

## **Summary of Oral History: Solomon Urbach**

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**This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [03/2022]**

Solomon Urbach was born October 25, 1926 in Kalwaria-Zebrzydowska, Poland as one of six children. His older brother was Samuel, then came Rivka, then himself, then Chava, then Chaskel and Shimon was the youngest. From 1928 to 1933 the family lived in Romania as relatives thought they would prosper there but they were expelled and imprisoned in Poland upon arrival until Polish citizens got them released. Then they settled outside of expensive Krakow and received assistance to live in Borek Fanecki. Solomon attended public school and Hebrew school until the Germans marched in. All Jews were required to wear an armband. It was too dangerous for his father to go out for food as he wore a beard so it was his mother's and the children's responsibility to stand in lines. Solomon had to walk four kilometers to school daily trying to evade the rock-throwing Christian children. They had a religious home and his father sometimes served as a Cantor (led prayers) and was self-employed at home as a tailor. At first the family spoke Yiddish and Romanian and later switched from Romanian to Polish. When bombing started, the family marched along with thousands of others towards Krakow but soon returned home. In '41 all Jews were required to enter the Krakow Ghetto but his family delayed entering the Ghetto until 1942 when neighbors were afraid to keep their presence a secret. At first Solomon continued working for a cabinetmaker but soon joined his family in their basement room. They were idle except when the Germans rounded them up to clean the streets or unload coal. One day he was taken to Oscar Schindler's factory where pots and pans were made and he received soup as payment. Solomon marched with 1,000 others daily to the factory, sometimes day shift and sometimes night shift. Around March 10 or 11, 1943 he and others were ordered to remain at the factory as there was an Action at the Ghetto which was being liquidated. On March 12 he was marched to the Krakow Plaszow Concentration Camp and assigned to the stone quarry. Trucks arrived with the corpses from the Ghetto and buried in the prepared pits. Solomon did not know if his family were among the dead or were deported. The director of the camp, Amos Goeth held daily Appel (roll call) when he did random shootings and lynchings. After a week Solomon marched out daily to the Schindler factory where he was a cabinet maker. Soon he was in charge of blackout shades for Shindler's office and became acquainted with Schindler. Late '43 Shindler built a concentration camp on his grounds for 1,000 workers. Solomon moved in and found the camp more bearable as there were no more shootings. They were given striped uniforms and tattooed "KL" (Konzentration Lager). Early '44 an English plane was shot down and landed in the camp burning four buildings. Shindler was ordered to return 700 inmates to Krakow and 300 would remain. Solomon requested to remain and it was permitted. Due to shortage of materials in September '44, Shindler was ordered to close the factory and move to Krakow Plaszow. Solomon once again saw friends hung and Ukrainian guards shoot the inmates. The next month he was loaded into a cattle car as the Russian Army was advancing and was shipped to Gros-Rosen Concentration Camp. Here the inmates were

kicked by the Ukrainian guards, killing some, and their heads were shaved with a stripe down the center. The hardships included insufficient room and the only clothing they received was a shirt. After a week Solomon, with 700 men, was deported to Brinlitz, Czechoslovakia, by railway to Shindler's new textile factory. There were 300 women from Auschwitz put in a separate area. Shipments of Jews would arrive and when he opened the door some had frozen to death. Solomon and another woodworker were assigned to renovate the villa for Shindler and his wife. While the guards slept, he would take food and smuggle it to the inmates and when found out, was not punished. Authorities inquired how Shindler had more food for the inmates than the Czech citizens so Shindler built a high wall so the food would be unseen. On May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Shindler announced that he had to leave, left revolvers for the inmates' safety and announced that Germany was surrendering the next day. He told the inmates to divide the supplies in the warehouse among themselves. The Russians arrived and said they were free but gave no help or direction. The inmates hung some of the brutal Ukrainian and Polish guards. Solomon, in a group of 17, headed toward Krakow by horse and wagon with some walking and changing places. After a week they reached Vnuzkawff (Breslau) and took a train to Krakow. He returned home but none of his neighbors or employer had seen any of his relatives. It was not safe for him to remain due to the anti-Semitism so he returned to his group of 17 in Krakow. He was the only one who did not locate a single friend or relative. First he lived in a room with 20 people and searched the UNWRA daily list of survivors. Then he was assigned a room in a student building. Survivors of concentration camps arrived bringing him a friend, Adam Mandel, who had been in Mauthausen. Due to the anti-Semitism and Communism he and two friends decided to go to Usti, Czechoslovakia, as the people had been friendlier there. Soon they realized Czechoslovakia was also Communist so in '46 went to Bamberg, Germany. From there, Solomon visited Shindler in Munich who recognized him and called him "Romick," a name he used in the factory. He continued his education by hiring a German professor to tutor him. At the same time, Solomon supported himself by working in an UNWRA warehouse distributing food to DPs. There he met Aida Birnbaum and worked in a radio repair workshop to learn how to repair small appliances. In March '49 Solomon took a former troop ship to the US and Aida and her siblings arrived three months later. Aida and Solomon married in 1950 in New York where he worked in woodworking and Aida as a seamstress. The next year Aida's parents bought a chicken farm in Flemington, NJ and the couple followed them there. He became a union carpenter and they had David in '52, Barbara in '55 and Henry in '63 and subsequently had grandchildren. Solomon went into the construction business, first with a partner and later on his own. In 1973 Solomon visited Israel with his wife and children and had a brief meeting with Shindler in Tel Aviv. He felt Shindler tried to make money while helping the Jews.