

Interviewee:	<u>FREILICH</u> , Bernard	Dates:	November 6, 1984
Interviewer:	Helen Grossman		November 13, 1984
Audio tapes:	8 English	Transcript:	1 vol. (unpaged) English
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SUMMARY

Bernard Freilich was born April 17, 1924, in Drohobycz, Poland. He attended public school, *Tarbut* School and *heder*. His family had a shoe store. Pre-war, he experienced antisemitism from his very early childhood. He describes worsening conditions for Jews under both German and Russian occupations: pogroms (some started by Ukrainians), *Aktions*, liquidation of the Jewish quarter, establishment of the Drohobycz Ghetto, and the role of the *Judenrat*. Bernard narrowly escaped death in the ghetto when over 200 Jews were killed. He gives vivid accounts of atrocities, slave labor, and incidents of retribution. His entire family, except one brother, perished and he explains how and where they were killed. He describes Jewish slave labor in Boryslaw, deportations from the ghetto to Belzec, and executions of Jews in the Bronica forest.

Several vignettes describe his father's interactions with the Gestapo and other Germans while working as their official boot maker. Later, after enduring forced labor under horrible conditions, Bernard worked with his father making boots.

When about 800 Jews managed to escape into the Bronica forest, Bernard joined a group of boys who hid in a bunker. He explains how he managed to survive for three and a half months and then to escape once the Germans discovered the bunker in May 1944.

Bernard describes the transport to, arrival at and processing at the Plaszow concentration camp on June 22, 1944. He witnessed brutal treatment and killing of the prisoners before and during this transport. He and his father worked as shoemakers for the Wehrmacht. Inmates were executed 24 hours a day. Bernard talks about the reaction of Jewish prisoners when 12,000 non-Jewish Poles arrived at the camp.

Bernard's testimony includes graphic descriptions of the horrible conditions at Mauthausen, gruesome atrocities and torture, including a father's futile attempt to save his son's life. He worked as a slave laborer at Gusen II building tunnels for *Messerschmitt* and *Steyrwerke* under conditions that guaranteed a life span of four to six weeks. He explains the complicated series of events that enabled him and his brother to work as shoemakers. Because he was hospitalized for a groin infection, he saw various terrible ways in which prisoners and patients were killed in

January 1945. He describes worsening conditions at Gusen as the Allied forces approached on April 22, 1945. He survived a death march to Mauthausen and then Gunskirchen, where the prisoners received Red Cross packages for the first time. He relates the chaotic conditions after the guards fled, and how he saved a friend's life.

Bernard describes his post-liberation experiences vividly and in great detail. These include encounters with American soldiers, sick and dying survivors in hospitals, Germans who had used slave laborers, and living in an apartment they confiscated from an SS member, with 10 other survivors. The American Military Police moved Bernard and his brother to a Displaced Person Camp.

In June 1945, Bernard and his brother tried to return to Drohobycz. They were conscripted into the Russian army as mine sweepers with 22 other Jews, but managed to work as shoemakers for the Russian General Staff in Vienna, Austria instead. Before Bernard could execute a plan he had devised to escape, his unit was marched back to Poland. He got himself transferred into the Polish army, searched for his father in Lodz, where he met and married his wife. After living in Schlachtensee and then later Feldafing Displaced Persons Camps, they emigrated to the United States in March 1949.

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SUBJECT HEADINGS

Holocaust, Jewish (1939 - 1945)-Personal narrative-Male
Holocaust survivors, Polish
Military occupation - German
Military occupation - Russian
Deportation from Drohobycz, Ghetto, Poland
Slave labor
Atrocities
Concentration camp - Plaszow, Poland
Concentration camp - Mauthausen, Austria
Concentration camp - Gusen II, Austria
Death marches
Refugee camps - Schlachtensee
Refugee camps - Feldafing
World War, 1939 - 1945 - Concentration camps-liberation
World War, 1939 - 1945 - Post liberation experiences