

Summary of Oral History: George Topas

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George (Yasick in Polish) Topas was born November 3, 1924 in Warsaw, Poland to a well-to-do family and later had two brothers: Shimon (or Stanislav in Polish) born in 1927 and Meir born in 1934. The family spoke Yiddish at home and were assimilated but celebrated Jewish holidays. When George was seven, the family became more observant. His mother studied law which was unusual for a woman, especially a Jewish woman. She met George's father by working as a tutor for him and his brother. George attended a Hebrew Academy and after one year at a Gymnasium, he attended a Zionist Agricultural School in Wajenuswolinsky which was 350 km. SE of Warsaw. He started in '38 at harvest time. The family realized Poland was a dangerous place for Jews so investigated immigrating. The Tarbot organization ran the school and graduates were expected to immigrate to Palestine but the British restricted it. When war was coming, they only had one shoe store left in Warsaw. His father had a shoe store briefly in Katowice until thrown out as he was not considered a citizen there. His father felt he was a Polish Patriot as served in the 1920 Bolshevik War at age 16 and joined the Polish militia. When war broke out, the agricultural school was suspended. George tried to return to Warsaw but only made it to Lublin where he met his father as their home had been bombed. His grandmother had gone to the US for the World's Fair and remained and obtained affidavits for the family. His father was afraid harm would come to the family if he showed them to the government. His grandmother sent them many food packages. The Germans confiscated their shoe inventory except for 20 pairs. The family lived in the Ghetto and George was made instructor to teach students how to plant vegetables. As instructor, he received an extra loaf of bread every week. He volunteered to help the harvest in Lublin and stayed a few months longer. Once he had to stand in front of a firing squad in Lublin. In April '42 there was a "Reign of Terror" in the Ghetto when people received jam and bread if they reported to the train depot. There were no volunteers for deportation, so the Germans picked up people in the street and threw them in trucks or had them march to the train. On July 22nd, George and Shimon were in forced labor working in a Luftwaffe camp. By this time, everyone knew Treblinka was a concentration camp as a deportee had escaped. George wanted to return home to see his family so announced that he is a shoemaker and required tools and equipment in the Ghetto. He escaped from the leader and joined a cleanup crew which he also escaped from and went to his apartment. He learned his mother and brother, Meir, had perished early (in Treblinka) but some relatives were alive. On January 18, 1943 there was an Action. He was working at the Airfield until the camp was liquidated. He was taken to the Ghetto which was in ruins and deported to Majdanek with 88 men suffocating in a cattle car. He was separated from those who went to the gas chambers. George was sent to Camp Bodzin which was the worst camp and he registered as a Chemist. Then he was sent to Camp Plaszow near Krakow and then to Flossenbürg to work on a super weapon. The project was unsuccessful and was disbanded. He was placed on a 3-day death march and in April was liberated by the

11th Army Division. He learned that his father died in Majdanek September 25, 1942 but his Uncle Ben was hidden by his wife, Rose, and survived. He has no proof of what happened to Shimon. In 1966 George had a reunion with survivors of the school in Israel and all lived in Israel except for him. In 1989 he visited Germany, Israel, and Poland including his grandparents' home in Plutz. The home had no running water which was in contrast with his home with two maids. He also visited Cralie where the family spent summers and spoke to Mrs. Levandos, the landlady, who remembered the family and that Shimon asked her to hide him in summer'42. She would take him to the next village to be a shepherd but he refused as did not know anyone there. George is still searching for Shimon as found his name in a cave in Israel with a Spanish address but no information from the Red Cross. He is thankful that the Germans tried to exterminate all the Jews but were unsuccessful.