

Questions to Consider When Viewing Video

1. Why does Gita Frankel feel that she never was a young person?
2. After walking 50 kilometers from their hometown, Kalisz, Gita and her family were in a ghetto concentrated into three streets. What are her memories of that time?
3. When the Jews were marched to the cemetery, what happened to her father? What happened to her 12-year-old brother?
4. Soon Gita and her mother and older brother were taken to the Lodz Ghetto. What was Gita's job in the ghetto?
5. How did Gita's 21-year-old brother, Yosef Leib, suffer in the ghetto? What happened to him?
6. What are Gita's memories of her arrival and imprisonment in Auschwitz?
7. What were the conditions in the next labor camp where she and her mother were separated?
8. How did the miraculous meeting of Gita and her mother occur in another concentration camp?
9. How did Gita and her mother survive the "March of Death"?
10. How did Gita's faith sustain her through her sufferings during the Holocaust?
11. What has been Gita's mission during the decades since the Holocaust?

Holocaust Survivor Gita Engel Frankel

Filmed on February 23, 2006



"I have never been your age."
~ Gita Frankel

Face to Face
A Holocaust Education Program at
Congregation Shaarey Tikvah
Beachwood, Ohio

Gita Engel Frankel was born in 1925 in Kalisz, Poland. Her family included her father, her mother, and her two brothers. In Kalisz she attended a strict Catholic school because her parents wanted her to mingle with non-Jews.

Kalisz was the first part of Poland invaded by the Nazis. In 1939 Gita's family was driven from their home to Zdunska Wola, where her mother had been born. Soon the Nazis invaded Zdunska Wola and created a ghetto, concentrating about 8,000 Jews into three streets. For two years, the Nazis rationed food, imposed curfews, rounded up the young people, and forced the residents to dig ditches for mass graves.

In September, 1942, the Jews in Zdunska Wola were forced to march to a Jewish cemetery for a "selection." To the right meant death. To the left meant staying alive. Gita's 12-year-old younger brother was sent to "the side for death." As Gita's father stepped out of line in an attempt to reach his younger son, he was shot dead in front of his family.

Gita and her mother and older brother traveled on crowded railroad cars for three days to the Lodz ghetto. The strict rations and intense hunger in the ghetto caused Gita's older brother to grow weak and die of starvation.

Eventually Gita and her mother were deported to Auschwitz, where they saw the flames from the crematoria and smelled the burning of human flesh.

They were stripped of their clothing and had to stand naked in front of a man who Gita later suspected was the infamous Dr. Joseph Mengele, who was in charge of deciding who would live and who would die. Gita and her mother were selected to live, but Gita believes they were not slated to live long because they did not receive number tattoos on their arms. Instead they were given fabric with their numbers written on them; Gita's number was 88,911.

Gita and her mother suffered through several other labor camps. At Stutthof there weren't even bunks to sleep in. Ultimately Gita was taken alone to Praust, where she worked making cement runways.

As the war was nearing its end, the prisoners could hear Russian planes overhead. Miraculously, Gita and her mother were reunited just before guards rounded everyone up for a forced march through the snow. The prisoners were hiding in a barn when the Russians found and liberated them.

After liberation, Gita was very sick and spent the next year and a half in a hospital and another year in a rehabilitation center. She and her mother returned to Poland but discovered that nothing was left of their old lives. They moved on to a Displaced Persons (DP) camp in Germany. There Gita met her husband, married, trained as a dental technician, and had two children.

The family came to the United States in 1957.