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Summary

Al Lachman co-founder Skokie Holocaust Museum (later Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center) Al b. Poland January 2, 1918 to Orthodox Jewish family, parents (mother died before war), 6 yrs. older brother; 1930 family moves to Lodz where 5 aunts & 5 uncles, many cousins lived (Later in interview, Al reveals 99% of family did not survive the Holocaust); discusses family gatherings, Jewish education & public schooling (ended age 13 when law forbade Jewish children to attend school); witnessing antisemitic gunman killing the butcher, then in the chase, gunman kills three more people; father's occupation candy maker; Al becoming a factory knitter at age 15 to assist family; memories of Lodz when WW2 breaks out, Polish Army dissolves but Polish men told to go to Warsaw to fight in defense of Poland; finding in Warsaw, people afraid to sleep in their beds fearful of being arrested in the night; in shelter during bombing, women & children crying; Al returns to Lodz; S.S. deports Al among many others taken in cattle cars to Polish town on Russian border, placed in barracks, transported on passenger train to Russia; Al worried train was headed to death camp, leaps from train, makes his way back to Lodz; father still alive (brother was gone, mother had died before war); Lodz's Jews required to move into ghetto or sentenced to death; ghetto is sealed off; Al's entrepreneurial endeavors to stay alive; accounts re: Rumkowski; at timestamp 00:53:00 Al shows photograph of Lodz Ghetto deportation to Chelmno "Only children & older people" under guise "going to working camp," rumor "Ghetto will be only for working men"; 1942 Al is released from arrest by S.S. Hans Biebow to the Lodz Ghetto Jewish Police; Al returns to ghetto then his father is deported "We didn't know that people could murder young & old."; conditions worsen in Lodz Ghetto though able to obtain small rations; Aug 1944, Al deported, "packed like sardines" into cattle cars, among 5000 people transported; arrival first to Birkenau then to Auschwitz where "people were falling out of cars"; selection process; being tattooed with number; many cousins had been on transport, most did not survive; Al making up his mind to survive; the crematoriums' smell; smuggled self into cattle car to Kaufering where the men had to build a barracks to sleep in; with Allies encroaching, the men now weak & sick were put on a train to Dachau, where majority died on the train; after arrival, Al stays with corpses fearful of being selected since he couldn't walk; Germans take Al for shower, his clothes filled with lice; Americans liberate Dachau (1:25:00 photograph of bunkmates & Al, all emaciated), so weak, Al was unable to feel sense of celebration; distrust that Amer soldiers were actual Allies & that their food killed so many not yet ready to receive nourishment, survivors began distrusting the Allies' food; Al diagnosed with TB, given IV fluids; sanitorium rehab under Amer supervision until end of 1945, Al didn't want to leave because "It felt like the best hotel." Survivors' directive was "Lay, rest & good food."; in nearby town, Al rents small apt for further rehab, receive food assistance through synagogue; finding no family in Lodz, immigrates to Sweden, marriage 1953, oldest son born; Al brings his family America; closing thoughts on the Holocaust, his mixed feelings on religion, wanting to go to Court with God.