

### **Oral History: Emil Braun, October 27, 1996**

Emil Braun, born September 10, 1930 into a poor, remote area of Czechoslovakia [currently Slovakia, near Hungary], the youngest of five children—two sisters and two brothers—describes: his father Aaron, a merchant, and mother Fanny; a religious household; speaking Slovak and Yiddish at home; attending a Slovak school; Slovaks being more anti-Semitic than even the Nazis; not having access to news media and learning late of events in Germany; Slovakia being administered by Hungarian troops; being a good student and feeling like an outcast; having a harmonious family life but hating his childhood life as much as his experience in the concentration camps [sic]; despite the poverty of the village Jews, the Jews being better off than the gentile peasants and being resented for it; being compelled to join a youth group for military training; in March 1944, all Jews in the village being ordered to report to the synagogue; being disappointed that no one seemed to consider disobeying the order; being transported to a disused brick factory, where Jews had been assembled from a wide area; living in primitive conditions for about three weeks; within days everyone coming to realize they would not return to their homes; both panic and dread setting in; widespread, constant praying by the prisoners; being transported in cattle cars to an unknown destination; not recalling any resistance; several people dying in transit; not being provided with food or water; arriving in Birkenau and undergoing selection; being advised by an inmate to stand on his father's feet to appear taller and more able-bodied; similarly, being told how to move through the next gate, where Mengele was; being surprised, after "delousing" and "showers" that they were not killed, but rather given work clothes and transported to Auschwitz; being tattooed and placed in barracks; after three weeks, being trucked to Jawiszowice as part of a labor detail; being separated from his father and older brother and grouped with others of about his age who were treated somewhat better than older inmates and assigned the relatively easier job of culling stones from coal on a conveyer belt; being given food by a Polish woman who took pity on him; on Sundays, being taken to another camp about 8-12 km distant, Bunamonowice [PH], where they dug ditches; periodic fitness checks by Mengele and other officers; his father failing a fitness test and being taken away; fights over stealing food among the young prisoners; receiving beatings and being forced to watch public hangings; on January 18, 1945, everyone in area camps being force-marched in the cold and snow, the number growing as they were joined by other prisoners; being carried when he could no longer walk, thus avoiding execution; being loaded into cattle cars and transported to Buchenwald; developing a huge boil on his neck and being taken to a camp "hospital," where he was strapped down while it was cut open; staying in the hospital for two to three weeks and then being sent to another barracks, which housed mostly Russian officers; being told after the fact about thousands of prisoners being executed during the liquidation of Buchenwald, his older brother among them; German guards fleeing as U.S. forces approached; seeing crematoria with corpses piled high; being offered a chance to go to Sweden or Switzerland but choosing to go home to see if any of his family had survived; participating without regret in a mob killing of an SS member; [beginning Tape 2]; his state of mind in the wake of his experiences; finding a surviving brother and two sisters; presuming his mother's death and being told about his sisters' time in an Auschwitz work camp; apprenticing as a jeweler; attending school at night; in 1949, deciding to leave Czechoslovakia; immigrating to Australia and building a life, including a wife and three children.