

RG-50.091.0082

Summary of Oral History Interview with Sara Kay, recorded 11-16-1984

Sara Kay (née Lipschitz), born in Wielen, Poland, in October 1926, describes her childhood and life with her parents and younger sister in the Jewish community in Wielen which was comprised of approximately 7,000 Jews out of a total population of approximately 25,000; describes the ritual bath, the slaughterhouse and the religious school; how she witnessed the beginning of the invasion of Poland by the Nazis on the morning of September 1, 1939 when she heard sirens and climbed on the window to close it, saw German planes, and was blown across the room when a bomb exploded; describes the evacuation of Wielen, how she lost track of her family during the evacuation and took refuge in Pabianice, which was near Lodz, and stayed with extended family members; German soldiers arrived and searched the house in Pabianice, men of all faiths were rounded up and some of them were shot; she returned to Wielen two weeks after the war started and most of the city, including her home, the hospital and the synagogue, was in rubble; she stayed with an aunt and saw that the Polish people and people who said they were Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) were taking whatever houses were left standing, including homes that were owned by Jews; the Volksdeutschen agitated antisemitism amongst the local population in the year before the war; her mother and younger sister returned to Wielen after the evacuation but she never saw her father again; the Jews of Wielen collected jewelry and handed it over to the Germans as a ransom, believing that they would be left alone as a community but that was not the case; she was put to work clearing the rubble and she also worked in a sugar beet factory; describes the hardships Jews suffered under the Nazi occupation, including the confiscation of a family member's potato farm, the closing of small businesses that had existed for many generations and the requirement to register and wear Jewish stars; in the summer of 1940 she left Wielen to live with extended family in a town approximately 36 km away from Wielen; around the time of Passover in 1942, her mother and sister were taken from Wielen during judenrein (cleansing of the city of Jews) and she never heard from them again; at the end of May of 1942 she learned that because of judenrein it would be better to go to an arbeitslager [forced labor camp] than to be caught while hiding; she was sent to the labor concentration camp in Parshnice [also, Parschnitz or Porici], in the Sudetenland [Czechoslovakia]; describes how she was housed with about 300 girls in an old factory building and they walked to work six days a week to a spinning factory that made thread; describes the horrendous working and living conditions, including the lack of food and constant hunger, the lack of medical attention, the lack of appropriate work clothing, and how she was forced to work in her bare feet while standing on a floor that was covered with dirty water; describes how in January 1945 male prisoners were crowded into her camp during the todesmarche [death march of prisoners] from Auschwitz and its subcamps; how one of her fellow prisoners threw some potatoes out the window to the male prisoners outside and the guards shot at the window and killed another female prisoner standing near the window; her camp was liberated by Russian soldiers on May 9, 1945, but the next day some soldiers started raping some of the female survivors; in June of 1945 she returned to Wielen and started working as a dressmaker; she was forced to leave Wielen because the Polish people were killing the Jews who had returned to prevent them from reclaiming property that had been confiscated during the war; she lived in Germany and then immigrated to Cleveland, Ohio in 1952.