

## **Case Study: Amalie Schaich**

The Roma people (sometimes known as 'Gypsies') are one of the oldest and most persecuted groups of people in Europe. Those called 'gypsies' by their neighbours were originally from groups, including the Roma, and also the Sinti, Lalleri and others, who preferred a travelling or nomadic lifestyle. For centuries, most countries had tried to send them away, refusing them permission to travel within their lands. They were almost always regarded with suspicion by householders.

When the Nazis came to power, their racist ideas made them hostile to the Roma and Sinti. They decided they were originally 'Aryan', that is, part of the superior northern European race which the Nazis believed in. However, because the Roma travelled from country to country, the Nazis thought they were no longer Aryan but anti-social and a threat to the well-ordered German society. As with the Jews, laws were passed to prevent ordinary Germans and others from having anything much to do with them. During the Second World War, upward of 200,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered in cold blood by the Nazis.

It is estimated that around 25,700 Roma and Sinti were sent to Auschwitz, the vast majority of whom were murdered immediately in the gas chambers. Others were placed in a section of Auschwitz which was known as 'the Gypsy camp'. Here they suffered from disease and lack of food and either perished there or were later gassed. Of the approximately 25, 700 'gypsies' sent there, only about 2,000 survived the War.

One of these was Amalie Schaich. Amalie's parents were sent away to the camps when she was nine and she was put into a children's home. Here she and the other children were examined regularly by doctors trying to find 'proof' that the children were racially inferior to other Germans. For a while, she received letters from her parents, although a lot of the lines had been crossed out by the Nazis. Eventually the letters stopped. In 1944, Amalie and the other 'gypsies' at the children's home were also



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sent to Auschwitz, where her brothers and sisters perished. Amalie's eye-witness testimony has been invaluable in helping historians piece together the story of the treatment of the Roma and Sinti under the Nazis.