

Summary of Oral History: William Schiff

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This summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on 03/2022

Tape I

William Schiff, born and raised in Kraków , Poland around 1919, describes his family when Germany invaded Poland in 1939; his escape along with his brother and father to fight before returning to Kraków once the Soviets invaded; the confiscation of Jewish possessions; the random arrests by police; his work breaking rocks in the Carpathian mountains; meeting his wife, Rosalie in 1941; the increasing dependence of his family on him; the movement of his family and other Jews into a ghetto in 1941 and his trips to see Rosalie outside Kraków ; smuggling live chickens into the ghetto for two years; the shrinking of the ghetto and the dilemma he faced deciding to remain with the family until they were moved to Płaszów concentration camp [more ghetto experiences at 46:30 on tape II]; his decision not to become a camp guard; the many hangings he witnessed; the series of harsh punishments for infractions; the day his wife disappeared to Auschwitz and his forcing himself onto the next transport there; the entry procedures at Auschwitz; his time working in a lab run by Dr. Maizel (?); and his frequent ability to steal meat from the lab testing area [more experiences about the camp at 53:40 of tape II.]

Tape II

Schiff goes on to describe his activity in the hospital; the evacuation of the camp to Gross-Rosen concentration camp in the face of approaching Soviet troops; his first escape, recapture and punishment; his next escape, recapture and transfer to Buchenwald; his illness that prevented another evacuation and his liberation by American troops; his slow physical recovery; his efforts to locate his wife including a time in Breslau before finding Rosalie when he arrived in Kraków; his difficulties in getting to the American side before he arrived at a DP camp; the decision by him and his wife about where to emigrate, deciding on the U.S. as those were the first papers to arrive; their August 1949 arrival (with their 3-year old son) in New Orleans, then on to Dallas; his path to citizenship; his job as a machine repairman for 17 years before quitting to own rental properties; the birth of his daughter in 1950; and his work to create Holocaust memorials, including those for Roma and Russians.