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TOVA FRIEDMAN INTERVIEW
PORTIONS USED IN: *THE THREAD SEASON ONE*

Tova Friedman, Holocaust Survivor
July 26, 2023
Interviewed by Noah Remnick
Total Running Time: 1 hour, 34 minutes and 22 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:
Tova Friedman
Holocaust Survivor

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Tova Friedman

Holocaust Survivor

00:00:08:00

NOAH REMNICK:
Can you tell me where and when you were born?

00:00:11:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

I was born in a place called Gdynia, which is part of Danzig, in Poland. Danzig is a free city. They always have German, have Polish, and I was born in the Polish side of it, called Gdynia, in 1938, September 7th, which is exactly one year before the war. The war was September 1st, 1939, so I was exactly a year old when the war broke out.

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NOAH REMNICK:
So walk me through the order of events a little bit. When and how did you arrive in the ghettos, and for how long were you there?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
In the ghetto, I was immediately- My parents went back home when Danzig, around Kristallnacht, became extremely dangerous, very terribly anti-Semitic. My father had a business there and he seemed to be doing okay, but not after Kristallnacht. He left to go home to his parents and he found that they were- within a very short time, the whole family had to move to a ghetto. That means to a section of town not at all where we lived, where they designated for the Jewish population. And I remember only being in the ghetto. I don't remember anything before. And I remember being under the table in the ghetto because there was no space for me to be anywhere else. And I remember little things. You know I was young, so it's hard to remember the death of my grandmother, because they came and they got her and shot her by the house. And I remember the death of my maternal grandmother. My paternal grandparents, my father came and he told my mother that he put

them on the truck and I knew where the truck was going because they were going to be shot. I don't remember consecutively every thing, but I remember different incidents because I was by then three or four years old. I remember playing under the table with a little girl who came to visit, so I guess people could visit in the ghetto. I remember a terrific hunger, and we were starving already, beginning of starvation. It was a bad time.

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NOAH REMNICK:
And then next is when you were brought to Auschwitz.

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
And that was- I was about four and a half. And then they closed the ghetto. I told you what they did. They kept moving people from place to place, just just the way they moved soldiers where they needed, from place to place. So they closed the Tomaszow ghetto after most of the people died of starvation and from cholera. And typhus. Typhus was rampant. We had no doctors because the Germans wouldn't come into the ghetto and they killed all the Jewish doctors. So then, they closed that and they took most of the people to Treblinka, and we went to this labor camp. 36, 37 people. I don't know the number. My father's at 36, but then I heard somebody said 50. I don't know.

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NOAH REMNICK:
And how long were you in the labor camp?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
In the ghetto, in the labor camp? Well, in 1944, there was in 1943, about a year. In 1943, the ghetto was closed. So we went to the labor camp and then in 1944, they took us. They closed the labor camp. So again, they closed the camp and they sent us to Auschwitz. It was like for the final solution, they were doing it as quickly as possible. That's where they increased because they were afraid of the allies and they want, the whole plan was to leave no witnesses. So every Jew and every person in any of those death camps had to be killed. So they took us to Auschwitz to to to begin now, which was only one purpose of murdering. They didn't even work there. You waited for your turn to be killed.

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NOAH REMNICK:
Can you tell me a little bit about the day that your mother found you in the camp? Did you have any sense of certainty that she was still alive even?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
No. Well, I did hear her. I heard her calling me. I didn't see her. I heard her. And I didn't know that. But time passing. I can't remember. I did not. Children, I don't think no time that well. But all of a sudden, she appeared. That was already when the the the the the person who watched us all disappeared also. It was almost that it was almost when the allies were on

their way. And so she could get into our barrack of the war. She couldn't have got into the barracks. She would have been shot. Go out to a different barrack. And she always had trouble. Recognize me? She looked terrible. Terrible. I think it was my mother, the way I remembered her. I have not seen her for quite a while and didn't remember her, but she could visit me. She was. My mother didn't take long, and then she knocked me out. She had the plan, which I didn't know about, took me to in February of women. But I remember her holding me very tightly because outside there was chaos just to make it from our barrack to to the. To what I guess she thought it was a safe barrack was, you could make it, there were shooting you see the Germans were walking around with guns shooting everybody who didn't get into the line fast enough. They were lining up everybody to leave Auschwitz. They were going to walk them to Germany because they didn't want to leave them as witnesses. By then it was chaos. They will shoot. The dogs were barking. There was shooting all they were. They were anybody who did. And we didn't want to go in that line. My mother said that she will not survive on that trip she knew was very far. She said to me and it was snow outside. And she said, Look at me. She was just her feet was swollen, starved, was she looked terrible. She said she had no shoes. She had like rags. She said, I'm going to die on the road. And if she looked at me, she said, you could survive the trip. You could maybe walk. And, she said these words, I don't want you to live alone in this world. I don't want you to survive by yourself. I want you to die with me here. When you die with me in Auschwitz. I said, Yeah. She thought you'd be shot. you could just decide not to go on that line because everybody who didn't go says that was shot. But she we snuck out and we were walking near the barracks very close to the barracks. You should be seen. And we

came to this hospital infirmary. And I remember she took my head, held it very tightly, and she went from corpse to corpse. Didn't know what she was touching bodies, all you women. And when she found the corpse she liked, I looked at the corpse. It was a woman warm. She could manipulate her body because the woman must have died minutes earlier. She's a get in. She helped me. She took off my shoes and she manipulated my body in such a way. I knew exactly what you wanted. She put my mouth, my head under her are right here armpit. But my mouth into the ground, my face to the ground. My head was here. And then she put my legs, one in between the woman. She was manipulating it. And then she covered it. But the woman's hands were out and the blanket was up to her chin, but her hands were out. She took them out. They were like this. I could feel it, because my head was right here. And she said, Try not to breathe much. No, but you should will cover you do not cover use of the bit. What happens if she disappeared? And I know what you wanted. So I started breathing very shallow into the ground, to the bottom. And then I heard the screaming and yelling. Rouse, Rouse out there. We coming. People were everywhere and they were shooting those. So it died. Not that does it make sense to anybody. But by then nobody was in the right mind. The Germans were not in their right mind. They wanted to just get out, run away before the Russians came and take as many people with them and kill those who stayed behind. So they started walking all around and somebody stopped by my bed, wanted to make sure that the dead person was really dead. Otherwise they would shoot that person, that woman. And I remember I stopped breathing. I was afraid the blanket would move a I. By luck, the person moved on. I could hear the boots. I couldn't have my breath any longer. And even then, it was very shallow after the person left it.

Screaming, yelling. Oh, I remember that shooting. And then there was quiet, but there was smoke. And then I said, Oh, my mother said, I can't get uncovered. I can't breathe. But I would not uncover my son. I knew she was right. I knew if I listened to her, I'll make I'll survive. I'll make it. So I, I didn't uncover by the time I couldn't hold anymore. She uncovered me. And this was her words. They are gone. Just like that. In Yiddish. They no longer here. And and I looked around. So many people had also hidden with corpses. And in order to get out of bed, they pushed the corpses off the bed so they could get. I did, because my mother took me out. The corpse was still on the bed. She helped me out and put my shoes on, but I couldn't find my shoes. I don't know what happened. So I was barefoot and all these people were the corpses all over. And we all. And then. And then the place was burning. And so it was the smoke that set the infirmary on fire. And then we walked out with everybody outside, and lots of people were walking. It was dark and there's snow. And I was wearing I don't know what. But I remember walking towards the gates and there was January 25th. The Russians gave January 27th, but the January 25th, the Germans had gone already. They left two days before the Russians came. So that's how we were liberated.

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NOAH REMNICK:
January 27, 1945. What do you remember about that day?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:

I remember. You have that picture with my showing my number to the Russians are all necklaces in a different uniform, which I never knew before. Screaming and yelling at Russia because they had trouble with the electricity. That's something. People always made noises in swimming, but I didn't know what it was. I didn't know what they were screaming. But once they got us, they saw the children. They were so they were kissing all of us. One Russian soldier picked me up and threw me in the air. And I remember looking at my mother. Was it my mother? And she smiled, so I knew it was safe. There was a day of liberation.

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NOAH REMNICK:
So you've spent your life reckoning with the legacy of the Holocaust and your memories of it. But it was only in more recent years that you began discussing your experience more widely through social media and your memoir. What motivated you to share your story in this way?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Well, I really started it when I was already in my fifties. I didn't do it right away because nobody wanted to hear it. I started speaking when my oldest daughter was in high school, and she the teacher asked the class if anybody knows anyone who's a Holocaust survivor. And my daughter asked me, and that's how we started speaking. I did not speak before, and I realized how many people know nothing about it. And I always felt that since I survived, against all odds, all odds, I shouldn't really be here, that it was my obligation

to keep the memory of those that were murdered alive. And once I started talking, it was like a floodgate opened, and I spoke to anyone who wanted to hear it. Anyone? Any time. And I've been doing it since.

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NOAH REMNICK:
It's been almost 80 years since the concentration camps were liberated. Why do you think anti-Semitism continues to persist in the way that it has?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
75 years about. It's ah, I don't know. It's very scary. I think what's happening in our world, it became as a people are frightened about all kinds of things. I mean the COVID frightened everybody and so many people lost loved ones. The world does not seem safe. And what's. That's my opinion. And once the world is in safe, people are looking for scapegoats. And somehow so of the years, the Jews became scapegoats. And that's what's happening right now. And it's very scary for me. And I talk even more than I used to. Maybe to see what effect I would have on those people who feel hatred towards my people.

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NOAH REMNICK:
There's a lack of understanding and education about the particulars of the Holocaust, and then there's just flat out denialism. How do you begin to comprehend such a phenomenon and how do you fight back against.

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:

I completely ignore the deniers because, I always think I'm a therapist. So I think if I were to go to a mental institution and somebody would tell me that they are killing will I believe that they're killing? Will they deny that they're killing? No. To them, their killings. So therefore, I think of this deniers as people who knows deranged or don't read history or don't understand anything. I would just do I just ignore them altogether. But that doesn't mean that I will stop speaking. And what bothers me is not the deniers so much. It's the people who are ignorant, who don't know, who are intelligent, who are kind, who are good people. They just don't know, how many people have never heard of Auschwitz or anything. So I think that's where I'm concentrating on. I don't want to do anything. Add what I don't want anything to do with the deniers.

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NOAH REMNICK:

You're 85 years old now. I don't think anyone would blame you for retiring or taking some time to relax. What keeps you going? What do you see as your mission?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:

It's not only my mission, it's my attitude towards living. I don't understand what relaxed means. I am relaxed. I mean, I'm relaxed when I have clients, when I speak to people like you and tell my story. I just want to be effective

and useful until the very end of my life. And sitting on the beach is not my personal answer to relaxation. I can understand other people love it and I could go to the beach once in a while, you know? But that's not my idea of how I want to spend my time. I sort of seek my time as a gift. I told you, I feel like I shouldn't be here. Melinda and I have children were murdered. My whole town. Most of the children were murdered from my town. Hundreds of them. Five survive. So I have that feeling. I should do something with that time to the very end. Really? If. If I stay healthy, Hopefully.

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NOAH REMNICK:
I want to take things back quite a ways. What was your family's life like before the Holocaust?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Well, I wasn't there. I was born a year before the Holocaust, but my parents told me about it because they always hope to reconstruct their lives. Especially my mother, who came from a very orthodox Jewish family, from a dynasty. They were they were Hasidim, very orthodox. And she talked about the wonderful life they had in a town called Tomasz of Mass of Yassky, boasted about 15,000 Jews before the war. It was about a third of the population, and they had complete freedom before the war. They got along very well with the non-Jews. And my mother studied that. My father loved music and singing and dancing, and they had wonderful Shabbos dinners, very large families. My mother came from 150 people, nine brothers and

sisters, and they all had children. It was like it was like other religious people believe in having children. And my father comes from eight and also was a lot of children. And nothing was left after the war. But they always talked about their families with nostalgia and with terrible guilt that they survived. Especially my mother, who was the only survivor.

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NOAH REMNICK:
So is it safe to say that you have no memories of life before the camp?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
No, None at all? No. My memories started at the age of two, two and a half. And that's only sporadically, because there's certain things that are so unforgettable that even a child who can't express it verbally, I just. I express it later on. I knew what was going on. Just it was a very abnormal time.

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NOAH REMNICK:
So entering the camp, do you have any memories of of walking through those gates for the first time.

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
There are many different type of camps.

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NOAH REMNICK:
Right.

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
The first camp I don't remember. The first was the ghetto. That means they robbed us all up and they put us in a in a tiny apartment and so forth with rules and regulations and so forth. I have memories not entering, but living there because I lived it till I was four and a half. Then came the labor camp that I remember very well, going to a labor camp where my parents worked the whole day. And then of course, was the Auschwitz. That was very memorable. We got on a terrible train, got off the train, and there we were. That's my memory. Start from entering the labor camp in Auschwitz.

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NOAH REMNICK:
Tell me a little bit more about that. Then entering Auschwitz for the first time, that that train ride and entering those given time.

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
There were very few children left, if any. I don't think there were any except myself, because they had taken you see, in each place I was the first thing they did was killed the children and the elderly for all kinds of reasons, And so by the time we came to the labor camp, there were very few children left

and the labor camp was over. The parents work a whole day in factories to help see the war effort in ammunition factories, and they still took the children away to kill them. And I was hidden at the time of the selection came so that I was one or maybe maybe out of two, I don't know, children that went on the on the transport to Auschwitz. I remember that very well, because that was the first time that my mother and father was separated. Till then, we were as a family. Three of us. My. My grandmother was killed. Everybody else disappeared or were killed. We didn't see anybody except. But we were there. I know my mother, my father, and I was part of their lives. And then entering the the cattle car, my father was taken away to. It was men. And I was with women, with my mom. And we got to remember my mother helped me on it because it was very, very hard to get on. And then I remember the ride. It was 36 hours. I didn't know it was 36 hours. I found out later and I remember it very much. It was by then I was five and a half, but I was an adult. Five and a half. I wasn't an American. Five and a half. I was a different type of child and it was very hot. So we were sweating because there was so many women all together. And I remember my thoughts and the worst thing was not to go to the bathroom and I didn't know how I could move. And I kept saying, Mom, mom, I need to go. And I think she even heard me. It was so much noise and screaming. And then I realized everybody was going with where they stood. So did I. It was very hard for a child to realize, Just go. Just go. And you could hear the smell and the thirst. There was nothing to drink, nothing to eat. It very dark. The whole the whole place was dark. Except there was a little window. But we did let in some light. But as I was small, the light never reached me. So I remember standing there and falling asleep on somebody else's back like a woman. Even her back was fired. And I just put my head up

and my mother was holding me around a whole time until we arrived. I remember that very well. Screaming. The smell, smells something. They stay with you forever. And I smell the cattle car. People were throwing up. They had dysentery. See, I knew I was going to Auschwitz, but I don't know if they knew what death was. I know it's a place you don't come back from, but I didn't know what exactly the adult women knew. So they were, like, screaming and crying and so forth. So I remember that very well.

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NOAH REMNICK:
When entering Auschwitz for the first time. What do you remember about that?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Oh, yes. You can't forget that, because it was you see, entering when we got on the cattle call was we didn't have a platform. My mother had to pick me up and put me in. Arriving there was a platform so we could go down. And I remember the light. All of a sudden, the light by the safety. And I saw most of all with the dogs. I've always seen dogs. the German shepherds. To this day, I. I live near a dog park right now. And ah, each time they pass by a house with the German shepherds. I know they're wonderful, smart dogs. And these are my neighbors. But it's a terrible feeling. And I remember the German Shepherds. They were very close to me because they were right by the train as we got off and then still remember their saliva. And I was tall enough to look straight into their eyes. And they looked at me and I remember saying to

my mum, I'm going to be killed by this. And she said, No, they're trained only to kill if you run and you're not going to run. So the entries, the first maybe hour or so was very, very memorable. There was a smell. I said, What's the smell? And she pointed to the chimney and I knew what she meant. There were the burning of the bodies, if there were gas, that they were burning them. And she never heard anything from me. And then they made us address all that. She said, Get undressed. I said, Why have I got to get dressed? She said, Because they want to check that we help see if we're not. She pointed. Through the smoke. I knew right away. I've been so conditioned to know life as it was that you didn't even have to say sentences. You just had to point. I knew what it was. And then they took us and they cut my hair. They took away my clothes, they cut my hair, shaved my head, It's interesting. Entering the cattle call, you were still sort of human. You went as a farm. I was with my mother and I had my own clothes, my own shoes. I had my hair. I looked like skinny, hungry, but like a person. That was a point where you separated. You stop being a human being. You entered a person and you walked out on the other side because that's how it was, you know? You enter here and then you would. I don't know how it was, but another door opened. You were you were not a human being. And after they shaved you, your hair, gave you some clothes, you were no longer yourself.

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NOAH REMNICK:
What do you remember about being separated from your parents? And did they impart any wisdom onto you about survival before you parted ways?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:

Well, my father was separated quite early. My mother much later, because I was in Auschwitz with her. My mother taught me survival all the time. From the time I was two or three. You don't cry because you make noise. So I know not to cry no matter what happens. When I was hidden in in the labor camp, I saw what was going on. She had put her hand over my mouth, although she didn't have to, but she was afraid I'd make a noise. I didn't. I learned not to cry. Also in the labor camp. She was alone a whole day with other kids running around because she was working. My father was working, so she taught me never to have eye contact with a German soldier because it meant recognition. She taught me to be invisible at such a young age, and I learned it when she taught me not to run. That's where she said to me, The dogs will kill you because you're not going to run. I said, No, I won't. She taught me that when you see a German coming towards you, you stand very still. You don't move. You lower your eyes. You put your head and a bat on your back of you. And if you have a hat on or you take it off. Cheryl She taught me to become invisible. Really? From the very beginning. Later on in Auschwitz, she gave me no lessons. She talked to me constantly. Knowing that one day I'll be alone and I won't know how to survive. But I did. She told me right away. she. She anticipated things. What? They cut my shave, my hair. Okay. Shaved my hair. I was very unhappy. My braids were lying down and I was standing naked and all that hair. I did a series of. They took my clothes. I didn't say anything. But you taught me in Auschwitz that you have to learn to control your bowel movement because you can't go to the bathroom anytime you want to. I now realize it's a luxury to go to the bathroom any time, But I had to go with

adults twice a day. And I learned, she says. I said, Mama won't be able to hold it. Yes, you will. Or you'll be shocked. I learned I learned also to take care of my bowl, to give you a bowl out of the tin and a cup. You can't lose it or somebody else will use it and get it. Get your rations because you get no rations if you don't have a bowl. Nobody stole my bowl. I hit it. So Will, I watched it. You don't. You learn. You learn not to cry. And when I get very sick, I learned to keep it to myself, even for my mother. Because I knew that meant death. I could see they would take these people who were ill and take them away. I knew what they were going. There were lessons all along. All along.

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NOAH REMNICK:
So during even the most brutal wars throughout history, children have often been spared. But children were particularly vulnerable during the Holocaust, as you mentioned, along with with the elderly. Why was that?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Well, first of all, the children were targets and they knew it. I know I was the target. My mother would tell me to go to kill you if they see you. So being invisible meant the only way you could. You could sort of be saved. And then physically, they were they were susceptible to disease. Oh, by the way, I had scarlet fever and diphtheria at Auschwitz and I survived, which in itself was a miracle, absolute miracle without any medication, because there were no doctors. Children knew that they were being slayed. They were being they going to be the first to die. They know it. You could see the children going to

the to the crematorium. And they were the first one to starve. Without food, without without anything. The typhus was very big and the kids died like flies from typhus and from starvation. Even those who didn't work. You just lie someplace and you done.

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NOAH REMNICK:
Were you able to maintain a sense of your own personal identity at all during this time, or was that completely stripped away from you?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
I don't know what that means. Identity. I still don't know. No, the the thought was, all I want is a piece of bread. Maybe I can eat soon. Maybe I'll find something in the garbage I did even when I was separated from my mother. I didn't even miss her. I forgot. Nobody had mothers. Nobody had fathers. I thought that's the way people have to do. Life is like that. My fear. I even dreaded our straits about food. I just dreamt about food. I thought about food. It's all there was. When they called the kids to line up to be tattooed, I fought to be one of the first kids. I thought it was food. I said, Oh, they're calling us to line up. It must be something to eat. And when they tattooed me, I didn't make a sound. So you learn, but you have to start very early to learn these things. Those kids who probably ended the war later, like they were four or five. They had a good life and all of a sudden had a harder time. I learned from the time I could remember what they did for my memory time.

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NOAH REMNICK:

You mentioned your tattoo. All these years later, you've chosen not to. Not to remove it. What do you remember about getting that tattoo? And why have you kept it?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:

Well, there was a time when I told you I thought it was food. So I fought a girl in front of me. She was a year older, so she won. And she was from my home town. And for the rest of my life, she killed herself. By the way. Years later, she gassed herself. Can you believe it? But I knew her dead, too. And each time I told her, I said, You got a tattoo ahead of me because you fought me. But when I. My turn came, there was this lovely young woman. The reason I say lovely because she was very kind to the children. And as she was tattooing, she tattooed trouble for me. Up, up. She had like a sheet because each wanted to have a certain number and that number was designated for my name. So I remember looking and it was like she put a needle into ink and there's a in each dot. And I remember looking at it, looked it hurt, but I was more interested in looking at it than the pain. And she said to me, Like this, which you've finished. She said to me, Do you know what this is? This number said, No. She said, 27,633. And I didn't know what she was saying because I couldn't read or write. I didn't know that this corresponded to numbers. By the way, it took me years to learn numbers. I learned alphabet easier than I learned numbers. I must have had somewhat of a psychologist thinking its numbers. So she said, If you don't remember the number, you're going to die.

So I said, Say it again. I think it was in Polish, but I can't remember. So I memorized the way it sounded. I didn't know the correspondence of eight, nine, seven. It was just just a word. And then she said, she gave me a rag. She put it the Cold War. I put it in cold water. And she said, Press very hard, because if you if you rub, it's going to swell this way. If you press, it's not going to swell and it won't hurt so much. And what I said to myself? What a nice lady. She doesn't like doing what she's doing. All the kids wanted to. And after that, you disappeared. She was Jewish. A Jew was killed after her job was done. So I memorized my number. It's again, you do what you do that which will help you survive. That's what you do.

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NOAH REMNICK:
All these years later, you've chosen not to remove it. You've kept that.

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Right.

00:39:23:00

NOAH REMNICK:
Why is that? Why was that?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:

I always. You know something? I had to fade to see what they are. Meet Hitler and I'll kill him or something. It was like with me. There was a and an inner anger against what was done. And one of the things I think somebody offered the doctor offered to take the number of. And I said, no, I did nothing wrong. It was like. It was like. It was it was a a symbol of what was done. And I wanted to show that the world knows. Even as a kid, I wasn't embarrassed by it. I mean, I some people I know two people who took the number of they felt they could look at it every day. I've got to tell you something weird. I feel it, although it's not possible. I feel like with the GP as just a bit tired left. I said, Oh yeah, that's my number. That's my left hand. It just wasn't it. It's, it's something I don't want the world to forget. Because if you forget that all those million and a half children will be not even nobody even knew they existed. But if I talk about it, they exist. They existed.

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NOAH REMNICK:
You mentioned the other children at the camp. What was your relationship like with the other children?

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TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Very little. When I first arrived to the barrack, because before I was with my mother, with all the children, I saw two that I knew from. From the previous labor camp and from my hometown. And then they disappeared. I asked them after the war, what happened? Apparently their parents, their mother came. It took them out. It took them somewhere else. I don't know the

process, how that happened. But one of them, our name is Ruth, a route guide pole. She's the one who committed suicide. I knew her, but there was no relationship between us. Don't forget, we were starving. Starving. We heard shooting outside. We knew what was going on. And it was time we even went to the. To the gas chamber. I didn't have any relationship. But what I did do was I'm still a little bit feel bad about that. There was like a ah, and a stove like an oven of bricks, but it was still warming because the winters in Poland are very cold and they were a little bit warm. So I love to go on the barefooted just to keep my feet a little warm. But I would do it in the middle of the night because I couldn't sleep and I would frighten the other children. I met this friend of mine, Ruth. She said, I have a question to ask you. Do you remember a monster would walk around on that of that stove? Like when I woke up in the middle of the night, I couldn't sleep. I saw this, This say said this. I said, Oh, no, Rothko. That was. Me. Can you imagine? She said, Oh, no. Took the years to talk to a psychiatrist about that. I said, I'm sorry I had this thing. I don't know, like a a type of of fearlessness. I still have it. It's it's like a marriage. So I went around at night making faces, scaring the other children, which are very I'm not proud of. In fact, I feel very guilty about that.

00:43:31:00

NOAH REMNICK:
What was the day to day life like for children at the children's?

00:43:35:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

It wasn't a day to day life. Starvation. We did go for a walk, so once in a while I remember walking out in a group two by two. We had partners. I didn't even know my partner was. And then I remember seeing frozen bodies on the ground. I had to walk around it because, there were there were corpses everywhere. And they didn't always. The Sonderkommando, which were the people called taking care of corpses, didn't have time always to pick up the corpses. At one time, I was always in the end, they'd already don't know why. I saw a little like a like a, I don't know, a barrack. And it had a little door there ajar. So I left the group and I looked in and I saw corpses cut up corpses from the very bottom to the very top. I said, Oh, so that's why they keep somebody corpses here. I wasn't surprised. I wasn't upset. That's what life was like. You kill people and then you burn their bodies. If you don't have time to burn the bodies. They were around everywhere you go. So you step around. You don't step on corpses.

00:44:57:00

NOAH REMNICK:
Tell me a little bit about the living quarters. Paint a picture for me. The sights, the smells, the sounds.

00:45:03:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
The living quarters was just a barrack with very little light. There was light on top. Everything was on top of. I had four. I changed it. I don't know why. At one time I had the very bottom. It was three tiers, and sometimes I had the very top. They must have told me to change. I don't remember why. Who said

what to me? And I don't remember the language. Are you woke up in the morning after you were and at night you couldn't. You didn't go to the bathroom you made in big parts that overflowing everywhere. So in the morning, each child would try to clean up a little bit their own shit, whatever, whatever. And then you I think you could wash. They would take you to a place where a communal wash place went to. Some are very quick. Then you went to the toilet, which the toilet was like. Or. Slabs of wood. Cut the thin. And big holes in it. But what that might fill in when I was with my mother still, because they were gigantic holes and I couldn't hold on, so I filled in. And when you went back, they gave me something to eat. You were fed twice a day. The rest of the time you just wanted to think about food as you would for a walk. There wasn't anything. Oh, they counted you. They cut all with my mother before I. Before I was tied to the. There was called uphill. You stood outside your cabinet for hours at all with the children. We were counted inside. We didn't go outside, but they counted as by numbers. They read the. They called up the numbers. And I had a bed made and she died. She was 12 to me. She was so old. I was the worry that she died. I knew she would die because I could see those starvation signs. We, kids would say she got three weeks or two weeks. She's going to die. The word was pagan. Pagan is a Yiddish word. That means. It's it's like street dying. It's like a street person. This sort of disintegrates. It's not a nice death like a dog that people forget to feed dies on a street somewhere. So that's the word. So I would say she's going to die like that. So I worry that they going to call her number, but I know her number because I heard it so much. So I remember pulling her by her feet to the spot in the front where all the kids had died that night. And she was my responsibility. She was in my in my bed. And then I said, Oh, she's

here or she's here. I know her number. I was so proud of that because otherwise they would call. They would call, they would call. Nobody's answering. We would get punished. What if she ran away? I don't know how she could run away. But they were, like, irrational. If somebody was missing completely irrational, they would punish everybody. So I averted the punishment by knowing her number and pointing to her. She died. I knew she would.

00:48:42:00

NOAH REMNICK:
You've mentioned a few times the starvation, that overwhelming starvation. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

00:48:48:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
There is no way to see. It's once again, I have to tell you, you have to be there. There is no way. There is no way to describe what happens to your mind and your body when you are deprived of food for a very long time with no hope of getting any. I mean, it just it takes over. Because what happens? I don't know much about the medical thing, but the body begins to eat itself. Because, the hormones and everything functions a little bit. So so everything inside, I don't know what happens to you. But. But. But. But you have to die. And the starvation, death by starvation was so common. But before that, there comes a period when you don't want to eat anymore. Because death is there already you gone. But before that, that's all you could think about. Somebody once said, I don't remember. It's not my quote. Somebody else's said, How did God

look to you? And the person said, A piece of bread. I got a gift from my mother on my sixth birthday. It was a piece of bread. I think she died because of that years later, because she stole a potato. She bartered it for a piece of bread. Because you know what, kid? I could eat raw potatoes, but it's better to have bread. And she was beaten because they found out that she stole the potato, her head was beaten, and years later, she died from it. She said she had a terrible headache and she died. She was 45 in America. But meanwhile, she gave me this present and it said, I didn't know I had a birth or anything. It said, Toler, Happy birthday. So happy sixth birthday. I couldn't read somebody. One of the caretakers who was there gave a read to me and then be who I am. I saved it. Because to me, life wasn't so terrible. I expected it to be worse. And I had this fabulous image. I saw everybody dying around me. I said, all that going to happen to me. What's going to happen to me is I had this image. I was going to be lying, dying, just about to expire. And then I said, Oh, I don't have to. I have I have bread. I'll take the piece of bread and I'll eat it and I won't die. So I hid it for that, for that purpose. It was my insurance policy, but I hid it inside my. Sure. And in the middle of the night, bread escape invaded all. I didn't even taste it. But they didn't touch me. That's another miracle. I could have been beaten by them. I could have been scratched by. Only my clothing was destroyed. Not even a sign on my body. They were carrying diseases that could have died from anything. But I did.

00:52:13:00

NOAH REMNICK:

There any other small acts of defiance that you engaged in over there over your years there, whether it was hiding the bread or any sort of secrets you kept or ways that you maintained?

00:52:25:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Well. It was all the in my mind, the child could do anything. I was with my mother still and they called us out for up in the counting. And I remember it was so uncomfortable. I think it was a very hot day. It was so uncomfortable. Hours and hours of standing and being counted. And that was an affront. I usually try to be in the back. I was the only child and I ended up in the front somehow. And I stupidly turned around a little bit because I was fidgety. If the four or 5 hours of standing still when a or a female Gestapo of I know for years people told me there were no females, I didn't agree. I said, I know what I saw. It had she had a skirt on. So then I looked it up on the Internet. Yes, there were females, not many, but they were. And they were vicious. That's what it did. That's it. So she took me out of line and she started hitting me. And I remember my thoughts. I said I didn't cry. My mother told me never to cry. And I said I had my head up. I had to because she she was tall and she was hitting my cheeks. And I remember I said to myself, okay, kill me. You could kill me, or you can hit me and hit me and hit me until I die. You will never know how much it hurts. I didn't want to give her the satisfaction that she's hurting me. Her hands were all red with open, open hands like that. And my cheeks, for all swollen. Not as sound came out, not a tear. Then she pushed me back into July and she said. Next time you stand still. She could have killed me easily. When she left, she would do another group. I remember

heaving. Oh, but I. T escape. That is sound. That is sound. I went back to the barracks and I was still off. I was unable to calm myself. But without a single sound. it's a type of a defiance, maybe. What could I do?

00:55:06:00

NOAH REMNICK:
What else do you remember about the ways that the Nazi soldiers spoke to and treated you?

00:55:15:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
There was very little context. The Nazis were very up there. There was a there was a, it was the people took care of us or categories, say care who were in charge of us about standing still and being clean, clean enough. So, I mean, taking the feces out of your bed if you made at night or whatever. It's a very rough, very tough. And. There was no as far as I remember, a kid. It's a good question. I don't remember any direct speaking to me, but I remember my mother interpreted to me like she would say, Take off your clothes. I didn't even hear the order. I don't even know what language it was. It's not the speaking children. We're just. We were just waiting to die. We weren't given orders. We weren't anything. We were just garbage to be gotten rid of as quickly as possible. I mean, even when we were in the. We went to the crematorium with their address. They didn't address. They told us to get addressed. It was an announcement. I don't remember what language it was. And they told us to make sure we know where we put our clothes because we'll come back. We take a good shower. We knew it wasn't a shower. We

knew that. But I didn't. I'm not sure we knew what was happening. Inside the door was a little window. I saw it, but I didn't know. So we waited outside and waited. And I saw them screaming and yelling at each other. People. And then they told us to get dressed. I don't know what happened that day.

00:57:16:00

NOAH REMNICK:
Do you remember any small acts of kindness that people displayed towards whether it was.

00:57:21:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
No, I wasn't lucky, except the nice woman who tattooed me. I really knew at five and a half that she was unhappy to do that. I know. I don't remember any. I wasn't with any adults except my mother. Oh, maybe. Wait a minute. It's interesting. When I fell into the latrine. Up to my neck, almost. My mother had trouble getting me out. I had no hair. I had very skimpy clothes. She couldn't get me the other women helpless. Then I remember. I forgot about that. They helped. And then someone got a hose, and they always be down. Yeah, there was. They helped my mother to get me out.

00:58:21:00

NOAH REMNICK:
Certainly no one is responsible for being a victim of the Nazis. But were there any characteristics that you think helped a person survive in those circumstances?

00:58:33:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

A lot of 95% of us. Look where you were that time. Another way. I think hope was a big thing in helping you continue. Hope that you will see the family again. People under delusion. My mother was. She said, Oh, you will see your family. I have so many brothers and sisters. You can have such a wonderful time. You think you're an only child? You may be, but you will see what a real family is like. She was not a delusion. Nobody came. So that kept the going throughout the worst time. And when she saw there was nobody left, she died. Very simply, she died. She died in America. Life was worth living. So I think people, number one, people who had hoped, people who were with family members I know of, I know personally of people like one woman was with her sister. They kept each other going. Family and relationship inside these terrible conditions was one one factor that kept you going. That's why they wouldn't let you stay long together. They would move you around so you don't have any new relationships. They knew that they were very smart psychologically. That's why they were. That's why they were such great killers. They understood that they used the Germans use their best minds, educated people. They knew that if you keep a group together for too long, they may have relationships with each other and there may be a revolt if you move them around all over. And you never know. My mother never knew where a family was. You couldn't write letters. You couldn't resist the radio. You didn't know anything. You could you could have any contact. I think people who had some contact with each other in some way, even if they

weren't related but were friends, made it much better psychologically. Could could live longer.

01:00:55:00

NOAH REMNICK:
Were there any moments in particular when you thought your own death was inevitable?

01:01:01:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
All the time. Just a matter of when. I thought that being Jewish, you'd done what together, child being Jewish and and such. And death was like one word. It was like, it's like kids now know what it when they five and a have whatever they go to kindergarten then they go to it's accepted. They know when they'll be going to kindergarten. So they anticipate the birthday. So they get they know they're going to be. That's how it was with me. I know. Exactly. And so the same all I do know the year or when all I had to do was find me and that's it. Or I would part of a selection of a group. They were ready to take the kids. I'm among the kids. I thought it or any any moment I would be dead.

01:02:12:00

NOAH REMNICK:
You mentioned this a little bit earlier, but what was your understanding of death?

01:02:15:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

I know that death is you just know. Come back wherever it is. I would like to ask you what your understanding of death. And you are an educated adult American. Human beings have a very hard time understanding death, right? Priests, rabbis. We don't know what that is. As a child, I knew it meant to get rid of the people, to get to get to get them away from this earth and not come back. That's. That's what I thought. That's what really death is. It was a matter of how and when. That's all. And I watched people die all the time. A dead body was as was as normal as somebody passing a flower in a garden. No.

01:03:14:00

NOAH REMNICK:

What do you remember about the day you were taken to the crematorium?

01:03:18:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

Well. Ah, they gave us a delicious breakfast. Which was the best. I didn't care. But I knew we were going because the barrack before that went the few. A few days before I knew the kids disappeared. I knew where they went, but I didn't care because I was going to eat. I told you they were only seeing on earth was food. What kids up to? What comes up to eat? I didn't care. It was something so something delicious. Something sweet, Delicious stuff. And we and we and we ate and then we got dressed. I was very cold. I didn't have gloves. So I went to the next barrack because they knew the kids weren't there to look for gloves. And I found a coat hanging and there were gloves

inside the pocket, and that was going to take them to use them. And then, you know what I said to myself? I was six. I said, I'm not touching those gloves. That little girl is never going to come back any more. I don't want to have those gloves. She instead of saying she'll come back for them, I shouldn't take the gloves. She won't come back any more. So therefore I shouldn't touch that. I had a feeling that she was killed. I know. And I was going to benefit by it. So I was not. No gloves. We went. We walked. And I remember we were passing the women. I didn't even know they were there. And my mother's calling. But my name, She's calling. Were you going? I couldn't recognize a voice. I said, Oh, my mother. Because who knows my name? Nobody could be my name. And as it was a crematorium and everybody was screaming because the women had children, the same group that was screaming and crying. And and and I turned to the little girl next to me because we had partners. And I said, Why are you crying? Every Jewish child goes to the crematorium. That's what I said to her. And then we walked. We walked. And then we came back because they they told us to come back. And I remember it was dark already. We went there was light coming back. It was dark. And I hear voices again. What happened? What was going on? And I said to my mom, I heard a voice. They couldn't do it this time. They'll take us next time. Just like that. Like this. If nothing, there's always supposed to be. Just next time. I wasn't elated. I wasn't happy. It was. When you grow up like that and you know nothing else. Even horror becomes normal when. In fact, after the war, when I came to America and I realized that there were children who ate in regular beds and slept in and had food and parties while I was in Auschwitz, I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it. I couldn't believe it. I said, I didn't say this to them. I

just thought to myself. She was playing piano while I was starving in Auschwitz. How is it possible?

01:07:07:00

NOAH REMNICK:
And how did you eventually reunite with your father? What a miracle.

01:07:10:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Oh, that's about much later. We stayed quite a bit in Auschwitz. We didn't know where to go until the Russians became very difficult to be with soldiers. In the beginning, they loved us and they did love us. It was the first time I ever tasted bread and soup. But we could eat that. We could be free and we could walk around Auschwitz and we could. And then they became very ill with drug a lot. And there was a lot of rape going on. And I remember we couldn't sleep anymore. And I couldn't understand it. My mother said, Sleep in your clothes. I said, Why? She said, Because we may have to run. I saw one where I said, These are our friends. What do you mean, run? So? So she didn't want to tell me what? But one night we were in a barracks sleeping when she. I was in my clothes. She woke me up and she said, We've got to get out of this barrack. So I did. And we hid behind something and I couldn't get it. I said, these are I thought, these are our liberators. What is this? And after that, shortly we had to leave. And that's also when the Red Cross came and gave us a pass and we would long story how we got back to our home town and what we did there. We had no place to eat. It was it was a very difficult time. Going back with my mother's whole. Nobody was there, no family. And then within

about a year, my father came because the house was liberated much later by the Americans. So he came much later. And then whatever further it was left, you go to laugh, right? The irony of life. We had to sneak out of out of Poland to go to Germany in order to reach the Americans. We wanted to reach Americans. We didn't know how. The Russians were everywhere. Communists. So we got into Germany and we went to the American sector in Berlin. That's so that's how I get my first chewing gum. We just swallowed. Yeah.

01:09:36:00

NOAH REMNICK:
So why did your family decide to come to the United States? What in America mean to you?

01:09:44:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Well, I'll tell you, I had an aunt in America come earlier. She knew she had a relative that vouched for her. And I had an aunt in Israel. We basically in the beginning wanted to go to Israel because we had enough of discrimination and Jew so difficult in Poland. But all my aunt in Israel said, don't come. You can't suffer again. There is no food in Israel. Terrible physical conditions go. You could at least start healing somewhere. And then the Americans, the soldiers that were part of our deep, deep camp works warned. And nobody knows. I mean, it's like my first chocolate, my first orange. They were like they were like, fabulous. And we said, we have to go. Well, we we don't we were accepted more. Were we accepted that like Europe, Europe was

beginning to be anti-Semitic then even too many refugees, too many homeless. Who needs those people? Refugees are not loved anywhere. But America promised it would be completely different. And of course, then they found that I had to be so Americans did not want to accept me until I was till I was healed. And then it was smooth sailing. It's the sea on the ship.

01:11:31:00

NOAH REMNICK:
So you eventually went on to study psychology and black literature before embarking on a career as a therapist. Tell me how you came to choose that path for your study.

01:11:41:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Well, I didn't do that right away as my second career. I did this at the age of 40. Before that, I studied black literature because I believed I and my husband both believed that since we were part of the minority and we had such terrible. He did. He was an American. But he but he was very in tune with all of this, that we should live among people that we feel could use our help in some way. So he moved into an all black Harlem neighborhood, and we were there for seven years, and he got his Ph.D. and I got my master's. And I really felt that wanted to teach black literature, which they said I shouldn't. I remember my professor said, What does a nice Jewish girl know about black experience? I said, I may not know about specific black experience, but I get it. I get their experience. So he let me get my math. Very interesting. And then we lived in Israel for many years, and when I came back here I said, I must do

something that is going to be meaningful to me. And that's how I started. Became a therapist.

01:13:11:00

NOAH REMNICK:
And did you ever do therapy yourself?

01:13:14:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Oh, I did, yes, absolutely. After my mother died and my father left for Israel, I was sort of homeless for about four years, three or four years until I got married. And I met this fabulous woman. By the way, after reading my book, her children called me Dr. Lillian Kaplan, and she was my therapist for a long time to try to figure out this whole war situation and my mother's death and just everything that is alive. And I said to myself, I want to do this for other people. Yeah.

01:13:56:00

NOAH REMNICK:
And what did you learn about yourself during those therapy sessions?

01:14:01:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
First of all, I learned that we all have a lot of strengths and that we can heal and that we can heal enough to help others heal. I really think I think that human humanity is very strong. It's not always tested. And and if we're

tested. We'll make it. I tell it to kids who are incest, victims of incest, victims of other things, divorce, of rape or just issues, teenage issues. And I always say, you can make it. Human beings are built to have resilience. That's that's how we were made. But you have to feed that resilience. You can't just, it's like a garden. You have to give it nourishment to that resilience and you'll make it look what all the Holocaust survivors have done. They built Israel. Many of them are very charitable. They build schools. They give money, they rebuild families. People who lost everything became fathers and mothers again second time around.

01:15:31:00

NOAH REMNICK:
Do you ever have a sense of survivor's guilt?

01:15:34:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
No, I have survivor's obligation. I don't know if you see. Depends how you just words. No, I feel that I that maybe this way I'm so driven it. I still work at 85 because. My obligation is to do something with the with with the years I've been given. I'm grateful that I have these years and I can't just sit and watch television or something, you know? Though I'm grateful that I have these years and I should put them to good use. I should talk about those who have killed innocent children just because they were Jewish. I'd like to do both. I'd like to remember that. So we we should never forget the 6 million who were just destroyed for no reason while the world was quiet. And it's also a warning. If we allow anti-Semitism to flourish or any kind of hatred, any kind

against any kind of people, it gives against. If your color is different or your sexual orientation is different or or your thoughts are different, I don't know. If we allow hatred, it is not checked. It's going to be like a set, like a cancer cell that gets spread. It kills the whole body. We will. We will. We will use our rules, our people. I was just in Africa. They. They poached and they killed the rhinos. Can you imagine? Are all thousands of rhinos there to lift? Human destruction.

01:17:24:00

NOAH REMNICK:
You've referred a couple of times to your mother's death in the United States. Can you tell us a little bit about the story of what happened there?

01:17:31:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
My mother, first of all, would you realize that? No, not none of the family was coming back. She wanted to series depression. And it lasted for a very long time. And we didn't have at that time, there wasn't help for trauma. It was like the fifties, the sixties were not they were not cognizant of trauma. So she was very, very depressed. And then one day she said she had a headache and she went to sleep. But you never woke up. And I don't know about that. They didn't have an autopsy, so I really don't know. They didn't do it at that time. It was in 1957. But she was hit in the head by stealing a potato. So maybe it was connected, but I don't know.

01:18:27:00

NOAH REMNICK:

You and your husband were married for 60 years. Tell me how you met and fell in love.

01:18:33:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

Well, I was a few weeks in in America. I was not even 12 yet. And my mother sent me to this Hebrew school because she wanted to be with all things that happened. She wanted to be a proud Jew. She didn't want me to cover it up. She didn't want me to forget who I was. And I met him there. He was 12. We were the same age. She was nine months older. And he was the only one who spoke Yiddish. I didn't speak English. And I remember there was, like, a large period. I didn't know what that was. And he took me by my hand and he took me to a drugstore at the time because at that time, drugstores had food. There was a counter you could get ice cream and and soda and sandwiches. So he bought me a cheese sandwich. And I said to myself, I'm going to marry him just like that. I went I went home and I told my mother I just met my husband. She just. Thought I was crazy. She didn't even answer. I liked. I felt at home. I've been through so many places and felt such an alienation. And this earth, Poland, Poland was a nightmare. After the war, everything. My mother's depression, the death of all the families. I was living in a nightmare. And I met him. And he seemed like he had a big family. He told me about his family. I never heard of people having grandparents. And it just felt and you spoke a beautiful Yiddish because Greg, they spoke Yiddish at his house. His grandparents spoke Yiddish. And he was very, very smart. He was already, I think, in high school when I could barely make, graduate school in only one

year apart. And I said, he he's all the positive that I don't have the stability, the family, the Judaism, the language. Can you imagine be able to talk to somebody when I couldn't talk to anybody except my parents?

01:21:03:00

NOAH REMNICK:
So earlier you were talking to us a bit about his sudden illness. I know this is probably still a bit fresh, but would you tell us?

01:21:12:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Oh, it's well, let's see. He didn't believe in doctors. He had a Ph.D. in biochemistry. He thought. He thought he knew a lot about. I don't know. And apparently, I just found a beautiful letter from my doctor. He didn't even have a doctor. And apparently he had an acute leukemia. But nobody knew and he didn't know. And by the time he realized that he was sick, he had a few days left to live. I don't know. We thought he had called it. It was the first week of coverage. The very first week. And the doctor called. He said, no, take him home. He doesn't have COVID. He's got a few days to live. Let him die at home. It was the biggest shock of my life. Die at home. What do you mean, die? What do you mean? He said. I'm sorry to tell you. We took his blood test. There is nothing there. It's all gone. And he died at home a few days later. With all the kids around in his own bed, in his sleep. And I got a beautiful letter, which is. Read it today to frame it. In fact, it's so beautiful. Who said it was a blessed, blessed death? Everybody would love to die in their own bed, surrounded by family and friends.

01:22:47:00

NOAH REMNICK:
You also had children of your own. How and when did you eventually tell them the story of your life?

01:22:53:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Right away. As soon as they ask my children, my grandchildren, as soon as I see my number and don't tell them, I tell them as they get ready. First I dealt with three year old. Yeah, I did. Why did you write this on your head? You're not supposed to write. I said, Yes, I did. Bad people did it to me. And as they get older, they know more and more and more until they knows as much as I do. And then I took them. Too many of them came with me to. To Auschwitz. To say the prayer of the ashes. And they saw the cattle call and they come with me to speaking. I make my children and grandchildren part of my life so that when I'm not here, they will continue.

01:23:49:00

NOAH REMNICK:
So speaking of your grandchildren, one of the reasons we're here today, one of the reasons I came to know your story is because of a little website called Tik Tok that I understand your grandchild introduced you to tell me the story behind your tick tock account.

01:24:00:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

I was having dinner in his house and the Friday night dinner, Shabbat dinner, and he said, you have 2 minutes after dinner. Of course. So is a Buddhist give you questions and it's subsequent take. I didn't know what that was because my daughter works for Tic Tac, the candy company. And I said, why would a kidney company be interested in the Holocaust? I never heard of that of that platform. And then he said, Oh. So he asked me a few questions. He said, it'll only be 2 minutes because those of their very short attention span. But don't expect anybody to to even ask your questions. I said, Who's going to ask me questions? I didn't know it was a directive event. And then the next day, he said, 20 people called 60 people, Hundred people. I said, Really? Thousand people? I said, Really? He said, Yes. So after that's Hebrew for grandma. They're interested, so we'll do it. At one time we had 50 million watching my number.

01:25:19:00

NOAH REMNICK:

Why does it matter to you so much to tell these stories? What is the importance of storytelling in your life?

01:25:24:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

Storytelling is who we are. Human beings can only, there was a time where people couldn't read or write, and storytelling was the way to give history. All the books that you have started with storytelling and I'm telling this story in order not to be forgotten. It's true. Now we have books and internet and all

that stuff, but there is nothing like a real story. It has a terrific emotional effect, much more than the written word. The reason that Hitler was was so successful because he was a great storyteller. He was a great speaker. And that taught me a lot. Also, I wanna be a speaker so that the people will hear me and have it have an effect. And I want my grandchildren to do the same. So I speak any time somebody wants me to. Very important not to forget those who aren't here anymore by telling their story because they're not here to tell it.

01:26:40:00

NOAH REMNICK:
What is the main lesson you've wanted to convey to your children and grandchildren about your experience?

01:26:50:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
I think I said two things just very. Remember, this is part of your history if you're Jewish or if you're not, even if you're just human being. This is what happened. If we're not careful, remember those? The innocent people. Remember the destruction of innocence on this earth? Number one. Number two. I'll be more cognizant of your environment, your environment, because by not seeing and not listening and not caring, this is what may happen. Good to be awake, to see what's going on. That's the third thing is which may be is the less is that. I guess hope and there was a lot of on the human eye see hope for humanity. I see positive things. But we have to work at it. You know what? I'll tell you a little story, which I sort of like, is a Greg. Greg's son is his

grandfather. Tell me about your feelings, about things he says to his grandfather. I guess the grandfather said, I always have two feelings. One is good and one is bad. What is kind? And the other one is me. And the grandson said, Which one wins? And the grandfather said, The one you feed. So you have to feed the good side of you. It really feels very important on every level.

01:28:50:00

NOAH REMNICK:
So have you formed community with any other survivors over the years?

01:28:54:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
Yeah, I do. First of all, I used to be in touch with the survivors from my hometown, but nobody slept. Two of us left. She's so I feel like I'm the almost the sole survivor of the whole. A representative, not a survivor. A representative of the. Of my town. Except second and third generation like my grandchildren would be speaking. But. But. And I also go to Auschwitz with the survivors. We had a fabulous 75th of our sort of our gathering for the liberation of Auschwitz, 75 years in Poland. But what made it wonderful was the people came. They came from all over the survivors with families. They came with crutches. They came in wheelchairs, But they all came with the same feeling. We made it. And there was hope that we rebuild our lives. We never forget, but we will never give up. I think that's that's that made me feel very good. Talked about food, about the wonderful things, how their life is. And you watch people who we've seen the children be murdered in front of

them have rebuild their lives. They other children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. It was an extraordinarily positive experience. And I think the resiliency of people is just it's to me, it's it's extremely uplifting. Otherwise, I couldn't get up in the morning.

01:30:44:00

NOAH REMNICK:
How do you see antisemitism continuing to manifest in the world and in your own life, even to this day?

01:30:50:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:
I see antisemitism as ignorance and I sort of want to embrace them and say, Come you, you hate me. Let's have a meal. Let's talk. I think it's it's it's it's a scapegoat of unhappy people. I think every time you will see a group of of of all skinheads or really anti-Semites, you will talk about their own lives. You will see they come from broken homes. They come from a from a background of misery. And they want to find a reason. And it's easily found somewhere. It's because of this. Hitler said our country is in terrible condition because the Jews took our jobs. We'll get rid of them. It will. Of all our jobs, we'll have prosperity. See? See a content happy person will not be an anti-Semite. He may not know Jews. He may not necessarily like them, but he's not going to want them as he did. So we have to look around and see who are those people and and work with them.

01:32:07:00

NOAH REMNICK:

Talk to us a little bit about the the importance of family in your life and.

01:32:11:00

TOVA FRIEDMAN:

What your family has been. The most important thing in my life. Because Hitler wanted to kill our religion, our continuity, our people. In fact, I wanted six children, one for every million that was killed by I stopped it for. But now I'm very happy. I have eight grandchildren. They all are very proud of being Jewish. They're educated Jews. They've been to Israel. They're going to be I they're going to continue my story. All of them. All eight know the story. And I know that they will continue and they come with me, not whoever is available when I travel and I talk. So I think it's been. I sort of did. I did. When Hitler said, Let's kill the Jews, I said, I'll have as many kids as I can. Get rid of the religion are not mine. They're going to be very Jewish to go to some of this, be Hebrew. And it's sort of a a an oppositional. I've tried to undo what he tried to do. And it's very meaningful to me. It's not just the theory. This. What is so important in my life? It's been a it's been it's if I'm vindicated, this is. I'm here and I'm and I am not just a survivor, but a thriving in a way. And and I don't have survivor's guilt. I have something else which is new in psychology, but I had it before they wrote about it. Survivor's growth. I feel. I feel like I'm still fighting, you know? For our right. Our people, our. US.

END TC: 01:34:22:00