

## **Helen Spekman: One Survivor's Story**

Told by Sandy Spekman

Helen Esther Zylberberg Spekman, born on September 15, 1922, died on April 26, 2008. She was 85 years old and a survivor of the Holocaust.

She was born in Ozorkow, near Lodz, Poland and was a young girl when the war broke out in 1939. She was born to a family of four siblings but was the only survivor of her immediate family.

Helen told Sandy Spekman, her daughter-in-law, her story in April, 1997.

Helen Spekman's story:

Little by little, my family was taken away from me. In 1940, my father, Abraham Yitchok Zylberberg, was taken away, and in 1941, my older brother, Shmuel. My father, as well as my mother, were in their mid-forties.

As soon as the war broke out, Jews were tortured. We had to walk in the gutter. There was a five o'clock curfew. We didn't have any food, it was freezing, and it was a very tough time. Nobody gave us any help. It was just terrible.

In 1942, the Germans took the whole city. They picked up ten people and we were forced to watch four people being hung in a public square. This was a big shock! Every Friday they did terrible things because it was a Friday.

Eventually, Ozorkow was made into a ghetto. One day they put everyone into a school and stamped on everyone's chests: "A" or "B". I was an "A". I hope you will remember this story – it is very important and very traumatic.

My two sisters, Hannah and Malka, were marked a "B". My mother, Bluma Rosa, was also marked a "B". The only other member of my family to be marked an "A" along with me was my brother, Hyman.

The Germans made everyone undress in public (both sexes together) and it was very embarrassing. Children were crying. I still suffer from this today. I don't know why they made me an "A" or anyone else an "A" or a "B".

Everyone was sent out periodically to the public square. One spring day, people had to sit on the ground for 6-7 hours. We didn't know what was going on. The Germans were counting every person to make sure that no one ran away. This went on many times, and as usual, children were crying.

One day, the “A” group was pushed to one side, and the “B” group was pushed to the other side. I never saw the members of the “B” group again – my mother and two younger sisters. First they were pushed into a truck. No one knew where they were heading, but the trucks must have taken them to perish in the gas chambers.

My group “A” went back to the ghetto, where we were squeezed together. After the separation of the groups, I spent a short time longer in the ghetto at Ozorkow. They made us walk like animals from the ghetto to the public square, and back again. Those who couldn’t walk were shot.

In 1942, the ghetto was liquidated and I was sent to the Lodz ghetto. From time to time, they would reduce the size of the ghetto. I worked at night in a lumber factory where I sanded baby cribs. Again, we were starving and freezing.

While we were living in the ghetto, we did not have a clock. However, if you were late for anything, you were put on the black list, which later was the list used to reduce the ghetto size. My brother, Hyman, was with me in the ghetto.

From Lodz ghetto, I went to Auschwitz. It was in Auschwitz that I was separated from the only remaining family member, Hyman. I was sent from Auschwitz to Berlin, where I worked in an ammunition factory. From Berlin, I was sent to Bergen-Belsen, and from Bergen-Belsen to Ravenbrück.

We were liberated by the Red Cross and I was sent to Sweden where I lived for 1½ years. I was there with my Aunt Ida (my mother’s sister). She had lost her husband and two daughters.

It is hard to believe that educated people (the Germans) did such an atrocious thing – they killed people for no reason whatsoever except that they were Jewish.

One flashback that occurred: When I was in Auschwitz, one day we were sent to the barracks. We were made to stand nude against the wall while they checked over our bodies. If anyone had any scars or even a pimple, they were sent to the gas chambers. One gentleman (a German) tapped me on the shoulder and asked me if I was left all alone in the world, and I replied “yes”. He said that’s what we wanted – that you should live the rest of your life miserable and lonely. I didn’t tell him that my aunt was standing right behind me.

Now this story is the truth! I never believed that people could do this – because the Jewish people were good to everybody. We didn’t hurt anyone!

THANK GOD THAT I AM IN AMERICA NOW!!