

Oral History: Henry Prinz, April 6, 1997

Part 1.

Henry Prinz, born in Lodz, Poland, on June 21, 1925, as officially registered, but three months later than Prinz says is accurate, noting that the discrepancy saved his and his twin brother's life in Auschwitz. Prinz describes: his grandparents' places of birth; his father, Israel Prinz, born in Lodz in 1894, and his mother, née Kleinbaum*; his twin brother, David; a middle class existence; his school life; speaking Polish and Yiddish at home; an Orthodox Jewish home; supporting Zionism but not joining a particular organization; assuming Polish anti-Semitism as a way of life; in 1939, being deeply affected during a student excursion to a historic church by a relic and painting depicting Jews at a seder drinking Christian blood [Tape at approximately 00:30:30]; anti-Jewish discrimination in all areas of daily life; being aware of events in Germany during the thirties; his family never considering emigrating from Poland; the beginning of the war and arrival of the Germans in Lodz [Tape at 01:02:00]; thousands of able-bodied men, including his father, walking to Warsaw; being surprised by the modern armament of the Germans; the return of his father to Lodz; being ordered to wear the Star of David; assaults on Hasidic Jews' beards, *payot*, etc.; creation of the Lodz ghetto, confining all Jews as of April 15, 1940; ten people sharing a flat consisting of one room and a kitchen; scarce available work; some people being sent to Chelmno but those in the ghetto not yet aware that they were being executed; his father being given a job outside the ghetto; being constantly hungry; beginning on a large scale in September 1942, block-by-block roundups of children and the aged, and the emptying of hospitals; all of those rounded up being taken to Chelmno; his family being subjected to, and passing, selection for transport, except for his grandmother; not having any weapons with which to resist; the presence of typhus in the ghetto; he and his immediate family being transported by train to Auschwitz on August 31, 1944 [asked for more details about the ghetto] being aware while in the ghetto of the progress of the war [tape at 01:53:00]; the functioning of the Judenrat in the ghetto; having heard of Auschwitz but not knowing about the mass killings; his mother remaining healthy but his father suffering from malnutrition-related conditions yet recovering; roundups for the liquidation of the ghetto beginning in August 1944; his family being among those on the last train to Auschwitz; arriving in Auschwitz on September 1 and going through selection by Mengele; his mother being selected for death; being ordered to undress and taken to (actual) showers; hair being shorn; being given camp clothing; being told repeatedly they would soon go "up the chimney"; enduring the head count; he and his twin brother inexplicably replying with different birth dates, not realizing then that they were thereby spared the Mengele experiments that were being conducted on twins; he, his brother, and their father surviving; all three being sent by train to work in a plane parts factory in Friedland* [possibly Frýdlant], in lower Silesia, approximately 3 km from the Czech border.

Part 2. Being liberated by the Soviet army; the process of the camp being turned over to local authorities by Germans who were dressed in regular army uniforms, with no longer an SS presence; fearing that retreating SS, who were demolishing roads and bridges, would return and kill the camp prisoners; escaping into the nearby forest; his father, who spoke Russian, making contact with the Soviets, including Soviet Jews, and being told they could take what they wanted from the nearby town; moving to West Germany in October 1945; marrying a

second cousin; surviving family, including a few aunts, uncles, and cousins; returning briefly to Lodz with his father and brother and deciding there was no reason to stay; making their way through East Germany to West; finding relatives in Germany who helped them; marrying on July 4, 1948; having a son; immigrating to Melbourne, Australia in January 1951; his wife having lost her parents and two siblings in the Holocaust; attributing his survival to luck; life in Australia; retaining his religious faith and continuing to be observant; feeling pride in the existence of Israel, where his wife has a very large family; being optimistic about the future of Jews. [Shows family photographs, noting some members who did and did not survive.]

*As heard/transliterated