

JACOB BIRNBAUM
RG-50.243.0003 (rec. 1990)

Jacob was born in Piotrków, Poland in 1922 where his extended family had lived for generations. His father was in the produce business and his mother was a bookkeeper. He had a younger sister. The family was Hassidic and it was an active Jewish community; approximately 50% of the town was Jewish. Jacob discusses his extended family in detail.

In 1936 the family moved to Dabrowa and in 1938 he started dental training. Piotrków was bombed heavily when the Germans came in. Jacob ran into the forest with his family and then went back to his parents in Dabrowa where there was no damage. Many restrictions started and the Judenrat enforced orders. They told the people that they should go willingly to the camps. Jacob was eventually taken, as were his parents, to Anhalt. He worked as a lumberjack for the coal mines. Then he carried bricks. He tells of his experiences. One guard was able to get him shoes from his parents who were in Auschwitz. At first, he was able to have contact with his parents, but eventually they were killed. There was a question as to whether they had been betrayed by his uncle. He states the history is murky, and his uncle was one of the few family members to survive. He doesn't know what happened to his sister.

Jacob was sent to another camp Breslau and assigned to help build a factory for Krupp. He became very sick, but a Kapo saved his life by telling him to work even though sick or he would have been sent to Auschwitz. Jacob tells of many experiences. He was very weak and looked like a Mussulman. He had some miraculous things happen to save him. He narrowly escaped being hanged because he had fallen asleep and let 2 trains collide on his watch. Then in December 1944 he was condemned to death and accused of sabotage. He was supposed to be handed over to the criminal police, but the SS didn't follow through on this.

The Russians entered the camp in May in 1945. Jacob walked out of the camp and into town. He had met his wife when he saw her dancing in the camp and they married after liberation.

After the war, Jacob began a dental practice in Poland. A program was started and the Birnbaums decided to emigrate. They fled through Czechoslovakia and Austria. They ended up in Munich where Jacob worked for ORT until 1949, when his uncle in the US filled out an affidavit for them. They arrived in Boston in June 1949.