

Renee Salt, born Poland 1929:

Early one morning, in the summer of 1942, we were woken up with screams of 'Alle Juden raus!' – all Jews out! We hid my grandparents and my four-year-old cousin in the attic, fully expecting to return soon to our room in the ghetto. In fact it was the last time we saw them and we later learnt that they had all been shot. The rest of us .. went out into the street, which was by then crammed with people, and like sheep we followed one another until we came to a large field, which was surrounded with Gestapo and SS men, all armed and with large guard dogs. ... Then they ordered parents to hand over all children up to 18 years of age. The cries of the children and the mothers' screams of "Almighty God help us, where are you?" still ring in my ears today.

Discuss:

1. What is Renee describing?
2. What experiences are involved?

Connecting Questions:

1. What do you think the significance of the question “Almighty God, where are you?” is?

Hannah Lewis, born Wlodawa Poland, 1936:

At first I didn't see her, and then all the yelling and the screaming and the commands, I suddenly saw her. She was with a group of other people and they were being pushed in front of the well, the well that she always collected water from. I tried to catch her eye, but it was as if she didn't see me and I didn't exist. ... I couldn't work out why was she not looking at me. And I was about to go down and take her hand as I'd done so many times before and somebody uttered a command. I was standing on the doorstep, looking at her and they started to shoot and I saw her fall. I saw the blood on the snow and in that moment, I always say I grew up. I knew I mustn't make a sound. I knew why she wasn't looking at me. I'd seen executions before, but they didn't have my mummy in it.

Discuss:

1. Why didn't Hannah's mother look at her?

Connecting Questions:

1. As well as concentration camps, Jews were murdered across Europe in mass shootings. What can this tell us about the different experiences in the Holocaust?
2. Does this challenge thinking around where the Holocaust took place and how people were murdered?

Susan Pollack: The selection took place immediately. My saviour at that time was a former Hungarian-speaking victim, and he started whispering to everyone, the few survivors, 'Don't say you are young, younger than fifteen years old.' ... So, when the German, the Nazi came and asked, 'How old are you?' I said, 'Ich bin fünfzehn,', 'I am fifteen years old.'.... And so he pushed me, but not before my mum, who was in her forties had been pushed to another side... I didn't know what was happening to her...And that's the last time I have seen my mum. I learnt about it later that she was gassed. I didn't cry. Human feelings left me completely.

Discuss:

1. Why do you think Susan was told to lie about her age?
2. Did the Hungarian Jewish prisoner take any risks in telling Susan to lie about her age?

Connecting Question:

1. Why do you think human feelings left Susan 'completely'?
2. What does this tell us about the camp experience and its impact?

Susan Pollack: There he was in his elegant uniform and we girls, stark naked, had to march in front of him. And for him to decide are we going to live or die? Are we going to be useful? That was the idea behind it. For doing some slave labour work. We knew that. I knew it from those who had been there for some time. I wanted to survive, was some feeling that overcame-, I wanted to live. So, I held myself straight, pinched my cheeks and I marched in front of him.

Discuss:

1. Why do you think Susan pinched her cheeks?
2. Why did the Nazis use Jewish prisoners for forced labour?

Connecting Questions:

1. In what ways does Susan show strength in this extract?
2. How are the female prisoners treated here and what do you think the impact of this was?

Manfred Goldberg: Anyone who didn't have the strength to keep pace with the march and began trailing behind was immediately shot, and their bodies just left where they fell. So, quite a number of people who were too weak, because the pace of the march was set by the SS guards who were strong, well-fed men, and they could march at a fair pace. And anyone who couldn't keep up with that pace, and began trailing, immediately lost their lives.

Discuss:

1. What is Manfred describing?
2. Why did the Nazis move Jewish prisoners in the later years of the war?

Connecting Questions:

1. Across Europe towards the end of the war, similar journeys took place. What do you think this can tell us about the Nazis' attitudes towards the Jews and their creation of concentration camps?
2. What questions does this raise about accountability for Nazi crimes?

Mala Tribich's Journey:

So, as we went in, the first thing that hits you is the smog and the smell, ... And then there were people there, but they were skeletons, and they would be, sort of, shuffling along, aimlessly, and then just collapse and die. So, there were dead bodies everywhere, and there were piles of bodies, and piles of twisted, decaying, undressed, naked corpses. It was just horrific.

Discuss:

1. What does Mala's description of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp tell us about camp conditions?

Connecting Questions:

1. Why do you think Mala's experience of the camp is important to consider when trying to understand what this environment would have been like?
2. What do you think are the challenges to understanding the reality of the events of the Holocaust?

Susan Pollack's Journey:

I had pulmonary tuberculosis and Typhoid and famine oedema, my leg swelled up, my left leg was swollen up. And what else did I have? Well, severe malnutrition. And I was close to death. And it was a miracle with me, an absolute miracle. I lay there, and I became aware that somebody was touching me. And I couldn't fathom it out, I thought, well, 'Who's that? What is going on?' And he lifted me up with his gentle hands and kindness and placed me in that ambulance. I remember that quite clearly because it was such a new sensation. ...Imagine, these people, these soldiers, after a hard war and battle until they got to Belsen, they still had that kindness in their heart. How is that possible? To this day I don't understand it. What is it that put that kindness, that goodness in their heart?

Discuss:

1. What moment is Susan describing?
2. What challenges do you think Susan faced in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust?

Connecting Questions:

1. What questions does Susan raise about humanity?
2. What questions do you think the Holocaust raises about humanity?