



Esther, you have one of the most positive outlooks of anyone I know, which is remarkable in light of your experiences as a child during the Holocaust.

Your willingness to share your journey from one of the darkest places in human history to hope and renewed life is an inspiration to everyone you touch and all who touch you. Thank you for letting me have the unique honor to introduce you to people and watch the incredible transformation of all those lives as they listen and experience your life story.



Fred, Inspired Friend

Esther

She was ten year old when the Germans invaded Poland in 1939. She and her family were forced into the Lodz Ghetto along with 230,000 other Jews. "There was no water and very little food, people were starving to death. Their swelled-up bellies scared me." In 1944, her family was sent to Auschwitz. "They separated us, men on one side and women and children on the other. A neighbor's little girl was standing alone. My mother quickly went over, held her tight and said 'I will take care of you.'" Josef Mengele, the SS officer known as the "Angel of Death," ran the human experiments at Auschwitz. "He asked my mother, 'Is this your child?' My mother said, 'Yes!' Mengele motioned for my mother, the child and my 12-year-old brother to go to the left. I was deemed fit for work and sent to right. I yelled, 'Mommy, Mommy.' I started to move towards her, but another prisoner grabbed my arm and said, 'Don't you dare move.' She knew where my mother was being sent. I felt a sadness and pain that has never left me. I knew that I would never see her again." Esther was sent to the shower to have her head shaved. Her mother, the little girl and her brother, Pinkas, were sent to one of Auschwitz's seven gas chambers to be exterminated. At 15, Esther was sent to the Bergen-Belsen and Rochlitz concentration camps and spent the next year with her fellow prisoners sleeping in tents, pitched in the freezing cold and snow of Germany. "We slept very close for body heat. One night, a Hungarian woman next to me told me to be strong. In the morning, she was dead." As the war was winding down Esther and thousands of other survivors were force marched for miles to railway stations to be transported to other locations so evidence of their camps could be erased. "They didn't kill us, probably because they didn't want to waste their bullets. I was starving and ate grass to survive. We spent one night at a barn, and I hid in the hayloft. The next morning when everyone was ordered to leave I stayed hidden."

After the war, Esther was reunited with her father. She found her way into the American zone in Germany where she met her husband, Benek, another survivor. "I was seventeen when I came to America on Valentine's Day in 1947. That is when my life began. I love this country. The pain of what happened is always with me and it made me realize how precious life is."



Esther - Holocaust Survivor