

Questions to Consider When Viewing Video

1. Esther was 12 years old when the Nazis invaded. What are two examples from the very beginning of her testimony when she is forced to act as an adult?
2. Throughout her testimony, Esther describes times when she and her family were helped by non-Jews. What are several examples of this?
3. Why was it necessary for Esther and her sisters to hide her father?
4. In the ghetto, Esther and her family were forced to live in one room. How many of them were living in this one room?
5. How did Esther's brother save himself at Auschwitz?
6. When Esther and her sisters were sent to another camp, where were they sent to work?
7. How did the German workers help out the Jewish girls at the factory?
8. What group of soldiers liberated Esther and the other prisoners?
9. What did the leader of those who liberated them tell the released inmates to do? How did Esther react to this?
10. What is Esther's message to all young people?

Holocaust Survivor Esther Gelbart Frank

Filmed on April 26, 2007



"Life is precious."

- Esther Frank

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

Esther Gelbart Frank was born in Poland in 1927 and had two sisters and a brother. On September 1, 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland and bombed her town. Esther and her younger brother and sister attempted to escape on a neighbor's wagon until they were separated from the neighbor. Facing great danger, they returned home on their own and learned that two of their uncles had been murdered.

Immediately, life changed dramatically for the Jews. Because Jewish children were not allowed to go to school, Esther and her siblings were tutored at home. All Jewish men were ordered to clean up the bombed areas of the town. Esther's father was beaten for refusing to bow to the Nazis. Esther's family was forced to move to a ghetto, where eight people lived in one room.

Hitler's goal was to make Europe Judenrein (cleansed of Jews). In 1941, Esther's father was arrested and the family never saw him again. To save the two youngest children, Esther's mother sent them to another city. Esther and her mother followed them on a very dangerous train trip. They removed their yellow stars and had no identification papers. They arrived at a new ghetto surrounded by a very high fence.

On Yom Kippur of 1942, the Jews heard that the ghetto was to be liquidated. Esther escaped by climbing over the high fence. Her mother's last words to her were, "Remember to save yourself, and if you do, tell everybody what they did to us."

Esther returned to her hometown, where she survived by registering for a work camp.

In June, 1943, the Germans rounded up all of the Jews and sent them to Blechhammer. From there Esther was shipped to another camp where she worked in a factory. She lived in a barracks with 40 other women, supervised by a vicious, inhumane 19-year-old female guard. Once, Esther was beaten severely for stealing potatoes.

By 1944 the camp had grown to 1,100 inmates, 500 of whom had been transferred from Auschwitz. The new prisoners told the others about the crematoria, but it was hard to believe.

The prisoners had known for several months that the Russians were coming to liberate the camp. On May 8, 1945, the camp gates were open and there were no Germans around. Esther looted food from a bakery and butcher. Back at the camp, her brother-in-law warned her to eat just a little bit because she had been starved for so long.

Hoping to immigrate to the United States, Esther moved to the American Zone. She arrived in the U.S. in 1949 at the age of 22. Thrilled by the sight of the Statue of Liberty, she kissed the ground as she disembarked.

Esther's final advice to today's students is, "Stay in school. Get a good education, and do the best you can, because life is precious."