

ALFRED HABER
BORN: AUSCHWITZ, POLAND
1924

Alfred Haber was born 1924 in Auschwitz which was within the Austrian Empire before World War I but became Polish after that. His father, who had served in the Austrian Army in World War I, was a grain dealer and his mother a school teacher until she got married. He had three sisters and one brother. They had a nice home and always looked up to the German culture. All children had German names except for his younger brother, who was born when Hitler was coming to power and was given a Hebrew name. He went to Public School and a Hebrew Academy. The town had a population of about 12000 including 7000 Jews. He shows a postcard written by his mother to her sister, the only possession of his mother he has left, and pictures of the main square and market of the town, of a group of students and a map of Auschwitz. They lived on the outskirts of the town near the barracks that later became part of the concentration camp.

With the German invasion in 1939 everything stopped. The synagogue was destroyed and their business was confiscated. He was supposed to go to Palestine with a group of other Jews but was stopped by German police on the way to Bratislava and brought back to Auschwitz. The camp was not ready then and he and his parents spent eighteen days in jail. All males had to report for forced labor. Soon, all Jews were evacuated to a camp in Sosnowiec where the whole family had to live in one room. All had to work to get some food. He worked in an oil depot draining oil from tank cars and loading them on trucks. Thus, he was spared from resettlement which meant transportation to a death camp. In 1942, all 30000 Jews were rounded up and had to go through a tribunal. He and one sister were assigned to work camps, his mother and one sister were sent to their death in Auschwitz and the rest of the family was sent back to the ghetto but killed later when the ghetto was liquidated. He shows photographs of two sisters. There was no possibility to develop a resistance movement because there were no forests nearby to hide in and the Polish peasants were mostly hostile. Then, he was taken to another camp near Gross Rosen where he worked on highway construction, and subsequently was taken to the camp at Bunzlau where he was a laborer. There was little food, mostly pumpkin soup and a little bread. Some managed to survive by stealing food

but many died in 1943 which was the worst winter. Early in 1944, he had a lucky break. The SS took over the camp administration; they were better than the civilians before who stole from their food rations. The camp commandant selected a group of skilled personnel - tailors, shoemakers, and so on. One day he was hit on the ear and when his wound would not heal, he was assigned to the selected personnel. He had to work in the laundry which was warm and next to the kitchen where he could obtain some extra food. After nine months, in February 1945, when the Russians approached, the guards left and the prisoners had to push the carts with their belongings and some food. They went from village to village and several times he narrowly escaped being killed. He had no information about the progress of the war. Eventually, he came to camp Dora Nordhausen, where rockets and airplanes were being built but, in spite of the importance of the work for the German war effort, many died from starvation. There were "only" two double ovens and therefore considerable backlog. He had to carry dead bodies to the ovens. When the U.S. Army approached he was taken to Bergen - Belsen where he was a helper in the kitchen clean-up crew. He had narrow escapes from being killed by the SS and Hungarian guards until liberation by the British after a few weeks. He hitchhiked to his hometown but was afraid of the people there and did not stay. He shows a photograph of the cemetery with the tipped-over grave stones. One sister is the only other member of his family who survived in another camp.

He gives five requirements for survival: 1. luck; 2. to be young; 3. to be used to hardship (Jews from Poland managed better than Jews from Western Europe because they were more used to hardship and cold); 4. willingness to steal food; 5. have some useful skill.

He agreed to the interview to inform people about what happened and to urge them to be on guard against hatred and not to be complacent