

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Archives

**Oral History Interviews of the
Kean College of New Jersey
Holocaust Resource Center**

**Interview with David Rosenblum
May 22, 1987
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PREFACE

On May 22, 1993, David Rosenblum was interviewed on videotape by Jeanne Miller and Bernard Weinstein on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum houses a copy of the interview as a result of a contributing organization agreement with the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the contributing organization agreement.

Summary of the
Interview with David Rosenblum
May 22, 1987

David Rosenblum was born on May 13, 1925, the youngest of 13 children. His father worked in the fur and clothing business. David's family lived in Kraków at the outbreak of World War II. When the Germans occupied Poland, David's father bought him a set of forged papers identifying him as a Pole, so he could use "aryan" looks to help his family.

The Kraków ghetto was established in 1941, and the family moved to Szydłówek, Poland. David's family was deported and he was unable to get them released. He remained at large with his forged papers. At Skarzysko-Kamienna, Poland, David saw the loading of trains destined for Treblinka. Returning to Warsaw, he tried to warn the Jewish authorities about Treblinka, but was ignored. He wandered homeless for the next two years, visiting Lublin, Poland and Lviv, Ukraine during his travels. He was captured by the Gestapo in Rava-Ruska, Poland, (Rava-Russkya, Ukraine) where he was tortured in the Montelupich prison, and then sent to Jaresolimaska concentration camp in Kraków.

David was then sent to Auschwitz, where he was part of a construction gang detailed to clean up rubble from the Warsaw uprising. The detail was then put on a death march to Kutno, Poland. David was then transported to the Müldorf subcamp of Dachau Concentration camp, Germany. In April 1945 he was transported to the Tyrolean mountains (Bavarian Alps). David escaped from the train and was quickly liberated by the Americans.

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He came to the United States in 1946 to live with his sister. He is married and has two children.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with David Rosenblum
May 22, 1987**

01:00:00

David was born on May 13, 1925. He remembers the wedding of his sister to an American cousin. In 1938 a group of German Jews were evacuated to Kraków. Neither Poland nor Germany wanted these Jews. The Jewish Committee ordered each family in Kraków to take one family in. Kraków's population was 400,000.

01:04:00

In David's house, 15 people lived in two and a half rooms. People had to sleep on chairs. David's father worked in the fur and clothing business. On September 1, 1939 World War II began. Two of David's brothers went to Lvov (Lviv, Ukraine) in the Russian side of Eastern Poland. On September 5, the Germans entered Kraków. All of the Jewish stores in the city were looted by neighbors.

01:07:00

The Germans took people off the street for forced labor. In December 1939, David's father's store was looted and sealed. Food was scarce and the family had no income because the family business was closed. Responsibility for the family was placed on

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David. His mother was quite ill. Dogs and soldiers waited for Jews as David waited in line for four or five hours to get rolls. At this point, David realized that he could pass for a Pole because of his fair features.

01:10:00

While waiting in line, David was asked if he was a Jew. He denied it and was allowed in the store. He noticed an officer with a hatchet. He later learned that geese were being killed in the next room. David realized the tremendous psychological threats and manipulations that were beginning.

01:13:00

David was aware of the situation getting worse. His brothers from Lemberg (Lviv, Ukraine), returned home. His father remembered World War I, and did not believe that the Germans could be this bad and did not worry. David's father was able to get 100 kilograms of flour and made bread to save for the difficult times ahead. David needed to learn a trade and got a job as a tool and dye maker. He was 15 years old. His father bought Aryan papers for him and got a forged seal and stamp. David's name became Roman Zamin Babish. David became the key member of the family who could get out and travel to help the family. The ghetto had not been established in Kraków at this time.

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01:16:00

At this time it was still possible to buy papers. David was forced to wear the Star of David, but refused to do so. He was designated as the person to help out if anything were to happen to the family. The family was forced to turn in all radios and other forms of communication to the authorities. David became a source of information. His brothers and sisters also had a chance to become "Aryan", but chose to stay with their mother.

01:19:00

In 1941, Kraków became a ghetto. The family went to Szydłowtek near Radom, Poland. David, his brother and grandmother had to leave Kraków because his grandmother was over 100 years old. His mother and sisters stayed in the ghetto. David went to church in a Capuchin Monastery in order to receive food. He sang in the choir there. One day as he was about to receive the Host, a former schoolmate noticed him. The schoolmate yelled out his name and called him a Jew. David faked an illness and ran away.

01:22:00

In David's school, 10 out of the 45 students were Jewish. In 1938 a law was passed that placed the Jewish students on one side of the classroom and the gentile students on the other. David remembers being beaten during recess, especially before Passover. Although he always considered his background to be

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Polish, children and others always treated his family as second class citizens. There was a constant feeling of Antisemitism before the war.

01:25:00

David does not understand why the present Pope (John Paul II) does not have more understanding of the Jews' plight. The Pope attended Jagellonian University, where Jews who approached the campus would be attacked by boys armed with razors attached to sticks. David recalls that there were German officers attending the Mass when he was almost caught. David returned to Szydlowlek where his father reunited the whole family. All of this took place in the period 1940-1942.

01:28:00

David's family lived in a one room apartment. His grandmother slept on a basket and was not aware of what was happening. David traveled to Warsaw, Poland, to see his uncle and bring food to the family. En route to Warsaw, he witnessed people being arrested and sent to an ammunitions factory labor camp. David's brother was captured. David tried to bribe the authorities for his brother's release, but was unsuccessful.

01:31:00

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David's brother worked in an ammunition factory where the workers were getting jaundice. David could not get him out of the factory and felt like a failure. Just before Rosh Ha-Shanah, David's family got the order for their relocation. The family went to a lumber yard. David went to the Gestapo and claimed that there was a Jew in their custody that owed him money. A Gestapo agent asked David to take him to this Jew. David led the Gestapo man to his father. His father gave him money and his brother gave him a ring. David went back to his grandmother and found that she had been murdered.

01:33:00

David ran and left the town. Near a cemetery, a Ukrainian accused him of being a Jew. David showed the Ukrainian his papers, but was forced to drop his pants. The Gestapo-man whom David had approached about the money came by. The Gestapo officer did not understand Ukrainian and let David go because he believed him to be a Pole. During the encounter, the Ukrainian screamed "He's a Jew" but the Gestapo-man did not understand Ukrainian.

01:36:00

David went to the town of Skarzisko-Kamienna and slept in a tree. He was scared and alone, and without a family. He felt lost. David followed a train to find out where his family had been relocated. He saw hundreds of people shot dead, others loaded into cattle cars and shipped to Treblinka.

01:39:00

David saw 20 or 30 box cars and heard the people screaming. He returned to the small ghetto in Warsaw. He searched for his uncle. David went into the main ghetto and went to the police station. He told the police that he had come from Malkinia, Poland and told them that children were being burned and cremated. The authorities did not believe him. He ran away and went from city to city.

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01:42:00

David went to Lublin, Poland, and Lviv. He slept on trains, in basements and gutters and stood in the street to beg. He was homeless from 1942-1943. David went to Rybotycze, Poland, and Starakhovitz, Poland, (Wierzbink), and witnessed all of the relocations. He felt no one cared anymore. No one helped him.

01:45:00

David left Warsaw. He had a business deal to sell horses' hair to make brushes. He went to the farmers to buy hair. David also dealt in the black market. Once, while staying in a hotel, a blond woman thought he was a Jew and David had to bribe the hotel police in order to escape. They bought him a ticket to Kraków where he thought he could collect some money from his father's unfinished business deals.

01:48:00

On a train at the Radom station, the authorities were taking everyone who didn't have a working card to work in Germany. David told the police he worked for the Polish underground and they let him go. He ran and jumped a seven-foot wall. The German police waited on the other side. He was taken in, but allowed to leave.

01:51:00

David walked back to Szydlowek. He remembered some money that was hidden in a coal box, but the family's apartment had been looted and ransacked. David took the train back to Kraków and asked his neighbor for help. His neighbor threatened to turn him in. The Gestapo caught him and he was arrested. He bit the side of his mouth as he realized that he would be executed.

01:54:00

David went back to Lubin and Rava-Ruska, Poland, (Rava-Russkaya, Ukraine), traveling from city to city. Each city he entered was in the process of getting ready for transport. He tried to help people wherever he went.

01:57:00

On March 14, the Kraków ghetto was liquidated and the cemetery was destroyed. The headstones were used as street pavement. David met a German friend who was married to a Jew. She was a conductor on a train. She told him where to find her husband who was hiding, but the husband told David that he could not help him.

02:00:00

David returns to the story of being arrested. He was handcuffed and jacked up. His captors slashed him with whips and tortured him. He was asked where the Jews were hiding again and again. His torturers forced bamboo sticks between his fingers and squeezed his knuckles. He fainted and was taken into a prison cell.

02:03:00

David witnessed some executions. Someone told him that he would not be executed. He was imprisoned in an eight-foot by eight-foot cell. His captors put braces on his hands, legs and neck. Over and over again he questioned himself about what he had done. The next day the braces were taken off. David realized that he would be executed and tried to kill himself. Someone called out to stop him. He was beaten and taken to another cell.

02:06:00

Anyone who was caught with Aryan papers was put into a cell and later executed. David recalls the "prayer" the prisoners were forced to say each morning "We Jews, it is our fault of the war, we are murderers and thieves because German blood has to spill, because we are murderers and thieves and we are the worst element."

02:09:00

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Many of the prisoners committed suicide. The undertaker would come in and bring bread. David was taken to Jerozolimska concentration camp in Kraków. Ninety-nine percent of the inmates caught with Aryan papers were executed. David spent six weeks in Montelupich Prison where the authorities tortured and interrogated prisoners in order to find more Jews who were in hiding. David is the only survivor of this prison.

02:12:00

David recalls that he scratched information about himself on the wall of his cell with a nail. This would allow someone to get in contact with his family if he died. David was put on a truck and sent to Auschwitz. There were not enough people in his transport for them to be sent to the gas chamber, so they were deloused, showered, and tattooed. David was given number 1453000. He was born on the 13th, was the 13th child, and was left on the 13th. Thirteen was his "lucky" number.

02:15:00

The next day a transport came from Belgium. David witnessed a woman give birth to a child that was destroyed by the Gestapo on the spot. David also noticed that people killed themselves on the wire. He recalls trying to go to the bathroom at night and fearing that he would be shot. David would have received 50

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lashes if he was caught going from Block 3 to Block 16 to go to the bathroom.

02:18:00

David recognized a doctor who was his neighbor in Kraków. The doctor told the block leader to give him nourishment. David was sent out on the next transport to Warsaw. Five thousand inmates were sent to Warsaw to clean up the rubble from the uprising.

02:21:00

David worked from 1943 to 1944 in this Aufbau Kommando (construction detail). He had to separate steel from bricks and perform other tasks. He tried to save survivors still in bunkers.

02:24:00

David recalls that there was no active resistance. He remembers a Jewish interpreter who tried to escape and was executed. The interpreter was hung for two days as an example to the rest. Five thousand inmates were put on a death march for four to five days. Those who could not keep up were shot.

02:27:00

David's blisters got so bad he just cut them and put his shoes back on. He continued to walk and then took a break. The conditions were severe. There was no water and David drank urine. Someone started to dig into the ground with a spoon for water. Water came up and the prisoners filtered water through their clothes. Only 2,000 made it to Kutno, Poland. When they arrived they all jumped into the Warta river because of their thirst. The Germans opened fire on them. The prisoners were put on a train to Dachau.

02:30:00

At Dachau, they were given soup and new clothing. They were told that they were going to build an underground camp in the woods. David had to carry cement on his back for 16 hours straight.

02:33:00

In the Müldorf, Germany, subcamp of Dachau, David realized the need to survive and stole bread from someone. He felt an incredible feeling of guilt.

02:36:00

David was placed on a transport to the Tyrolean mountains (Bavarian Alps). American planes began to bomb the train. The prisoners threw their jackets out of the train to show the pilots that they were prisoners. The conductor was shot and his leg needed to be amputated. The leg was amputated with a spoon. David jumped off the train and tried to escape by running into a field. This occurred in April 1945.

02:39:00

As he ran, David saw a German soldier and told him that the Americans were coming. He took the soldier's gun from him and jumped up in a tree and waited. A tank with a white star on it

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came close and David gave identified himself. He told them he was a prisoner.

02:42:00

A Jewish-American officer was on the tank. David drove with them to the camp where the other inmates were. The Red Cross came in to help the wounded. The Americans forced the Germans to bury the dead. The Americans gave the guards to the inmates for immediate execution. The prisoners were given three or four days to "do what you want" before the MP's (Military Police) would arrive. Everyone was given food, but the food was too rich and many people died.

02:45:00

David went into town in his striped suit with a machine gun. He stormed a house and took some food. Anger and revenge were everywhere.

02:48:00

David went to a field hospital to do volunteer work. He tried to trace his sister and brother-in-law in Long Island (New York). He could not find any other family member. David wanted to set up a Kibbutz for farming and move to Israel.

02:51:00

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David wanted to move to Israel because it was "a place to go." He had no longer a homeland. He received news from his sister who sent him money rolled up in toothpaste containers and in packages of food every week.

02:54:00

David received permission to come to the United States. He was shipped from his camp to Munich and from there went on to Bremen, Germany and the United States. He arrived in the United States on May 13.

02:57:00

David had one suitcase and threw everything in the ocean. He did not want to leave anything of himself behind. Arriving in New York May 24, 1946 he saw a sign with his name on it. He told his sister he was the only one to survive. David tried to get a job, but it was difficult.

03:00:00

David got a job in the fur business. He wanted to go to Hollywood, California, but ended up in Las Vegas, Nevada. He went to San Francisco, California, and worked as a shoe salesman. He continued to run. David had no youth between the ages of 15 to 21 and kept on running. He returned to his sister.

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03:03:00

David became a partner in a business. He met his wife while in the business. He has two children and lives in Newark, New Jersey.

03:06:00

It was still very hard to stop. He still needed to run. He would get up at three in the morning and go to Fulton Fish market. He felt fear and could not be alone. He needed to be a part of something.

03:09:00

Later, David had open heart surgery. He is hoping for grandchildren. He lives in Bloomfield, New Jersey. David realizes that time is passing and that Holocaust witnesses are dying. Some people want to hear about the Holocaust, and some don't.

03:12:00

David always wanted to go to America. He always hoped to be with his sister. This kept him going, the goal of reaching America and his family.

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03:15:00

David never felt proud of being a Pole. He was always a second-class citizen. He was put down and unable to feel pride. David admits that he does not believe in God.

03:18:00

David wants to protect his son. He did not allow his son to be circumcised because of his experiences. He did not want what occurred to him to happen to his own son.