

LEE POTASINSKI

Family:

Lee was born in 1932 in Bendzin, Poland. He was taken to labor camp at 9½ years of age. Father had a retail/wholesale business of ladies' wear and piece goods which was taken away from him.

War:

Ages 20 to 35 were taken to labor camps. Left only old people, children and women. Took Mother's uncle first. He lived in the same building. Next they took Mother's sister - her child was taken away and killed. No notice was given. The people that were weeded out were taken to a gathering place near the train station and sent on with others from other towns to camps. At one point the whole town had received notice to gather. All went and were kept there 1½ days. They were told that they were getting new papers. Anyone caught without new papers would be arrested. Adults spent time talking about trying to save the children. At this time he was 8½ and felt he could do nothing. It was up to his parents to save him if they could. Gradually the S.S. called people to the front and decided how to divide the families. They weren't taken and were sent back to town. An hour later grandparents came back and life continued. One to two times a week soldiers went through homes to take people. Took anyone who was not working. Therefore, Mother took children to work in factory on night shift hoping that Nazi's wouldn't find them and take them away. He never went to school until he came to America. One day she couldn't take him to work. They stayed with their grandparents in ghetto. Nazi's came with trucks to round them up. Taken to open field with two aunts, two cousins, sister and grandparents. Started selections again - young people to labor camps, old people to extermination camp. Grandfather told him he must get across to healthy people. He saw rest of family marched to Auschwitz.

Labor Camp:

He had no family with him on way to transport. He cried and the S.S. man told him be quiet or you're dead. He stayed 6-7 months and was only 9½. Did mostly construction work. Food: Coffee in morning, Bread and soup at night. No medical care. If you became ill, you recuperated on your own or died.

Lee Potasinski (cont.)

This continued from camp to camp until he arrived at Anna Burk. Stayed three months. They were then marched to railroad station. He saw a building with a chimney and a peculiar smell. Realized it was human flesh burning. He felt that it was the end of his life - age 10½. On other side of tracks dead bodies were being unloaded. They were marched out of their train to barracks. Next day they were forced to enter a white tile room. Told to undress. They were numb by this time and didn't care what happened. They really did get showers and were given prisoner clothing. Everyone got tattooed and sent on to a camp in Auschwitz. There were occasional selections. In between they just sat around and waited as there was not enough work to go around. Food was scarce and the latrine was the favorite "hang-out."

Death March:

(Side 2)

Russians were getting closer by this time and they were told to be ready to leave by night. They were taken by truck to the railroad where they slept all night. In the morning the train started moving and they ended up in Bavaria. They marched for two weeks until they reached Dachau. Many were killed or died during the walk. The camp was so overcrowded that they had to stay outside. After two weeks they were marched to outskirts of Munich where 3½ to 4000 people were crowded into two or three barracks. Then they began to take people into the woods and shoot them. All became very quiet and suddenly a Jeep pulled in. He ran out and asked if the Jeep soldier was Jewish. It was so unbelievable - he said they were free to go. Noone left because noone knew where to go. They all kissed and embraced. They stood around waiting for someone to tell them where to go and what to do. They walked into town - any store and they took bread.

After liberation:

German people denied knowing anything was going on. Stayed in barracks another 4-5 weeks. Finally went to Displaced Persons Camp. People sickened and died from overeating or eating the wrong food. They were able to travel freely without ever encountering a challenge. Returned home and found an Aunt. After 5-6 months Father and finally Mother showed up. The Gentiles after the war weren't any better after the war than before the war. Gentiles had taken over their house and belongings. Stayed in Poland one year but were unable to take their things back. Left Poland due to fear of persecution. Went to Munich and finally South America in November, 1946. Stayed there one year and came to United States and went to school eventually graduating college.

Conclusion:

He speaks about difficulty of Next generation growing up in homes of survivors and the scars left on the living. Should it happen again he will never go to any kind of camp.