

## **RG-50.493.0069**

### **Summary**

Lena Factor, a survivor of the Holocaust, was born in a small town in Poland, which was 95% Jewish (no town, birthdate or maiden name given). Besides her mother and father, she had two brothers. Her father died at age 35, and five years later her mother married again. She went to a Jewish school and knew Hebrew, Polish, and German in addition to Yiddish. Her fluency in German was to be especially helpful to her after the Nazi invasion. Ms. Factor said that although her mother had a hard life she was a “fighter,” something Ms. Factor learned from her. Her mother was exterminated at 43 years old along with her younger son and Ms. Factor’s eleven-year-old step-brother. Her older brother escaped to Russia (Siberia) shortly after the war in Poland began and survived. Unfortunately, his then wife and two children did not go with him and were killed.

Soon after the Nazis invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 they shot two hundred people from her town. Ms. Factor was fortunate. She and nine other women were taken as housekeepers for Nazi officials. She worked there from 1940 to 1942, even after most surviving Jews were taken to the “large” ghetto (no identification), because she spoke German and was well-liked by her Nazi bosses. After a brief period in hiding, she was taken back for nine more months but then sent to a concentration camp Pionki. There she worked in a munitions factory twelve hours a day. Conditions were terrible, but there were no gas chambers or crematoria. She was there for thirteen months and survived she said, in part, because of her will to survive. By then the Russian front was coming closer and she and other surviving inmates were moved by truck to Auschwitz. She did not stay there long. She was among 500 selected to work in another camp (Hindenburg) in Germany. She and other inmates became like a family and looked after one another. Again, her German served her well as she was given special treatment by her German female overseer. On January 20, 1945 she was taken on a death march which ended up at Bergen- Belsen. Most of her fellow inmates did not survive the march. Conditions there were even worse. There was almost no food and most of her days were spent sitting on a cement floor. Many of the inmates, including Ms. Factor, came down with Typhus. Fortunately, she survived when the British liberated the camp on April 14, 1945. She said that 35,000 of the 45,000 liberated died after liberation.

A few weeks after liberation, she left and found her cousin’s husband and stayed with him a while. Then she went back to Poland hoping to find other relatives. She found none but met her future husband there. Finding the Polish people very unfriendly to Jews – there was a local pogrom in which ten people were killed – she insisted that she and her then husband return to a DP camp in Germany. Her two children were born there. She stayed from 1947 to 1951 when she was able to get a visa to the United States. Her oldest brother and new wife were already living in Chicago. Ms. Factor and her family were supposed to be sent to Davenport, Iowa but the authorities changed their mind and decided to send them to Omaha, Nebraska. She stayed there for five years but was determined to go to Chicago where there were many more Jews, including her brother and wife. After five years in Omaha she moved to Chicago and lived there for twenty-four years before moving to California. After a difficult period of adjustment, she came to love the United States, especially its freedom. She also continued to believe that the Poles were, at best, unwelcoming to Jews.