

Summary of Oral History Interview with Jack Ellis July 1990

Jack was the oldest of three children. He had two younger sisters, Rhoda and Gertrude. His father had his own business in scrap metal. They led a normal and comfortable life. When his father died Jack was 10 years old. His mother was not able to continue with the business, so she sold it. With the money from the sale they could manage. Jack's father was a citizen of Poland. In 1938 they felt the danger. The restrictions started. Jack had to leave the gymnasium and could only be employed by Jews. In October 1938 all citizens of Poland were deported. They were not allowed to take many of their belongings, just one suitcase. They transported them to no man's land, between Germany and Poland. The Jewish community provided them with food and shelter. Jack remembered that they had family in Lodz, but did not recall their address. Finally he went to Lodz and with the help of the Jewish Federation he found an uncle, who wasn't too happy to see them or take care of them. A business man donated a factory to the newcomers where they occupied one floor, the Federation supplied them with food and the essentials. Altogether there were 200 people, men and women. Eventually they all had to go to the ghetto. The conditions were very bad. In 1940 Jack volunteered to go to Germany to work in a labor camp so he was able to help his family. It did not work out this way. They lived in barracks, the food was rationed and the conditions were severe. His job was in building super highways. One thing that was important, they could communicate. He learned that his mother had died. In 1942 the camp was liquidated and all of them were sent to Auschwitz in cattle cars. During the 3 days of traveling they only received 1 pound of canned goods. They all were hopeful, thinking that by surviving the labor camps for 2 years it can't be much worse. The feelings soon changed. As soon as they arrived, their heads were shaven and they tattooed numbers on their arm. They all were numb. They were taken to a tent and they assigned them to different commandos. It was very hard labor and they worked between 12-14 hours daily. The first day he saw five inmates hung. Later, he was lucky to work in a post office sorting mail. When packages arrived and were not claimed because of death he could help himself and even his friends. That work lasted ½ year and then he went back to hard physical labor. In 1945 the Russians came close. The bombs did not bother them. Shortly they were evacuated from Auschwitz. They worked 5 miles from there. They could see the chimneys and also smell it. Then they took them on a march for a few weeks without any food. All they ate was snow. It was so horrible he can't describe it. Finally they were taken to Bergen-Belsen where they were liberated by the British and later were taken to a displaced persons camp. By then he weighed ninety pounds. His sister survived went to Holland and married her cousin. In 1949 he came to Buffalo. He went back to Germany once but had no desire to go back again. Jack has a hard time believing that all that had happened to him. He is very sorry he couldn't give more details, it was so long ago. His message is that this will convince people that all of this did happen.