

Interviewee:	<u>DON</u> , Sam	Date:	December 8, 1982
Interviewer:	Hanna Silver		
Audio tapes:	3 English	Transcript:	1 vol. (unpaged) English
Restrictions:	None		

SUMMARY

Sam Don (formerly Zalman Domb) was born on January 15, 1927 in Ostryków, a Polish village. He describes pre-war life: schooling, farming and family history, antisemitism exhibited from non-Jewish children, religious life. His family and the six other Jewish families in the town were farmers. Sam describes the German occupation in 1939, restrictions put on Jews, and forced labor in forests. He describes their deportation to the Makow Ghetto and describes Polish townspeople looting Jewish homes.

Sam was caught smuggling food for the Polish underground and imprisoned in Plotsk for nearly a year. In December, 1942 he was sent to Birkenau /Auschwitz and was there until early autumn 1943. Sam details his many experiences in Auschwitz including the hierarchy and relationship of *Kapos*, *Stubenältesters* and *Blockführers*, the *Sonderkommando* and daily routines. Sam was saved when a Jewish guard exchanged him for a dead body, when he was designated as a *Muselman*. He worked in an excavation *kommando* distributing tools, but through his connections with the Jewish guard—who had saved him—smuggled lots of goods back and forth from “Canada” (the group sorting clothes from the bodies of dead Jews) to bribe *Kapos* and *Blockführers*. He describes his brother’s electrocution on a fence in Auschwitz in 1943 during one of these smuggling operations and also shares a gruesome story about Christmas Day in Auschwitz and how the Germans shot and tortured inmates for fun. He explains why the Polish townspeople had to have known what was happening because of their proximity to the camp; the chimneys, flames, smoke and the smell. He describes an attempted escape of three Jews from Auschwitz and the Polish civilians returning them to the Germans. He also describes one instance of kindness from a German guard who threw him a piece of bread.

Sam was later sent as a political prisoner to the coal mine, Jaworzno. In January 1944 he witnessed the massacre of hundreds of Jews there. He describes a forced march to Jawiszowice in spring of 1944 and describes the elderly or infirm being shot before the march started. He describes three months of hard labor and another forced march to Ohrdruf where he describes improved conditions. Sam was later sent to several slave labor camps in East Germany, then to Buchenwald and later to Terezin (Theresienstadt), Czechoslovakia, where he was liberated by the Russians on May 8, 1945.

Sam met his wife in 1946 in the German displaced persons camp, Heidenheim. They came to the United States in June, 1949 and were married in a synagogue in Philadelphia on October 23, 1949. The rest of Sam’s family perished in Majdanek, Chekonoff (slave labor camp) and Auschwitz.

In 1988, Sam added to his testimony with another interview, describing a return trip to Poland with his son and daughter.

See also Sam Don's 1988 interview in which he discusses his experiences on his trip back to Poland, and his wife, Shirley Don's interview.

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SUBJECT HEADINGS

World War II 1939-45 Personal narrative, Jewish
World War II 1939-1945 Poland
Ostryków, Poland
Makow Ghetto
Jaworzno coal mine, site of a January 1944 massacre
Birkenau
Auschwitz
“Canada” - Auschwitz
Ohrdruf
Buchenwald
Theresienstadt
Atrocities
Muselmann
Heidenheim – displaced person’s camp