

DONOR : LOUIS ROSENBLOOM  
INTERVIEWER: ESTHER SAMPHIR  
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Tape Footage: approx. 50 mins.

Tape Footage: Background

1-267 Louis was born December 23, 1904 in Lagerf, Poland, near Kielce.

He had two brothers and three sisters. One sister came to Canada in 1930. One sister was married, had four children and owned a grocery store in Lodz.

Louis' father died in September, 1938, a year before the war began.

When the war broke out, Louis and some other family members went to Nochmelnich, and then back to Kielce.

Louis' father had his own locksmith business in Lagerf.

In 1928 he moved his family to Lodz, after a fire in their hometown. In Lagerf, they had lived in their mother's parents' home.

There were about 500 Jews in Lagerf.

Lodz

In Lodz, Louis' father started a junkyard business. One of Louis' brothers, who was married and had one child, owned a hardware store.

None of Louis' siblings, except for the sister in Canada, survived the war.

Life in Lodz was not bad. There were 250,000 Jews living there. There was a large synagogue near Louis' sister's store.

268-728 There was a small synagogue in the area where Louis lived. About 300 people attended it. Sometimes Louis went to the big synagogue too.

Louis had an uncle who owned a grocery store in Lodz, where he had lived for years. He gave Louis and his family an empty suite to live in when they first came to Lodz, and invited them to take whatever they needed from his store.

Louis had many Polish neighbors. They were friendly, but the Poles and Jews did not really bother with one another.

Jews and non-Jews attended the same schools.

Louis had finished school in his hometown.

All the Jews in Louis' hometown were taken away in 1941-42.

In 1939 the Germans came into Lodz. Before they arrived Louis and his family went to a small city near Warsaw where they stayed for a few days.

Then Louis took his sister and mother to Nochmelnich, where they thought it would be safer. They didn't really know what to do, or where it would be better.

In Lodz all Jews had to wear a yellow band, and then a Star of David.

When Louis returned to Lodz after a few days, many Jews had left town. Many more were taken to labor camps. The children were not touched yet.

Everyone worried about having enough to eat. The Germans were always looking for men to work. Anyone who could run away did, especially the younger people.

In the small city Louis stopped in enroute to Warsaw, there were no Germans yet. There Louis met two neighbors who advised him not to go to Warsaw because the Germans were already there, and many people were being shot. So Louis and those he was with returned to Lodz.

On their way back to Lodz they stopped in a city filled with tanks and soldiers. Louis and the others were lined up, questioned nicely, and then allowed to go.

Louis' mother was looking for them when they returned. Louis rode a streetcar home. He had no money but he was too tired to walk.

### Labor Camps

729-1152

In 1940 Louis went to a small city in another district. There he worked for the SS digging a well, three days on, three days off.

Louis was davening on Yom Kippur when a SS man approached him and made him explain what was written in the Machzor.

When this work was done, Louis was sent with other young unmarried men to a labor camp in Germany. First they stopped to work on a big farm, staying there almost a year. They then went to Germany in 1941.

The men walked the last 15 kilometers, arriving at the work camp at night. A SS man told them the camp would be good.

None of Louis' family or friends were with him. Some acquaintances were.

There were 300 men in Louis' group that arrived together at Roxer work camp. There were already many Jews there. The group was divided.

Before this, Louis was at a camp on the Polish border. It was called Newsbacher. There the prisoners told him the food was not very good, but he better eat anyway.

In Germany Louis worked building a highway. Once a day he was fed soup and 200 gram of bread. His legs were swollen.

The work was very hard. Louis was there about a year. Only young people worked there. Older people could not do the work. There was no hospital, nothing.

The men cleaned their barracks themselves. There was a 'Meister' (supervisor), barbed wire surrounding the camp, and a guard dog. Some men ran away.

One man at the camp sent a letter to the SS complaining there was not enough food. All the prisoners were punished with a whipping because they would not say who wrote the letter. They were lined up 60 to each side of the barracks and whipped one by one. Louis managed to climb out a window and avoid the beating. That night there was a particularly bad supper.

Nearby there was a camp for French prisoners. They somehow helped the men in Louis' camp by threatening the Germans in charge.

1153-1539

An order came from Berlin to stop the building of the highway. The barracks were taken down. Of the 300 men only a few were missing. The others were still strong.

The men were sent by train away from the border and deeper into Germany. They arrived at their destination at daytime but had to wait until dark to come out of the train, so they would not know where they were.

They were taken to a lager three to four kilos from Frankfurt, and not far from Berlin too. It was a civilian lager.

Here Louis did electrical work in a factory that was being built. He lived in a barracks. The other workers were Jewish. A German civilian was in charge and he was not too bad.

### Auschwitz

Louis was in this lager all summer. From there he was sent to another lager, and then to Auschwitz the first week of May, 1943. In the barracks there he witnessed two brothers being reunited.

Louis arrived at Auschwitz by train. There he waited for Mengele with the others for 45 minutes. They stood in rows of five and Mengele walked by examining them. At one point he selected one man because he thought he was old, but when the man said he was only 31, Mengele let him go back in line.

Five hundred people were sent to the right. No one knew which side was good. It was such a big camp.

When Mengele was done, a truck arrived to pick up those he had selected. Thinking that those on the truck would have it easier, one man who had lost a finger went up to Mengele to point this out to him. Mengele let him go on the truck.

The 800 men in Louis' group were sent to a barracks. There were people

there already. At first they did not work, but sat outside all day doing nothing.

They were given striped pants, shirts, and hats to wear. They wore their own shoes. The number on the shirt matched the number on the arm. There were people of all nationalities there. People spoke what ever language they chose.

1540-2073 The Jews mixed with others. In Birkenau, Louis was in one barrack where the prisoners were separated according to nationality.

Louis' number was 142193, with a small Star of David underneath it. He had stood in line and been given a card with the number, which was then tattooed on to his arm with an electric pencil. When someone died, the camp administration would know his nationality.

It took only a few minutes to do the tatoo, because the two Jewish men doing it were educated in this skill.

When they arrived at the camp the prisoners were asked what they did.

At Auschwitz Louis ate not badly. There were three to a bunk. The soldiers had clean barracks. The prisoners received black coffee in the morning, 200 grams of bread after work, and a bowl of soup at work. Sometimes they received margarine or vurst.

Louis worked as a carpenter, making wagons and rocking horses that were sold all over Germany. Then he worked repairing airplane parts. He had to collect plywood and saw it to specific dimensions. Louis worked with an older German man on this, and actually taught him what to do.

There were only men in Louis' section of the camp. The women were in another section, but they saw them everyday.

Louis did not have anything from home with him.

Louis was in Auschwitz from May, 1943 until the end of 1944, when he was sent by train to Shtutoff.

There were two crematoria in Auschwitz, and four in Birkenau. Louis worked near them. He also made hangers.

Louis saw everything that went on. He saw people from the ghettoes, whole families, go into the crematorium. They did not know where they were going.

Some of the intelligentsia from France were brought to Auschwitz. They were dressed up very fancy. Everything was taken from them. One of these women, an actress, refused to disrobe. She knocked a revolver out of the guard's hand, picked it up and killed him. She was gassed.

The crematoria had iron doors so people could not break down the doors. An SS man turned on the gas. At one time 2,500 people were killed.

One day a civilian boss found Louis and his co-worker resting. This was considered sabotage. He wrote down their numbers on a piece of paper, meaning they would be put on the list of those to be gassed. Then he called over another meister, and discussed the matter. They agreed to give Louis the paper, in return for 150 cigarettes. Louis tore up the paper, and got the cigarettes.

Everything was available in Auschwitz. There was a canteen for the Germans.

At one point, every morning at 11 a.m. Auschwitz was bombed. The SS men were frightened. A siren warned everyone to lie down. The SS hid in holes in the ground. The prisoners were not bombed because their clothing was identifiable from the air. If this bombing had come two years before, many people would have been saved.

There was a hospital at Auschwitz. Louis had two operations there. He reported to a Jewish medic when he had neck trouble, and the medic sent him to a Jewish doctor in the hospital housed in another barrack. Mengele checked him over too.

A German doctor was going to operate on Louis without an anesthetic. In the end he found an oral anesthetic. Louis recovered and returned to his barracks and to work after two weeks.

### Shtutoff-Danzig

Louis went to Shtutoff in 1944.

After the bombing the Germans were scared that the prisoners would be airlifted weapons and would revolt.

Louis was liberated by the Russians near Danzig.

2074-2691 Shtutoff was used as a place to keep people. The SS came everyday and asked for certain kinds of laborers. Louis was there for two weeks. He volunteered to work, thinking he would get food that way. When he wasn't working he just stayed outside all day.

One rainy day when the men were in the barracks, the SS came in and took Louis to the head of the camp for questioning. Louis was not afraid. Louis was fat from Auschwitz. The chief asked where he had been because he looked so good. He gave Louis a shower and fresh clothes, checked him over, and sent him to Danzig with an SS man, to be exchanged for a prisoner there.

The SS man advised Louis not to run away. He led him through the forest with a rifle. They rode two buses to the train station. Louis had never seen such a fine and big station as in Danzig. Soldiers were coming and going. Louis had to stand. Soldiers asked him who he was and offered him cigarettes. One civilian could not understand why Louis didn't sit down.

Louis arrived at Danzig at night and was taken to the Jewish prisoners. They questioned him about where he had been. They told Louis that this camp was good as long as he behaved. Louis said he had been in many camps and had always been

good. He would be good here too.

They were living beside the submarines. Those who worked on them at night couldn't walk the next day. Louis worked during the day. This saved him.

Louis was in Danzig six months before being liberated in a nearby small town by the sea. Danzig was shot up. A Polish-German woman took some men into a barn and saved them.

Once in Auschwitz, two Polish men had helped Louis walk to work. There was always an orchestra playing.

### Liberation

Louis returned to Lodz with Russian soldiers. He went home and to the Jewish committee and didn't find anybody from his family. No siblings had survived.

Louis lived in Lodz for three years. He worked and his sister in Canada sent him things to help him out. She had found out he was alive.

Louis had told everyone that he was going to survive. He didn't lose this belief for a minute.

At his home in Lodz there were no windows or doors.

A Polish friend from before the war was surprised to see Louis. He said he thought all Jewish men were dead.

Louis worked in Lodz with a Russian tailor who paid him 1,000 zlotys ever day.

Louis found a few pictures on the floor of his house.

### Canada

In 1948 Louis' sister brought him to Canada. She did a lot for him. His brother-in-law got him a job in the small Capital Clock factory where he worked. The boss there, Jerry Cohen, was good to Louis.

Louis attended shul in Lodz after the war. Some Jews returned to Lodz, mainly from Russia and some from the camps.

There was an organized Jewish community in Lodz after the war. They celebrated Yom Tovim, and a committee cooked for everyone. Survivors became one another's family. They got together on Shabbat.

The Poles took all the silver from Jewish homes. They took the Torahs and sold them back to the Jews after the war.

When the war ended there were 800 Jews in hiding in Lodz. They wouldn't come

out even when the Russians arrived.

From 250,000 Jews in Lodz, maybe a couple hundred survived. "From Auschwitz you can't come back."

In Auschwitz there were two signs; 'Work makes you free,' and 'Keep this clean, this is your home.'

The small work camps in Germany were not so bad.

One potato was like a million dollars.

Louis took a Polish ship to Toronto via Denmark, England and New York . He took a train from Toronto to Winnipeg.

Louis' sister had one son. They were very satisfied to see Louis.

Louis has pictures from Auschwitz that he got when he returned there after the war with 60 other people. They said Kaddish there.

Once in 1943, when the men were returning to Birkenau from work they came across the SS trying to get a group of Jewish women to undress. The women were not cooperating. When the SS saw the men returning, they let the women go.

Louis arrived in Winnipeg on Purim, March 12, 1948. His sister made a party for him. She was both happy and not happy.

In his family, the brothers had wanted the sisters to marry first.

A year after he arrived in Winnipeg, Louis married Jane, who had arrived from Russia years before. They have been married 39 years.

Louis is retired.