

Questions to Consider When Viewing Video

1. How old was Helen at the start of the war?
2. Where was Lodz? Why did its location make it easy for the Germans to take it over?
3. Where was the ghetto in Lodz established? What were the living conditions for the Jews in the ghetto?
4. What did Helen witness during her daily life in the Lodz ghetto?
5. What killed Helen's father? Why was there a problem in having him buried? What does that tell you about conditions in the ghetto?
6. When Helen and her sister arrived in Auschwitz, they arrived without any mementos of their lives in Lodz. Why was this?
7. Describe how Helen and her sister were processed into Auschwitz. How did this affect them?
8. Where were Helen and her sister sent after Auschwitz?
9. Describe the conditions there and some of the "jobs" Helen was forced to do.
10. Why and where were Helen and her sister sent next?
11. Describe the conditions in that camp.
12. Describe Helen's liberation and why schooling was so important to her. Where was she eventually able to go to school?

Holocaust Survivor

Helen Jachimowicz Potash

Filmed on April 17, 2007



*"Nobody can take away your education.
That stays with you the rest of your life."*

- Helen Potash

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

Helen Jachimowicz Potash was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1929. She was ten years old in 1939 when Germany invaded Poland.

The next year, the Jews of Lodz were forced to abandon everything they owned and move into a ghetto. People died daily of starvation and disease. Helen's own father died in their single-room apartment, and the body had to be left there for six days until it could be carted away for mass burial. Two of Helen's sisters had gone to Russia to escape the Nazis, but the rest of the family lost communication with them in 1942, when Russia was invaded by the Germans.

Helen spent five years in the ghetto until the Nazis liquidated the residents in August, 1944. Then Helen, along with her sister, mother, and brother, were taken by cattle car for a harrowing three days to Auschwitz. There they were "sorted," perhaps by the infamous Dr. Mengele. In the line Helen witnessed an infant being taken away by force from its mother and shot by Nazi guards, a horror she could never forget. Helen and her sister were kept alive, but guards sent her mother and brother directly to the gas chambers. In Auschwitz the Jews were forced to strip, and Helen lost all of her remaining possessions. Her head was shaved, and she was given a number. This was so close to the end of the war that Helen was not tattooed with her number.

Soon after, Helen and her sister were sent to a labor camp in Hamburg, Germany, for about eight

months. By this point the war was ending, so they were sent on to Bergen-Belsen, where they were greeted by mountains of bodies. They had no food or water for two days.

There were rumors of the end of the war. On the second day, the prisoners heard a commotion by the concentration camp fence and went out to find that the German Nazi guards had fled, but the Italian and Hungarian Nazi guards were opening fire on the prisoners, rampantly killing anyone in their path.

Helen and her sister came to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1947, and Helen immediately enrolled in Cleveland Heights High School. Despite the fact that she'd had only four years of formal schooling, had not had any education for eight years, and was still learning English, she was placed in the 11th grade. She worked hard and graduated. Helen continued studying and taking classes throughout her life.

Helen's sister was the only other surviving member of her family. She had no pictures of her family, but one day, in a book about the Lodz ghetto, she happened upon a picture of herself with her mother, surviving sister, and brother.

Helen met her husband, also a survivor, in Cleveland and was married right after high school. Helen Potash died on December 25, 2009, leaving behind five children, 16 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.