

HOLOCAUST INTERVIEW WITH FRANKA CHARLUPSKI

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0:04:46

From Lodz Poland. When the Germans came the Jews were herded into the ghetto, the family in one room. Her grandmother had a bakery in another city, and her mother and some sisters went there. Mother came back to the ghetto to see how they were doing, and then she couldn't leave again. They were six siblings. The entire family consisted of at least 50 people. They were comfortable but not wealthy. In the ghetto everybody worked. There was little food. They were in the ghetto from 1940 to 44. In 1944 in August they were taken to Auschwitz. They were separated, men to one side, women to the other. Her mother, her sister Rosa and herself to one side, and as they were walking, her mother was pulled out because she was recognized as a mother, and they never saw her again. She does not know what happened to her father. Rosa and Franka went to a concentration camp together.

10:32

They were taken out of their homes into the ghetto, which was fenced in. Her old neighborhood was predominantly Jewish. Some people did survive the ghetto, hiding there. When they were going to the ghetto, she felt despair. She remembers walking in the street seeing a German with a Polish girl who liked the coat Frank was wearing. The soldier took Franka's coat and gave it to her. That was before the ghetto.

14:30

Her first husband was denounced to the Gestapo. He was believed to have money. Husband was taken in and beaten, but released. Some Jews told on other Jews.

15:49

They had a room and a kitchen in the ghetto. It did have facilities. They stood on line for food. If they knew the policeman on duty, they might get another pound of potatoes. It was starvation conditions.

People got typhus. There was tremendous disease in the ghetto, and there was no help. Franka's family didn't get sick.

18:36

There was a curfew. There was no entertainment. Everybody stayed home. If you tried to get out of the ghetto, naturally you were shot. Otherwise there was no violence in the ghetto.

29:59

One day Frank didn't go to work. There was a truck in the court-

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yard. Mothers knew that the Germans were coming to get the children. Franka saw something fly by the window. The Germans were throwing children out the window from the fourth and fifth floors into the truck. She will never forget it. That was the most horrible thing she saw.

21:44

The family in the ghetto went to Auschwitz together. Her sisters outside, she didn't hear about until after the war. In Bergen Belsen a fellow recognized Franka and told her that her sisters were alive. Two brothers and a sister didn't survive.

23:52

Before the war, they were an orthodox family, the children went to public school. They were raised to respect people and honor their parents' wishes. They went to the theater and the movies. They lived a normal European life.

25:03

Franka had German friends. They used to go to village outside Lodz where they rented a house every summer. In 1933 when Hitler came to power, her German friends asked her to go with them to a dance, as she had done before, but that time it had a different feel. They didn't treat her the same way as before. They never went back to that place.

27:44

Friday night at their house, everybody took baths and got dressed for shabbat, they lit candles, they had a meal. It was a very very orthodox home.

28:26

Her father did keep kosher in the ghetto. When they got a ration of horse meat, her father refused to eat it. Her father had a beard. The Germans did shave his beard. Her parents needed a picture for a passport, father had to cut his beard for that picture. That was the day they hanged 12 Jews in the square and everybody had to come out and see it.

30:40

It was a shock to see her father without a beard.

31:08

She doesn't remember how she found out about the transport. They might have been taken without notice, but she remembers being pushed into the cattlecars in August. The trip to Auschwitz took 3 days. They put as many clothes on as they could. In the cattle car people were dying right and left from hunger, from the smell. At Auschwitz they were separated. She held on to her mother. It was a big mistake. Her mother was 44 years old. Franka is sure she would have survived if they hadn't hung on to her. She would have gone to work like the rest of them. They never saw

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her again.

34:39

When the door to the cattlecars opened there were Kapos around who told them to give up everything they had. The kapos were inmates. They didn't give them their things. They were taken to the showers, they were shaved. Franka was not given a number, apparently there was no time. SS men were walking by, women standing naked, heads shaven. Whoever had a spot or a scar was taken out right away.

They got clothes after the showers, long dresses for short women, and vice versa. In the barracks there were bunks with straw pallets, a horrible rusty dish. They didn't go to work. She was only there for three days. One August night they were sitting outside the gas chambers, shivering. An SS woman with a whip came by and counted them, as they held on to each other. Franka's sister was 298, Franka 299, her girlfriend 300. They were taken away, but knew they were not going to the gas chambers which were in the opposite direction. They were taken to the showers and given a top, a shirt and a kerchief. Stayed overnight in the barracks, and then on train to Bremen. Assigned to barracks and work. Franka was with Hungarian women. Didn't speak each other's language, but German they had in common. Some of the Hungarian women did not like having Polish women in their midst. They walked 8 kilometers to work in clogs. They cleaned bricks for reuse. She met a German woman with one arm, and Franka asked if she could help and hoped for an extra piece of bread. Franka was invited into her house. The woman made lunch for her.

41:42

Franka told her she had sisters, the woman gave her sandwiches for her sisters. The woman turned on the radio so Franka could know what was going on. Every afternoon Franka spent a couple of hours in the woman's house. In a bombed house, they stole food etc. Franka got in through a basement window and found a velvet vest among a lot of good things. Franka put on the vest. The woman of the house walked in and asked what Franka was doing in her son's Hitler Jugend vest. Franka went back out the window and hid. The house owner went to the SS, but Franka was not caught.

45:29

A German Wehrmacht man who had lost his arm was their foreman. The women stole winter vegetables. If somebody complained about missing vegetables, the foreman would say it had to be the Russians from the other camp. He was good to them and never scolded them. During an air raid, the foreman took them into a good air raid shelter, but the Germans in the shelter refused to be in the room with Jews, and the foreman had to take the Jews to an open space. A bomb fell on the bunker, but not one person in the open was injured.

48:26

In Auschwitz, Franka didn't think her mother, young and healthy, would have gone to the gas chamber. She never found out but knew. The chimneys in Auschwitz were going full blast. They didn't know that an Auschwitz existed.

49:48

Sitting outside the gas chamber, her mind started wandering. She knew she was going to die. Doesn't like to think about it. There must have been a reason why she was better than the other 6 million. Why me? She was right there, but for some reason she is still here. She could scratch the eyes out of the professor who says the Holocaust never happened, and she wouldn't feel ashamed of it.

51:20

She was in Bremen from the end of August to the 7th of April, and liberated on the 15. The camp leader told them they had to evacuate because the Russians were coming, so they were given a loaf of bread, put them on a cattle car and took them to Bergen Belsen. They waited until dark to take the prisoners of the cars, The reason for the need for darkness became clear the next morning. There were dead bodies all over. They were taken to a small barracks containing 800 women of all different nationalities. Franka had to go to the toilet, and somebody pointed outside. There was a funny smell, it wasn't a toilet smell. As they got closer they saw arms, legs, heads separated lying 15 high in the toilet. She wakes up at night seeing that image. They had to drag bodies into mass graves.

When the English came in, they had to be taken away. It was too much for the soldiers. Her sister got sick of typhus, like 75% of the camp. One morning her sister said she would like a piece of lemon. Franka went to the English kitchen and made them understand what she wanted, and a soldier gave her a lemon. On the way to the barracks, she saw an English and German soldier walking together. The English asks the German what happened in the camp. German said he didn't know. Franka went up to the English soldier and said: He has been here so and long, and he doesn't know. I have been here 7 days, but let me tell you what happened here. And she told him. The water was poisoned. Nothing to eat. If you see the dead bodies you will get the picture, etc.

At Bergen Belsen there was no food. If you walked a potato you would never survive. After liberation they opened the storage, there was plenty of food. People were so starved, they were sitting with a can of beans in their hands, dead. Pork and beans was a killer.

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58:33

They stayed in the barracks. her sister taken to the hospital. They remained in the barracks until the SS barracks were cleaned up, they moved in there , two to three girls to a room. They stayed there for a few months, then to a displaced persons camp. The authorities wanted to send her to Sweden, but she refused to go. Didn't know if anybody in her family had survived. Her sister developed a gall bladder problem. A German doctor wanted to operate, but Franka didn't let him. She later got some medication that cleared it up.

1:00:24

Fate allowed her to survive. She has children and grandchildren. She tries to help others as much as she can. She feels she owes society something. Feels there was a reason why she survived. Doing charity she is repaying. She is grateful for being alive. The US was her savior, she loves this country. She won't even visit Poland. She might go with her children to Poland if they insisted on seeing it.

Has spoken to young people. Finds them very responsive. She doesn't enjoy talking about it, but wants to make others aware.