

Summary of Oral History: Harry Tabrys

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Harry Tabrys was born in Vilna, Poland on March 4, 1924. He was the second oldest in a family of six children. In Poland, he was called Aaron or Arke. His father was a chimney sweeper and did masonry. Theirs was a Yiddish speaking family. When his older brother was 14, he helped their father. The home was kosher though his parents were not observant and the grandparents influenced the children to attend services. Harry attended a Hebrew School or Chedar, a Jewish School to learn Yiddish and Polish, and a Public School where everything was taught in Polish. He felt that by living in Vilna, he benefited from the progressive education and spirituality from the Vilna Gaon Rabbi. At 12, Harry belonged to an illegal Communist organization that indoctrinated him. Germany occupied Poland in '39 but Russia occupied his area. His older brother organized food on the Russian side and was sent to Siberia. For two years his father was almost blind due to an accident and Harry supported the family. In '41 Russia formed unions for each trade and Harry was 16 and had to join the Chimney Sweeps Union. For nine months Vilna was considered Lithuanian and then became Russian. War broke out between Russia and Germany. Harry taught himself to speak and write Russian from Russian films and literature. When war broke out he was recovering from typhoid and ran toward Russia with friends but Germans prevented them from continuing so he returned home. The Lithuanians volunteered with the SS and killed half the population. His mother and the youngest child were taken. Harry's home was part of the Ghetto where he resided for two years until it was liquidated. During this time, Harry went to work with the Poles. He was shipped to Estonia to a work camp for a year and was in several from '43 to '44. He had typhoid again and recovered. From a work camp in Narva near Finland, the Germans took him by ship to Germany as the Russians were getting closer. From Shithof, he was taken to Dav Mer in Bavaria for nine months which was the worst camp with unbearable sanitary conditions including lice. The Red Cross and Jewish organizations gave them packages. Then he was sent to Dachau for three weeks. The Americans were coming so on April 30, 1945 he was transported by cattle car to the Alps. The next day there were no guards and he and four friends went into Statga, a little town, to find a place to sleep. The Americans came and they were given clothes and housed in a German home. He was taken to a DP Camp called Feldner (?) with barracks for 2,000 people where he remained for four years. In 1946 Harry got married. Rations were insufficient so he used the Black Market. His wife worked as a seamstress and he attended trade school. They were able to immigrate to the US in '49 with the help of Truman's law that survivors of DP camps could enter the US. Through published lists, his father and brother found him in the DP camp and followed them to the US in '50. First they lived in Boston, then NY where his daughters were born: Ellen in '51 and another daughter in '55. After working in a supermarket and owning a grocery, he purchased a candy store/laundrette in Long Island where he worked for 14 years. His daughters

married and the older one had two daughters and the younger one, two sons. In 1978 he sold his business and purchased a condo in Florida. He believes the young should be acquainted with history.