Germany.

34:00 The Germans would come with their leather coats and dogs for the people. To this day, Irene can't look at a leather coat. She also can't eat rutabaga as that's about all they had to eat in the Ghetto. She didn't see an egg for six years. There was black marketing. Hunger was a terrible thing remembers Irene.

35:00 Irene knew of no resistance or underground at Lodz. They were in "hostile waters" being right next to Germany. They were like slaves. Unless people were in the process of being deported they could at least be with their friends. Irene had boils from lack of vitamins.

36:00 Her father knew, everyone but he kept his integrity. Her parents just sold everything and hid nothing. Her father was recruited to help get the Jews but he refused. In 1944 the Lodz Ghetto was closed down.

37:00 The people were brainwashed. They were told that they were going to Czechoslovakia to work and to bring their belongings.

1:00 Irene tells that at this time her mother's family was still intact.

2:00 On her father's side she had three uncles in Cleveland. Irene was 14 when she was put on the cattle car. There were 70-100 people in one car without food or water.

3:00 Half the people died. When they got to Auschwitz, they were given bread. It took three days and three nights on the train from Lodz to Auschwitz and all the while they were still believing that they were going to Czechoslovakia.

4:00 If the people on the train believed they were going to be killed, they would have bolted. They arrived at dawn in Auschwitz. There was heavy barbed wire and people inside who looked totally insane.

5:00 Irene said it just looked like an insane asylum. Women and children were separated from the men.

6:00 First he was deloused. She said everything is methodically thought out and that that's what's so unforgivable. They were not savages; they were educated people.

7:00 They were stripped naked and their clothes were taken away. There were whole factories in Auschwitz that just sorted clothes. Irene was clutching a photo album and it was taken away.

8:00 She had to parade in front of Mengele. (Irene broke down here and needed to stop). Mengele chose her sister to one side. Irene and her mother fell and kissed his boots to let them be together. They didn't care if it was life or death if they could be together.

9:00 Mengele let them go and it was the sister who was chosen to die. That's why she doesn't have a number.

10:00 Everyone was naked and screaming. At the door: they were told that they were going to take a shower. They were never put in and Irene thinks they were out of gas.

11:00 Irene and her sister said they were older on advice from another prisoner. They stayed in the barracks three weeks. It was October and very cold. At 5 A.M. they lined up in fives to be counted. The only safe place was the latrine; the only place they could meet and talk.

12:00 They had one plate of soup for five people. Some people stole bread. There were about 12 people to a bunk. They only lined up, they didn't work. They still didn't believe that people were murdered.

13:00 All countries were represented at Auschwitz. The German women guards were brutal. Irene keeps repeating how insane it all was.

14:00 No one could imagine what it was like. It's totally unforgivable what the Germans did. Her friend was a twin who had experiments performed on her. Irene was in a lager that was in transition. She went on a train to Bergen-Belsen which was in Germany near Hanover.

15:00 The whole barracks went. There were no barracks at Belsen, just straw on the ground. Irene had lice by this time.

16:00 Women from Budapest were brought in still in their silk dresses and stockings. They were in total shock because they came from almost normal conditions. Irene and her group had gradually been dehumanized. The conditions were better in Belsen because they could just lay there. Conversation was mostly about food and what they'd do if they survived the war.

17:00 There was cold water to wash with. Irene left Belsen just before the big typhoid epidemic.

18:00 Irene felt she was again in a transition camp. They were sent to Buchenwald in the Hartz Mountains. They have spent several weeks in Belsen. Buchenwald had airplane parts and munitions factories. The Hartz Mountains was a giant bunker.

19:00 There were 250 women, all Hungarian, except for about 17 Polish women. They had volunteered to go thinking it could be better and it was. They lived in heated barracks with hot water. The SS German women were guards. This was getting to be later in the war and the guards were becoming fearful and not so brutal.

20:00 Irene was chosen with her mother and sister to maintain the barracks and didn't work in the factory.

21:00 Irene's mother continued to fight for their survival. They survived minute by minute. Irene is reluctant to talk about her experiences because she feels that no one can really understand if they haven't been through it. It was just beyond belief.

22:00 They were always in jeopardy of something -- frozen feet, no food, beatings. It was joyful when the bombardment began.

23:00 Toward the end of the war, they were sent on a death march. They slept in ditches at night. This was in April or May. One morning they awoke and the guards were gone. If one couldn't walk they were killed. They didn't know where they were marching.

24:00 They didn't know what to do when the guard left them. A Polish worker found them and took 17 of them to his barracks and gave them men's clothes.

25:00 Irene was liberated where these Polish workers were. The Americans came. The women were put in Private German houses. The Germans were afraid of the Americans. The Germans had plenty food and still lived in their own houses.

26:00 She wanted to kill them all -- especially the children because she saw what the Germans did to the Jewish children. She said the Americans were wonderful. She was able to speak English. Her first marriage Proposal was from a Polish bar owner from Chicago!

27:00 There were Hungarian and Polish Jews here. This part of Germany was on the Elbe River. They were liberated by Americans but on the other side of the river were Russians. Irene wanted to hurt the Germans but no one would let her and she got furious.

28:00 She didn't want to go back to Poland. She was very pro-American and she and her mother and sister go permits to go west. She, at that time, wanted to go to Palestine. She had refused to stay where she was because it was the Russian zone.

29:00 They ended up in Frankfurt but it was in ruins and they were glad. They were the first women survivors in Frankfurt. They stayed in a hotel. She began to look for her father and was given a jeep

and driver to go to various camps.

30:00 Irene worked in General Eisenhower's headquarters as a translator. She spoke German, Polish and English. She had a terrible fear of guns and the people were considerate of her.

31:00 They saw their first black people in the American army. Her sister went with the Israeli Brigade and a kibbutz was started in Germany because there were so many Jewish orphans. The Israelis wanted to smuggle her and her sister to Palestine but they wouldn't take their mother.

32:00 Her father weighed 70 pounds. He had been in hard labor camps. He went to Poland to look for his family but couldn't find anyone. He got his apartment and business back in Lodz.

33:00 Someone told him they saw his wife and children in Frankfurt. Irene said he literally walked from Poland to Frankfurt. Irene saw him in the street and recognized him. Irene says many Germans still have goods they stole. She also relates that they were almost ashamed to be an intact family. Eleanor Roosevelt was brought to the house where they were staying.

34:00 Major Wilson from Cleveland met her father and he contacted his three brothers who lived there. Her uncles responded immediately.

35:00 After arriving in New York Harbor, she went to Boston. Irene had married a soldier in Germany. They separated later on. Her parents joined her in Boston. She had only been married a year and he was Jewish.

36:00 Her father's brothers really helped them. They liked Boston because it was more European than Cleveland. Her present husband also came from Lodz but had gone to England to study medicine and didn't spend the war in Poland. He, however, never saw his family again.

37:00 He studied medicine and did his residency in Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. He and Irene have two children.

1:00 The children are Michael and Susan. She says her children had three mothers, her, her mother and her sister. Her sister cannot have children because of her experiences in the war.

2:00 Nothing was ever hidden from the children. Their house was always open to incoming refugees and newcomers. Irene's experiences affect each child in a different way.

3:00 Her husband was connected with Harvard Medical School. One night when top professionals were present at the school, a film unknowingly was presented. It was Night and Fog. Irene had taken her 14 year old not knowing about the film and the child ended up

in the hospital. She had an unknown fever and was unable to sleep without her mother with her for a week. Her son is very American. He's into sports and married a non-Jew.

4:00 The children went to Hebrew school because her father paid for it. Her son was Bar-mitzvahed. The family celebrated Jewish holidays and her son loved a visit he had taken to Israel. However, he liked California better!

5:00 Her daughter is much more Jewish than her parents. As far as Irene's own religious beliefs, she feels if there was a God who could supervise such an insanity, and that this was not the first nor the last, she finds it very difficult to believe.

6:00 Man just needs to believe there is a God for his own purposes. Irene feels very strongly culturally Jewish but she doesn't believe in organized religion. She recalls, however, when she was very young and had her education in the Polish catholic school she didn't want to be Jewish. She states, "Hitler made me Jewish! It was such a strong experience, strong results happened. She did Prefer her children marry Jews because it would be a continuation of Jewish culture.

7:00 It is the debt to the dead. Irene says they died in vain no matter what anyone says. But, if Jews didn't continue being Jewish, they are even more in debt. She feels being a survivor makes her different from others. She doesn't mope or moan because she can't stand that. But, she does have a special bond with survivors.

8:00 She can't stand being put into a "Ghetto". She says that's the trouble being Jewish in Pittsburgh because you have to belong to a synagogue or a club. A bigger city is better. Irene says she feels a lot of anger. She says the Pope, the leader of Catholics, could have helped with one word.

9:00 She questions hypocrisy. She feels that you can't live with anger on a daily basis or you'd be neurotic. You have to live a new life. She had a strong feeling for Israel.

10:00 The Jews must have a place like Israel to look up to. Irene likes America. She likes France, too, even though they behaved badly during the war. She's heard anti-Semitic remarks in America.

11:00 She believes the Poles behaved very badly.

12:00 They should atone for their behavior. They still teach that the Jews killed Christ. It's a collective guilt. The Jews gave so much culture to Poland and everywhere else.

13:00 Irene thinks survivors need more clout. She sees the more educated ones as more integrated and doing even less. It's the less educated who do more. Irene says she is asserting her identity as a survivor in speaking now and feels she is speaking for the dead. The Germans erased a whole culture that will never be. It can't be

brought back. She sees very few children of survivors carrying the torch.

14:00 Irene says it should be taught in school with European history everywhere. She has her doubts about the human species.

15:00 Her father showed a nobility of character and value under the most trying conditions. Her Parents always loved life.

16:00 Irene and some of the other survivors have very deep friendships. Some have changed, however, and it hurts her. She doesn't hear from them anymore; their values have changed.
.END.