

FELA WARSHAU  
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Fela Warshau was in a labor camp outside Hamburg where she was sent to the city and made to clean streets after bombing. She said it was the end of March 1945 and they knew liberation was coming but didn't know if they would survive. They were taken by train to Bergen-Belsen. She describes terrible disarray with bodies piled like cordwood, terrible smells, barracks with just bare floors. They were guarded not by SS but volunteers wearing white bands of surrender. She and the others were not fed; there was no water, no food, no work, they were covered in lice. People just dropped dead where they stood. She kept together with 2 friends and her sister. Her sister found a potato which the 4 shared for several days. Prisoners licked sweat from latrine walls.

On the last day, they lay down in the barrack and prepared to die, but then heard loud noises. British troops entered the camp; they were not really there to liberate it, but were attracted by the terrible stench. They distributed bread but people still died that day.

The sick were weeded out and put in makeshift barracks in Bergen. Belsen barracks were made of bricks. Her sister got sick but survived. Wooden barracks were burned. Survivors were disinfected and given other clothes. British slowly started feeding the survivors; her future husband was liberated by Russians who gave prisoners much food and had many deaths because of it. She stayed in Bergen-Belsen two months. They were not locked up and could move around. German doctors and nurses were brought in to work under duress. She said she got satisfaction from seeing Germans have to help bury dead. The Germans said they didn't know who the women were in the camp and were told they were prostitutes being punished. She and her sister found 2 cousins eventually but couldn't find over 60 other relatives. A man she knew from Lodz ghetto said he saw her father go to the gas chamber at Auschwitz.

She and her sister and friends were then in a DP camp; one friend got a message from brother in the American zone, so they went there by coal train. They arrived at Feldafing, one hour by train from Munich. It was very crowded with survivors from all nations. There was no newspaper but there was much music, art, and film was organized for survivors. She tells of a skit that was popular that made fun of Hitler and Goebbels and Goering and that it felt so good to be able to make fun of them. Warschau signed up for ORT courses. People didn't want to go back to Poland because of antisemitism. People paired up and married other survivors who understood what had happened. Married for comfort, not love. She married a man from Lodz ghetto in 1946 who worked as a policeman in the DP camp.

In Feldafing they were not locked in and could go to Garmisch or Munich. She stated the difference between American and British was that the British had no warmth, but Americans did. There were no children at first, but later the survivors started to have children in the camp.

She did not think she had the strength to journey to Palestine and it seemed no one wanted the survivors in the beginning.