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Summary

Henry (Chaim) Sarna was born July 7, 1922 in Bialystok, Poland with three brothers. His father was a bookkeeper; his mother, a housekeeper. He experienced some anti-Semitism but felt it was minor since half the city was Jewish. Henry participated in some Zionist groups as a youth. The family considered moving to Palestine but the breadth of family ties in Poland held them back.

The Nazis entered his city in September, 1939. The Russian Army returned in November 17, 1939, saluting each other as they exchanged control. On June 22, 1941, Germany invaded Russia with Bialystok heavily devastated, leading his family to flee by foot, stopping in Vawkavysk. They returned to Bialystok due to widespread fighting and were forced into the ghetto; he described life in the ghetto. One of his jobs was working as a vehicle mechanic for the SS.

As a volunteer fireman, his father was allowed to stay until the ghetto was closing in 1943. His family went with the rest of the final group to Treblinka, where the train car of the women and children were diverted into the camp while their rail car continued on to the camp at Maidanek-Lublin. He never saw his mother again. He volunteered as a mechanic and was sent to Blezhein (sp.), while his father and three brothers remained to perish. Henry was transferred to a work camp in Łędziny. As the front approached in late 1944, they were force-marched to a railhead where they were transferred east. He jumped off in Czechoslovakia where, masquerading as a Russian, he was taken captive but treated and fed well, and brought to Prague. He was revealed as a Jew and put into Theresienstadt.

Henry was liberated May 8, 1945. He, his wife (once confined at Bergen-Belsen) and two sons came to the United States October 24, 1949, and then onto Youngstown, Ohio. He had one daughter in America. One son died as a child of leukemia. After 15 years in Youngstown, he became ill and moved to California. He bought a small liquor store, moved to Israel for a while, but then returned to Los Angeles where he had a series of small shops.