

HERMAN DZIEWIENSKI
RG-50.323.0004. (rec in 1986 in Atlanta)

Herman was born in 1916 in Proszowice, Poland into an observant farming family with 5 brothers and 4 sisters. He went to Kraków to become a butcher but ran to Lvov in 1939 when the Germans came to Kraków. He went back and forth to home and Kraków until he was sent to the ghetto in Kraków where he stayed until the ghetto was liquidated. His parents were killed in Slomnick.

He went to the labor camp Plaszow where he built barracks. There was a lot of killings; it also was very cold, but eventually Herman was put to work as a butcher in the kitchen where it was warmer and he had more access to food. He sustained beatings but was a good worker and survived. Also, he had food when others were starving. He talked about life in general in the camp and saw people purposely running into the electrified fence to kill themselves. They were not tattooed but given numbers to wear on their shirts and rarely shoes. He said there were Jews who informed and collaborated with the Germans. Herman also worked in the stables there for a few years. He said most of the people brought to Plaszow were killed immediately in pits. Some were killed through hard labor, such as having to lift 200-pound rocks. He also spoke of seeing Goeth, the SS leader of Plaszow who used to ride into the camp on his horse and shoot people at will. Herman had to feed his 3 Dobermans and bury any leftover food.

When Plaszow was liquidated in 1944 he was sent with about 600 others to Czestochowa where he found some of his friends. He had already been in German hands for 5 years. The Russians came in the winter of 1945. He remembers hearing the bombs and whizzing of bullets. He worked with food, bringing food from the town to the camp at one point the Germans returned and he hid in a basement with other prisoners until they heard the Russians come back.

Herman found that 2 of his brothers had survived, one by joining the Polish underground. He met up with his future wife, Maria. In Kraków. She had been sent to Auschwitz from Plaszow and survived. They did not want to stay in Poland because it was too dangerous for Jews, so they went to Germany where they lived for 5 years. They came to the United States in 1950 and were settled in Atlanta by the Jewish Federation. They had three children and after two years, bought a small store. They have never been back to Europe. Herman still has nightmares about his time, particularly about babies killed by throwing them against walls because it was cheaper to kill them that way than spend 5 cents on a bullet.