

Overview of “Surviving Auschwitz: Children of the Shoah*”

During World War II, the Nazis killed six million Jews — men, women and children — from all over Europe. At least one million Jews were killed at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most notorious of Hitler’s concentration camps. In mid-January 1945, as Soviet forces approached Auschwitz, the SS began evacuating the camp, force-marching 60,999 prisoners to Germany. About a fourth died from starvation and exposure or were shot by the SS for falling behind.

On January 27, 1945, the Soviet army entered Auschwitz and found 7,000 prisoners alive. Among them were two young children from Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, a town in central Poland. Tova Friedman, 6, and Frieda Tenenbaum, 10, had not only survived the Jewish ghetto in their town but had also lived through two slave labor camps. Now, thanks to their Soviet liberators, they even survived the Kinderlager, the children’s camp at Auschwitz, which in reality was a holding area for the gas chambers.

Using videotaped testimony from the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation and other sources, [this film] documents the story of these survivors as they progressed through the Nazi system, starting with the Tomaszow ghetto, then the labor camps, and finally Auschwitz. The program [includes] Soviet-produced archival film of their liberation from Auschwitz, as well as wartime photographs of Auschwitz, Tomaszow and other sites, plus pre- and post-war family photographs.

On-location filming at Tomaszow, the two labor camps (Starachowice and Blizyn) and Auschwitz in the program’s epilogue show the survivors revisiting these sites with their children and reflecting on the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust 60 years later. While their story is one of tragedy and horror, their message is one of tolerance and hope.

*Shoah: “catastrophe”; the Holocaust

