

MAURICE MARKHEIM
RG-50.005.0040. (recorded 1983 California)

Maurice was born in Krakau, Poland in 1923, the youngest of 7 and the only one alive. He said their world stopped in 1939 when the war broke out. The family took in other Jewish families who were refugees from smaller towns. Marie was picked up in the middle of town by the SS and sent to a work camp in the forest. It was only men. They worked without food, water, coats. He figured out how to leave the camp with other who were day workers and went home to Tarnow in the evening. He hid in the hospital during the day and pretended to be sick.

He was able to return to Krakau to meet his mother and sister. He was very close to his mother. They were already in the ghetto but Maurice didn't have ID and couldn't live inside the ghetto. His mother was able to leave the ghetto for a little while to talk with him, but eventually his mother and sister were sent to Belzec and he never saw them again. He also learned later that his father had already been shot in the ghetto when he had seen his mother. He talks about the ways he should conduct himself that his mother told him.

Maurice worked with the Germans connecting railroad cables in different places every day. All Jews were then sent to the small town of Vinishka near Krakau. One of his brothers was already there. He talks about how frightened he was of the black uniformed SS men. He was doing cemetery work. The Germans were taking truckloads of Jews out from the town and killing them, and Maurice and other men had to dig the graves, then pick up the dead bodies and run with them to the mass grave and cover them up. They worked in 12-hour shifts.

Maurice said he was lucky to be taken to another work camp and not be shot in the forest. This camp was Plaszow. First it was commanded by Miller. He describes horrible conditions. They built road and barracks in 12-hour shifts. He then worked in a cable factory with about 100 other people. The chief engineer was Keeler and the Director was Boerman. The conditions at Plaszow were horrific. Boerman was able to help him get a room back in the ghetto with his brother, who helped him survive by giving him extra food and clothing. Then he was moved back into the larger Plaszow camp where Amon Goeth became the commander. Maurice said he had no words for how evil Goeth was. He hung two of his best friends for taking a slice of bread.

Again, Maurice was able to move back to live in the factory where he stayed for two years. He describes thousands of Poles being shot and then having their gold teeth extracted before they were put in mass graves. He then was able to join the Schindler Jews and that is what saved him until the end of the war.