

## **RG-50.407.0161**

### **Summary**

Joseph Teitelbaum was born May 16, 1921 in the Galicia region of Poland (now Ukraine), a town called Zloczow (Zolochiv). His parents were Samuel and Deborah (née Katz), and he had a sister four years younger, Rebecca. He used to regularly visit Rabbi Taub in his grandfather's town of Sasov during yontif holidays. His four paternal aunts also lived in Zloczow; only one, Tauba, survived. His mother's siblings (one brother and six sisters) all perished but for one sister, Gitl, who was sent to Russia, ultimately moved to Israel.

His family was "well-off" in a house that his father built in 1935-36 that still stands at the time of the interview (1997). His father represented POLIM, a government-owned wholesaler of petrol/kerosene, and he had a church candle factory. Joseph started in a public school which had many Jews since the town was over half Jewish. In 1936, he went to a private, Jewish gymnasium. Joseph considered his family Orthodox, as was most of the town, and believed in Zionism, aspiring to move to Palestine someday. He experienced no anti-Semitic feeling until the war.

In October, 1939 the Russians came and the school dissolved. Rumored to face arrest for being a "capitalist", his father fled to Sasov. Joseph returned to public school, whose curriculum now included topics on communism. His father returned covertly shortly before the Nazi invasion in 1941. His father was detained for a few days but released. The Nazis set up a Judenrat to run the community, assess money, assign work details; most were existing community leaders. He witnessed random acts of violence by the soldiers, but he was not harmed. After about two months, they started to build two camps, one of which was a labor camp called Lackie. After it was built, Joseph says there were categories of people eligible to work: 1) those who worked; 2) those who didn't work and paid the Judenrat; and 3) those who didn't work and didn't pay. He was part of group 3, a dangerous category because new conscript laborers were taken from it. In one instance, he was able to bribe a conscripting gang to avoid capture.

On August 27, 1942, he was warned by one of the "good" Jewish policeman of an imminent Nazi action in sufficient time to hide his family in advance of next day's roundup of 2700 Jews to Bergen-Belsen for execution. He hid at the fuel firm run by his cousin, Nathan Heilbraun, who survived the war. In September, a German businessman, Mr. Wylicki of the company Hoch & Tebau (?), set up an operation to de-assemble the homes of exiled Jews using the local SS labor camp and re-selling the parts. Joseph was able to join the crew as an electric tradesman and live in a group home. Food was sufficient and he was able to often secret some to his family.

Another deportation of 2500 Jews took place on November 1, 1942, but, again, advance warning allowed his family to hide. A few days later, the SS began to cordon off a ghetto and closed it off Dec. 5, 1942 containing about 9000 people, some of which came from surrounding

towns. Joseph found a spot for his family at one of the ghetto's corners allowing him to sneak out periodically; sometimes he smuggled fuel from Nazi supplies into the ghetto. Overall, food was tight for many in the ghetto with frequent starvation deaths. He felt survival was often simply an issue of luck, citing some examples.

On April 2, 1943, Joseph's family woke to see the SS and Ukrainian guards surrounding the ghetto. His mother and sister were able to hide in an outside "bunker", but they were captured. He and his father were separated, but upon learning that night that the ghetto was to be liquidated, he smuggled his father to his work factory. He also helped others to escape over the next few weeks; those who did not escape were executed en masse including his mother and sister.

Joseph became friendly with a Major (Hauptman) Rupel who claimed to be anti-Nazi, which allowed Joseph to secure firearms and hand grenades for a group in a nearby forest.

Through a series of prolonged moves, he found a new spot for his father to hide. After a while, they sought refuge in the forest leading into the winter. In March, 1944 the Russians approached in an offensive. But, Joseph returned to a "bunker" owned by a man named Kulper where the rest of his family was staying. Kulper allowed him to stay in return for Joseph's family signed over the deed to their house. Then, July 13, 1944 a Russian offensive overran their hiding spot, liberating them, and permitting them to return to their homes. He did cooperate with the Soviets as they prepared to continue their offensive, but managed to avoid a dangerous assignment to clear mines.

Joseph concludes with anecdotes about his post-war travels and reunions. His father died in 1948. He married an old girlfriend in 1951; they had two sons, David and Alec.