



GIZELA FUDEM

One Speaking for Many

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

GIZELA FUEDEM - BIOGRAPHY



Read Gizela Fudem's bio and excerpts from her interview, and answer the questions:

- Where and when was Gizela born?
- What can you tell about her childhood and growing up before the war?
- What happened to her family during the Holocaust?
- Why did she decide to tell her story?
- How a testimony of one person can become a voice of many people?
- What makes such personal stories so important in learning about the Holocaust?
- Which fragment of Gizela Fudem's biography was the most moving for you? Why?

GIZELA FUEDEM - BIOGRAPHY

Gizela Fudem, née Grunberg, was born in 1924 in Tarnów. She had an older sister, Tauba, and a younger brother, Moses. They were raised in a traditional Jewish family – their father was a devout member of the Hasidic community. During the Holocaust, Gizela lost her entire immediate family. She survived the Tarnów Ghetto and the Plaszow, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps. After liberation, she stayed in the DP camp in Bergen. There, she met her husband, Leon Fudem. They married in Bergen and then decided to return to Poland. They settled in Wrocław. There, Gizela completed her studies and worked, and their only daughter, Barbara, was born. After Leon's death in 2005, Gizela moved to the United States to join Barbara, who had emigrated from Poland in 1981. Gizela Fudem passed away in 2020.

Gizela Fudem was one of very few survivors from Tarnów, and she chose to speak not only about her own tragedy but also about the fate of an entire community that was almost completely destroyed. Her memories include the names of her parents, grandparents, siblings, far relatives, and friends, as well as images of pre-war life: home, shop, holidays, school, religious customs, and neighborly relationships. She also spoke about post-war life – rebuilding the world after the catastrophe and daily struggles, but also about happy moments.

The project participants worked based on an interview recorded by Centropa in 2005, and on Gizela Fudem's biography available at www.centropa.org.

GIZELA FUEDEM - EXCERPTS

FROM THE INTERVIEW

My name is Gizela Fudem, my maiden name is Grunberg. I was born on 24th November 1924 in Tarnow. I lived in Tarnow before the war and for the first two years of the war. When it comes to my siblings, I had a brother - Mojzesz - four years younger than me, and a sister - Tauba - older than me, also by four years. I come from a religious family, even very religious, my father was a pious Jew with a beard, and never tolerated anything that wasn't kosher. [...] My Mother, Sara Lea Grunberg [nee Muschel], was the eldest of six children. She had two sisters and three brothers. These are their names in order: Bronia, Bala, Berisch, Rafael, Mozes. [...] The youngest sister, however, was a sort of a black sheep in the family. Her name was Bala. They used to call her Bajla in Jewish. She was a bit of a communist and Grandpa had all sorts of problems with her, because before each 1st May the police would come to arrest her. [...] My father's name was Josef Nechemiasz, he was born in Stopnica. He was very religious. He used to go and pray with other Hasidim 4 to one of the shtiblach. That tzaddik, he came from Kolaczyce [40 km from Tarnow]. They used to call him Koleszycter. Mom was even upset at those friends of Dad's, that when she met him he wasn't that superstitious, yes, he was very religious, traditional, and that was always most important, but there was nothing bordering on the absurd, that he didn't do. And later Dad, according to my Mom, started spending time with such a crowd that was just too holy, and they had this influence on him.

At home, I remember, before the war we had a servant, a maid, Polish. There was one for many years, my Mom took her in as a young girl; she was maybe a teenager. First she worked for a Polish neighbor that lived above us, and she kept pestering her, didn't treat her well at all. Mom found her in the basement once [...] because that neighbor from above had thrown her out. So Mom took her in and taught her, so that she never mixed up treyf with kosher. [...] And she was with us for many years. She learned everything and became so enlightened and elegantly dressed, that, for example, when my friends came over, those who didn't visit often, they thought from far away that it was my Mom. Marynia - that was her name - came to us when she was about 14, and left when she was, I think, 27. She left finally, because she had a brother who was a priest, who kept telling her to leave and he took her in. First she had to learn how to cook normally, because for us she made Jewish dishes, and she had to learn how to make pork chops. So she had to take a course, and then she was his housekeeper, he got a parish somewhere there, and she went there. As children we were so attached to Marynia, that when we woke up we weren't calling for Mom, but for Marynia. [...] And when she was to go home for Christmas, we baked her special cookies with a hole in them, so that she could hang them on a Christmas tree. And after her we had another girl, Wisia, also Polish. She stayed until the war, but we didn't get as attached to her.

GIZELA FUDEM - EXCERPTS

FROM THE INTERVIEW

For all these holidays we didn't use to go to a synagogue, but to that unfortunate shtibl where Dad always used to go. It was very ugly. There was a balcony upstairs where women went. And men were downstairs. I remember that Dad used to take us there for Yom Kippur, and maybe for Rosh Hashanah. For all other holidays and on Saturdays we had our prayer books and we had to pray at home. And with time, I simply started to cheat. I could read it, because I learned to, but I didn't understand it, and I can't say that I was passionate about it, I didn't really care. But for some period of time, before I started to rebel, I used to say a few prayers that I had marked in my prayer book. And we had to say it every Saturday morning, when Dad was in the prayer house, and when he came back he always asked, and that was the worst, because I didn't want to lie. So, to somehow get out of it, I kind of said a part of it, and when he asked whether I had already said my prayer, I would answer: yes. And it wasn't a lie entirely, because I had taken a look at it somewhat.

I went to a normal school - public, Polish. And there were Polish and Jewish kids there. [...] Most of the teachers in the public school were Polish. Only religion was taught by a Jew, Mrs. Taubeles. Because we went to religion separately - all Jews from both schools. And religion for non-Jews was taught by a priest. I didn't really experience antisemitism, there; maybe sometimes there'd be something slightly unpleasant. There were teachers who would nag at some of us sometimes, but it usually went together with the fact that a girl was a worse student, or came from some neglected home, and then she was also teased about being Jewish. There weren't any antagonisms between girls. Usually no big friendships either. It's just that we were about 30 Jews there, so naturally all my friends were Jewish.

On the other hand, however, in the class that I went to starting in the 5th grade, there was a girl - Polish, who saved my life during the war. We weren't really friends, but it so happened that I bumped into her and told her I wanted to get out of the ghetto. And she helped me out; I spent a few weeks at her place on the Aryan side. Her name was Gabriela, but everyone called her Ela. But I'll get to that later. I didn't go to that school on Saturdays, but they just had gym, music then, on purpose, because we were more or less half and half of Jews and non-Jews. It didn't matter much, and I was always a very good student, so nobody demanded that I went to school on Saturdays. After I graduated from this school, as I said earlier, I went to a business school.

GIZELA FUEDEM - EXCERPTS

FROM THE INTERVIEW

Back then, in 1940, we could still get around somehow. But it was getting very unpleasant, every couple of days a new announcement appeared saying what [Jews] cannot do and what they have to give up. We weren't allowed to have furs, tea, etc., and everything was punishable by death. The posts were in Polish and German. And men were also not allowed to wear beards, we had a horrible and painful moment when the barber came to our home to shave my Dad's beard off so that he could go outside, because if not, then the Germans would catch him and tear the beard off. Whoever was at home, we all cried, together with Dad. Grandpa, of course, also shaved his beard off; I don't know what it was like at his place then. But I remember that my grandpa was without a beard, we joked at home then that he looked like an old highlander. Because he was very tall, huge. Dad's beard wasn't very long, but still had to be shaved. And they didn't use a razor, but something nasty, it was called 'razol,' some chemical agent. First it was cut with scissors, and then treated with that 'razol,' it was a lesser sin if treated with 'razol,' I don't know why... I remember as if it was today that situation in the room, I know where each one of us stood, when they were cutting that beard off.

Before the first action [June 1942] the ghetto wasn't closed yet, and our house remained in the ghetto. But after that action the ghetto got smaller and was surrounded by a partition and the house we lived in was outside the ghetto. So then we had to move. First to Grandpa's, for a week, maybe two. Later even Grandpa's house was outside the ghetto, and we moved into the area of that destroyed synagogue. [...]

We survived the second action [in September 1942], because we all went into hiding. My sister and I hid in one of the basements in our house. I remember that after the last people entered that hiding place, someone on the outside bricked up the entrance. And we managed to save ourselves, and it so happened that Mom and my brother were somewhere else, in some hiding place on Starodabrowska Street, and Dad was somewhere else yet. Dad used to work somewhere, but I don't remember now where it was. [...]

During the third action [in November 1942] I lost my family, only my sister survived. It was in the fall of 1942. On the day of the action my sister went to work, I had escaped from the ghetto a week earlier and stayed at that school friend's of mine I mentioned earlier, Gabriela, her maiden name was Niedojadlo. My sister told me later how it happened. It turned out that our parents were hiding in the same basement as I had with my sister during the previous action, but someone informed on them. It was someone who was taken away. He was at the train station and said he would tell where the Jews were. He was a Jew as well. He thought he would save himself.

GIZELA FUEDEM - EXCERPTS

FROM THE INTERVIEW

My sister was at work and when she came back, our parents and our brother were gone; they had taken them in the meantime. I stayed at that friend's for the next few weeks. But my sister was in despair and wanted me to come back, because she couldn't live alone in the empty apartment. And when it turned out that I couldn't go anywhere, I decided to go back to the ghetto. I kept telling myself that if I go back and manage to get myself a false 'Kennkarte,' I'll still leave the ghetto. And so I just went back to the ghetto, a brother of my friend took me back in; I went into the ghetto along with the people coming back from work.

When I went back to the ghetto I didn't have permission to work, and with the greatest effort I managed to go back to the same company. I worked there with my sister for one more year, until the end of the summer of 1943. [...] The ghetto was divided into two parts - for those who worked and those who didn't, and we lived in that first part, until the ghetto liquidation...

Later it turned out it wasn't a total liquidation, but they moved most of the people. First they kept us at a bus station for two days in a row. We had to kneel. On the first day they took people to the camp in Plaszow and on the second day the rest of the people went straight to Auschwitz and nobody survived there. My grandfather and those aunts were taken on the second day. My sister and I ended up in Plaszow. I think we were moved on Thursday and the others on Friday. But they all died. My sister and I got to Plaszow and stayed there for a year.

In Plaszow we worked for the same company, which moved there. Because the entire management of that company was from Cracow. We worked shifts there and the day shift was almost entirely from Cracow, those who had been in Plaszow earlier. We were on the night shift almost all the time for quite some time. And during the day they would catch us and take blood. They would catch and take blood for soldiers. And it didn't bother them that it was Jewish blood. We lived in barracks, 100, maybe 200 people in each, I don't remember exactly. The food at Madritsch's wasn't too bad because he organized some extra bread. And it wasn't that clay that we used to get, but for his employees they were bringing food somewhere from the outside and we used to get a quarter of a loaf of bread for exceeding the norm. [...]

That's how I managed until August 1944 when they moved us to Auschwitz.

GIZELA FUEDEM - EXCERPTS

FROM THE INTERVIEW

On 30th December 1944 my sister and I were taken to Bergen-Belsen 19 in one of the last mass transports. It was such a transport that the one after us went on foot. [...]

My sister during that time was literally fading away before my eyes. She was three and a half years older than me, but everyone said about her: 'your younger sister.' They thought she's much younger than me, while I was 20 and she was almost 24. But she looked 15, she was looking really bad. I came down with typhus at the camp, but managed to get better, but when she got sick, she was getting worse and worse every day. During that time there was absolutely no more bread. [...]

they hadn't given us bread for entire weeks, since January, February. For the last two, three months we were only getting brewed turnip, with nothing else, not even salt, just like that, half raw. It was in these conditions that my sister came down with typhus. [...] It was in the last period of the war, I would go to see my sister, try to organize something, bring her something, save her.

And then the English came, and liberated us. They were a bit late, say, if they had come a week earlier, there would have been a chance. I had a friend whose sister was also in the same state and she rescued her, but really at the last moment. But my sister was like a skeleton then and it was too late for everything. They freed us on 15th April and she died on 23rd April. We knew what was about to happen a few days before the liberation. People were talking, and Germans were taking off, there were fewer of them, every once in a while some were leaving. We knew the front was getting closer. And when the English came, they said through the speakers not to worry, that we're free. I remember I wasn't even joyful, I had no idea how to be happy. I couldn't believe it was really the end, I wasn't really conscious of anything.

After the liberation they deloused and fed us, and after a while they began moving us to a different place. It was about two, three kilometers from the camp. There were barracks in which Hungarians working for the Germans used to live. They had been sent away and we got an entire town of barracks. Tens of two-storey houses forming these squares. There were also one-storey houses for diners, theaters and administration. Initially they turned most buildings into hospitals. And then more or less it turned into a DP camp, a camp for displaced persons

GIZELA FUDEM - EXCERPTS

FROM THE INTERVIEW

I married my husband in Bergen. It was on 11th September 1947. We got married in the office, and I remember that my husband didn't understand German and didn't say anything. At some point I had to give him a sign so that he'd said 'Ja' [German for 'yes']. Some family members can't forgive us until this day that it wasn't a real Jewish wedding. But nobody was thinking about that back then. [...] We stayed at the camp until 1948, and then decided to go back to Poland. Everyone was advising us against it. But I wanted to study more, and I thought it would only be possible in Poland. Besides, I was very much attached to the language and couldn't really imagine living anywhere else.

In Poland first we went to Wroclaw, because I already knew then that two younger brothers of my mother, Rafael and Mozes, had survived. [...] Later I went to Lodz to look for the rest of the family. And I got there exactly when my cousin Sara Lea [daughter of Baruch, Gizela Fudem's father's brother] and her husband were ready to leave for Israel. I managed to see her then. I decided to stay in Wroclaw then. It was still 1948, and after some two months of being in Poland I took university entry exams, humanities then, because I thought I'd study English, and I thought I'd like that. But later it turned out I preferred science and moved to the polytechnic where I got a degree in civic engineering, a bachelor's and a master's degree. In the meantime I began working at the construction mechanics faculty, I worked there as an assistant for nine years. And later I moved to a design office, where I worked until my retirement.

Our only daughter was born in 1955. Her name is Barbara and she currently lives in the USA. She graduated from a university here, she took biochemistry, and she emigrated in 1981. She couldn't find herself a place for herself here. Besides, all her friends scattered around the world and she couldn't really find herself here. Since I had relatives in America, she decided to go there. [...]

She always knew she was a Jew, we never hid anything from her, but she had little contact with Judaist practices, because we observed no traditions. [...]

Here in Wroclaw since the beginning we've had contact with Jewish circles connected with TSKZ. We also used to go to the Jewish theater on Swidnicka Street, back when Ida Kaminska used to perform there. The only contact I have with the Jewish community is when I pick up matzah for Pesach. I also have an ID from the Association of the Repressed. And sometimes we went to celebrate the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, because my husband comes from Warsaw. The group of those who go there keeps getting smaller and smaller.

Workshop 1

Gizela Fudem – One Speaking for Many

Objectives: Students discover how one person's life can become the voice of an entire community and how personal stories connect the past with the present.

Introduction:

- Do you know anyone who has shared stories about their family or the place where they grew up?
- Why do you think such stories are worth listening to?
- Can one personal story represent many people? How?

Short presentation of Gizela's story:

Main concept: Gizela didn't try to replace the lost world; she built her new world on the solid foundations of what existed in the past, before the war. Her story became a bridge between the lost world and the reconstructed one.

Four areas, each representing a different aspect of Gizela's life:

- Testimony of a Lost World – stories about family, friends, and the Jewish community.
- Encounters Between Worlds – people outside the Jewish community who played an important role (teachers, neighbors, friends).
- Building Life After the War – work, family, and daily life after tragedy.
- The Legacy of Memory – how Gizela's stories preserve the memory of people who are no longer with us.

Group work:

- Choose a sentence or excerpt that you think best illustrates the idea of "one speaks for many."
- Consider what emotions it evokes and what values it conveys.
- Prepare a short presentation (2–3 minutes) in which you tell the rest of the class about your part of the story.



Discussion:

What does it mean to “speak for those who can not speak for themselves”?

Summary:

Gizela Fudem – One Speaking for Many

Why did she speak “for many”?

- She survived, but lost almost her entire family.
- She spoke of a world that no longer exists: prewar Jewish Tarnów, everyday life, traditions, childhood.
- Her testimony restores the names and faces of those who perished.
- Thanks to her story, the victims become people, not numbers.
- What she experienced and remembered is part of collective memory – one of the voices that speaks for thousands of silent ones.

“One person can save the memory of an entire world that has disappeared”

ADDITIONAL TASK:

Read a selected excerpt from Gizela's memoir.

List:

- three emotions you feel as the recipient,
- three emotions you think Gizela might have felt,
- three things you think she wanted to pass on to future generations.

Create any artistic work (drawing, computer graphics, short film, poster, poem, or other literary text) that conveys the message of the story of Gizela Fudem and her loved ones.

Additional questions for discussion:

Which events in Gizela's life had the greatest impact on her identity? How did these events shape her self-perception?

Which places associated with Gizela in Tarnów and Wrocław held particular significance for her? What can these places reveal about her life and experiences?

How might Gizela's story be perceived by different generations? What aspects of her life might be particularly important to people today?

What emotions does Gizela's story evoke in you? What makes her story particularly moving?

What biographical elements of Gizela—her childhood, life during the war, life after the war—had the greatest impact on her perception of the world and herself?

Gizela witnessed dramatic events. What mechanisms of memory and forgetting might have played a role in her life?

What, in your opinion, was the most important message from Gizela's story that is worth preserving and passing on?

Workshop 2

Gizela Fudem's story and the context of human rights

Objective: Students will learn about selected issues related to human rights and their violations by relating the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the experiences of a specific person.

Introductory Discussion:

What are human rights?

A brief presentation of Gizela Fudem's biography:

Key Idea: Gizela Fudem survived the Holocaust, was imprisoned in the Tarnów Ghetto and three Nazi concentration camps, and lost her mother, father, brother, and sister – she was the only survivor of her family. After the war, she managed to rebuild her life and tell the story of her tragic fate and that of her loved ones. Her story is a call to current and future generations to remember the victims and prevent atrocities.

Group Work:

[Each group receives one page with quotes from the interview and selected articles from the UDHR]
Read excerpts from the interview with Gizela Fudem conducted in 2005. Then, read the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Consider whether Gizela Fudem's memories and the provisions of the Declaration have any common ground. Are the situations and events Gizela Fudem discusses consistent with or inconsistent with the articles of the Declaration? What does this indicate? Write down and present your reflections in poster form.

Presentation of the results of group work and discussion:

What themes related to human rights did you find in Gizela Fudem's biography? What reflections accompanied reading her memoirs through the lens of human rights?

Summary:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by the UN General Assembly. Its adoption was influenced by the events of the Second World War the NS crimes.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Paris 1948

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Paris 1948

Article 17

1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 23

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Materials created as part of the project implemented by Galicia Jewish Museum in cooperation with Centropa, V Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. gen. J. Jasińskiego in Wrocław and Zespół Szkół Ekonomiczno-Ogrodniczych im. T. Kościuszki in Tarnów.



The project was supported by the EVZ Foundation



This publication does not represent the opinion of the EVZ Foundation.
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