

SMU - DALLAS, TEXAS

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My name is **Jack Oran** and I was born in **Sierpc, Poland** on May 10, 1924. However, I consider October 5, 1949 my birthday because that is when I arrived in the United States. My life before I arrived in America wasn't really living, it was not even existing. I had four sisters and one brother in addition to my parents in my family. None survived the Holocaust except for myself.

My father wanted me to go to Hebrew school because I was the oldest son. My father did all kinds of work to pay for the Hebrew school since we were poor and he needed money to afford the Hebrew education he wanted for me. I finished school and in 1938 was supposed to report to a seminarium in **Warsaw** on September 10, 1939 to become a hebrew teacher but I couldnt go because war broke out on September 1, 1939.

**Question: Can we go back to you telling us a little bit about your town and what kinds of changes were going on before the war?**

My town of **Sierpc** was 50 percent jews and 50 percent non-jewish catholics. It was not easy to live in my town or anywhere in Europe as a Jew where Jews were a minority. I experienced bigotry like being called names and being attacked. There was a history of hating jews passed from each generation of Polish people to the next generation. As a Jew I was taught to turn other cheek. That's the way it was and I had to learn to live with it. It was important not to rock the boat.

When war broke out the Germans began to segregate the Jews. We were forced to walk on the street instead of the sidewalk and were marked with either armbands or the Star of David. I experienced the real bigotry then. They took away our dignity and we felt like we were down in the gutter but our will to live still existed and we did all we could to adjust and continue.

We were shoved from one ghetto to another. I experienced hunger and starvation. I was in four ghettos before being transferred finally to Auschwitz.

**Question: Can you describe the ghettos?**

The first ghettos were not so bad but there was no free movement.

**Question: What were the names of the ghettos and what were the approximate dates you were there?**

The first was **Scherbs (p)** where I was from 1939-40, I think but I am unsure of the dates. The second ghetto was **Warsaw** then back to **Scherbs (p)**. The third ghetto was **Schegova (p)** and the fourth was **Malava (p)**. I was in Warsaw from approximately 1940-41. It was horrible there, especially when they sealed it completely and no one could come in or out. My father somehow made arrangements to sneak out with me and my brother and escape to **Scherbs (p)**. My father was arrested and brought to a concentration camp. I was oldest and had to care for my brother. My oldest sister came back to **Warsaw** and tried to get out my mother and other sister and we did get them out. The camp my father was in was then liquidated and my father got out.

**Question: What camp was this?**

It was called **Rachaus (p)** and it was a camp for criminals and although my father was not a criminal he was branded as one.

**Question: What were the living conditions like in the Scherbs(p) ghetto?**

The living conditions in **Scherbs (p)** were primitive but there was no starvation and it was bearable. We did work for the Germans like shoveling snow and construction. In the summer there was a work unit that drained the lake but mostly the work was snow clearing.

In Warsaw all had to do mandatory work but I was not 18 years old yet so I was not assigned work. But my father had to work and when they assigned my father I went in place of him. Then many times I worked in the airport called **Ochaincha (p)** which was 5 to 10 miles from the ghetto. We walked 3 hours to get there and 3 hours back. In the summer we worked in the gravel pits and in the winter we shovelled snow.

**Question: What was the formation of the ghetto? How did they decide who worked?**

Every one in the ghettos had to be registered. There was mandatory work for those over 18 years old once a week, it was not voluntary. Others made livings by commerce which was difficult, but possible. When they sealed off the ghetto it ended the commerce. It had been possible to trade with non jews but my family didn't. My family had nothing. We were on the brink of starvation. I worked any job he could to get some money because my family had basically nothing. I lost 3 sisters in the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Warshaw leaves a bad taste in my mouth.

**Question: What were the social and political systems in terms of law enforcement and government?**

The social and political system in the ghettos were such that each ghetto had its own jewish law enforcement enforced by jewish people themselves. I didn't mix in politics. I was an outsider, not an insider in **Warsaw** to participate in the politics.

**Question: How was the closing of the ghetto accomplished?**

The closing of the ghetto was accomplished by the Germans coming in and they blocked off streets with brick walls, barbed wire and broken glass. A week after the sealing of the ghetto my family managed to get out. I was 15 or 16 years old at the time. My sisters didn't want to come because they were involved in too many things in the ghetto.

We were then brought to **Schegova (p)**. They wouldn't let us bring anything with us on the 45 minute to 1 hour drive in open trucks. The new ghetto was a jewish community but the Germans had the final sayso as it was supervised by them. I had to work but I didn't want to do what they wanted me to do, so I hired myself out to a farmer to work outside of the ghetto. The farm was about 10-12 km away. I would bring money back to my family every week or every two weeks. Alot of people did it to get away from the ghettos. Then one day I came down with typhus. Shortly after I went back to work the order came for all jews working outside to come back to ghetto. The Polish people just followed the Germans orders. They could have hid us, but they didn't attempt to help the Jews at all. Before the edict I had been treated like any hired hand. I slept in the stall with the cows.

We were then brought to **Malava(p)** ghetto which was empty because the people who had been there were deported to **Auschwitz**. This was Chaunakah 1942. We stayed only one night. **Malava(p)** was a transit point. Then we were transported to **Auschwitz**. I consider the third day of Chaunakah a memorial day for my parents because it is the day we arrived at **Auschwitz**.

**Question: When you were on the trucks from the Malava(p) ghetto what were you thinking?**

We didn't know much about what was going to happen because there was little communication. We were not aware of what would happen to us in **Auschwitz**, and we couldn't believe the things that were actually happening. Who could believe people could do such horrible things to other people?

We were put in a passenger train. We were packed like herring in the trains. We couldn't move and went to bathroom right there where we lay. I was with my parents and my brother and one sister. When the train stopped at **Auschwitz** we were all grateful to stop. Our clothes were full of waste. They then separated the 18-45 years old to one side and the rest to the other side. My father told me to say that I was 18 although I was only about 16 and my profession was a gardener. The screams and tormentation from separation of families was the first really awful thing I experienced in my life.

They then took us to **Bircanau** where they were stripped of everything which we were glad to get rid of. However, we didn't get a shower and then we were given striped clothing or civilian clothing with red stripes painted on it. Our heads were shaved,

and we were tattooed. The tattoos were brutally done by sadistic inmates who had been there for years and worked their way up to this job of tattooing new prisoners. Some of them were Jews but most of them were poor people. As they did them if you grimaced they smacked you very hard.

At **Bircanau** when you asked about your parents you were told to look at the crematorium flames because that is where everyone ended up. The officers came around looking for strong people. They picked my father to transport dead bodies from the gas chambers to the crematoriums. Now I was all alone.

The camp was very dirty. The bunks were three stories high and three feet by three feet, with six people to a bunk. Each morning people didn't wake up. The first thing you did was search the dead's pockets for bread. Once I found a piece of bread in a dead friend's pocket bread with lice on it but my hunger was so great I just wiped it off and ate it. The lice was horrible, we scratched till bloody and there was no place to take a shower. To get to the restroom we had to walk through lime in their wooden shoes and many broke their legs.

My first job was to collect the dead bodies and put them on a wagon to a central place where they loaded them on trucks to go to the crematorium. Ten to twenty a day died of their own accord. They threw themselves on the barbed wire when they couldn't take the beatings or the work anymore. You would lose everything in the camps. At first I would make friends with people with things in common with me but I would often watch them just disintegrate, until they would die. It got to the point where I didn't make friends

anymore. I became selfish and isolated myself. I didn't hurt anybody but I couldn't stand to see my friends hurt anymore.

One day they took me and other young men to another camp-womens?- and I was brought to the hospital where they sterilized me. We got a furlough from work and bread and it didn't hurt. Little did we know what would happen later on.

I heard my father was in block 1 or 2 but I couldn't see him because it was an isolated block with a brick wall you couldn't look over. I spoke with my father who threw out a food package but there were a lot of vultures (other people) who took it away from me. My father told me to organize a group and he would throw another package. I got some food this time. The vultures were mainly Ukraine people who came in to steal these sorts of packages.

The Germans came again to take young men from **Bircanau** to **Auschwitz**. They told us they were taking us to brick laying training. We didn't know if it was true but anything had to be better than the hell we were living in, or at least we figured it couldn't be worse. They disinfected us and took all our clothes and made us run from block 1 to 17 naked.

Block 17 was a clean place. We could take showers, but the head of the block was **Alfred Auschowski (p)** who was a German criminal who killed his family. The green triangle worn on his uniform indicated he was a criminal. He was sadisitic. We were taught brick laying but the French Jews were so sadisitic and bad it was difficult to learn. The German who selected was nice and the couple in charge of the school was nice, but the underlings were sadistic, brutal murderers. The man in charge of the block was the worst.

The first thing he told us was that since we were on the second floor we had to take our shoes in our hand when going to the restroom at night. But in the night we would get disoriented, as we were often sick and we would forget and the shoes made noise and woke him up. He would then take us up to the top rooms in the school and open all the windows and douse us in cold water and then beat us. Of the eighty that arrived with me in three days there were only about six left.

There were new inmates everyday and the older ones tried to teach them how to live by the rules, because they had adapted to their commanders way of life. He took pride in doing this terrible beating to us every night.

One day they called me to go to the hospital- all those who were sterilized and survived were called to that hospital. It was the first time I met **Mengele**, not person to person, but he was in charge of the project. There were Polish doctors under him actually performing the surgeries. I was castrated on one side. The surgery was done in a very primitive manner. The shot I was given shortly wore off and I could feel pain but when I showed a sign of discomfort Dr. Derrig(p) told me to shut up or he would make sure I didn't survive. There were about six or eight of us who had this procedure done then. When we were in the hospital they were scared of being selected because we couldn't work, so we wanted to be released in just two or three days, and volunteered to get out.

We were done with school so I was put in as apprentice to the real brick layers. My job was to carry bricks and cement. There were bad working conditions and in one hour my stitches came out



and I was bleeding and hurting but I didn't go to hospital because I was scared and I didn't want to face Dr. Derrig(p) again. So, I used paper from margarine which I found in the garbage to try to stop the bleeding. My wound oozed for 6 months and then miraculously healed. I was then called again and they did the other side with the same doctor and the same type of procedure. What saved me was the built in instinct of survival and my need to come out some day and tell the world because no one would believe it. I always told myself it could be worse.

Word got around about my being castrated. So one day I was told my father would be marching back at 4pm. This was the last time I saw my father. My father asked if it was true that I was spayed. I felt that my father equalized me with an animal but my father didn't know about the word castration because it wasn't in our vocabulary. After the meeting with my father I asked a doctor about the extent of castration. The doctor told me I wouldn't have children. I didn't want to hear anymore. So I wouldn't have children. Right then I was intent on surviving.

My number was 80629. I had been in **Auschwitz** for 2 years. Mine was a low number and I was already considered a survivor as numbers for new inmates were now in the 200,000's.

Now I had a choice of different jobs. One job that was needed was someone to sort belongings of new arrivals. There was plenty of food at this job. In addition, the same truck that brought belongings also went to get lunch and bring it to the inmates. I came up with an idea. I decided to give a proposition to people who worked in the kitchen and loaded food onto the truck. They

used wood to fuel trucks, so there was a big crate where the wood was put. I proposed to hide sacks of items from the belongings, things like food and clothes, behind the wood and the SS driver wouldn't know. I would split it 50-50 with the man loading the trucks if he took it off and hid it when the truck went to pick up the lunch. The plan worked and I received many IOU's in return for these items.

The German SS officer in charge had an inmate cook who didn't please him and he asked for another cook. I said I could cook and I got the run of everything with that job. It was a rule that nobody could take anything out of the building where the belongings were sorted but people did. One day my friend got caught and I talked to the SS officer and asked for leniency and then went over to my friend and slapped him so the SS Officer let me handle it.

By this time I had many IOUs. There was very bad water in the towns so I used his IOUs to get the job of bringing good water to the big shots in the surrounding towns. **Hess** was the commander of the camp and I delivered water to him too. At this job I worked among civilians with 2 SS guards. I got things from civilians by trade or buying. It was often hard to get items in but some officers looked out for the water carriers and allowed us more leniency. Our buckets had false bottoms and we swapped with the maids things like butter in exchange for lingerie.

One day we had very anti-semitic guards and I purposely dropped water on the floor in the **Hess'** house. I had the maid get **Mrs Hess** who got her husband to reprimand the guards for pushing us around. I did this job until the end.

Backing up, before when I was a brick laying apprentice there was the women's camp where I met a nice girl and we talked through the barbed wire but couldn't get closer. We had a real affection for one another. Toward the end I wanted to see her because I knew **Auschwitz** was to be liquidated the next day.

**Question: How did you know this?**

We knew this because we could hear the artillery from the **Red Army** coming very close. I knew electricians who went to the womens and gypsies camps so I collected on some more IOUs and was sent in. I got a hold of the girl and we made a vow, "from this dough will become bread."

The following day we marched out. We could take whatever we could carry. A good friend had broken his leg so we took a wagon from the washateria on which we put provisions and then the friend with the broken leg and we pushed the wagon. I then decided I would strip off my zebra clothes and have on civilian clothes so I could pretend I was a farmer who couldn't wait for all the people to pass and had to cross the road. After 36 km I attempted to escape but was caught by a guard trying to run away. The guard told me I would be punished but noise in the back distracted him and I crawled away. I got up and walked in my civilian clothes until a quarter mile away and then started running towards the woods. I saw about six others who had done the same thing. We decided to split up into three and three but me and the other two with me got caught by Gestapo. We were put in a basement.

We were put into another camp where we thought for sure we

were dead but God must have been watching over us because they brought us to another camp that was being liquidated. They put us between 3 ft of electified barbed wire in the winter with no clothes. After 3 hrs we were brought in and showed our numbers. They gave us clothes and food and brought us to a train which transported us toward Germany. We decided to try again to escape out the window at dark. The first was killed with machine guns, the second wounded and I was the third. The others didn't want to help me but I threatened to say it was all their idea if questions were asked so they helped. I came down in snow and heard machine guns around me. I started walking and realized I was wounded. I saw two houses with antennas which I figured must be Germans. The third house had no antenna so I went into the shed with the cows and lay in the hay.

One hour later a woman comes in to milk the cow. She was talking to the cow in Polish. I didn't want to come down and scare her, so when she brought the milk back to house I went to the door and told the woman I had two friends with machine guns who would put the house in flames if I didn't come out alive. I asked for bread and milk. I had old clothes on and my coat was from the Italian military. God was looking over me and I saw 4 Italian military officers walking by. I just followed them until they came to a town. I went onto a side street. There I saw an elderly couple and their daughter. I asked to stay with them and they offered me the shed.

The Germans were digging ditches to stop the Russian tanks. They didn't speak Polish so I, who spoke German and Polish, acted

as interpreter. One day the leaders didn't come back and so the workers stopped the project. Then one night it was too quiet and in the dark I could see people getting up and falling down. Three Germans came into the house and confiscated a bed to sleep in. They had escaped from the front. I saw two people outside who I cried to in Russian. I turned the Germans in the house over to the Russians on the condition that I get a pair of the rubber boots. The Russian captian asked me to take them to a bridge they wanted to stop from being blown up and the Russian captain was very grateful for my help. He gave me a paper that I couldn't read, but when I gave it to one of the women officers on the street she sent me on the first vehicle headed to wherever I wanted to go. I travelled as a VIP in the direction of **Auschwitz** to see if any one was still there. The paper said I was very important and I was treated very kindly.

We stopped in a town and I heard there were 2 Jewish girls there. I met them and they came to Auschwitz with me. Word had been that I was shot by the SS. My friend was there and couldn't believe I was alive.

The funniest part was that in **Cracau(p)**, the next big city, the people were paying tremendous amounts of money for clothes. So Joe, my friend, and I got some clothes from the barracks and went into **Cracau(p)** where we sold them for more money than we had ever seen. Then we went into town and had a big dinner in a restaurant.

The my cousin **Leon Settlig(p)** called me to **Biersk(p)** where he was in law enforcement. What I wanted to do though was to go to **Scherbs (p)**. On our way to **Scherbs (p)** my cousin's friend and I

passed **Warsaw** which was levelled. When we got there the **AK (Home Army)** was there. They were Anti-Semitic soldiers who killed Jewish survivors.

We escaped and went back to **Biersk(p)** where the **AK** had arrested my cousin. We went back to the train station and travelled to **Cutlivitcz(p)**. I met other survivors and we headed to **Breslo(p)** where we opened bakeries. I became an alcoholic and drained my sorrows in drink. As time passed more and more survivors arrived in **Breslo(p)**.

I started working for the Russians interpreting what the captured Nazi's were saying. Time passed and the Polish government took over the town. I would now have to register and be eligible for the draft. We decided to sell the bakeries. I decided to travel west to avoid the draft. I met a woman who insisted on coming with me and so we became engaged. When we got to **Marbrook(p)** I made contact with relatives in America. Then I left my fiancée for six weeks to go to Paris to have an operation that I heard could help me with my sexual problems. When I got back from Paris my fiancée had met another man and so I planned on going to America alone.

I went to live with my uncle in New York. My first job was washing dishes for three dollars an hour. I didn't know any english then and although the job was below my capabilities I knew I would move up.

Now it is 1986. After 21 years of marriage I have just been divorced and that is when I decided to write a book about my experiences which is in the process of being released. The message

I want to relay is that it could very well happen here too. It started in Germany with one man who was very prejudicial and the Jews were singled out as the scapegoats. I have felt the prejudice all my life. My aim is to make people aware that it really happened. To make people understand that it is so horrible to take away the manhood of a person, the dignity of a person as a human being. I want to leave something behind so maybe I can awaken people to see that there is no place in this world for the bigotry.

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funniest part- Cracau enormous prices for clothes- got clothes from camp took train to cracau 50 km took a day and night because of blown up train lines. People willing to pay anything for clothes. They took the money so much they had to carry in a sack and headed for town. When he was born in that city he was very poor he didnt know the etiquette of eating in restaurants. Now they go into a fancy restaurant and they order what other people had because they didnt even know the concept of a menu. They had meat they didnt know how to handle themselves with fork and knives so they used their hands everyone in the restaurant turned and looked like they were from the jungle. Biersk- cousin was in law enforcement came to get Jack brought him to house but Jack didnt want to be in law enforcement. Wanted to go back to Scherbs so he an a friend of his cousins left to go tho Scherbs. Passed Warshaw which was levelled. Made it to Scherbs In this town there was AK home Army who killed

jewish survivors. Polish man came and warned them they were to be shot. Went to station and Got away by showing his paper. When they got back to his Biersc his cousin was arrested by the AK. Girl in house waved them away. went back to train station and got back on Russian car got to cutlivitz Walking on street use password aumha one of us to identify another survivor. Met people who ran away from Loofah e. Poland from AK. Aim to get to Berlin. Used paper to get them all on train.

town 30km from Breslo which had just been taken the day before. Met more people six of them hitchhiked to Breslo which was burning because it had just surrendered the day before. Took apartments in an abandoned building.

decided to open a bakery because one of them was a baker. opened three bakeries. Germans who owned bakeries went to work for them Got acquainted with russian officer in motor pool. Got soldiers to go get flour got flour pur germans to work in the bakeryformed lines in front of bakeries fro bread from the night before Party with German girls Jack didnt have the desire nor mood to try anything with the girls because what had happened in the camps left and saw russians with barrel of whiskey the street who he drank with woke up in the gutter. Became an alcoholic- drained sorrow in drink.

As time passed more survivors came to town

Girl and her brother come in and he directed them to an apartment. One day they found Jack drunk in gutter- undressed him and put him to bed. Woke up in pool of vomit- very embarrassed.

Started working for the Russians as an interpreter- job was

interpreting Nazis when they were brought in. satisfied his hatred. Got lists of Nazis in Breslo frtom the others who were looking to save themselves. After interrogation Nazis were put on trains and sent to Siberia. One day Jack met another survivor who told him he ran into Marcia, the girl from the concentration camp. Went to Ludge where Marcia was. Came to locked gate where he shot off the lock.Went to her apartment when she opened the door she fell into his srms. It was the first time he had touched her.The next day they went for a walk and Jack told her about what had happened to him in the camps. He and she agreed to remain close friends but nothing more because they were the only survivors from their families and they couldn't perpetuate. All Jack wanted after this first rejection was to drink and get back at the Germans.

Polish government took over the town and Jack had to register so he was now eligible for military duty. They decided to sell bakeries. Jack met a girl who wanted to go with him west because she was in love with him. Jack tried to discourage her but she wouldn't be discouraged and so her sister suggested that at least they should get engaged if she was to go with him, so they got engaged.

Took train- went to Marbrook got an apartment had grandmother and uncle in America. There was alot of networking of Jews to find relatives of othetr Jews in America. Made contact with his uncle in AMerica. Heard of doctor in Paris who could help him with sexual desire by an operation. So Jack went to Paris for six weeks he was in hospital where he received an implant from the doctor. When he got back to his fiancée she told him that she wanted to get out of the relationship. In 1946 he came to Marbrook but he had to wait

until 1949 until he could arrive in America. Took up movie projection and he got a diploma. His Uncle then got him a job at a movie house and so Jack finally came over to America. First job washing dishes for three dollars a day. On day on Delancy Street he meets a friend who was partners in bakeries in Breslo. He was going to Austin, Texas to get married and he asked Jack to come out with him and they would start a business. Jack didn't know english when he arrived in America, so his uncle was worried that he would get lost. Jack had nmet brothers from Brooklyn on the way over so Jack called them. They told him to come over, so Jack went out and although he got a little lost he made it. When he got back his uncle was very upset he had called the police, he never believed Jack had been in Brooklyn. After being married fro 21 years Jack was divorced and that is when he dedcided to write a book which is in the process of being released. The message he wants to relay is that it could very well happen here too. It started in Germany with one man who was very predjudicial and the Jews were singled out as scapegoats. He felt the prejudice all his life. His aim is to make people aware that it really did happen. To make people understand that it is so horrible to take away the manhood of a person, the dignity of a person as a human being. He wants to leave something behind maybe he came awaken people to see that there is no place in this world for the bigotry.