

Interviewed Oct. 24, 1995 (2:04:07), and Nov. 22, 1995 (53:15), in Melbourne, Australia
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The first tape covers his early childhood, family and schooling, the start of the war, and his wartime camp experiences. The second tape begins with him in an orphanage in France and continues to his immigration to and early jobs and life in Australia. There is a gap in the narrative, as the tapes do not include his liberation or how he got from Germany to France.

SUMMARY:

Simon Michalowicz, born Dec. 2, 1929, in Wieluń, Poland, describes his intensive religious schooling; his family of two older brothers and four sisters, plus one younger brother, his parents, his grandfather; getting into mischief at the family-owned orchard about 5 km from town; the “very great” antisemitism in Wieluń, with Jewish boys frequently knifed by Poles, and a huge poster in the market square — “Jews to Jews and Poles to Poles” — to segregate the Jewish buyers and sellers; the bombing of Wieluń at the start of the war on Sept. 1, 1939, German planes “bombarding” the people running from the city; the hanging by German authorities of a dozen Jewish men in the marketplace, and rounding up Jewish men to work in coal mines or quarries; going to the family property in the country, where in early 1940, Germans came to take heirlooms and beat Simon’s mother when she protested, then killed the dog that tried to protect her; all the Jews being placed in one big house in a village to work for the administrator of the area, a German who in early 1941 warned Simon’s sister they were making Wieluń *Judenrein*; the family running into the forest to hide for several days, then being told by a Jewish man their best chance was for four of the siblings to go to a labor camp and their mother, a sister and her baby to the mother’s brother in **Tschenstochau?**; the difficult separation from his mother; life in the work camp, where they were sent to demolish old Polish houses and build new ones on land taken from the Poles for the Volksdeutsch from Poland and Romania; not believing a boy who returned from **Częstochowa** and told them people there were all sent to Treblinka; in 1942 being packed onto a train to Blechhammer, where Simon was among five children who were selected for work (all of whom survived); the role of Karl Demerer, the Judenälteste, in aiding prisoners; daily life in the barracks, roll call at the Appellplatz, building air-raid shelters for the Germans; being tattooed in 1943, when Blechhammer becomes officially a branch of Auschwitz as the SS take over the camp from the SA, improving cleanliness but using cruel punishments; as a boy with a fine voice, joining professional artists starting a theater the SS wanted for their entertainment; the struggle to keep clean and hide illness or injury from the guards; learning a sister, Lola, was alive and being able to meet with her in the camp; hearing shooting and cannon as the Russians approached shortly after New Year’s 1944; being forced on a death march to Gross-Rosen, from which the “famous cars” transported the survivors to Buchenwald, but not before the Americans bombed the train at **Weimar**; assigned to Block 49, Barrack 23, where he was aided by fellow prisoners; while cleaning debris on the streets from bombings in the town, meeting a guard from Blechhammer who recognized him from the theater and urged him, “You have gone so far, keep it up. I don’t think it’s going to be very long”; life in an orphanage in France after the war; kind treatment by the French people; decision to immigrate to Australia after being refused by Canada; months’ long voyage in 1948 on the SS *Derna* from Marseilles, through the Suez Canal, to Australia; efforts to get a job; being taken in by

Australians and having a first taste of family life; meeting his wife and marrying in 1950; being “quite happy” now, with two daughters and six grandchildren. Near the end of the second tape, Mr. Michalowicz sings two songs, one described as “the song of Treblinka” and one he composed on family life in Australia.

Asked by the interviewer if he had any last thoughts, Simon Michalowicz replied:

It was impossible to tell you what ... it's like when you are torn away from your parents, your mother especially ... at that age. ... also the sufferings and every day what you went through in the camps, especially what they call the Todesmarsch ... how you walk in the cold without food, without clothes, without anything. ... From day to day I had to fight to survive. You cannot possibly describe that it's possible that one human being could have done a thing like this to another human being. I myself, now, I cannot believe it myself. I have been through it ... but I cannot believe it even is possible. Sometimes I think ... it was a dream; it's unreal. And yet now to hear that people come out and say it's nonexistent ... it's not true, it's false ... it hasn't happened, that it's exaggerated — it's unbelievable. ...

You've got to think of the future ... Now still survivors left. What's going to happen in 20, 30, 40, 50 years? It can happen again. If it's already denied now, what's going to happen in 50 or 20 or 30 years? ... A tape like this will come up and say, Here we are, we've got proof. It happened, it existed, it's proof. That is the only reason that maybe we are doing this: Maybe I can prevent a future tragedy to some other future generation. Hopefully.