

USHMM

Interview with Solomon (Shlomo) Malek

Dec. 13, 1993

Tape 1

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Name: Solomon (Shlomo) Malek

DOB: 23 November, 1930

Location: Visheul de Sus (Mosey) in the County of Maramuresh, Transylvania.

Village located in the valley between two hills: Jews on one side and Christians on the other with a small river in between, bridged by several bridges.

Up to 1941 the village belonged to Romania and from 1941 to 1944 the village belonged to Hungary.

Under the Romanians, antisemitism was static _____. Under the Hungarians, antisemitism was active, open, and opportunistic.

The Jews were all religious (Orthodox, Kosher, Zionists), and very poor. Life was very harsh and life expectancy between 40-50 years.

His family consisted of 6 children: 5 boys and 1 sister. He and the sister were twins. Two other brothers were also twins.

His father was a SOFER, which is, he wrote Hebrew texts for mezuzot and tefilin for which he also made the little boxes and the leather strips. He also painted signs in front of stores and some paintings.

He (Solomon himself) attended public school plus Heder plus Yeshiva and helped around the house, when father was doing forced labor.

The Ghetto

Late in 1941 Jews were herded into one edge of town into a Ghetto. Several families to one house, women and girls in the bedrooms, men and boys wherever they could find. Exit was prohibited but he returned 2 times to their house to bring some items left behind but the Christian neighbors emptied the houses. Food was scarce and of very low quality- whatever one could buy from the Christians, secretly.

The Hungarian authorities spread fear on the Jews. Some Jewish leaders were arrested during the night and never came back.

Starting in May 1944, they began to empty the Ghetto. Father was sent to forced labor and mother and kids had to take care of themselves. Mother found work as a seamstress for the army and kids had to support themselves, preparing food and other necessities.

The Road to Auschwitz

After Pesach_1944 they started sending people to Auschwitz. People bundled belongings in large bed sheets and showed up at the train station. Soldiers pushed them in about 40-50 per train car, one on top of the other, kids screaming and elders crying. At one corner, by the window, 2 people held a sheet while someone relieved oneself in a night pot. The pot was emptied through the window but most of it ran back in. The smell in the car was horrendous and water was nowhere to be found. Father came along with them and with a small knife he made a hole in the floor for them to use for their needs. When the train stopped and peasants who tried to sell them water were shot by the guards.

The trip to Auschwitz, under horrible conditions in the cars, lasted 2-3 days with no food or water and people relieving themselves in their clothes, which caused the unbearable stench. There were approximately 20 cars with 40-50 people in each.

Auschwitz

They arrived in Auschwitz one early morning. Someone lifted him up by the window and he saw military of all grades with large dogs held back by the soldiers.

In the center of the lineup was Dr. Mengele with a loud-speaker asking for twins to line up behind him and then they opened the doors of the cars. People jumped out, some fell to the ground and others jumped on them: men were sent to so called labor units and women were sent to the barracks. The rumor was spread that women will stay in the barracks, prepare food for their husbands who will return every evening to spend the night. Men were separated into able-bodied for work units the rest for showers and ovens from where black smoke filled the air every night. All this operation was done quickly with screams and yells and pushing dogs. Somebody pointed at him saying he is a twin so they sent him plus his twin brothers to Mengele's cabin. There they were to be showered – he saw his mother and sister naked pushed towards the shower room, then to disinfection.

He contracted scabies and was given an ointment which emitted a very pungent odor. He had to sleep outside with little covering. Eventually he got better and joined his mother, sister and twin brothers in the Auschwitz ghetto, in the Mengele group of twins.

Life in these barracks was not bad for the several hundred twins, mostly girls plus 1-2 German twins. Food was good and varied, but toiletry was primitive and offensive: a large barrel with holes in the sides where the urine would pour out and the excrement would accumulate. Two (2) boys would take the barrel out and empty and wash it.

The children were taught to sing and dance – propaganda for visitors to see how well they keep them. Nurses were looking out for them. They took blood samples from them by finger puncture and let blood

drip into a tube. At the next room they were given a square of sugar. A nurse took their personal data: height, weight, color of eyes, and number of teeth, etc., etc.

Then they face a door with a sign for Dr. Mengele. On entering, Dr. Mengele in a white coat talks to some young medics (Dr. Kening). They entertain the kids with classical music. They also demonstrate to the kids what happens if they misbehave: while the music was playing even louder they beat up someone who presumably stole something. They beat him up with a whip until his naked upper body was red and blue while the other kids had to watch. They also took the kids to various plays and concerts. This was approximately their life in Mengele's cabin.

Women brought them food and he helped carrying it. He also helped taking clothes from their cabin to another. He was able to steal potatoes by hiding them in the clothes that he carried from room to room or cabin to cabin. Every day there was some bad news. Father still went out to work and returned by evening. **On August 15, 1944** father went out to work and never returned.

Liberation

Toward the end of 1944 the smoke from the chimneys was lighter and rarified.

The Russian armies approached the camps. They put up large balloons that indicated their march westward. The majority of twins survived – he met some in Israel, Budapest, and Canada. Mother reached Bergen Belsen and met her brother who is now in Canada. After liberation she looked for the children. A cousin of hers told her that the children are alive. They were all liberated together but they separated after that. The Russians just let them loose to go home if they can find their houses.

Tape #2

Soon the Russians arrested him and interned him in a large camp in Catowitz with others liberated from other camps. There he met his sister and brothers. He also met a family of 7 dwarfs and a man who operated a communal steam bath. This man arranged for him and his sister and brothers to return to their home.

The Russians took all the people plus some liberated soldiers and put them on trains to go to Russia. The first train stop was in Chernowitz, where he and his brothers and sister left the train and entered one of two large camps- they picked the one closer to Transylvania...to their home.

He found a Russian commander (Jewish) who helped him plus his brothers and sister to get into a train whose last destination was **Arad**. He got off in **Siget**, but his brothers and sister went to **Arad**. He stayed in **Siget** a year and several months, did all sorts of dealings and made lots of money. This was in the Russian zone but during the night he was able to cross the border and reached to the Romanian side of **Satumare**. Here he saw a house with a large illuminated sign the "Red Cross". He entered to ask for help and they arranged for him to get to **Arad** where his brothers and sister waited for him. Together they went to **Mossey**, to their own house. Some neighbors gave them furniture and utensils- some of which were their own, the neighbors took when they left.

After a while he and 3 other youngsters left Mossey by horse and buggy and went to **Cluj**, where he joined an organization called "The Jewish Democratic Refugees" with 500 other returnees. Here he had to learn a profession and he was sent to study to be a tailor and a shoemaker. He did not like it and when an electrician was looking for a bright young fellow he joined him as an apprentice. The electrician had a brother, a jeweler, and he joined him and learned the business and worked for him for 4 years to get certified as a jeweler.

By 1961 he went to Botoshani, got married and moved to Israel. He worked as a jeweler for a large manufacturer who soon went bankrupt. He bought the plant in partnership with another worker. They did well, but after a few years he sold his share to his partner and went into the construction business, where again he prospered.

His sister lives in **Israel** in **Kiriat ATA** where she worked as a seamstress for the ATA company. Her husband works for the postal service. They have 3 married daughters. His brothers, with the help of Agudat Israel, moved to America and live in Spring Valley, N.Y. They live a simple, modest life nowhere near their abilities and talents.

Throughout this interview it is immediately obvious that Solomon Malek is the typical survivor **par excellence** who no matter what fate has prescribed for him overcomes, survives and succeeds where others succumb.

H. Solomon, translator