

1  
2 Interview with: ESTER KORMAN

3  
4 Reporter/Transcriber: ALAN F. BOWIN, R.P.R.

5  
6 Date Transcribed: November 19, 1986

7  
8 \* \* \*

9  
10 BY THE INTERVIEWER:

11 Q. Your name and where and when you were  
12 born?

13 A. My name is Edja (phonetic) Korman.  
14 They call me here Ester because it's more a Polish  
15 name. And I'm born in Przemysl (Sha-mish), in  
16 Poland, and my family lived around that area, the  
17 little small towns in that area, and we were in the  
18 ghetto in Przemysl.

19 Q. When were you born?

20 A. And I was born on June 30, 1925. And  
21 my father was -- not interesting. My father had  
22 five sisters, three brothers; my mother had ten  
23 sisters and one brother, and it was a very huge  
24 family, with children, each aunt and uncle had  
25 children, and we are two survivors from the whole

1 Ester Korman

2 family, me and my sister.

3 When Hitler occupied German -- Poland, right  
4 after that, Russia came in and we were under the  
5 Russian occupation, and I was still a young --  
6 a minor, so I went a little bit to the Russian  
7 school. Then, when Hitler came, he took over and  
8 he took us, like, to labor, work, in our town.

9 And I was working and trying -- and made a  
10 ghetto, right, as probably everybody knows. All  
11 the little towns were taken to one big town and  
12 made a ghetto out of it. I was very Polish-Irish  
13 looking. I was blond and I was the only one from  
14 my house -- I had five sisters and a brother. I  
15 was the only one who was able to go out, out of the  
16 ghetto, smuggle some food in or took off the band,  
17 the Mogen David and bring in some food for the two  
18 years of the ghetto we had, and worked in a -- like  
19 -- how would you call it? Not labor camp, but in  
20 the ghetto, and go out and every day bring -- go to  
21 work and, on the way back, bring a little bit  
22 food.

23 Before -- the first thing what they did is  
24 took my father out and they killed him right there  
25 in the ghetto. So we were left with my mother and

1 Ester Korman

2 my sisters and my brother, one brother.

3 Each time, they started to take out more and  
4 more people -- I'm going to say a little shorter  
5 because it's a long story. They were taking the  
6 little bit older, or weaker. Somehow, I was pretty  
7 strong and I was working, so they kept me, like,  
8 to the end. But at the end, I saw the -- I was  
9 already coming towards the end, and I knew that I  
10 have to run away.

11 I had some friends connection with Polish  
12 Catholic people, and one day they came in close to  
13 the ghetto, and I was going to work, and I took off  
14 my band I was Jewish and I ran away with my sister  
15 and my sister's husband, who also didn't look  
16 Jewish, and we were able to escape.

17 I was -- we were hiding in -- like, in the  
18 grass during the day and, at night, we walked  
19 through and we went out to this Polish family.

20 When we came there, there was no food, so my  
21 brother-in-law had to go out to find some food for  
22 us. She made a little hole in where the stable  
23 was, and, like, we were just able to sit a whole  
24 day the way we sitting now, and twice or three  
25 times a week she used to bring us in a little bit

1 Ester Korman

2 food.

3 During the night, we were able to come up a  
4 little bit, stretch the legs, because it was quiet  
5 and nobody -- there wasn't danger. She was in  
6 danger just the same as I was, because there were  
7 signs everywhere: Any Polack will find a Jew or  
8 keep a Jew, they're going to kill them just the  
9 same.

10 So, we were there, like, from a couple weeks  
11 and my brother-in-law said he has a friend who he  
12 has by him, like, clothes and things; maybe he's  
13 going to give them all up and he'll bring us some  
14 food. This guy -- when he came into him, this guy  
15 kept him there and killed him. He never came back.

16 So then we were left alone. We really  
17 couldn't survive there for too long because these  
18 people didn't think it would take such a long time;  
19 they thought, maybe for a couple weeks. But they  
20 -- they were nice and they kept us for two and a  
21 half years.

22 And every day they used to tell us lies.  
23 They used to tell, "Don't worry, they coming  
24 already, you'll be liberated," to give us the  
25 spirit, to give us their food they didn't have

1 Ester Korman

2 themselves that much.

3 So we were -- like twice a week, three times  
4 a week, some potatoes and water.

5 And we were there, like, for two and a half  
6 years, hoping maybe we'll see somebody, maybe  
7 somebody will get.

8 I was undernourished and I was -- wasn't able  
9 even to walk when I -- because of the sitting. So  
10 I was sitting there for, like, two and a half years  
11 and only you stretch my legs out, and I thought  
12 I'll never see anybody.

13 But the Russian came and liberated us, and  
14 they took me to the hospital, and I was in the  
15 hospital for a couple weeks there, and they -- I  
16 came back and I started my new life, started to  
17 work a little bit, and with my sister who lost her  
18 husband and was with me.

19 Q. Did you stay in Poland?

20 A. And we stayed in Poland for a couple  
21 of months, and they started the pogrom again. The  
22 -- wherever they saw Jews, they were killing them  
23 again. So I started, knowing the Polish, the  
24 Polish, Polish, and they called it "armeakryova"  
25 (phonetic), they -- they anti-Semites.

1 Ester Korman

2 They said, "Oh, you were liberated. How did  
3 you get to stay alive?" And, "Well, if you weren't  
4 killed by Germans, we going to kill you, too."

5 So we really -- so I started to wear a cross  
6 and I started to be again as a Polish woman and I  
7 started to work a little bit for people; they  
8 didn't know that I'm Jewish.

9 And then, when 1945, I heard there is --  
10 everybody is going to the German side; there  
11 is displaced camps. We decided to run away  
12 from Poland and to go look, maybe somebody has  
13 survived. We went everywhere looking. Like in  
14 Germany, Fahrenwald (phonetic); I was in Landsberg.  
15 I was everywhere looking for people, but I didn't  
16 find anybody.

17 Then, in fact, today, I'm looking everywhere;  
18 there is nobody alive, because where my town was,  
19 they didn't take to camps. I know my brother was  
20 in camp, but one of his friend ran away, so they  
21 took ten other people and -- for -- in his place,  
22 and they killed them right there.

23 And all the stories till today. But I'm  
24 here, really, to show that I'll never forget and  
25 to tell the story to my children and grandchildren.

1 Ester Korman

2 Because it took a long time. I didn't want to talk  
3 about it. I didn't want to even say. I wanted to  
4 forget. Matter of fact, there is a lot of people  
5 that I remember and I erased them, but as I'm  
6 getting older I start to remember.

7 Why did I do all that time? I want to tell  
8 the story because, pretty soon, there won't be  
9 anybody to tell the story. And I have two sons.  
10 I never told them the story when they were young.  
11 I didn't want to inflict the pain upon them. But  
12 now they really want to hear it and they really  
13 questioning -- it's very hard to talk about it  
14 because it really hurts. But, like, right now, you  
15 -- really, you take a pill, you take a tranquilizer  
16 and you speak out. You really -- and that's why  
17 I'm here, to be able to say. I have a sister who  
18 was pretty sick, so she couldn't come, the one I  
19 was with her. She couldn't come, and she says --  
20 she's in the United States, she's in New York City,  
21 and thank God I came to the United States and we --  
22 thank God --

23 Q. When did you come to the United States?

24 A. First we came -- yes, after  
25 liberation we didn't have where to go, so we went

1 Ester Korman

2 to Fahrenwald, to displaced camp, and we stayed  
3 there and we met -- I met my husband, who was  
4 also alone, and the two of us, we made a life for  
5 ourselves; we went to Paris. And my older son was  
6 born there. And from Paris -- my sister was  
7 already in United States. We had an aunt here who  
8 brought us over. So, from Paris, she brought me  
9 over to United States.

10 I lived in New York, and that's where my  
11 children got educated. I'm very proud of them.  
12 He's a doctor and the other one is a scientist  
13 in Harvard. And I have two lovely grandchildren,  
14 and I'm very happy to be alive and to be here,  
15 no matter what. And I'm very thankful to United  
16 States for giving me the life here where I thought  
17 I'll never have any more life, that we would be  
18 wandering from one country to the other. But we  
19 found a home in United States, and that's why I'm  
20 here.

21 Q. What was the name of the town where you  
22 were from?

23 A. The town was Biercza (Beer-cha).

24 Q. And was that in --

25 A. And Przemysl. The ghetto was in



1 Ester Korman

2 Przemysl because Biercza didn't have a ghetto.  
3 Was a smaller town and didn't have a ghetto. So  
4 they took us right away to Przemysl, and from all  
5 the little towns, and that's where we had two years  
6 a ghetto.

7 Q. What do you think about the Polish  
8 situation now?

9 A. Well, right now they -- I sympathize  
10 with them because, no matter what, there are still  
11 good people. I -- I'm in contact with the people  
12 who helped me; I send them money, packages. I love  
13 to bring them here but they're very old and I'm  
14 afraid to touch them. And I -- there is some of  
15 them you could love, and I feel sorry for them that  
16 what happened now.

17 I think they lost out a lot, because I think  
18 the Jews should have been in every country. They  
19 shouldn't be just concentrated; they should have  
20 been free to be in every country. But unfortun-  
21 ately, Poland doesn't have any Jews because they  
22 really probably never made it comfortable for us to  
23 stay.

24 Whoever even stays in Poland is not in their  
25 own name. I have a cousin in Poland who is under

1 Ester Korman

2 different name, a Polish name; and if I write let-  
3 ters, I can't write everything what I would want to  
4 say it, because he would be afraid.

5 And that's the story. It's a story and very  
6 short, but it's very hard to tell everything what  
7 had happened, how the German came in and how they  
8 took away everything, how they hit us, how they --  
9 how they split the head of my mother and --

10 Q. You saw that?

11 A. And I saw that as a little girl. It's  
12 -- the hate is there even though I don't want to  
13 hate. But I'm trying to be -- I mean, to forget.  
14 I mean, I would never buy certain things from their  
15 country, which is maybe not right; but it's very  
16 hard to erase the hate, yeah.

17 Q. What do the names on your note there  
18 mean? Are those towns or --

19 A. This is the towns that I'm looking  
20 for some people.

21 My mother had ten sisters and one brother,  
22 and each one had six, seven, eight children, and  
23 nobody's alive. And each one had a little family  
24 in a different town, and I never met anybody.

25 I remember my little cousin went out to bring

1 Ester Korman

2 some food -- he was very young; he was like ten  
3 years old -- and he ran out from the ghetto to  
4 bring some potatoes, and I was there with him,  
5 because I was young and, as I said, I didn't look  
6 Jewish.

7 So I saw him, and we knew that we going out  
8 to bring some food but we not supposed to say that  
9 we know each other. He had some potatoes in his  
10 pockets, and this German came over to him; he says,  
11 "Jude?" That means Jew. He says "No." He started  
12 to talk Polish. He says, "What do you have in the  
13 pockets?" Took out the potatoes and the carrots  
14 and he shot him right there. And I saw this.

15 And this was the survival. This is what you  
16 had to live for five years. And we really want to  
17 forget about it, really never, never want to tell  
18 that story. But if we won't tell the story, who  
19 else is going to tell?

20 Q. Do you know any people that were in the  
21 concentration camps?

22 A. Yes, my husband was in concentration  
23 camp. Yeah.

24 Q. Where was he?

25 A. He was in Tionek (phonetic), and

1 Ester Korman

2 Sachsenhausen, and another concentration camp which  
3 I know is right here.

4 Q. Were they in Germany or --

5 A. Germany.

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. I have a brother-in-law who was in  
8 Buchenwald and in Auschwitz -- Tionek, Buchenwald,  
9 Auschwitz -- who was also survivor, and he lives in  
10 Paris. And he was affected by the war. He never  
11 -- he's very nervous. He has a lot of problems,  
12 because he was also young when he was -- he was  
13 in. And these are friends of mine also, Buchenwald  
14 survivor.

15 Q. Have they been able to talk about their  
16 experiences? Have they told you about them?

17 A. Yes. Not a lot.

18 Q. Uh-huh.

19 A. Not a lot of talking about experience.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. Maybe -- maybe George could talk  
22 sometime.

23 Q. I see. Okay.

24

25