

**Tana Gelfer**  
**Oct. 12, 1994**  
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### **Abstract**

Tana Gelfer was born on October 7, 1939 in Berlin to a German Jewish father, Herman George Reichmann, and Joliannna Kohn Reichmann, a German actress whose stage name was Hansey Kornau.

Tana's maternal grandmother, Theresa Kohn, had converted from Protestantism to Judaism. Tana says that her grandmother was not deported because she had been born Protestant.

Tana's father was taken away in December 1942. In 1944, SS men took her mother and her from the home they shared with the grandmother. At a holding place, four-year-old Tana was separated from her mother and put with other children. She ran away several times, finally found her mother, and a few days later, they were transported to Theresienstadt.

They arrived September 1944 in Theresienstadt, where Tana recalls a park, swings, concerts, as well as lice everywhere, terrible odors, being hospitalized several times, and seeing people die. A German officer who saved her from being deported was killed for protecting her. She says she still feels bad about his being killed.

The night before Russian soldiers liberated the camp in June 1945, she and her mother were on a list of inmates to be gassed the next day.

They hitched rides to Berlin and rejoined the grandmother. They never received any information about Tana's father or his family, so Tana assumes that they all perished during the war.

In Berlin, Tana attended school until 1949 when she, her mother, and grandmother received visas for the United States. The Jewish Council arranged for them to live in Newark, New Jersey, where Tana entered the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

After she graduated from high school, she worked for an insurance company. She married in 1966, and had two children.

Tana says that only 100 children remained alive out of the 50,000 children who went through Theresienstadt.

**1:06**

Tana's father was a banker but was forced out of his job when Nazis came to power. He taught Hebrew for boys in a religious school.

**1:52**

Tana's mother was originally an actress, but she too was forced out of her career. She then worked for a travel agency until she was fired. She started a children's store with money inherited from her grandfather. The store was destroyed in Kristallnacht.

**2:44**

Tana's father had one sister, Kate, and an older brother. His mother died when he was a child.

In 1940, father's aunt committed suicide on night of wedding, when her husband was killed.

Tana's father's family was from Gelsenkirchen in Germany. Father had come to Berlin on business trip when he met his wife, Johanna Kohn.

**5:20**

Johanna was also an only child. Her father, Emil Kohn came from Vienna, Austria, where his grandfather was ballet master of the Vienna Opera House.

Mother's mother, Theresa, had converted from Protestantism to Judaism. Her husband, Johanna's grandfather, was a prominent advertising person. They were wealthy but lost everything in the 1929 stock crash. He died in 1935.

Mother always wanted to be an actress. She went to acting school and performed in small towns. Her stage name was Hansi Karnau. She had a very trim figure and could play boy's roles, including roles in Shakespeare.

**9:49**

Tana's mother was born on Dec. 30, 1904, and lived very comfortably. From 1939 to 1949, Tana, her mother, and her grandmother lived in an apartment until they left Germany in 1949.

**10:50**

Tana has a few memories of her early childhood in Berlin. She remembers walking around the streets with her grandmother and a good friend who hid her. She remembers her father putting her on his shoulders and racing around the dining room. She also remembers him taking her for walks in the park.

**13:43**

Tana reads a poem that her father wrote when she was four months old predicting a difficult future.

On Dec. 22, 1942, her father was arrested. Tana was two and a half years old. Mother never knew what happened, but after the war she did find his name on a list. Her mother never spoke about her father being taken away.

**15:26**

Tana remembers being picked up with her mother and taken by truck to Ranishe, a holding place. Her grandmother was not picked up because she was not considered a born Jew. Tana was separated for the first time from her mother for four days. She remembers being very scared. They were reunited and then sent to Thierienstadt.

**18:07**

Tana's mother met old friends. Everyone slept in barracks, which were filled with lice, fleas, and foul smells from waste.

**18:57**

Inmates were fed once a day with soup. Tana saved the bread crusts, which she broke into little pieces to last for the day. She was in the children's part of the hospital many times with all kinds of childhood diseases. She once had a blood transfusion from her mother.

Children attended a day camp run by young inmates. They did some artwork. Tana remembers having to watch as men were brought into camp from trains. They were sick, half-starved, and freezing and made to stand nude outside until they died. The Nazis made sure that small children would remember these scenes.

**22:55**

Fortunately, Tana and her mother were in the same barracks and slept in the same bunk. She still has her teddy bear and will never part with it.

Tana remembers Minnie and Fritz Simon. Fritz was blinded in WWI. His wife was a secretary. They had no children until they got to Theresienstadt and had a son, Michael. Their friends kept their secret. They all survived and lived in Mt. Vernon, New York. Michael became a doctor.

**27: 14**

Tana did not come in contact with many Nazis. She does remember a German officer, Zimmerman (not an SS officer) who had known her family in Berlin before the war. He befriended them and saved their lives by destroying papers ordering them to be killed. When he was found out, he was killed.

Grandmother was not taken to the camp because she was born Protestant. Nazis measured Tana's mother's head and nose to determine whether she was Jewish, since her mother was not.

Mother remembered when Red Cross came to Theresienstadt and how the Nazis "dressed up" the camp. They opened bakeries and stocked the grocery stores.

**31:53**

Mother had several jobs, including picking rhubarb and spinach. She had told Nazis she had farming experience. Another job was to escort women to the water showers and try to reassure them that they were not gas chambers. She also had to go through boxes of ashes to see if there were any valuables. She recognized many of the names.

**34:34.**

Tana was often hospitalized because she had many childhood diseases. There were 75 to 100 children in a barracks. They had separate single beds but no bathroom facilities. The nursing staff was inmates.

**35: 43**

Night before liberation, signs were posted that everyone would be gassed. Next morning, camp was liberated by the Russians who kept inmates there for two weeks until they were able to walk on their own power. Then the prisoners were set free.

Mother and Tana decided to go to Berlin where grandmother still lived. They walked and hitched rides on haywagons. They stopped at one farm where the farmer gave them oatmeal.

**39:49**

When they got to Berlin, Tana remembers finding the indoor market close to her grandmother's home. Grandmother had no idea that Tana and mother had survived the war. She was overwhelmed

Mother decided to apply for a Visa to U.S or Israel for Tana and her mother. She knew she did not want to stay in Germany.

Tana was sent to Jewish Council in Switzerland for three months to recuperate and start school. She said that only 100 out of 15,000 children survived Theresienstadt.

Tana went to school in Berlin until 1949. Her mother worked for town hall in Berlin.

Mother, Tana, and grandmother got their visas and sailed on a U.S. Navy battleship to the United States. Everyone was very sick. Their final destination was Newark, New Jersey.

When they came to Newark, they were given a single room in a private house.

Mother got job as seamstress in factory. Had to pay rent for 1Br in home with kitchen privileges.

Tana went into 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She learned English quickly. Everyone was very helpful.

**49:16**

Mother remarried in 1952. Her husband was Archie Anklowitz. He had no children of his own. They moved to Irvington, New Jersey, and Tana graduated from Irvington High School. She worked for an insurance company and then a title company.

Her mother died in 1991.

In 1966, Tania married Donald Gelfer. They have a 26-year-old daughter, Karen, who is in advertising, and a 24-year-old son, Steve, who graduated from college and does computer work.

Tana works for Sears and Robuck. Her husband worked in the Post Office.

Tana remembers that after the war, her mother met a young Hungarian man who asked her to marry him. She learned that he was a Nazi war criminal and was trying to use her to get into America.

Before war (1938-1939) mother lived in Berlin as a Jew. She had to wear Star. But her mother did not.