

Manya Moszkowicz Friedman Born December 30, 1925 in Chmielnik, Poland

Manya was born December 30, 1925, in Chmielnik, a small town in central Poland. Her father owned a furniture shop and her mother took care of the home and children. German troops invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and three days later, Sosnowiec, where they had moved in 1938, was occupied. At the end of 1943, Manya's family was deported to Auschwitz when the ghetto was liquidated; she never saw them again.



School Girls dressed in costume for a school performance. (Manya, second row, second from left)



Manya's extended family taken at a wedding. (Manya standing at far right)

Manya's Story About Her Liberation

"The shrill sound of the Kapo's whistle, like a whip cutting through the air and through our shivering bodies, reminded that it was time for the appell (roll-call). I rushed to get in line — lines of grotesque-looking figures. In the winter we shivered from the cold underneath the striped, thin dresses, in the summer we sweltered under the oppressive heat, waiting to be counted. The countless reading of the numbers, no names, the faint reply "here," counted by one of the Kapos then another; often someone in line fainted from exhaustion and weakness, and had to be supported by others. Even in this small camp it seemed like an eternity, being counted and recounted, again and again.

But that day was different. While standing in line to be counted, a Kapo accompanied by a military person walked up to our group, pointed a finger at about a dozen or so girls, and ordered them to step forward. You could sense the uneasiness and anticipation in the lines, the lines shifted like an ocean wave. What now? In those few

seconds all kind of thoughts flashed through my mind. Why me? Where to? Sneaking a quick glance at the others around me, I tried to figure out how I differed from the rest. Again the thought, why me? And why now, when there is a spark of hope that this hell may finally end, judging by the frequency of air raids, and the roar of Allied planes above our heads. There was no use trying to find a reason, there was no reasoning in camp. To the many questions circling in my head, there were no answers. Though one thing was certain, a selection had never meant a better lot.

After the selection, our small group of girls, with stooped shoulders under the weight of uncertainty, resigned to feeling helpless and dragging our feet in the wooden shoes, was marched toward the gate of the camp, leaving the others behind, and not knowing what the future would bring. Would there be a future?

Outside the gate, a white, covered truck was waiting, a few Kapos and soldiers were mingling about, flirting and laughing, a familiar sight. The Kapos motioned to us to climb into the truck, but it brought few results.



Manya Moszkowicz in her first civilian dress after the war, speaking with a security officer at a school in Lund, Sweden

Though the truck's tail-gate was down and we tried hard, we were too weak to conquer this hurdle, despite the fear that at any moment the Kapo's whip come down on our emaciated bodies. Instead, to everyone's disbelief and amazement the Kapos actually helped us climb up into the truck. Somehow, from nowhere a crate appeared which we used for a step to climb up. I thought I was hallucinating, or this must be a dream, I did not trust my senses any longer. But momentarily I recalled how the Germans often used all kinds of tricks to get the people to come to an assembly point, using the pretense either to register, or to check and stamp the passports, but instead were put in trains or trucks and deported.

After being settled in the truck, each one of us received a "C.A.R.E." package. Again disbelief, but no time to rationalize "HOW" or "WHY", even if this would represent our last meal. Within seconds the packages were ripped open and the contents devoured. IT WAS FOOD. There was powdered milk, cocoa, sardines, crackers, everything was eaten at once, we were not even aware what it was. Some of the girls got sick, our stomachs not used to digesting such food.

The truck kept rolling on with its exhausted, helpless, resigned cargo, and we had no clue where to. No one spoke, each one of us preoccupied with our own thoughts. Then, lo and behold, the truck reached Denmark. FREEDOM? Incomprehensible! We were all dazed, unable to comprehend what was going on around us. (It was the end of April 1945, and Denmark was still under German occupation).

It appeared that the white truck that our group was being transported in was from the Swedish Red Cross. It had markings on the sides and on the roof, but we were not aware of it. Later we learned that negotiations were going on between the Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte, head of the Swedish Red Cross, and Himmler, head of the Gestapo, about the release of Norwegian POWs, but since it was the end of April, and Himmler was realizing that Germany lost the war, he agreed to Bernadotte's request to release from the camps some Jewish women of Polish origin and hand them over to the Swedish Red Cross. Thus began the brave rescue operation."



Portrait of Manya Moszkowicz as a teenager

