

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN, CLEVELAND SECTION

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	HERMAN FRANK	
Name of Interviewer	Sally Weinberg	Date
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NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Herman Frank was born in Lodz, the second largest city in Poland. He was the only child of a well-to-do family in the textile and fur business. He had an active and happy childhood, going to concerts and the theater, and vacationing abroad.

Herman recalls that there was a great deal of anti-Semitism in Lodz, even before the war. Jews could not go out at night without fear, and he feels the Poles would have risen up against the Jews even if there hadn't been a war.

The Franks were aware that war was imminent, and they considered leaving Poland. However before they could make plans to go, Herman's father died. His mother was unable to give up everything she'd worked for in Poland, so she and Herman remained there.

Seven months after the death of Herman's father, in September 1940, the Germans invaded Poland. Herman's mother had been preparing for the war, buying food and distributing jewelry and other valuables among relatives and hiding some in the house. She even had a dentist place a diamond in a cavity in Herman's tooth.

When the Jews of Lodz were ordered to move to a walled ghetto, Herman and his mother were able to live with an aunt, whose house was inside the wall. After the ghetto became more organized, they were told to move to a room in a small apartment.

Herman's mother had been depressed since her husband's death, and she was in poor health. When epidemics began sweeping the ghetto she became sick and she died in 1942. After burying her by himself, Herman remained in their room alone. He was 17.

Herman had attended a textile engineering school in the ghetto, however after two terms all schools were closed. He was given a responsible position in a clothing factory, and he also had many unofficial jobs which enabled him to live relatively well.

In 1944 the Lodz ghetto was liquidated and everyone was sent to Auschwitz. After a few days, he was sent to a work camp in GLEIWITZ. He remained there until January 1945.

As the Allies advanced, GLEIWITZ was evacuated. Herman and some friends escaped, but were captured by SS soldiers and rejoined their group at a camp called Gross Rosen.

At Gross Rosen Herman was propositioned sexually by the camp commander. He refused, and was given extra-hard work in retaliation.

A week later the prisoners were evacuated to Buchenwald. It had been bombed, and they had to wait for several days at the train station before they were actually taken to the camp.

They were moved again a few weeks later, to Berga-an-Elste. Because of an injury, Herman was assigned to work in the kitchen and he was able to eat whatever he wanted, restoring his strength.

After three weeks, Berga-an-Elste was also evacuated, and this time Herman and his friends escaped successfully. Although the SS interrogated them, they were able to convince them that they were Polish civilians.

Shortly after that, the war ended. Herman went to the American zone in Wieden, Germany, and worked for the U.S. Army. He married another Polish survivor in Germany, and their first son was born there.

In 1949, an aunt of his wife's sponsored their entry into the U.S. Life was difficult and discouraging at first, but Herman's enterprising character eventually enabled him to own his own carpet cleaning business.

Herman currently lives with his wife in Pepper Pike, Ohio. They have two sons and two grandchildren.

Herman Frank

ABSTRACT

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PRESENT LIFE

59 years old. Lives in Pepper Pike, Ohio. Self-employed in carpet business. Married, two sons, two grandchildren.

BORN IN LODZ, POLAND

Second largest city in Poland. Large textile industry.

FAMILY SITUATION AND CHILDHOOD

Herman was 14 years old in 1939. Only child. Father was in clothing and fur business. Family was well-off. Herman went to private Jewish school. Had tutors for Torah and religion. Family belonged to largest synagogue in Lodz. Lived in center of city. Had gentile and Jewish neighbors. Spoke Yiddish and Polish. Family went to concerts, theater, ballet. Vacationed in Mountains. Went skiing, ice skating. Herman sees childhood as a little over-protected.

THERE IS MUCH ANTI-SEMITISM

Jews couldn't go out at night without fear of attack. Even without Hitler, Poles would have risen up against Jews. However some gentiles did help Jews during war.

HERMAN KNOWS THERE WILL EVENTUALLY BE A WAR

Got information from newspapers, radio, gossip. Knew Polish army couldn't fight Germany successfully.

FAMILY CONSIDERS LEAVING POLAND; FATHER DIES

Father died in 1939 - seven months before war. Family had connections in Switzerland, but mother couldn't bear leaving Poland.

GERMANY INVADES - SEPTEMBER 1940

City bombed three or four days before Germans arrived. When Germans arrived they held a huge parade. Most Poles went out of curiosity.

MANY GERMAN JEWS IN POLAND

All German Jews with Polish background had been deported to Poland. Jewish organizations in Poland helped them.

ANTI-SEMITIC ACTIONS

Immediately Germans began beating Jews and cutting off beards.

MOTHER PREPARES FOR EMERGENCIES

Jews had problems getting their money from banks. Mother used what money she had to buy gold, non-perishable food, soap. Spread them around to different relatives.

UNCLE WANTS TO TAKE HERMAN TO FRANCE

Uncle was living in Paris. Came to get Herman but mother didn't want him to go. Uncle couldn't leave Poland, died in ghetto.

HERMAN AND MOTHER GO TO LIVE WITH RELATIVES

They had large apartment. Stayed until sent to the ghetto.

CURFEW IS IMPOSED ON JEWS

Many who ignored it were shot.

JEWS ARE SENT TO THE GHETTO

Notices were posted ordering Jews to the ghetto. It was a fenced-in area, formerly a slum on outskirts of town.

MOTHER HIDES VALUABLES

Hid furs wrapped in plastic under floorboards of apartment. Placed jewelry behind ceramic tiles in heater. Put more jewelry in heels of boots, put a diamond in cavity in Herman's tooth.

HERMAN AND MOTHER STAY WITH AUNT IN GHETTO

Her apartment was in ghetto. Knew they'd be sent there, so had already brought some furniture. 25 people (all relatives) living in two-bedroom apartment.

GO TO GHETTO AT END OF 1940. AS THEY ARE LEAVING FOR GHETTO HERMAN IS SEVERELY BEATEN BY HITLER YOUTH WITH SHOVELS

JUDENRAT-JEWISH COMMITTEE IS FORMED TO ORGANIZE GHETTO LIFE

Most of Jewish intelligentsia already deported. Most remaining doctors, lawyers, rabbis were in Judenrat. They set up schools, factories.

NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO LEAVE GHETTO. THOSE WHO TRY ARE SHOT
GIVEN RATIONS EVERY SEVEN DAYS

Bread was made from clay. Difficult to make rations last seven days.

JUDENRAT MOVES PEOPLE TO DIFFERENT APARTMENTS

Herman and mother shared a small apartment.

HERMAN ATTENDS TEXTILE ENGINEERING SCHOOL IN GHETTO

After second session, all schools closed. Children over age nine sent to work.

HERMAN WORKS IN FINANCE MINISTRY OFFICE IN GHETTO

OVER 200,000 PEOPLE IN THE GHETTO. IT IS LIKE A SMALL NATION
GHETTO UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

Herman joined underground. Had a radio, listened to BBC news twice a day.

AT FIRST HERMAN'S MOTHER IS ABLE TO SELL VALUABLES FOR FOOD
GHETTO RATIONS

Bread, potatoes, other unusual vegetables Germans didn't want. Once a month got ten ounces of horsemeat.

AFTER TWO YEARS HERMAN IS WORKING IN A CLOTHING FACTORY

He dispersed raw materials, collected finished products.

MOTHER BECOMES SICK AND DIES - 1942

She had been depressed since father's death. There were many epidemics in ghetto. She became sick and died. Herman buried her by himself. She was 41, he was 17.

10,000 PEOPLE ASKED TO VOLUNTEER FOR RELOCATION. THEY ARE TAKEN TO CHELMNO AND KILLED

25,000 more taken later. All under age ten and over 65. Mother had been selected, but bribed guard to let her go.

HERMAN RECEIVES A LITTLE BETTER TREATMENT BECAUSE OF HIS POSITION AT THE FACTORY

VIDEO 2 OF 3

HERMAN'S LIFE DURING TWO YEARS ALONE IN GHETTO

Constantly changed jobs. Joined anti-bomb squad, got extra soup every third day. Worked overtime at factory for extra food. Had no social life - worked seven days a week, always tired. Had girlfriends, but remained very independent. Lived alone until his section of ghetto was made into a concentration camp for Gypsies. Then he lived with another boy and girl (brother and sister).

GHETTO JEWISH POLICE

Power went to their heads. They beat Jews, rounded them up. Loyal to Gestapo.

OF HERMAN'S LARGE EXTENDED FAMILY, ONLY OTHER SURVIVORS ARE TWO COUSINS

PEOPLE KEEP BODIES OF DEAD RELATIVES AS LONG AS POSSIBLE SO THEY CAN USE THEIR RATION CARDS

When a body was picked up, ration card was collected. Those caught were tried in ghetto court.

GHETTO IS LIQUIDATED

68,000 were still alive. Herman one of the last to go. Could have stayed longer on a clean-up brigade, but couldn't stand being there any longer. Chose to go.

HERMAN IS SENT TO AUSCHWITZ, 1944

Didn't know where he was going. Still had boots with gold in heels. Had some sugar, cocoa and soap, too. Put in train with 120 others. Spent 16 hours on the train.

ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ

Train doors opened, saw bright lights. A man told Herman he'd be going out through the chimney. Herman hadn't heard of Auschwitz, even from the BBC. Men were given showers and completely shaved. Allowed to keep their shoes. Someone told Herman they'd take his shoes away because they looked like boots. He got a knife from an SS guard and cut off the tops. Given striped uniforms, taken to a barracks. Man in charge of barracks beat one of them to death to frighten the others into submission.

HERMAN GIVES AWAY HIS POSSESSIONS

Before going to shower, Herman still had a Mont Blanc pen/pencil and some bread. Knew they'd be taken away, so he threw them over the fence to a woman prisoner.

AFTER A FEW DAYS IN AUSCHWITZ, HERMAN IS SENT TO GLEIWITZ

Asked for tool mechanics for volunteer work detail. Herman and 20 others sent to work camp near Polish border. Slept three men to a bunk. Given bread and soup daily. Many German homosexuals there as Kapos. In GLEIWITZ from July until the next January.

PRISONERS ARE CODED WITH COLORED TRIANGLES

Jews - yellow. Political prisoners - red. Homosexuals - purple. Murderers - black.

500 PEOPLE IN CAMP. SELECTIONS EVERY TWO WEEKS

Those selected were put on trucks and gassed with exhaust fumes. Herman was sick during one selection, but he made sure no one knew.

THEY KEEP WARM IN WINTER BY MAKING PAPER COATS. HERMAN NOW HAS WOODEN SHOES

Before going to Gleiwitz he took gold out of shoes, traded for two cans of meat.

PRISONERS PRAY BY THEMSELVES, KEEP TRACK OF HOLIDAYS

FIVE OR SIX SUICIDES EVERY DAY

They had rope belts - people used them to hang themselves.

PRISONERS MUST SHAVE EACH OTHER'S HEADS EVERY DAY

Because Herman's hair was so dark, it looked like he hadn't been shaved. He was beaten or forced to roll in the mud as punishment.

SOME DAYS GUARDS REFUSE TO START BREAKFAST UNTIL THEY SHOOT TWO OR THREE MEN

HERMAN'S PHILOSOPHY OF SURVIVAL

His experiences traveling outside Poland let him know there was a lot to live for. He also had no one else's survival to worry about. Could focus on his own survival.

HERMAN SPEAKS GERMAN, IS ABLE TO TALK TO SS

They gave him news about the war, so he knew it was almost over. They told him if he survived, he had to tell people they had been good to him.

HOLOCAUST IS ALWAYS IN HIS MIND

He dreams the Germans are taking his children.

HERMAN BELONGS TO A ZIONIST ORGANIZATION AS A CHILD

PRISONERS EVACUATED FROM GLEIWITZ IN JANUARY

Marched from place to place to escape Russians. One night Herman was left in a barn with a sprained ankle. Has no memory of how he rejoined the others.

THEY ARE TAKEN TO A CAMP CALLED GROSS ROSEN

HERMAN AND TWO OTHERS ESCAPE

Recaptured after a few days by SS. Weren't shot because since SS were guarding Jews, they wouldn't be sent to front. This also caused them to postpone returning Herman and others to Gross Rosen as long as possible.

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CONDITIONS AS GROSS ROSEN

Thousands of prisoners, including Russian prisoners of war. The prisoners were building a new camp. Existing one was a giant mud puddle.

Herman Frank

CAMP COMMANDER PROPOSITIONS HERMAN SEXUALLY

Herman brought to commander's office. Commander was wearing purple triangle, indicating he was homosexual. Told Herman he wanted to help him. Let him pass out bread that night, so Herman could have extra food. Asked Herman to come to his bedroom. Herman told him he knew he was powerful, but Herman wouldn't have a sexual relationship with him.

HERMAN IS PUNISHED FOR REFUSING COMMANDER'S ADVANCES

He had to pick up bodies of people electrocuted on fence. Very difficult work. After three days, commander asked if he's changed his mind. Herman said no, was sent back to same job.

EVACUATED TO BUCHENWALD FIVE DAYS LATER

Put in open train cars with five-foot high walls. Given bread and sausage. Traveled six days with no food, water. Had Ukrainian guards. Herman had some sugar. Shared it with the men he'd escaped with earlier.

OF 112 MEN PUT ON TRAIN TO BUCHENWALD, 14 SURVIVE

ARRIVAL AT BUCHENWALD

Camp was bombed the day before. Herman and others had to lie on floor of train station two days before going to camp.

HERMAN IS AT BUCHENWALD FOR A WEEK OR TWO

Had metal tokens to exchange for rations. People killed each other for the tokens.

TAKEN TO BERGA-AN-ELSTE

Herman had to carry railroad tracks. Was very weak.

HERMAN IS INJURED

Slipped, caught his testicles on a train buffer. Two boys carried him back to camp.

HE CANNOT RETURN TO WORK THE NEXT DAY, IS ASSIGNED TO THE KITCHEN
Could eat anything he wanted, could smuggle food back to barracks.

STAYS IN BERGA-AN-ELSTE THREE WEEKS. HIS STRENGTH AND COURAGE ARE RENEWED. CAMP IS EVACUATED

HERMAN AND THREE FRIENDS ESCAPE DURING THE MARCH

Had smuggled food out of camp. On second day they walked away from others. Hid in barns and sheds.

THEY FIND A GERMAN FIELD CAMP, ARE NOT RECOGNIZED AS JEWS. THEY WORK AT THE CAMP A FEW DAYS, THEN ARE QUESTIONED AT GESTAPO HEADQUARTERS IN ZWICKY

They claimed to have run away from a factory. Said they were Polish civilians. After one night in jail, Gestapo gave them identity papers which would allow them to move about freely.

HERMAN WORKS ON A FARM PLANTING POTATOES

ONE SUNDAY HE HEARS AN ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE WAR IS OVER

GOES TO ZWICKY. IT IS OCCUPIED BY FRENCH, BRITISH, AMERICANS AND RUSSIANS.

HERMAN AND HIS FRIENDS GET AN APARTMENT, ARE HELPED BY THE RUSSIANS

HERMAN STEALS A GERMAN GASOLINE TRUCK, TAKES IT TO THE AMERICAN ZONE IN HOFF

HE GOES TO WIEDEN, GERMANY IN 1944 AND WORKS FOR THE ARMY

HE MEETS HIS WIFE IN GERMANY

She was also a survivor, Polish. Married in Wieden, first son born there.

THEY COME TO U.S., 1949

Wife's aunt in Cleveland sponsored them.

OTHER SURVIVORS IN THEIR FAMILIES

Wife's brother and two sisters; two cousins of Herman's.

HERMAN BEGINS WORKING FOR D.O. SUMMERS CO. AT 65 CENTS/HOUR, EVENTUALLY BOUGHT HIS OWN CARPET CLEANING BUSINESS

HERMAN TALKS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST WITH OTHER SURVIVORS

MIGHT VISIT LODZ IN THE SUMMER IF HE HAS ENOUGH COURAGE

FEELS HE WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER EDUCATED IF NOT FOR THE HOLOCAUST, BUT HIS EXPERIENCE DID GIVE HIM "STREET SMARTS"

HERMAN HAS FORGIVEN, BUT WILL NEVER FORGET

Still has nightmares. He's learned to live day-to-day.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, HERMAN WOULD NOT HAVE AGREED TO BE INTERVIEWED.
BUT NOW REALIZES THOSE WHO ARE LEFT MUST TELL THE STORY

HERMAN FEELS THERE ARE TOO MANY STATUES AND PLAQUES INSTEAD OF
HOLOCAUST EDUCATION. REAL EDUCATION IS THE BEST COMMEMORATION