

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	JACK GILDAR		
Name of Interviewer	Sylvia Abrams	Date	8/10/84
Name of Abstractor	Michelle Heyer	Date	6/6/88

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Jack Gildar was born in Tarnowa, Poland, a town with a small, but strong, Jewish community. The Gildars were a close, loving family, but when Jack's father died their life became difficult. At the age of nine, Jack went alone to Lomza to attend school. He lived from day to day, sleeping with any family which would take him in and feed him. After several years he became an apprentice carpenter.

Even before the war, there was a good deal of anti-Semitism in Tarnowa. The town's residents did not commit many violent acts against Jews themselves, but outsiders frequently came into the town to persecute Jews.

When the war broke out, Jack was working in a town near the German border. He immediately returned home, and discovered that Tarnowa had been bombed, but damage was not too severe. Tarnowa was located in the Russian-occupied zone, and Jack's family was not too fearful of the future.

In 1941, however, the Germans took over. Life for Jews became very difficult, and in 1942 they were sent to a ghetto in Lomza. From there they were sent to a camp in Zembrov and four months later Jack and his family were sent to Auschwitz.

At Auschwitz, they were separated. Jack's family was taken away and he never saw them again. Jack was sent to Birkenau, then to another section of Auschwitz, where he worked in an SS hospital.

Because of his work, Jack was able to trade for extra food, medicine, and items such as soap and razor blades. He shared much of his good fortune with others, sending food and medicine to friends and cousins in other parts of the camp. He was also able to remain relatively strong and healthy, which probably saved his life later, when conditions became worse.

In January 1945, the camp was evacuated as the Russian army approached. Jack and others walked for four days to the Czech border, where they boarded trains for transport to Mauthausen.

After one week, Jack volunteered for transfer to Ebensee. He remained there, in a forced labor camp, until he was liberated by the American army.

http://collections.ushmm.org
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection.
Jack spent June through November after liberation in an abandoned lake house in Austria. He then went to Germany, where he lived on a Kibbutz in Landsburg. 1949, when Landsburg was closed, Jack discovered that he had relatives in Cleveland. He arrived in June 1949.

Today Jack lives in Beachwood, Ohio, where he works as a butcher. His wife, Sara, is also a Holocaust survivor. They have two children, Rochelle and David.

ABSTRACT

VIDEO 1 OF 3

PRESENT LIFE

Lives in Beachwood, Ohio. 60 years old. Works as a butcher. Has a wife, Sara, children Rochelle and David.

BORN IN POLAND

Lived in a town between Lomza and Ostrelenka called Tarnowa. Family very religious. Had two brothers, five sisters.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN TARNOWA

Of 300 families, 15 were Jewish. Strong Jewish community.

MORE ON JACK'S FAMILY AND HIS CHILDREN

Father died when Jack was nine. Jack left home to live and study in Lomza. Went from family to family for food. Went home twice a year. Family also very poor. Father had been a locksmith. Family was very close, loving. Had some relatives in Tarnowa and had good relations with neighbors. Spoke Yiddish.

JACK BECOMES APPRENTICE CARPENTER

ANTI-SEMITISM IN TARNOWA

Life difficult for Jews. Residents of town not so cruel - probably ashamed to commit violence because town was so small. But outsiders come in to attack them.

WAR BREAKS OUT

Jack was in a town near German border. Went home immediately, found Tarnowa had been bombed. But not badly damaged.

TARNOWA IS IN RUSSIAN ZONE. JACK'S FAMILY DOESN'T THINK OF LEAVING

BROTHER IS IN POW CAMP NEAR LUBLIN. THEY NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN

GERMANS TAKE OVER IN 1941. LIFE BECOMES MORE DIFFICULT

JEWS EVACUATED IN 1942

JACK IS WORKING ON A RUSSIAN COMMUNE WHEN GERMANS INVADE. JEWISH LEADER IS SHOT WHILE IN JACK'S ARMS. JACK IS 14 YEARS OLD

TARNOWA JEWS TAKEN TO GHETTO IN LOMZA

Filled with Jews from surrounding area. Looks on their faces filled Jack with fear. Stayed one night.

TAKEN TO ZEMBROV

Stayed four months in old Polish soldiers camp. No heat, had outdoor sanitation. People dying of typhoid.

FIRST TRANSPORTS TO AUSCHWITZ - JANUARY 1942

BROTHER DISAPPEARS

Smuggled family jewelry out of ghetto to trade for bread. Never returned. Jack learned later he was killed in the woods by a grenade thrown by Polish farmer.

JACK IS TRANSPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ

Weather is -20 degrees C. Taken to trains, given bread rations. Trip lasted three days.

ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ - JANUARY 1943

Stepped off train. Assigned to walk left or right. Jack lied, said he was 18. Family loaded on trucks. He never saw them again. Jack's group forced to take off clothes. Shaved, disinfected, tattooed with numbers.

THEY ARE TAKEN TO BIRKENAU

Bunks made of cement. Six to eight men per bunk. Incredibly cold.

ONE NIGHT BUNK COMMANDER ASKS IF ANYONE IS HUNGRY. ALL WHO ANSWER ARE KILLED

JACK VOLUNTEERS FOR CARPENTRY CREW

Taken to another part of Auschwitz. Stayed until 1945. Worked with thousands of others in pre-fabricated barracks.

JACK THINKS ONLY OF HIMSELF IN ORDER TO SURVIVE

Volunteered to wash floor for five extra pieces of bread. He knew it was from rations for whole bunk, but didn't care.

JACK GETS DIARRHEA. CURES HIMSELF BY BURNING BREAD INTO CHARCOAL, EATING THAT.

VIDEO 2 OF 3

JACK BEGINS TO "ORGANIZE" - TO TRADE ON BLACK MARKET, STEAL FOOD

Transferred to job on street-cleaning crew. Had access to items he could steal.

ORGANIZATION OF BARRACKS

3,000 to 4,000 per block. Each block three or four stories high. Each room had a chief, usually a Polish or German prisoner. Germans stood guard outside.

JACK GOES TO WORK IN SS HOSPITAL

Hospital Kapo liked how Jack worked. Jack allowed to wash, got clean clothes. Lived in block with cooks, musicians, other prominent prisoners. Jack was able to eat leftover food, so he gave his rations to a cousin.

JACK STEALS SHEETS, SELLS THEM FOR FOOD

MORE ON JACK'S SMUGGLING AND TRADING FOR FOOD AND MEDICINE

JACK HAS COUSIN IN AUSCHWITZ. TAKES HIM FOOD AT NIGHT

MORE ON JACK'S TRADING; HOW HE USED MEDICINE TO TREAT SICK FRIENDS

JACK NEVER SEES ANY WOMEN IN AUSCHWITZ. CHILDREN HAVE A SEPARATE CAMP

SS WHO ARE SICK IN HOSPITAL HAVE DIFFERENT ATTITUDE

They were nicer because they had lost their authority.

JACK NARROWLY ESCAPES A TRANSPORT

Some of Jewish hospital workers were rounded up, but head doctor saw Jack and sent him back to hospital.

JACK NEVER SEES ANY RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE IN AUSCHWITZ. DOESN'T SAY KADDISH FOR HIS FAMILY

JANUARY 1945 RUSSIANS ADVANCE. CAMP EVACUATED

Jack could have stayed, but was afraid they'd destroy hospital. Before evacuation he was allowed to fill backpack with supplies. Had good shoes, socks, a blanket.

THEY WALK THREE TO FOUR DAYS

Very disorganized. Never counted prisoners.

IT IS BITTERLY COLD, BUT JACK IS HEALTHY

AT CZECH BORDER THEY ARE PUT ON TRAINS TO MAUTHAUSEN

Prisoners already there looked dead. Jack was sure he would die.

A WEEK LATER, JACK VOLUNTEERS FOR TRANSPORT TO EBENSEE

Worked digging tunnels and refining gasoline. Conditions were terrible. No mattresses, no heat. Jack took pockets off coat, used them for socks. Block fuhrer took away Jack's good shoes, gave him wooden shoes instead.

VIDEO 3 OF 3

JACK REMEMBERS SEEING GYPSIES BROUGHT INTO AUSCHWITZ TO BE GASED. SS SAW A JEWISH PRISONER WATCHING - HE DISAPPEARED IMMEDIATELY

JACK TALKS ABOUT HIS WORK AT EBENSEE

Carried away stones created by blasting tunnels into mountains. Later changed to crew building wooden supports. Also loaded sand for cement mixing.

PRISONERS AT EBENSEE WERE MIXED - FROM ALL OVER EUROPE - JEWS AND PRISONERS OF WAR

JACK BECOMES SELFISH - THINKS ONLY OF HIS OWN SURVIVAL

Some prisoners had to be carried to work. Jack avoided this so he would have more energy for his own survival.

CONDITIONS AT EBENSEE

Jack was so hungry he ate coal and grass. Everyone had lice. They washed once in three months - it was freezing cold and they had to go outside wet.

JACK'S FEET AND BACK ARE FROSTBITTEN

LIBERATION

Liberated by Americans. Guards were Volkdeutsche - they just walked away one day.

JACK'S MOST PAINFUL EXPERIENCE IS LOSING HIS FAMILY

JACK HAS A FEELING ALL THROUGH THE WAR THAT HE WILL SURVIVE

JACK DOESN'T THINK MUCH ABOUT GOD DURING THE WAR

His experiences left him with mixed feelings about religion.

AT ONE POINT THERE ARE RUMORS THAT THE GERMANS INTEND TO SEND JEWS TO AMERICA

JACK WONDERS WHY ALLIES DON'T SEND HELP SOONER

They could have gotten weapons to prisoners, encouraged uprisings.

JUST BEFORE LIBERATION, JACK IS BRUTALLY BEATEN

WHEN AMERICANS ARRIVE, THEY GIVE PRISONERS TOO MUCH FOOD. MANY DIE

JACK DECIDES TO WANDER AROUND, LOOKING FOR FOOD. HE AND FRIENDS FIND A WOMEN'S DP CAMP NEAR A LAKE

Lived in abandoned house there from June until November.

JACK GOES TO BAD GASTEIN, AUSTRIA. MEETS AN OLD FRIEND WHO TELLS HIM HIS BROTHER IS DEAD

No reason for Jack to return to Poland.

JACK GOES TO LANDSBURG, GERMANY

Lived on a kibbutz there until 1949, when it was closed.

JACK COMES TO THE U.S. IN JUNE 1949

Discovered he had relatives here. United Nations paid for his trip.

JACK SETTLES IN CLEVELAND, WHERE A COUSIN LIVES

He married, began to work in the meat business, went to night school.

JACK HAS NEVER DISCUSSED HIS EXPERIENCES AS EXTENSIVELY AS IN THIS INTERVIEW. TOLD SOME TO HIS DAUGHTER. SHE VISITED AUSCHWITZ. HOSPITAL WHERE JACK WORKED IS NOW A MUSEUM

THE HOLOCAUST HAS MADE JACK A MORE EMOTIONAL PERSON

HIS FEET AND SHOULDERS ARE STILL OCCASIONALLY AFFECTED BY FROSTBITE FROM EBENSEE

JACK KNOWS ROSE KAPLOVITZ, ANOTHER SURVIVOR

She was partially responsible for his decision to be interviewed.

JACK DOESN'T THINK ANOTHER HOLOCAUST COULD HAPPEN - ESPECIALLY IN U.S.

JACK FEELS THAT ISRAEL IS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF POWER AND STRENGTH FOR JEWS TODAY