

Interviewee:	<u>WILLNER</u> , Charles	Date:	November 11, 1981
Interviewer:	Lucille Fisher		
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## SUMMARY

Charles Willner was born in 1926, in Dombrowa, Poland into a large, religiously observant family. His father was in the cattle business and a decorated Polish Army veteran.

Charles describes anti-Jewish regulations after September 1939. In early 1940, when only 13 years old, he was sent to Pustkow labor camp and describes conditions there. In November 1940, he was held in Montelupich prison on a trumped-up charge. He was tortured and released after six weeks. While at Pustkow he was given passes by a German officer and was able to smuggle food to relatives in Dombrowa and Tarnow. He was caught and sentenced to die by German S.S., but another man was killed instead of him.

Charles stayed in Pustkow until 1942 when he was transferred to Mielec, a Heinkel-Messerschmitt airplane factory. He describes the heavy labor and surviving typhoid. He also explains why most prisoners did not try to escape from Mielec.

In 1944, prisoners were transferred to an underground salt mine then to Plaszow, near Krakow. He describes in detail his 11 weeks at Poliowa Gorka, a site of mass murders. Mounds of corpses they had to uncover and burn after their gold teeth had been extracted. He witnessed the execution of people caught crossing the border, random killings, and retaliation killings if anyone managed to escape. He describes how he survived by chance.

In late 1944, after a stop in Gross Rosen, he arrived at Oscar Schindler's ammunition factory in Brinnlitz where he remained until May 8, 1945 when the Russians liberated the camp. He testifies to Schindler's protection of his workers and refers to acts of sabotage. He also speaks of his own attitudes toward Germans today and his pride in the State of Israel.

After liberation in 1945 he searched for his family, encountered Polish antisemitism, including the murder of a fellow concentration camp survivor. He left Poland for Prague, then Munich. There he was united with his older brother, the only other survivor of his immediate family. With the help of Jewish agencies, the two remained in Germany. In May 1948, Charles Willner emigrated to the United States. He met his future wife, a survivor of Auschwitz, on the boat.