

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN KENTUCKY INTERVIEW PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE INFORMATION

Abe Jakubowicz

Residence: Louisville, KY.

Length of interview: approximately 3 hours.

Date(s) of interview: 7/14/99

Related resources:

- Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation video interview, conducted 2/19/96 (summary below)

Evaluation/further information about interview:

Contains clarifications/further details about his wartime experiences, and then focuses on his postwar life, with a particular interest in his family (married a German, non-Jewish woman), and his reflections on life in Louisville.

Summary of Shoah interview:

AJ was born on 9/24/24, in Piotrkow, Poland. He grew up about 60 miles away. Sheltered, happy childhood. Went to high school in Warsaw, where he was when the war broke out.

Parents had a license to ship byproducts to chemical corporations. One brother, Gershon, b. 1929. Grandparents very religious, but parents assimilated. AJ was a member of some Zionist organizations.

When the war started in 1939, the whole family went to Warsaw—they decided it would be safer there. They stayed for about a month, and then returned to Groszitz, which was occupied by the Germans, who had taken away all of their furniture. Food was obtained through black market. Did not go to school. At one point, was sent to a farmer's home, where he stayed for about 3 months.

On 2/5/41, order came that all Jews must go to Warsaw ghetto. AJ was very afraid. In ghetto, there was starvation, and people dying on the street. AJ was there for 3-4 months, then were smuggled out, and escaped back to Piotrkow. There, they lived again in a ghetto. AJ worked for a company that made office furniture for the German army. Living conditions very cramped. People turned towards religion in their desperation. AJ was lucky; he did not get hurt.

On 10/13/42, the ghetto was encircled, and then liquidated within one week. 2,000 people who worked in the glass factory were allowed to stay in the ghetto; the others were deported to the extermination camp Treblinka. AJ allowed to stay, too, because his mother volunteered him for carpentry work. His father worked in the glass factory, and also stayed. AJ lived in a dilapidated home that housed 10-13 boys to each room. 2-3 months later, it was determined that there were 1,000 more people in ghetto than were needed. AJ was one of those gathered to be deported. A gendarme recognized him, and took him out of the line. 900 who remained in the line were taken to the forest and shot.

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After a few days, taken to Tomaszow Mazowiecki—there for a few weeks—and then to Starachowice, where he made ammunition for the German military. Bad conditions there. “God watched over me,” says AJ. There until about March, 1944. Then all were shipped to Auschwitz. On arrival, put in the “Gypsy camp”, where he remained for 2-3 weeks, and tattooed with the number A-19172. First work, for 5 or 6 weeks, was to unload potatoes from the train. Was physically abused. Considered suicide, but was afraid.

In Auschwitz until about September, 1944, then shipped to Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen. He had the will to live, and hoped for a miracle. In O.S., was quarantined for about 10 days, and then sent to Ohrdruf. Started to build the camp on arrival. Nothing to eat, hard work, cold, wooden shoes. Always prayed: something nobody could take away.

In about February, 1945, forced march to Buchenwald, about 100 km away. Those who could not walk were killed. Was sick; made it only with help of Dutch prisoners. Put in barrack with “diarrhea people” on arrival in Buchenwald. After 2-3 days, realized he was better off dead than in there. Managed to move out. After a few days, American army arrived: 11 of April, 1945.

After liberation, gained about 5 pounds per week. Took about 6 months before he could walk decently again. Didn’t want to return to Poland; knew his entire family was dead. Instead went to Berlin. From there, went to DP camp in Frankfurt am Main. Had TB, and was put in a hospital near Frankfurt. There until April, ’47. Met his wife while staying there. She was a young German non-Jewish woman. Her family was anti-Nazi, and welcomed AJ. Married in 1947. “Somehow I could not hate. Most Jewish people could not.” Worked for IG Farben in Germany. Had 2 children. Knew he did not want to stay.

Moved to the US in 1956. First to Philadelphia—trouble finding job—then to Louisville, to work for Ford Motor Co. This was his nicest time in the US. He felt completely free. He had felt free in Germany, but this was different. Eventually started his own business: 20/20 eyecare in Elizabethtown. Now owns 5 stores.

Has been married 49 years. 3 children, 7 grandchildren.

3-4 years ago, went back to Poland, and traced his wartime route. Going to Piotrkow was horrible. Couldn’t go in home. Went across the street, and prayed. Would not have gone to Poland if not for his children. He doesn’t have the same faith in God that he once did.

Photographs shown.