

Summary of Oral History: Jacob Blatman

RG#: RG-90.159.0001

This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [05/2022]

Part 1 of 6

Jacob Blatman, describes: only knowing his maternal grandparents, his paternal grandparents having died before he was born; his father being born in a small town near Warsaw, Poland; his family being prosperous merchants; his father growing up in Radom, the youngest of probably six children; his uncles, aunts and cousins being of widely disparate ages; one of his uncles a well-respected Hasidic rabbi; some of his relatives emigrating to Palestine; his parents being married in 1918 in Radom, Jacob being born in 1920; living in Katowice when the war broke out; [abrupt end to Part 1]

Part 2 of 6

When the war broke out, Jacob, his father, and his uncle David going to Radom, where the family leather business was located; during the night, Jacob's father noting that the Polish army was retreating and civilians were fleeing; the three escaping east by train, unaware the rail lines had been bombed; progress of thousands of people halted as they were encircled by the Germans' rapid advance; taking refuge in a town with an acquaintance; returning to Radom, not realizing his mother and sister, Branca (sp), in Radom had fled east; Jacob, escaping to Russia, accidentally reuniting with his uncle David and his mother; all of them again returning to Radom; his mother being diagnosed with cancer and leaving with his father to be treated in Warsaw; his mother dying and father returning to Radom; in 1941, moving into the [presumably Radom] ghetto; working construction on the Gestapo building and hearing the cries of those being tortured; being constantly hungry; working in a steel foundry; the Germans carrying out executions in the night; receiving meager rations that they had to find ways to supplement; hearing that Jews had been massacred in Lublin; the Germans having free rein to execute people in the street; in August 1942, being seized in a roundup but being among a group that was released; not realizing at the time that those taken away were to be gassed; witnessing the horrors of random executions without comprehending the nationwide magnitude of what was occurring; anticipating a roundup, his father insisting that Jacob should flee without him; a man offering to hide Jacob, but Jacob refusing, fearing the man could not be trusted; such lack of trust being endemic amid offers of reward for those who turned in Jews who were outside the ghetto without permission; hearing that an action had occurred and discovering that his father was among the deported; being hidden by a friend outside the ghetto; being arrested in an action but being taken for labor; his hair being clipped so he could be easily identified; witnessing "the first formal execution" of a worker [abrupt ending to part 2]

Part 3 of 6

Benefiting in treatment and job assignment by his ability to speak both Polish and German; being hospitalized to remove a splinter from his eye; escaping from one labor camp to another nearby where conditions were better, but having to hide during the day because he was unregistered (notes that this was now 1943); encountering a group with connections to the Polish underground; the usual SS guards in his labor camp being replaced by concentration camp specialists from Majdanek; Jacob working construction jobs in the camp but then being moved to office work in an auto parts factory because of his German language ability; in winter 1943, beginning to pick up rumors that the Germans were not doing well militarily; Jacob participating in one of two groups digging escape tunnels; the first group getting caught and being severely beaten; Jacob digging the second tunnel with about four others; the camp being evacuated (before an escape could be attempted) and the inmates being force-marched east; elderly and sick prisoners being shot; spending a night in an abandoned chemical factory; the next day being placed on trains headed toward Auschwitz; some people being selected and executed in Auschwitz but Jacob and others going on to a labor camp in Weitingen(sp) where he would eventually be liberated by the French in April 1945; a group of Poles arriving with fatal gangrene; Jacob having spotted fever but recovering; being moved to Terezin camp, where conditions were even worse; these being labor camps, not extermination camps, where many people were dying of disease; in late 1944, being asked to become a block leader but declining to do so after receiving conflicting advice from his friends; being sent back to Weitingen(sp), which had been changed from a factory to a hospital camp run by the French; being moved a few more times and arriving in Stuttgart, where he met his future wife [Part 3 ends abruptly]

Part 4 of 6

[Responding to questions] Never seeing his sister since August 1939; being grateful to have had nurturing, loving parents; having a close relationship with his sister after about age thirteen; having a very good childhood; possessing a few family photos that survived the war; laboring in the factories on twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week; recalling inmates/prisoners constantly being hanged as examples, to the point where the sight became routine; laboring to exhume bodies for cremation as German military fortunes changed; recalling the inefficiency of having exhausted, starving prisoners do manual labor and the bureaucracy that kept this system in place; not being able to sabotage munitions when he was working in weapons factories [Part 4 ends abruptly]

Part 5 of 6

[Asked about his liberation] describes the arrival of the French military, which then continued moving east toward Soviet lines; spending most time in Stuttgart until emigrating to the U.S.; traveling to Bergen-Belsen in an unsuccessful search for his sister; returning to Stuttgart and deciding to go to Poland to search for her; unable to find her, concluding she was dead; moving to the American zone in Berlin; immigrating to the U.S.; arriving in New York; planning to marry Margaret; moving to San Francisco; being joined in March 1949 by Margaret (arriving from Germany) and marrying; working as a jeweler and pursuing a college degree in accounting; [part 5 ends abruptly]

Part 6 of 6

[Responding to questions] Maintaining a Jewish identity in Poland and the U.S. but not being strictly observant; describing virulent anti-Semitism in Poland after the war; experiencing comparatively less postwar anti-Semitism in Germany.