

-TITLE-JACK SITTSAMER
-I_DATE-
-SOURCE-UNITED JEWISH FEDERATION HOLOCAUST CENTER PITTSBURGH
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-
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-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
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-NOTES-
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0:00:29 He was born in Mielec, a small town of about 3,000 people (60% Jewish) near Kraków in December 1924.

Father was born in Poland in 1901 Moshe Sittsamer
Salesman

Mother was born in Poland in 1904 Pearla Montauk

There were five children in the home and they spoke a combination of Polish and Yiddish. The names of the siblings was: Israel, Yasov, Deborah, Kepil.

0:03:57 Orthodox, religious family,

4:21 Jack went to Catholic School as there was no public school. During religious instruction they were allowed to go out from the school if they wished.

He also went to Cheder everyday, he had many non-Jewish friends although

:06:14 it was common for the Gentile kids to beat up on the Jewish kids.

:07:38 About 10 days after the invasion the Nazis came in. They burned synagogues, harassed Jews, drove some Jews out of the synagogue on the Jewish holidays and chased them into a slaughterhouse and murdered them and then burned the place down.

Nazis would grab people to go to labor crews and this went on until

:10:29 March 1942. Jack and his family stayed in their home but were required to work without money. His mother had a large family and they all helped each other to find food and survive. All the older boys and the men labored.

:12:16 In March, 1942 the SS came in and took Jews to the marketplace; made selections - left, right; he never saw his older brother again. Then they were all marched to the airport at Mielec and anyone too old or weak to make the walk were killed by the Nazis as they walked along.

:14:15 The more religious the men the more the Nazis wanted to kill them. His father was taken aside and shot at the airport hangar. Then, there was another selection and only a group of 100, Jack included, were selected to be workers. All the rest were taken to the transport, including his mother and siblings and he never heard of them again.

:15:32 He worked in the factory until June 1944. At first, there wasn't a camp, just buildings but after more came they put bared wire around it, with guard towers and eventually there were more than 3,000 people

15:59 there.

:17:51 The labor camp in Mielec felt bad to them at the time but when they experienced the other camps they knew it had not been the worst.

As the Russians approached in 1944 Jack and the other workers were moved to Wieliczka. They had gotten up and gone to work like any other day and then had been told to board trains, the SS even kept German families from boarding, he said the Jews go first.

:21:02 They stayed in Wieliczka a week and then were put in boxcars, sent to Auschwitz where they were forced to remain in the boxcars for two days.

they were classified as productive workers and Auschwitz refused to accept them. So they were then sent to Fl"ssenburg. There was a crematorium then and when they got off the train they could see the piles of shoes and they realized that it was a death camp. They were showered and deloused and given numbers and suits.

:23:16 It turned out that his older brother did not survive. After the war Jack found out his brother had been killed at Puskopf (ph). He met a cousin who had seen him there.

Jack went through more selection and was sent to a camp - Leitmeritz in Czechoslovakia. The Luftwaffe was in control there. Germans were building an underground factory. He worked on tunnels there.

When he had been Mielec he had typhoid fever, for three weeks.

:26:00 He doesn't remember anything. Someone took care of him. Moving him from the day shift quarters to the night shift and back again. It saved his life.

:28:19 Then he left Leitmeritz. 400 were sent to Dachau. Everyone knew that was a very bad place to go. 400 went to Mauthausen. At Mauthausen there were SS guards. At Leitmeritz, the Czech guards were not so bad. The Ukrainian guards were very cruel. He was only in Mauthausen for 2 weeks.

:31:20 He was sent to Gusen II, a work camp near Mauthausen. There was a factory there and he worked in 12 hour shifts. People who were sick stayed behind but they were killed. Jack went many times to work sick, and with a fever.

:33:16 When Jack was liberated he weighed 80 lbs. Gusen II itself was never evacuated. Lots of people died there. On May 5th suddenly the Germans were gone and the Americans came in. He couldn't have lasted much longer.

:36:19 He couldn't believe he was free but they stayed in camp one night and then went out and to the nearest town which was Linz. There was an American Red Cross. They got food, and got very sick. A lot of people got sick and died from eating too much.

39.05 He went to a garage, slept, went to a house and the woman said he could stay/ The neighbors came and took his clothes and burned them and gave him fresh clothes. After a few weeks he began to look better.

ù41-21 He couldn't get over the idea of having enough bread, he would stand in many lines for bread and then hide it. The Austrians helped him, cared for him and he left after a few weeks.

He went to Salzburg and hitchhiked, and came to a big camp, all Jews. He stayed there a month. In the night they were put on train and went to Italy - Bologna - and stayed there in kind of a tent city.

:45:45 He and others were waiting for transport to Palestine. The conditions were bad, so they left, traveling around and then they heard of a camp - a military academy sort of - and were there for 6 weeks.

Everyday, more people were coming to this place and then Jack heard about a cousin who was alive in Germany and so Jack returned to Germany.

:47:07 There he found an UNRUH organization but he didn't like the camp atmosphere. He heard of a friend who was in Eggenfelden in lower Bavaria. The friend lived in a home that had belonged to an ex-Nazi. They had chased out the ex-Nazi and lived there until 1949.

:49:26 He registered to go to Australia. There was a long waiting list to go to the US. He heard some people were ending up in a camp in Cyprus.

He came to the US in 1949. While living in Eglington he had gotten free food in the restaurants. People would help him. The German citizens claimed not to know what had been happening but that would have been impossible because, for example, when the Jews were marched from Fl"ssenburg people in small towns would stand and watch them and spit on them. People knew.

:52:00 He started to leave for Australia but then saw some Ukrainians on the boat and started to have a very bad feeling about that so he just left the boat, his luggage and all.

He ended up coming to the US and landing in Boston. Social workers were there to help. Many people got off in New York. He was sponsored by people in Pittsburgh. But when he arrived at the station in Pittsburgh there was a mix-up and no one was there to meet him. He sat all day on his suitcase and eventually someone from Travelers Aid came over and

:56:00 tried to help . She put him in a taxi and sent him up to the Jewish Federation .

:57:00 When he realized that he was the only survivor of his family he wondered "Why me?" He was young, he could take chances, he would break into places to steal food, garbage from the Nazis. If you got caught it was a death sentence.

He had been taught that God would protect the religious.
He still

1:00:41 doesn't understand how God did not protect innocent children.

When he first arrived in this country he didn't want to go to schul. But after getting married, now he goes. He lost a lot of faith.

:00:09 Still, have faith. You need faith. Anyone can be a good Jew in his heart.

Of course, America meant a lot, to be able to start a new life. His uncle is in Israel. His mother's brother is in Israel. He had survived by going into Russia. After his uncle had been in the Polish Army - in 1940 - he had been released from a German POW camp and went to work for the Russians.

:04:38 He wouldn't go back to Poland; the Poles were as bad as the Germans; they were working hand in hand with the NAZIS.

You have to be alert to what is going on.

:06:00 It's good when survivors can speak in the schools. He hasn't been able to speak to his children about this but they have seen a tape of his experiences.

:10:22 One good outcome of the tape he made is that it went to the Brooklyn Museum where people realized that the Commandant of Mielec, Josef Schweinberger (ph), who is in the process of being extradited from Argentina could be recognized by Jack. So Jack may have to give testimony against him. Jack has given a deposition to the German Consulate.

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