

Interview with FRANCES GAGE  
Holocaust - Oral History Project  
Date:                      Place:  
Interviewer: Ruth  
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Q       WOULD YOU TELL ME YOUR NAME, PLEASE?

A       Frances Gage.

Q       AND WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

A       I was born in Poland.

Q       IN WHAT YEAR?

A       In 1923, it was the 15th.

Q       WHAT TOWN WERE YOU BORN IN?

A       The little town, Braunlau (?) And I was 15 years old when the war started. And by that time I was 16 when Hitler come to our little town. I had four brothers and my parents. We lived very happily in just - in our little town. We were an upper class family and everything was fine until Hitler come and made a mess of the whole thing.

Q       AND WHAT HAPPENED, WERE YOU DEPORTED, WERE YOU SENT TO CAMP?

A       Well, I knew my husband from three - since I was 14 years old. When I was 17 years old we were married. His parents said that it would be best that we would be married. Single people were always sent away. When you were married you can be with the family together. You just called a family. So I was married when I was 17. When I was ten months married they took away my father, my two brothers and my husband to Poesin (?) and I was seven months pregnant.

Q POESIN WAS?

A Poesin was in Poland and when the baby was four weeks old and this was - I mixed up the whole thing. I was married in 1940. In 1941 they sent us, everybody out. My husband to Poesin. My parents - oh God.

Q DO YOU WANT TO START OVER? ITS FINE, WE'RE GOING TO EDIT ALL THIS ANY WAY.

A You will? Okay. And then after they sent away, away and I don't remember exactly which month, a little before the High Holidays, they sent us to the ghetto, to Lauch, in 1941.

Q THEY SENT YOU AND YOUR MOTHER -- AND TWO YOUNGER BROTHERS --?

A And my four weeks old baby. They sent us to the ghetto to Lauch. We didn't get too much letters from Poesin. My mother always sent a card to Poesin but we don't know but they got it. News that they are alive or not and we didn't get nothing from them.

In 1942, it was a \_\_\_\_\_, they closed up all the streets in the ghetto and they started taking sick people, old people and children to ten years old, thrown on wagons - it was horrible and they took my baby away too.

And then later on \_\_\_\_\_ you are young, you can work and that time my mother started to lose weight and she was very depressed but I didn't see it. When we came to get to my brother broke a leg, his foot, went in

and it was a turn, he was with the wagon until they could stop the horses and it turned out he was a whole year in the cast and he never could walk straight and his foot was he could never wear a shoe right; but he worked later in the ghetto.

The younger, like the children 12 years, they took them 12 o'clock at night to 6 o'clock in the morning without food. They have no days, no night.

Well, by that time when they took away, we still was in the ghetto too until 1943. My father come back with two of my brothers to the ghetto and I think there were two or three weeks and it was after a year and a half I didn't recognize my father. He was a big, heavy man, beautiful man, but he was so thin, I just recognized the voice, but I did not recognize him. After that they sent him back away. Everything my brother said to my mother, "Mom, I am so weak, I can't stay on my feet." But she couldn't help him, the poor woman, what could she do?

We tried everything to let them come out to be free in the ghetto but it didn't help to send them out. I can't talk.

Q IT'S ALL RIGHT.

A Well, in 1945 they sent us from the ghetto.

Oh, I didn't tell you in the ghetto I was 18 years old they took me to - and I didn't have anybody to help me, to advise - so they took me to wash clothes. I got the job

washing clothes. I was making \$18.00 a week and I needed maybe \$20.00. I was washing clothes by hand ten hours a day, seven days a week and didn't make enough to buy the rations. We didn't bring too much, they gave us just a half hour to pack and when - they gave us to pack - so we didn't bring too much. But what we did bring we sold it out so we could buy some little bit more food, somebody was selling or what. It was not enough, my brothers were all swollen.

Q SWOLLEN FROM STARVATION?

A Yes. In 1944, that was - I think in September - they sent us all out from the ghetto to Auschwitz. When we came to Auschwitz it was such a mix up, in one minute I didn't see my brothers and I didn't see my mother. Yes, my mother went with me and Dr. Mengele said left and right and left and right so my mother went one side and they asked how old she was and she was and she said I am 42 years old, but she was looking so worn out that she didn't look her age at all and I was 21. And it's hard.

Q OF COURSE. DO YOU WANT TO STOP FOR A FEW MINUTES?

A Then my mother went to one side and I went to the other side. There were just - we didn't know where we went.

First thing they took all the jewelry down from you. If somebody got it with them what they got. Later they took all the clothes down from you and you come in the other room. They cut the hair all around, all of you just like a child was born without hair. The other one, they

give you a cold shower to mix up your mind that you don't know where you are going and what you are doing. Later you stay in the line all naked. One got a skirt, the other one got a blouse, the other one got a dress. No brassier, no underwear, nothing. They just let you go and they were sitting and we were in the back. I met a guy and I recognized his voice and I said to him I know you. He said where do you know me from? You are from the same town what I am. He asked me who I am and I said I am Aaron Sheffer's daughter, Frauna. He said, my God \_\_\_\_\_.

I said my hair is not the matter. I don't want to be somebody older. Well, he said, lady please help me find my mother. She said where is she, he said she is on the other side, she said you will never see her again. And I never see my mother.

I was in Auschwitz six weeks. It was such a terrible thing. You stay in the same place, you sit in the same place and you sleep in the same place, was nothing, just right on the floor, was no way not to move, when you say move to somebody you just -- throw cold water or they beat you with a broom -- not just me I didn't get too much beating but the Jewish girls from Chesolovakia, from Poland \_\_\_\_\_, and that after I looking for somebody.

You couldn't - nobody in recognize and the minute you couldn't recognize each other it was so different and from that they picked up a few people they get all the selection,

they check you; when you have one little scratch on you right away it was the other side to the crematorium.

I was sent to Freiburg (?). I was sent to Freiburg and in Freiburg I worked by the factory to build airplanes. After, I don't know how many months we were there. We lived in the factory. We never had a little air for months. We went from back and forth. We worked from 12:00 to 12:00, twelve hours a day, from 12 midnight to 12 in the day time. Six o'clock we get dinner, everybody got dinner, it was a little soup and a piece of bread. Oh yes, in the morning by 6 o'clock in the morning, I don't know what time it was, we got a little cold coffee. We worked 12 hours a day. After that they picked up a few girls that were a little stronger and - I still looked - I don't know how but I never was a skeleton and they took me to work in the \_\_\_\_\_. This is like to work where they spray the airplanes and I worked awful hard. By then, by that time we worked the same thing like the other ones 12 hours a day and at one time there was a big mish-mauch and they give us - at night - they say pack what you had, well, we didn't have nothing, just the only thing what we had was what we wore on ourselves.

You washed and you put up wet, sometime you can put up, they never gave us changes of nothing not in Freiburg. They put us in open wagons, how much we could.

I didn't tell you, from home when the packed us

from home, they gave us a half hour and we couldn't take nothing this is \_\_\_\_\_.

I had a little four week old baby. I mixed everything up, with a four week old baby I just took a few things for the baby and we went out with nothing from home and I really had nothing and we had lots of beautiful things at home.

From the ghetto we left what we brought in the ghetto we left. We took nothing to Auschwitz and now again.

Q WHAT WAS THE MONTH YOU ARRIVED IN AUSCHWITZ?

A Oh, I don't know.

Q WAS IT EARLY IN THE YEAR?

A Late in the year, it was raining when we stayed in Auschwitz, maybe it was September.

Q SO RIGHT BEFORE THE HIGH HOLY DAYS?

A Something like that, before the High Holy Days. I don't know really.

Q OKAY.

A And when we came, I don't think this part will be very good. I mixed up dates. I am so excited. I get so emotional.

Q THAT'S ALL RIGHT.

A I get so emotional. My husband is getting mad at me sometimes he says, "Why are you doing it to yourself?"

Q STOP AND TAKE A DEEP BREATH. WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF TIME.

A And we came to, I don't know how many concentration camps we passed. They gave us a piece of bread. We went to south Czechoslovakia. We went past there they gave us a little piece of bread and little soup in Czechoslovakia. They gave us a little bit and we came into Marthousin.

Q SO THIS WOULD BE JANUARY OF '45?

A No, no, no it was before

Q IT WAS BEFORE?

A I don't know the date.

Q I AM JUST TRYING TO GET A SENSE OF TIME.

A I don't know the month. We never had -- we knew one thing, it was a Saturday, we got a double portion of bread -- month, but what month and what day we don't know it. And then week and somebody person they start screaming and a lots of girls we never would come out any more. But there were people were so sick there. They were laying in the dirt when they making on themselves. They were so sick, so dying, so many dead bodies, so many.

They give us some kind to work to carry back and forth and then most of them they were laying sick.

Q WAS THERE TYPHOUS?

A Typhous, yes, but I was sick, I had blocking out, everything, could keep nothing inside and I don't know how many weeks.

It must have been the end of -- maybe it was in



February or March, but I know that on May 5th, 1945 the Americans came in. I don't know how it was the people were dead and they stand up to welcome the Americans. It was a beautiful day, it was to see the white car with the white flag and the Germans were still shooting down and still fighting back.

And I was there, not long, maybe two months I was after the war and I went back to Poland. I hardly could walk. I had swollen feet. I had mens shoes, maybe size 42 put some paper in and that's all what I got. I made me from my bed a little skirt and a blouse and with that I went back to Poland to look for the family and didn't found nobody. Nobodys alive, but I had a friend of mine that now they live in Los Angeles, he told me that my husband is alive. And he, but he didn't know exactly where he was. So I found my husband's family in Poland. I stayed with them and another friend come and give me the address. And I had a beautiful dream, my mother came that I shouldn't stay here any longer and then she said you go to Germany and you will find your husband.

So there was a group of boys and girls went and I went with them and I was looking for my husband, maybe two weeks, I was going from place to place, in the English zone, the American zone and he was living in the French zone and I meet him again.

Well, in September 15 will be forty years we have

been married. We are very happy. We have three beautiful children. They are all married, thanks God and I have four grandchildren. And two years ago we went to Israel for a reunion. This year we went to Washington.

Q WAS THAT YOUR FIRST TRIP TO ISRAEL?

A No, no, we were before and, please God, next year we are planning to go again if will be we will and we are going to England. I have some family in England so we go to see them. I have beautiful children, good children. My daughter-in-law just sent me flowers for Mother's Day. Sunday we go to my daughter's and --

Q I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW MORE QUESTIONS IF I MAY?

A Yes do. Not too hard ones I am awful tired.

Q NO, I UNDERSTAND. TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR REUNION WITH YOUR HUSBAND. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER FROM THAT DAY?

A Well, I got the wrong address first thing when I find out where he is -- everybody said that he should come to me after the war but he didn't know that I am alive, that's what I understood. An my mother's dream told me not to stay here too long just to go that I will find him. So I just took my mother's advice. You know, don't make a point but I am telling you the truth, any time I am in some kind of bad or what I dream my mother and I am always glad. I am always coming out right. She was a beautiful woman.

She told me in the ghetto not to work so hard that

when my husband comes back I should have a little bit more strength, I will have more children. I have to have strength to have it. She was right.

And then, well we were strangers when we met. We hardly knew each other. We worked hard to become friends and husband and wife and we accomplished a lot.

We were very poor. We didn't have nothing. My husband didn't make no black market. And, oh, yes, I got a letter from America in 1945 when my aunt. The letter was somebody's alive from the family Sheffler. When I got the letter I wrote her back and she sent me why my name is different not Sheffler, Gage. I wrote her that I am married. By that time my daughter was born. Ruth was born in 1946, December 6. She is named after my mother and we are very happy once more.

Q WHEN DID YOU COME TO AMERICA?

A Oh, March 17 we came to Stockton.

Q OF WHAT YEAR?

A 1949.

Q SO YOU WAITED FOUR YEARS?

A No, I got my aunt sent me papers right away, right away in 1946 but we have to wait for the quota, for the Polish quota. She was to pay for the airplane. She was to pay for everything. By that time I was expecting my daughter when I got her letter but now we have to wait for the quota. So Ruth was two years old when we came to

America. When Ruth was four years old and three weeks old Ben was born, Benjamin Aron, he's named after my father Aron and Benjamin after my husband's father. I have the youngest one, George, he is named after my husband's mother Gella is George.

Now, George has two little girls, Shawn and Tiffany. Ruth has Elliott and Ben has Johnny Michael. They are beautiful children, you can see them.

Q DID YOUR CHILDREN ASK YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FAMILY?

A I will tell you something, I never stop telling to them. Especially my daughter is very interested. She knows everything. I bring home records and we always talk, they know everything where we are and from where we come and our roots from home, they know it. I also tell Elliott, he should know in case he learns from school to know that his Buba and Sada, this is grandma and grandpa, they were in the concentration camp. And we are not from stone, we had families but they were all killed in the war.

Q DOES HE ASK YOU QUESTIONS, DOES ELLIOTT ASK YOU QUESTIONS?

A Not yet.

Q NO?

A But he was in the airline, in the airport when we left to Washington and little tiny baby when we went to Israel. No just a minute that was for the first time, for

the second time he was a big boy already.

Q SO THERE IS A LOT OF OPEN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN?

A Oh, yes, we are very close. Very beautiful, close my children are beautiful. We are good parents, but they are also good children.

What would you like to know I will tell you again, I feel better now.

Q I HAVE ONE QUESTION. BEFORE YOU CAME TO THE UNITED STATES DID YOU STAY IN GERMANY?

A Yes, many years in Bavaria -- before we stayed in the French zone but later my husband thinks it would be much better in a little town. Enatoch was nothing just a little, so we have lots of friends in the American, zone and we came. As a matter of fact I met lots of people in Washington to see that we were neighbors.

Q IN GERMANY WHILE YOU WERE WAITING?

A We were living there in -- neighbors, lovely people, we were so happy to see each other it was amazing.

Q WHAT WERE YOU DOING DURING THOSE YEARS WHILE YOU WERE WAITING TO EMIGRATE?

A My husband was working. He was a shoe maker, he was working.

Q AND YOU WERE WITH YOUR CHILDREN?

A When I had my little girl, just one little baby I had, yes. My aunt sent us -- we get all the -- some food

with the Americans sent. And then my husband was working and then we came to America. We didn't come rich. We were poor. We didn't make no black market.

Q HOW DID YOU HAVE ANY DEALINGS WITH THE GERMAN PEOPLE?

A No, you mean did we like them or we ignore them. Well, we live by Mrs. Rain and I'm telling you she was not a Nazi. She was one of the finest, gentle lady. She helped me to raise my daughter and we went out to the theater, to a show, or some place she would not allow to come a babysitter. She didn't trust her. She took her in her bedroom until we came home. When she went out she baked cookies or she bring the cookie or candy or something, it was amazing how she was nice to us.

Well, there were lots of Nazis, lots were good people too.

Q WHEN YOU WENT BACK TO POLAND TO LOOK FOR FAMILY, DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY HOSTILITY FROM THE POLES?

A I will tell you a story. When we came to Catovin by train from Austria and I went into the bathroom and I need five cents, they let me stay maybe three hours and I didn't have money and a girl did not believe me. She said, "What did you bring with you, give it to me." And I don't have anything and the let me stay maybe three hours and the let me out until the train was leaving to Lauch for just five cents. They were not too good, the Poles. We have

nothing in common with them.

Q HAVE YOU BEEN BACK TO POLAND SINCE -- ?

A No. To who? To what? What I look there -- I have nothing.

Oh, my husband, we were in Germany four years ago, my husband was a witness and he recognized the man what was working. My husband worked in the coal mine in Germany and Yauoshna was the name and he recognized the guys the \_\_\_\_\_ that was there, but my husband is not the type to talk nothing bad. He didn't talk nothing bad at nobody.

Q SO HE WENT -- YOU WENT BACK TO GERMANY? DID YOUR HUSBAND GIVE TESTIMONY OR NO?

A He did.

Q HE --

A Oh, I was there with him four years ago.

Q WHAT WAS THAT LIKE FOR YOU?

A Terrible, I couldn't take it. I broke down after it and they said you are free, you are free don't worry about it, but it takes too much out of us.

Q I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU ONE MORE QUESTION, IF I MAY?

A Yes.

Q DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANTISEMITISM IN THIS COUNTRY? DO YOU SEE IT OCCURRING? ARE YOU AWARE OF IT?

A Well, I will answer you. It is a free country and it is a beautiful country and no can give so much to people who want to work like America does. I love this country

very much. I also love Israel. Israel, we need Israel more than anything so we can go with the head up but the roots are here. We came very poor to American and I won't go no place. I'd like to go for a visit to Israel, but I don't know. I like to live here. I am a good Jew believe me.

Q I CAN SEE THAT.

A But I love America, it's a land of opportunity.

Q WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR YOU AT THE WASHINGTON GATHERING AND BEFORE THAT IN JERUSELM?

A Jeruselm, I was not tired, I was so free. I loved every minute what I was there in Jeruselm. I met nice people. The children are so free there, they have so much freedom and it's very beautiful and Washington was a very nice experience, it was touching. Hurts, all the reminders and all the things. I really don't know what to tell you.

Q BUT YOU WOULD GO AGAIN?

A Definetely, yes. I just tell to my husband when God give you life we can walk in our feet any place that we go. It is nice to see the people, it is nice to experience.

Q SO ALTHOUGH IT'S VERY PAINFUL --

A It's painful, but we will go again.

Q IS THERE ANY RELIEF IN TALKING ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE?

A No, it makes me upset.

Q SO IT MAKES IT WORSE TO TALK?

A Hurts terrible. I am not from a stone.



Q SO WHY DO YOU TALK ABOUT IT?

A Well, you asked me to talk, I want to help you. So now, I won't tell you and somebody else won't tell you how would you know? You couldn't do, no writing everything would just be quite but it is not so. They should never forget or never forgive.

I think we have enough.