

Transcript:

Frida Landau

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Interviewer: OK. We'll talk a little bit about what pre-war life was like. Where you grew up?

Frida Landau: I grew up—it was Czechoslovakia then when I was born. It was 20 years, Czechoslovakia. After that, the Hungarian came in. After the 20 years. They were there about a year and they deported us. I was born in [unintelligible 0:00:28.8]. It's now Krajina. It used to be Czechoslovakia. In Hungary now it's Krajina.

Interviewer: What year were you born?

Frida Landau: A little louder.

Interviewer: I'm sorry. What year were you born?

Frida Landau: What year?

Interviewer: I'm sorry.

Frida Landau: A little hearing problem.

Interviewer: That's OK.

Frida Landau: I was born the 3rd of August 1925.

Interviewer: 1925.

Frida Landau: In [unintelligible 0:00:58.9].

Interviewer: I'm sorry. What country?

Frida Landau: Czech...

Interviewer: What was Czechoslovakia became Ukraine, right?

Frida Landau: Yes.

Interviewer: OK. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Frida Landau: We were seven children. From the seven, only two of us, left. Maybe you know Esther Schlanger, she's my sister.

Interviewer: I do know Esther. We interviewed her. We did. We interviewed her our last trip out.

Frida Landau: Schlanger?

Interviewer: Yes. Oh, no. Gertrude Schlanger. That's who we interviewed. Gertrude. Are they related?

Frida Landau: That's a sister-in-law.

Interviewer: Oh, OK. No, Esther, we didn't. Gertrude, that's right.

Frida Landau: Yes. My sister, she's 90 and she's not able to give you answers.

Interviewer: OK. I just knew Schlanger sounded familiar.

Frida Landau: Yes.

Interviewer: What did your parents do? What did your father do?

Frida Landau: He was with wood—what's the word? Lumber?

Interviewer: Lumber?

Frida Landau: With lumber and we have a little farm there.

Interviewer: Tell me what you remember about growing up there. In 1925, so it was probably 10, 15 years before anything really started, is that about right?

Frida Landau: That's about—no, I was in Lithuania then.

Interviewer: Tell me what it was like growing up there.

Frida Landau: Well, like you grow up in—I couldn't tell too much. Just helping out the family and that's it.

Interviewer: Working on the farm.

Frida Landau: Yes and going to school and that's about it.

Interviewer: Do you remember experiencing any antisemitism or anything when you were a child?

Frida Landau: Very well.

Interviewer: You do?

Frida Landau: It was then—when the Hungarian came in, they used to be they thought that, mean —those neighbors, ours—they used to be break in the windows. We have to put wood on it, on the windows. Always shouting, “The Jew is that, “Jew is that.” Antisemitism.

Interviewer: What did you think was happening? Did you just think you've lived in a place that...?

Frida Landau: We didn't do nothing. We couldn't do nothing. We didn't have any right to do it. We just—come night, we went hiding in the woods. Nobody would find us and in the morning we came back.

Interviewer: You were hiding in the woods?

Frida Landau: Yes, running away just so that people who break the windows wouldn't get to us.

Interviewer: This was before the war?

Frida Landau: That was when the Hungarian came in. That's already was [“nilosch”] then. They call those “antisemites.”

Interviewer: Do you remember what year that was? Was that after Kristallnacht, do you remember?

Frida Landau: That was before we were deported about a year before.

Interviewer: Do you remember how old you were then?

Frida Landau: No. I would be about 18, 17 to 18.

Interviewer: So growing up there as a child though you stayed in your house at night? Are you still left?

Frida Landau: Sometimes we did, sometimes not. When we see it's a little quiet down then we stayed. When it's a little—we felt that something's coming up, we went away or we were hiding in the attic.

Interviewer: How was that? What did you think was happening?

Frida Landau: We couldn't tell. We couldn't tell what's going to happen so we just hide.

Interviewer: Did your parents talk to you about it?

Frida Landau: Of course.

Interviewer: Do you remember what they used to tell you what's happening?

Frida Landau: What could they do but there was nothing to talk. We just have to suffer.

Interviewer: What do you remember most about that time?

Frida Landau: Not much.

Interviewer: Do you remember being afraid more than anything, hungry?

Frida Landau: That's all. Afraid. Hungry, no.

Interviewer: No?

Frida Landau: We weren't hungry.

Interviewer: But afraid?

Frida Landau: I couldn't say that, just afraid.

Interviewer: Tell me about the war. Where were you around 1938-1939?

Frida Landau: I was, at that time, I was right in our place. It started out after '40.

Interviewer: So you were okay until then?

Frida Landau: Hmm-hmm.

Interviewer: 1940, what do you remember?

Frida Landau: 1940 to '44. '44 we were deported.

Interviewer: Deported to where?

Frida Landau: To Uzvarot if you heard about that.

Interviewer: Deported to where again, I'm sorry?

Frida Landau: Uzvarot. It was a ghetto. It was—what's the name—brick factory. They brought us from our place of homes to the ghetto and we were there. But I was there about four, five weeks. It was open. You had the roof over it and no walls. Just open floor. Nothing else. We were there for about five weeks. After that, they deported us to Auschwitz.

Interviewer: Your whole family?

Frida Landau: My whole family and that came just me and my sister. And my brothers, they were living in Prague. They went in earlier in the camps. They were in Theresienstadt.

Interviewer: You were about fifteen in 1940?

Frida Landau: I can't remember.

Interviewer: That's okay. That's okay. No. You were born in 1925 and in 1940 you've been about 15 years old. And that's when you were taken to the ghetto.

Frida Landau: Not to ghetto. I was about 18, no? 1944.

Interviewer: Oh, 1944, you were 19, that's right.

Frida Landau: Yes.

Interviewer: So do you remember when you went to Auschwitz?

Frida Landau: I remember we came—my sister had two children and my parents were together. So my mother took two children and one left with her, my sister. Then they divided us—left and right—and we were separated. We came there and they told us that we're going in the shower. And so they showered us and we were expected—

which one can go, right and left—who stays alive, who doesn't stay alive. I'd say.

Interviewer: Was that the last time you saw your mother?

Frida Landau: Last time I saw my mother.

Interviewer: Was that day the last time you saw your mother?

Frida Landau: Just when we got from the train down. My mother and father, that's the last time I saw them, my sister with the children. That's about it. And then we stayed in Auschwitz. I was in the 16th Block, I believe, if I remember right.

Interviewer: 16th Block in Auschwitz?

Frida Landau: Hmm-hmm. Or 15 or 16—don't remember.

Interviewer: How long were you there?

Frida Landau: I was there about until - just approximately - I was there about eight, six, seven—about eight months. After that, they took us to work.

Interviewer: What did you understand was happening to you at the time?

Frida Landau: We knew everything because there were people who told us about that. We had there Polish people who were there about a year or two already and they told us what's going on. I just suffered and cried and that's about it.

Interviewer: Were you religious?

Frida Landau: Yes?

Interviewer: Were you raised religious—Orthodox or...?

Frida Landau: Yes. I'm Orthodox.

Interviewer: Orthodox? Religiously speaking, how did you understand what was happening to you? Let me help you understand my question, some survivors felt abandoned by God, some felt God could not control what was happening, some prayed, some didn't, some still pray, some never went back to God.

Frida Landau: No. We are in it, we still stay with God.

Interviewer: Stayed with God.

Frida Landau: My family.

Interviewer: What do you think—how do you think—what kept you praying while you were there?

Frida Landau: Just to stay alive. That's all. That we wouldn't be burned like the rest of us—my family and everybody's family.

Interviewer: We had somebody say that she prayed because that was the only thing the Nazis couldn't take away from her. Did you feel that way?

Frida Landau: Couldn't take what away?

Interviewer: Her religion, her prayer, her faith.

Frida Landau: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Did you feel that way?

Frida Landau: Yeah, I felt that nobody can take that away. You're born with it, you stay with it.

Interviewer: How did you explain what was happening to you while you were there? Did you wonder where God was through all this?

Frida Landau: Just said, "Thank God, we are alive," you know. The rest of us, we couldn't help it. We have to take the way it is. There was no other way. Just live in fear.

Interviewer: What do you remember most about Auschwitz?

Frida Landau: Not much to remember. We stayed on the block, on the—there were three of the bunk beds, two or three of those. We were eight people by the head, eight by the legs. That's the way we slept. So there was nothing to remember. We just went and slept in the morning. In three or four o'clock, they wake us up and went [unintelligible 0:12:18.0] and just went through and counted

us. They looked whom they take out to burn. So then we came back, we just said, "Thank God, we are still alive."

Interviewer: What's your job in Auschwitz?

Frida Landau: I didn't have any.

Interviewer: You didn't have a job?

Frida Landau: No.

Interviewer: What were your duties during the day? What did you do during the day?

Frida Landau: Just sleep and talk and that's it.

Interviewer: Anybody that you remember talking to? No?

Frida Landau: I don't remember any people.

Interviewer: Were you there with your sister?

Frida Landau: My sister, the whole time.

Interviewer: She was there with you the whole time?

Frida Landau: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: You didn't know where your brothers...?

Frida Landau: We were lucky we stayed together?

Interviewer: You didn't know where your other siblings were?

Frida Landau: No.

Interviewer: Yes. During this time...?

Frida Landau: We have a [bloko]. She was a Polish. [Yirka] was her name. She was pretty rough sometimes, Jewish girl.

Interviewer: Rough, how?

Frida Landau: She didn't believe if somebody was sick or not sick or she's just pretending to be sick, you know. We get through the way it was.

Interviewer: She was another—she was somebody who was at the camp with you?

Frida Landau: Yes. She was the block [unintelligible 0:13:51.8], she took care for all of us.

Interviewer: She took care of all of you?

Frida Landau: Well, the meat, the food came in, she was in charge on that, unless something comes up, nothing back.

Interviewer: By 1944, pretty much everybody knew what was going on by then. I've heard it said also being—I'm actually the grandchild of Hungarian survivors and one of the things that they had said was they found it impossible to believe that there was a death factory.

Frida Landau: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: Even in 1944/1943, the Hungarian invasion being March of 1944, they still refuse to believe that there were Jews being slaughtered. Did you feel that way?

Frida Landau: That's true. The same way. From Auschwitz, I went to Heinischen, that's Germany. That was a factory for Maschinengewehr. They call that—how would you say in English?

Interviewer: Mach-?

Frida Landau: Ammunition factory or something.

Interviewer: Ammunition factory?

Frida Landau: Maschinengewehr, that's what they call that. People were working there from 6:00 in the evening to 6:00 in the morning.

Interviewer: That's where you work?

Frida Landau: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did you do there?

Frida Landau: The parts.

Interviewer: You worked on the line.

Frida Landau: Yes.

Interviewer: With your sister?

Frida Landau: My sister, together, yes.

Interviewer: So you were transported out of Auschwitz to a factory?

Frida Landau: Yeah.

Interviewer: This was in—do you remember what year?

Frida Landau: Heinichen. Oh, which year?

Interviewer: Yeah, if you remember.

Frida Landau: That was about—that could be about five, six months something like that. I don't really remember.

Interviewer: That's OK. Do you remember how old you were? Maybe in your twenties?

Frida Landau: Yeah. Something, early twenties, yes.

Interviewer: Had you heard yet about possible liberation? That the Russians were coming?

Frida Landau: The liberation was like this. We heard the bombing and they went—it was almost the end of it—they took us to—they would have to go to Theresienstadt. They took us to Theresienstadt. We went with the train awhile and they put us down on a place just where—land. They claimed that Theresienstadt doesn't have place. We have to stay. We stayed there about ten days with no food, with nothing. [Pause] Many of them, they ate grass. Water, we still have it there. It came to—after the ten days, we walked to Theresienstadt. They got us where to put it so we went to Theresienstadt. There we were just lying down on those bunk beds and waited for something to come. Then in '45, the Russian came in and we were liberated.

Interviewer: Tell me about that day.

Frida Landau: Wonderful day. On that day, everybody ran out and waved to the soldiers. They went through. It's unbelievable, can't explain it. It was the most wonderful day of our lives.

Interviewer: We have somebody that celebrates that as a birthday. Do you feel that way? We have somebody that says that day, liberation day, was like a second birthday. Do you feel that way?

Frida Landau: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: He called it the "birth" of his freedom. Does that mean something to you?

Frida Landau: Yeah. That's it. Right. That's how we get to be alive.

Interviewer: Where did you go from there?

Frida Landau: To Prague.

Interviewer: To a DP camp?

Frida Landau: We registered all and went to Prague. And there was—I think it was YMCA, if I remember right. We went there and there they fed us for a while and put us on the train and shipped us to our homes. But we came to home...

Interviewer: Is that with your sister?

Frida Landau: Just two of us. I don't know about the others, what happened to them. I don't know. But we went from Prague to look for the house. We didn't find it. Nobody. I don't know what's happened. Then we didn't know where to turn. My brothers came back two of them, and they lived in Prague. So they find us some home. We came back and I lived in Prague after that.

Interviewer: So you and your sister and two brothers survived?

Frida Landau: Yeah.

Interviewer: You lost then three more?

Frida Landau: Three more.

Interviewer: And then your parents?

Frida Landau: Yes.

Interviewer: And then your sister's children?

Frida Landau: Yeah. Parents, and that hurts the most. That's about the story.

Interviewer: When you...

Frida Landau: When I came back from home, went to Prague, I was there living three years.

Interviewer: You lived there three years?

Frida Landau: Yeah. And then we decided, when the communists came in, that we go out.

Interviewer: Were you married yet at that time?

Frida Landau: No.

Interviewer: No. Did you come to the US from there?

Frida Landau: No. I went to Austria and registered there. I had to wait for the quota. I have to go to America but the quota was too long. So we decided we go to Canada.

Interviewer: You said the quote was too long?

Frida Landau: Yeah, the American quota.

Interviewer: Letting so many people in?

Frida Landau: Yeah.

Interviewer: Right. OK.

Frida Landau: So we had long to wait. My sister was already here. So we went to Canada and I was living in Toronto for seven years.

Interviewer: You and your brothers?

Frida Landau: No. Just me.

Interviewer: Just you.

Frida Landau: Just me. And I married there in Toronto.

Interviewer: And then when did you come to the US?

Frida Landau: It was 1957.

Interviewer: So you've been here a long time. You come straight to Nashville?

Frida Landau: Straight to Nashville.

Interviewer: What brought you here?

Frida Landau: Because the sister lived here.

Interviewer: Oh, this is where she came?

Frida Landau: Yeah. We've been through so much not to be together would be a shame.

Interviewer: And you came here?

Frida Landau: Yeah.

Interviewer: How do you like Nashville?

Frida Landau: I like Nashville. It's my home. I feel I'm home. The home I had at home - that was not home anymore. America's my home.

Interviewer: What do you remember most when you look back on your whole experience? When you think about it?

Frida Landau: What I remember the most?

Interviewer: When you think about it, what do you remember the most?

Frida Landau: Just how I grew up and what we went through, the bitterness, and I can't explain it.

Interviewer: Did you tell your children what happened?

Frida Landau: They know. Yeah.

Interviewer: Did they have trouble understanding?

Frida Landau: Yeah. But they grew up here, so they can't understand completely. That's my life.

Interviewer: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Frida Landau: There is nothing to add to it.

Interviewer: When you understand that 14, 15, 16-year old children are going to hear the story, your story or somebody else's story, they're going to be shocked. They're going to be shocked that not just maybe they've heard about the holocaust in the history class...

Frida Landau: That's not it, when you see someone else in trouble, you feel that you go through it too because you can't take it just yourself. You have to look—somebody else is suffering too. So you feel like a lost person.

Interviewer: What do you want someone to know about what happened? What would you want them to know if they were to learn about the holocaust?

Frida Landau: The bitterness that we went through, and it is indescribable. It could not be [unintelligible 0:24:07]. That's what we remember. I can't describe what it was, how it was, how you go through. The morning you wake up, you say, "Thank God. I'm here and I'm OK." All I need now is to be well. And if that, you don't have it, you don't have nothing.

Interviewer: Honored. We're all honored that you came out to share this story with us. I know it was very difficult.

Frida Landau: Thank you. It is very difficult. You'll see. It's not so easy. That's why I already—a long time, you asked me for that. And I couldn't get to it. I just—my heart, I couldn't get to talk about it. It gets you some, but you remember in the nights after that.

Interviewer: I know. And I want you to know that the whole Holocaust Commission and the Jewish Federation has counselors and social workers for bringing back up some memories. If there's somebody that you want to talk to, I can put you in touch with somebody if that might help. I'd be happy to do that.

Frida Landau: Thank you.

Interviewer: If there's nothing else you'd like to add.

Frida Landau: That's all to it. I can't tell you more. I told you all of it.

Interviewer: Okay. That's okay.

Frida Landau: It's better [unintelligible 0:25:34.9].

Interviewer: Okay.