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Summary

Part 1 of 2

Paula Ruthling (née Pesla Brucha Rubin) was born in Poland. Her family moved to Remscheid, Germany, when she was two years old. They moved to Frankfurt in 1918. Her parents divorced. She and her sister went to school in Frankfurt and then worked, she in a Jewish company, her sister in a lawyer's office. The business where she worked after a while became unprofitable and she was dismissed. She then worked as a ballet dancer in the troop of Trude Strauss, in Frankfurt (timestamp 00:44:05). They worked in several theaters and opera houses, for example the UFA Palast.

She met her husband in Frankfurt. He was not Jewish, was a painter, produced placards announcing movies etc. The events of '33 were very upsetting, they were very concerned. They had less and less work, he probably because his wife was Jewish.

They moved to Paris in 1935 in the context of an artistic engagement there (00:04:40). Life there was tolerable, even though the French authorities were unfriendly. She and her husband did not have IDs and had to go to the French authorities regularly to receive temporary permission to stay. Before the war Germans were viewed with suspicion, they were considered the "5th column", i.e. potential spies. Being German, she and her husband were deported to southern France into a camp, which was unpleasant, but not life-threatening. Then, when the Germans occupied France, they were let go and united in a town in southern France, where they stayed for several months before returning to Paris by train. The SS controlled the train for Jews, her husband insisted that she not identify as such. In Paris her husband worked for a while longer. Now, under German occupation, the French were not authorized any longer to give residency permits to Germans (which she and her husband were). Instead they now had to present themselves to the German authorities in Paris who interrogated them.

During these interrogations they did not reveal that she was Jewish. Interrogations went on for about a year, until suddenly they were arrested, she at home with the daughter who was two years old at that point, he at work. He worked at the Lido (I presume as a theater painter). When they were arrested he fainted. They were incarcerated in Paris in September 1943, taken from there to Karlsruhe, remained there until Christmas that year, when they were tried as political criminals. They were accused of propaganda against Hitler, which was totally unfounded. "We were totally unpolitical". As political prisoners she was deported to Auschwitz and he to Dachau for the duration of the war. The daughter was taken from them and was taken to Berlin. She was taken to Auschwitz in January 1944 where living conditions were horrendous, in a "block" with other female political convicts. She later realized that as a political convict she was actually out of danger of being killed in a gas chamber. Therefore, she was never "selected". She describes in detail the horrible inhuman living conditions: Terrible hygiene, no sanitation, punishment with a leather whip etc. Women who had lived a privileged life suffered most in Auschwitz, often got sick right away and died. Not all inmates were Jews,

there also were Germans: Prostitutes and criminals. These women got supervisory jobs and were particularly gruesome. She worked in a factory, got sick, was taken to the sickbay where she got dysentery and from there was taken to a "nursing" block. She describes the horrible conditions there. The sick lived with the constant fear of being sent to the gas chambers. At some point she was covered with boils and she was "selected", but in the last moment was not called up to go to the gas chambers. She later learned that she was spared because she had had a regular trial with the verdict that she had to be kept prisoner until the war would be over.

She then talks about the many inmates arriving in 1944 from many countries, many of which were immediately killed. "When they were told what would happen to them they would not believe it". The horror of corpses thrown out from barracks, from where they were picked up to be cremated... Saboteurs who destroyed the incinerators were publicly hung. A woman, Bella, who escaped with a polish man, was caught, brought back to Auschwitz, protested heroically, got hold of a razor blade and killed herself before they could hang her.

During the time in Auschwitz she was able to exchange letters with her husband in Dachau. She also received a card from Berlin telling her that her daughter was growing up well.

She did not experience the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviet Army. In early 1945 (?) she was brought first to Bergen-Belsen, where she was scared to death because they had to shower and thought they'd be gassed, but it really was a shower. From there she was brought to Salzwedel, close to Hannover, where she again worked in a factory. There she was liberated by American troops and was able to return to Paris. It then took four years until one could get information out of Germany.

Right after the war she was engaged as an artist by the American troops in Karlsruhe (she mentions again her profession as an artist at timestamp 00:32:10). There an American officer helped her find her daughter in Berlin. She went to Berlin with an Army train and reunited with her. The daughter had lived with an interfaith couple who had wanted to adopt her. She then went back to Paris with her daughter and a little later her husband was also liberated and joined them in Paris.

Part 2 of 2

Her husband refused to be divorced from her, even when threatened to be shot. But then the divorce was decreed by some higher authority. She learned about that, but never doubted that this had been done without his consent.

She is shown old photographs of Frankfurt, remembers the department stores which were owned by Jews. She remembers SA standing in front of these businesses, on the windows of which was written: "Who shops here is a big pig", "Who shops here, is being photographed", etc.

She was not religious, but was connected with the Jewish community. She did not observe Jewish holidays.

She looks at old photographs, remembers a few things, is reminded of the synagogues in Frankfurt, most of which do not exist anymore. She remembers going to school, where she and her sister were once abused and the head master pushed back against the insults.

She would not move back to Germany, because she remains fearful that antisemitism could emerge again.

Her husband was okay in Dachau; he did portraits of people and he was respected for that.

She vividly remembers many horrible details, - for example the time when she had all those boils on her body and people gave her flour to cover the stains and boils on her skin. And, for example, when she had a massive boil on her leg, which she covered with a piece of paper and which made it hard to climb up to her cot, shared with five others.

She does not comprehend why the Jews were Hitler's target.