

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

**Name of interviewee:** Gage, Francis

**Date of interview:** 6/5/1991

**Summary:** Frances was born on August 15, 1923, in a small town in Poland. She lived with her parents, Aaron and Ruth Scheffler, and four brothers (one older and three younger). The family spoke Yiddish at home. They were Orthodox; her father was a businessman and felt that education was very important. Frances went to a mixed school, but says that there was plenty of anti-Semitism in her town and among the Polish people in general. She describes anti-Semitic incidents in the town, and how when the Germans came in, the Poles were quick to point out which of their neighbors were Jewish.

Frances was married at age 17 to a man from a neighboring town, whose parents were family friends. She was seven months pregnant in June, 1941, when her husband, father, and two brothers were deported to Posen to work. When her daughter, Ilke, was one month old, Frances, her mother and her two youngest brothers, along with the new baby, were rounded up and sent to Lodz ghetto. This was in September of 1941. They were hardly given any time to gather up their belongings, and Frances took only a few diapers with her. She said she was not aware of the political situation and no one had any idea of what was to come; she was eighteen years old.

In the ghetto, there was barely enough to eat. Frances worked ten hours a day scrubbing floors in order to earn enough money to feed herself and her baby. She briefly describes the conditions in the ghetto. There were roundups and deportations of people who were put on trains. The residents of the ghetto did not know where they were taken. In one of these roundups, the Germans gathered all the children and elderly people - Frances' daughter was taken at the age of one year and seven days. Frances' husband never got to meet their child.

In 1944, the Lodz ghetto was liquidated and the people were sent to Auschwitz. Frances went with her mother and two younger brothers, and provides some details about the conditions of the journey. When they reached Auschwitz, Frances' mother was immediately sent to the crematorium. Frances describes Dr. Mengele putting her mother in the line to the gas chambers. She does not know exactly what happened to her younger brothers, who did not survive. She saw her father once in Auschwitz, where he had also been sent, but he was a shadow of his former self; neither he nor her other brothers survived. She describes selections in Auschwitz.

Frances spent about six weeks in Auschwitz. Later, she was sent to Freiberg, a camp where she worked on airplanes in a factory. As the Russians approached, the Germans sent the prisoners to Mauthausen. Frances describes the terrible

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conditions and sights of Mauthausen, where most people (including her) were too weak to work. The Americans liberated Mauthausen on May 5, 1945. After the war, Frances returned to Poland to look for her family. None of her relatives survived, but she learnt that her husband was alive and she was eventually reunited with him. He had spent some time in Auschwitz working in a coal mine. Frances describes the ongoing anti-Semitism in Poland even after the war, and the reaction of the people who- instead of welcoming the Jews back and celebrating their survival - said things like, "What? You're still here? I thought they got all of you."

Frances' daughter Ruth was born in Germany, and when she was about two years old - maybe around 1947 or 1948 - an aunt of Frances was able to get them tickets to America. They moved to California, where they had two more children, Benjamin and George. Frances' children and grandchildren are named after her parents, brothers, and her first daughter. She has gone back to Germany with her husband because he was testifying in a trial against Nazi war criminals, and she says she would like to go to Auschwitz to say Kaddish, but her husband does not want to go.