

**Maurice Friedberg**

**August 12, 2009**

**RG-50.030.0536**

### **Summary**

Dr. Maurice Friedberg was born December 3, 1929 in Rzeszów between Krakow and Lemberg (Lvov), Poland and raised in Jaroslaw on the San River where his grandfather lived. His brother, Simon, was born in 1932. Maurice was raised in a middle class Jewish observant home. His father manufactured bricks which he used to build small houses. His mother was a homemaker and the disciplinarian. Maurice attended the State Polish School in the morning and chedar (Hebrew School) in the afternoon. The family's apartment was in a Jewish neighborhood. The war began September 1, 1939 with a Nazi airplane flying low over their house. His father was in the Polish Army at the time. The Nazis ordered the family out of their apartment to be deported to the Soviet zone of occupation. They went to Ternopol where his mother's sister lived and his father joined him in a few days as the Polish Army had been crushed by the German Army. His father worked for the German authorities while they remained there from September '39 to spring '40 when they decided to return home rather than become Russian citizens. Unfortunately, their cattle car took them east to Siberia instead of west to the other side of the San River. The Russians placed the family in a lumber procurement barracks. It had no running water and there was an outhouse. Ephraim, his mother's brother was with them and was disciplined for delaying work by praying and was sent to a camp with common criminals. When he returned, he was mentally ill. Maurice and his brother attended school. He developed jaundice from malnutrition and it affected his liver and gall bladder. June 22, 1941 the Germans attacked Russia and the Polish deportees were permitted to leave the camp to another area in Russia but not to specific cities. The family decided to go to a warmer climate and took a cattle car on the Siberian Railway to Jambol in the South. They found a place to sleep and lived off the Black Market by selling items for food. Again, Maurice attended a Russian school and had books to read but had little to eat. Sometimes he carried precious objects for his father to exchange. They managed to organize a Bar Mitzvah for him. Later, Maurice switched to the Polish School which was 90% Jewish and he was happier. The family moved to Jaroslaw where they had running water and an indoor bathroom. He became fluent in Russian and learned some Kazak. After the war, a distant cousin asked them to join him and they took a train to Krakow. Maurice attended a Polish Independent State School in Lvov. He went with a group of children to view Auschwitz and Birkenau. Later his parents went to see it. There were synagogues in Krakow and lists of survivors on the walls of the Jewish agencies. Maurice was the only Jew in his school and anti-Semitism was rampant. The family feared the pogroms and did not want to live in a Communist State so they traveled to France in March '46. They were told it would be easier to get to the US from France rather than from Germany. The JOINT (American Jewish Immigrant Aid Association) placed them in a hotel and gave them a hot meal daily. Maurice learned to speak Jewish from the other immigrants during his two years residence and, also, learned to speak French. They could have left quicker to Venezuela but they waited for the US. They felt euphoria

when the State of Israel was created. His parents left with Simon for New York in '48 and Maurice followed a few months later in December. They settled on the East Side of Manhattan and his father worked in a men's clothing factory as a shipping clerk. Maurice started school and it took about a year to learn English. After high school, he studied organic chemistry at Brooklyn College and transferred to Columbia University to study Slavic and East European languages. After he earned a Ph.D., he taught at Columbia, transferred to Hunter College and then to Indiana University in Bloomington. He taught ten years and then went to Illinois College where he taught until he retired. Maurice enjoyed research and writing better than teaching. He decided to give this interview as survivors are dying and he wants to preserve the historical record.