



THE HISTORY OF “THE HEART FROM AUSCHWITZ”

Her name is **Fania**. The **F** on the front of the heart is the first letter of her name.

During the war, Fania was in Poland. She was a prisoner at the **Auschwitz** camp and was forced to work in a munitions factory.

December 12, 1944, is Fania’s **birthday**. She is 20 years old.

In the munitions factory, Fania has a **friend** called Zlatka.

Zlatka wants to give Fania a **gift** for her birthday. She decides to make a heart which will contain the signatures of many women who work in the munitions factory.

Zlatka makes the heart and it is very difficult to find the things she needs to make it with. **Scissors, paper, material** and **pencils** are very rare, forbidden objects.

Once the heart is made, she puts a **note** in the heart and then gets about 20 women to sign it. These women, all prisoners in Auschwitz, come from different countries. They write in the heart in **Polish, German, French** and **Hebrew**. In the heart there are messages of **friendship**, words of **hope**, birthday **wishes** and **signatures**. Then they give the heart to Fania.



In January 1945, Auschwitz is evacuated. Fania and her comrades are forced to walk towards Germany. This event is called the “**Death March**”. Fania manages to keep the **heart hidden** under her arm for the entire journey.

After walking for three days, Fania and some of the other workers from the munitions factory are deported by train to Ravensbrück, which is a concentration camp for women. The last message is written in the heart by a young woman on January 26, 1945, at Ravensbrück.

Fania and Zlatka are both survivors of the Holocaust. Fania’s favourite inscription in the heart is “**Freedom, Freedom, Freedom.**” Fania donated the heart to the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre in 1988. It is an exceptional object in the museum: It is one of the rare objects known to have been created by prisoners in Auschwitz.

In 1998, Zlatka, like many other Holocaust survivors, told her life story in Yiddish in front of a camera in Montreal. In this recording, she tells how she had the idea to make the heart and how she proceeded to make it. She says: “**We were 20 (women); that is why I imagined 20 layers.**” In fact there are 12 women’s signatures in the heart.

The story of the heart continues. In 2008, a **documentary** was made about the heart. The directors Luc Cyr and Carl Leblanc travelled all over the world **to find the women who signed the heart.** When the documentary was being made, Fania saw the Heart from Auschwitz again at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre. On this occasion, students from Lambert-Closse School in Montreal, who did The Heart From Auschwitz activity, gave her a heart for her 84th birthday.

Fania now lives in Toronto. She was born on December 12, 1924.
Zlatka lives in Buenos Aires. She was born on September 24, 1924.



Zlatka Pitluk recounted her life story and her experience of the Holocaust in front of a video camera on September 16, 1998. Certain survivors choose to do this in order to transmit their memories to young people.



Fania Fainer, December 10, 2008, at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre. Here she is in front of the glass cabinet in which the Heart from Auschwitz is displayed.