

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN, CLEVELAND SECTION

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	HELEN FRIED	Date	12/20/84
Name of Interviewer	Sally Weinberg	Date	8/28/87
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NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Helen Fried was the third of ten children in a large, orthodox family in Hust, Czechoslovakia. Hust was a town of 60,000 with a large Jewish community of 25,000.

Helen's father was a Torah scholar and her mother supported the family by running a leather store. Helen's grandparents lived in an adjoining house and helped raise the children.

The family enjoyed good relations with their gentile neighbors. Most of their customers, in fact, were gentiles.

In 1939 a civil war broke out between German and Czech forces and for the next four years a constant power struggle made the political situation very unstable. The family's store was confiscated and made into a spy center, so they were able to monitor the situation fairly closely.

At one point, Helen's grandfather overheard that Helen was to be executed for making fun of Germans. She was saved by a Hungarian invasion of Hust.

Under Hungarian control, the family's store was returned and life was relatively good. Soon, though, anti-Jewish measures were imposed and Germans were once again in control.

In 1943 the Jews of Hust were ghettoized. After four weeks they were all deported to Auschwitz. Helen's parents, four brothers and one of her sisters were killed immediately.

Helen and four sisters remained in Auschwitz together until late 1944, when they were sent to work on a farm. Shortly after they arrived the farm was evacuated and Helen and her sisters were forced to march, supposedly to Berlin.

After several days of marching, the sisters escaped and took the identity of Polish maids for the German army who had become separated from their unit. They were able to maintain these identities until liberation, although they were separated.

Helen went to work in a factory with 60 Russian women. She was liberated before the official end of the war by Russian soldiers and was reunited with a cousin.

Helen Fried

JEWS ARE ROUNDED UP - 1943

Taken to the synagogue, stayed three days until some streets could be marked off for them.

HELEN IS WARNED BY A SOLDIER THAT SHE MUST DO SOMETHING TO HELP HERSELF

TRAIN LOADS OF DEPORTEES GO THROUGH TOWN

The family took them food. Helen's mother hoped to find the son who lived in another city, but he wasn't there.

THE JEWS OF MUST LIVE IN THE GHETTO FOUR WEEKS

Then were told they were being taken to another town. The family was marched past her aunt's house. Helen's six-year-old cousin saw them, cried, "I don't want to die!"

AN AUNT'S BROTHER GETS FORGED GENTILE IDENTITY PAPERS, WANTS TO TAKE HELEN'S SISTER (HIS FIANCEE) TO LIVE WITH HIM

She is exposed as a Jew, he decides to go with her.

ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ

Women advised to give small children to the older women. One of Helen's cousins refused, was sent to gas chamber. They didn't know why they were being separated.

THEY SEE A GROUP OF WOMEN WITH NO HAIR, IN STRANGE CLOTHES. THEY THINK THE WOMEN ARE CRAZY

Ten minutes later, they looked the same.

THE TRAIN JOURNEY TO AUSCHWITZ

Took several days. They were packed so tightly they had to stand the whole time.

HELEN'S PARENTS, FOUR BROTHERS AND ONE SISTER ARE KILLED IMMEDIATELY AT AUSCHWITZ

HELEN AND SISTERS ARE TAKEN TO A BARRACKS

Building was as long as a city block. Blockalteste (leader) was a Polish rabbi's daughter. She now lives in Canada.

MENGELE COMES TWICE PER MONTH TO MAKE SELECTIONS

HELEN IS NOT TATTOOED WITH A NUMBER

Too many prisoners to tattoo.

DAILY ROUTINE IN AUSCHWITZ

Were counted in the morning. Then did nothing all day. The older sisters decided to work to get more food for younger sisters. They cleaned toilets.

PILLS ARE PUT IN THE FOOD SO THEY WILL NOT MENSTRUATE

THEY HIDE FROM MENGELE'S SELECTION, ONE SISTER IS CAUGHT

Her hands were tied. Guard wanted to cut her hair as punishment, but she wouldn't let him. He prepared to shoot her, and Blockalteste convinced her to let him cut her hair.

A MONTH LATER ONE SISTER DREAMS THAT MOTHER WARNS THEM TO HIDE AGAIN NEXT TIME MENGELE COMES

AT THIS POINT IN THE INTERVIEW, HELEN IS OVERCOME WITH TEARS

VIDEO 2 OF 3

MENGELE COMES A WEEK AFTER THE DREAM. HELEN IS SEPARATED FROM HER SISTERS

She was sent to a train, found the older two sisters, but not the two younger.

THEY ARE TAKEN TO A FARM - NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1944

It was really two farms with 1,000 girls at each.

THEY MUST DIG DITCHES TO STOP RUSSIAN TANKS

Frozen ground was dynamited, then they dug. Only food during day was a bowl of soup. Walked two miles to and from work site.

A GERMAN SOLDIER LIKES HELEN'S OLDEST SISTER, MAKES HER HIS MAID

She was able to get extra food. Felt very guilty because her fiancée was in Auschwitz. Wanted to kill herself.

THEY ARE EVACUATED

Awakened at 5 a.m. Given a loaf of bread for five girls. Told they were to walk to Berlin. After a few days they ran out of food. Tried to eat horse feed mixed with snow. Those too weak to walk were put on wagons.

SABINE, HELEN'S SISTER, IS FORCED TO DIG A MASS GRAVE

All the women from the wagons were shot. When one of the sisters became too weak to walk, they carried her.

ONE NIGHT THEY HIDE IN A HAYSTACK

Climbed high in the stack because Germans looked for girls with pitchforks. Hid for four days, but had no food or water so decided to come out.

THEY PLAN TO GO TO A LIGHTED WINDOW, EXPLAIN THAT THEY ARE MAIDS OF GERMAN SOLDIERS

An SS man gave them some food and sent them away. Went to another house. Overheard the owners plan to test their identity; they'd leave food on the table. If the girls took it they were Jews. If not, they were maids. They took no food - only milk, so they were allowed to stay.

THEY WANT TO STAY AND WORK IN EXCHANGE FOR FOOD, BUT THE FAMILY WON'T RISK HAVING REFUGEES WITH NO PAPERS AT THEIR HOUSE

AFTER THREE DAYS THEY ARE SENT AWAY. THEY GO TO ANOTHER FARM AND ARE CAPTURED BY TEN-YEAR-OLD BOYS WITH GUNS

Taken to jail in Christianstadt. Claimed they were Polish maids, so guards brought in a Polish boy to see if they spoke Polish. They didn't but the boy did not report them.

THEY ARE KEPT AT THE JAIL AT NIGHT, GO OUT TO WORK DURING THE DAY

Two of the sisters worked as nannies, and when the families they worked for left, took them with them.

HELEN WORKS IN A FACTORY WITH 60 RUSSIAN WOMEN. THEY ARE EVACUATED AFTER A FEW WEEKS

HELEN GOES TO A FARMHOUSE

Asked to take a bath. Locked herself in the bathroom until the Russians came.

HELEN IS LIBERATED BY THE RUSSIANS

Many of the Russian women had gone with the Germans. Russians were angry. Helen told them she was Jewish, but they didn't believe her. A Jewish soldier tested her with questions on Judaism.

HELEN SEES HER COUSIN OUTSIDE. THEY ARE SENT TO WORK FOR THE RUSSIANS

During Pesach Helen and her cousin had to live on potatoes. Cousin became sick, was sent to the hospital.

A RUSSIAN GENERAL FALLS IN LOVE WITH HELEN

Wanted her to marry him. She assumed he was Jewish, although he never told her, because despite Russian anti-Semitism, he knew a lot about Judaism. She told him if he loved her, he's help her find her cousin. He ordered soldiers to drive her to all hospitals in the area.

IN A LARGE CITY, SHE REFUSES TO GO BACK WITH THE SOLDIERS

Doctors at hospital there were Russian Jews. Let her work there. While holding a lamp during surgery, Helen passed out. After that she only bandaged wounds.

MAY 9, 1945 - WAR IS OFFICIALLY OVER

Doctors brought wine to Helen in celebration.

A WOMAN DOCTOR OFFERS TO TAKE HELEN TO PRAGUE. FROM THERE SHE GOES TO BUDAPEST, HEARS SISTER, SABINE, IS STILL ALIVE AND IS IN HUST

FINDS SISTER IN HUST

They heard Russians were about to close border, decided to go to Budapest. Conductor demanded money, but they had none. A man offered to pay their fare; Sabina later married him. Their uncle was on the train, too.

THEY GO TO DOBRYZN, WHERE UNCLE HAS A BUSINESS. LATER, HELEN AND THREE COUSINS GO TO LIVE IN PRAGUE

OLDEST SISTER, SARAH, FINDS THEM IN DOBRYZN

Walked in one night as they were getting ready to go out. Had been liberated by the Americans and sent to Prague, where she heard where they were.

HELEN GOES TO DP CAMP IN LEIPHEIM, GERMANY TO WAIT FOR A VISA TO GO TO U.S.

HELEN IS ENGAGED TO A MAN SHE MET IN BUDAPEST

He could have gone to Australia, but no women were being accepted. Helen offered to break their engagement so he could go, but he refused to leave her.

THEY MARRY IN PRAGUE - AUGUST 1946

THEY HEAR HUSBAND IS GOING TO BE DRAFTED INTO RUSSIAN ARMY SO THEY FLEE TO GERMANY

VIDEO 3 OF 3

WHILE IN GERMANY THEY HEAR HELEN'S BROTHER-IN-LAW IS IN JAIL IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

He had been looking for them and Russians suspected he knew where they were. Helen's husband went to Czech border, raised money to free him.

WHEN RUSSIANS KILL CZECH PRESIDENT, SISTER AND HUSBAND GO TO VIENNA

HELEN AND HER HUSBAND COME TO U.S. IN 1949

Came to New York. Joint Distribution Committee helped them find a place to live and a job for husband. Worked as a tailor for \$18/week, but didn't know how to sew. Later worked in a mattress factory. Worked in an aluminum factory.

ANOTHER SISTER AND HUSBAND MOVED TO CLEVELAND. HELEN AND HUSBAND, OTHER SISTER AND HUSBAND EVENTUALLY JOIN THEM

HELEN'S HUSBAND GOES INTO FURNITURE BUSINESS, EVENTUALLY BECOMES PARTNER

HELEN AND HUSBAND TALK WITH EACH OTHER ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES, BUT NEVER WITH THEIR SON

Wanted to shield him.

HELEN'S FEELINGS ABOUT JUDAISM

Joined a synagogue in Cleveland immediately. Feels proud to be a Jew. Sees much anti-Semitism in U.S. - we must be careful.

HOLOCAUST HAS AFFECTED HELEN'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

She has nightmares, had to take tranquilizers for ten years.

SHE FEELS SURVIVORS ARE STRONGER THAN OTHER JEWS

HER FEELINGS ON WHY SHE SURVIVED

She was healthy at beginning of war - fatter, so was able to go longer without food. Having sisters with her also helped.

HELEN THINKS AMERICANS DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THE HOLOCAUST

But hopes they never have to, because only way to really understand is to experience it.

HELEN CAN NEVER AGAIN BE TRULY HAPPY

WE MUST BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT NAZIS AND KU KLUX KLAN IN U.S., AND ENSURE THAT ISRAEL IS STRONG.

A strong Israel is the best way to commemorate the Holocaust.

HELEN WILL NEVER GO BACK TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA, BUT HOPES TO GO TO ISRAEL

SURVIVORS IN HELEN'S FAMILY

Husband has a brother and a sister in Australia. One brother killed in Warsaw ghetto. Helen has a sister in Cleveland and in New York.

HELEN IS GLAD SHE SHARED HER EXPERIENCE

Now she won't take it to her grave. She hopes it will help her emotionally.