

RG-50.106*0050
Frances Hirshfeld

Tape One,
Side A

46:

Born July 26, 1918,
Frieda Miriam Rosenbloom
Kielce. Poland

Father died before she was born. When she was five years old, her mother placed her in aunt's house in Zafiester

Larger town then Kielce... 35,000 people. Five or eight thousand Jews. Frances went to grammar school and gymnasium.

2:20

When 21 years old, Sept. 1939 war broke out. "I will never forget."

2:57

Studied reading, writing, and arithmetic. In gymnasium studied literature, history, and mathematics. Many friends. Happy home. Relatives who raised her were very good to her. Saw her mother frequently. Mother stayed with her for first full year.

"Life was a happy life."

4:34

Family conservative and very observant. Kept kosher. Cook had to be Jewish. Friends were mostly Jewish.

5:38

Taught how to pray in Hebrew by a tutor every day after school. Also learned history of Jewish religion. .

6:11

Family lived in business section of coalmine area. Uncle imported ten or more trainloads of coal and distributed it to factories and homes. He had a very successful business.

Father was a traveling salesman. Buried in Radom. Mother did not tell her much about father but did take her to the cemetery.

7:53

Loved by her uncle. As she got older, missed knowing about her father.

Got to know more of father later on through relatives, especially a cousin in Australia.

9:04

Lived in predominantly Catholic setting. Went to a Jewish grammar school. Gymnasium more selective. Only took Jews who could pay for it. Some incidents of anti-Semitism.

10:40

When war broke out began to feel anti-Semitism from the Polish people. Poles often reported on Jews.

Had some non-Jewish friends.

12:07

Husband told her that in Warsaw pre-med he had to stand at back of room because he was Jewish.

12:44

Jews heard news about Germany but were not too concerned until Kristallnacht. When Nazis came in, they took all Jewish professionals and shot them. It was very scary.

14:37

Describes reading about Kristallnacht in Polish newspapers. Everything Germans did was well planned and recorded. In middle of night they broke in and destroyed all Jewish synagogues and businesses. "They came in with a blast." Germans kept meticulous records.

17:17

When Poland invaded, everyone was running. Uncle loaded everything and everyone in a cart. Went to Ukraine, but decided to go back to Poland. Francis asked by uncle to go back to Poland. Had to smuggle herself through frozen rivers and borders. Germans had occupied family's apartment. Family in Ukraine then came back. Uncle's business had been confiscated. Worked as a secretary until had to stop because lack of transportation. Then worked in a factory that made uniforms for soldiers. Germans organized a Jewish organization (Judenrat) to manage Jews.

24:05

In beginning of war, she stayed with mother. Moved to a restricted area that was fenced in. Conditions so bad. People crammed into tight quarters. Winter long. Allowed to exit only if you had a permit.

Family lived in one room. Still had a Jewish cook. Aunt and one other family member deported. We had to register and were given food stamps.

Uncle's family: one daughter and Frances, who was like a daughter. Everybody except Frances perished.

"You had to obey orders. You had to wear white armbands with blue Star of David. Later we had to wear a yellow star."

Jews had to stay in ghetto. Could not go out. Could play cards and read.

Tape

Side B

Food rationed. Had meat very rarely. "We somehow survived. We had to come out and be counted."

Nazis deported old people and children. But tried to keep only people who could work.

34:17

Frances lived in ghetto from 1940 -1943. Life was miserable. If you were caught breaking a rule, you were severely punished. "Very difficult to live." Began to hear about Auschwitz. Frances was deported to Auschwitz.

37:17

Transports started 1942. Always lived in fear that you would be in next transport. In 1943, Frances was sent in one of last transports. Came in middle of night. Took only one bag. Loaded on cattle cars and packed in like sardines. At Auschwitz, ordered to strip. Every hair on body was shaved. Everyone was given a number and picked clothes from piles filled with lice. Dress was striped material. Hit if you complained. Number on arm also put on clothes. During winter inmates had to cut off material and sew patches into dresses.

Frances Number was 56,362

42:08

First impression when arrived. Hell. Nazis with dogs. One Nazi with one finger made decision who would live or die.

Uncle and nephew taken away. Frances sent to work in a hospital zone that was really awful. You saw chimney smoke and fire rising everyday.

Frances survived typhoid. "Can't possibly understand why I survived."

At Birkenau Frances contracted scabies. Very contagious. Female doctor suggested using own urine to wash skin. It is the most horrible itching disease. "The worst, the worst. "I don't know how I survived."

In Birkenau one miserable, rainy day in early 1944 ordered to go to a courtyard to see "entertainment." The "show" was to watch a woman, Mara, who was going to be hung for having tried to escape. She had razor and cut her wrists so died before she was hung.

51:03

Saw a woman go to barbed wire to kill herself, but guard saw her and shot her.

In hospital Frances tried to make patients comfortable by washing them and feeding them. One woman was being eaten by vermin. Many people had cholera.

No bathroom. Even people with cholera had no facilities. Male prisoners had to clean out the latrines with bare hands.

People dying like flies from hunger, illness, Winter so cruel.

Friendship essential to survive.

Almost daily selection. New transports coming in from Hungary and Romania. Other prisoners were sent away to make room for newcomers.

In munitions factory they worked on tiny parts of hand grenades. Hard work. Always hiding from bombs. Sheer hell in every instant.

1:00:10

Only knew about Warsaw uprising when survivors came into camp. "Unbelievable"

Part 2

1:23

Warsaw ghetto leveled. Nazis shot everyone. So many stories.

Heard about other camps from survivors who came to Auschwitz.

4:11

Jan. 18, 1945 started to march toward train station. Death march. Allied armies closing in on Germany. Freezing cold. Loaded into an open cattle car and sent to Ravensbruck. "Hell on wheels." Area like a pit. Slanted cement wall covered with excrement. Just had bread to eat.

A few days later shipped to Marhoff where they did nothing. After three months sent to Leipzig, final transport. April 1945 bombing so severe. Then marched to Dresden when it was being heavily bombed.

8:01

Ravensbruck was a pit. Just bread. Marhoff just a waiting place. Slept in brick building.

9:23

April 14, in middle of night marching between Leipzig and Dresden, Frances and another girl stepped out of march and went into a deep forest.. Finally noticed a church steeple and walked into the village. Met two women farmers who gave them potatoes with dirt. A man then, invited them into his home. Had marvelous meal with pork chops and cabbage and then given place to sleep. When awakened they had coffee and cheesecake.

During stay in village, they stole clothes from burgomaster's home. It was their only change of clothes.

Three weeks after escape, war ended. Russians occupied village.

21:06

Frances describes first moment of liberation. They went into village and could not believe that they were free.

Frances then went to Brussels with her friend. Jewish families who survived took in homeless Jews. She then started to try and locate families in United States. Found her uncle in Florida who then planned to bring her to America. She left for America on October 1946.

26:44

Describes how she spent her days waiting to go to America. Did not work, uncle kept sending money. Senator Pepper very helpful to uncle.

Describes personal life. Met many people, including her husband. Married just before she left Europe. She and husband had been neighbors in ghetto.

Her husband was Polish but was educated in University of France. He spoke eight languages, but loved French. Lost entire family, and he was imprisoned. After the war, he returned to Paris where he had a job...

Tape 2 Side B

Frances came to United States first. Husband came three years later. During that time, she went to see husband in Paris for six months. Became pregnant and came back to America. Husband came July 1949. He met an American reporter in Paris who wrote article about him. This helped get him into United States.

37:41

Frances and husband lived in South. Had a son. Husband made successful living as a textile engineer.

Husband died of asthma age 74.

40:59

When Frances went back to Poland to visit aunt's grave, she realized that Poles were still anti-Semitic

Talks about sister who had lost her baby in the camp. Describes how baby was tied in sack and sent to oven.

“How can people do such things, and yet people still deny it. That is a worry. Our days are limited.”