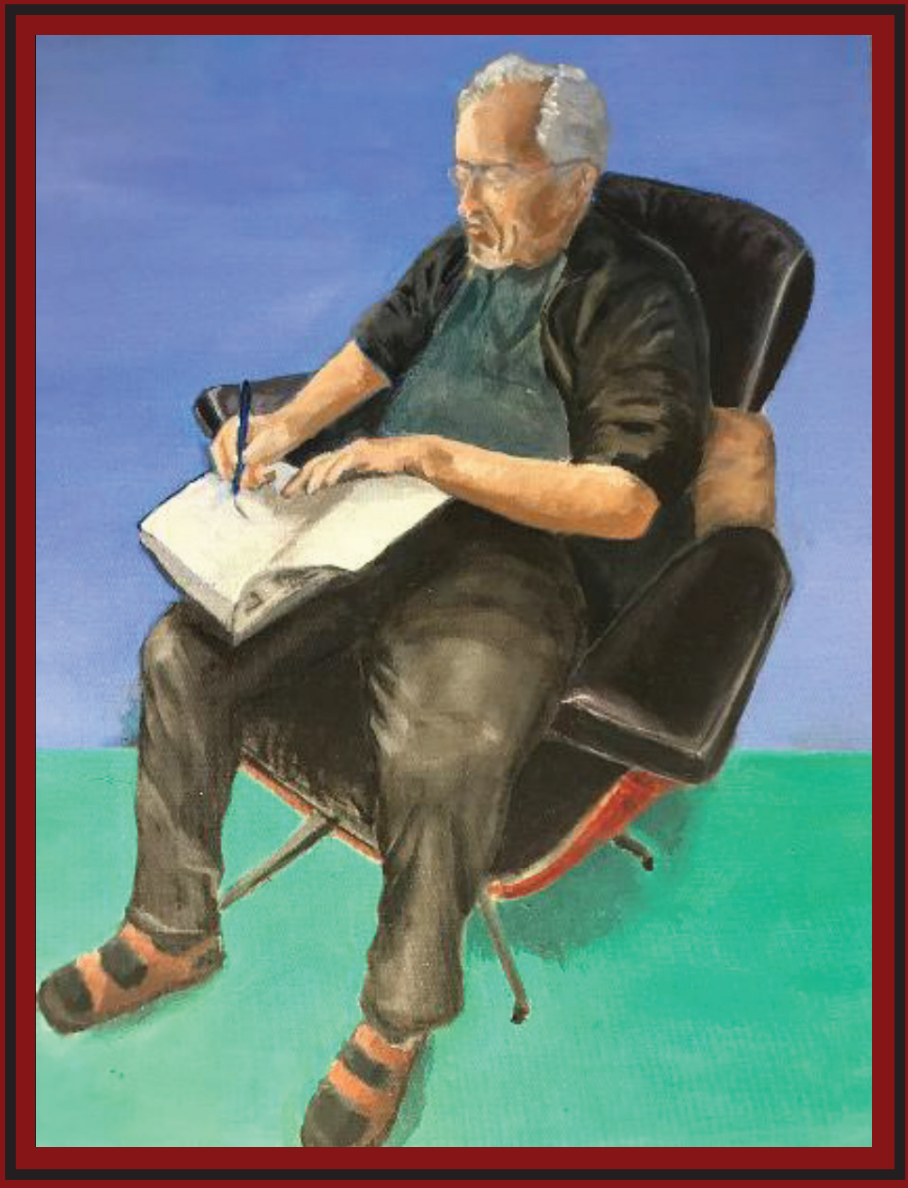
Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in South Florida

Simple Deeds of Kindness

Holocaust Survivor Israel Joe Sachs' Memoir



As told to Bobbi Kaufman

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Republished by
The Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies
and The George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies

The George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies
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University of Miami
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University of Miami

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The information in this book is presented in good faith. It is not intended to be a history of the Holocaust. The words in this book are the words of Israel Joe Sachs as he recalled his personal experience in the Holocaust. This is his story and his truth.

On the cover: A portrait of Israel Joe Sachs painted by his daughter Helen Sachs Chaset.

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FOREWARD

"For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.…

"... I have tried to keep memory alive…I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget we are guilty, we are accomplices."

- Elie Wiesel

As time goes on, the number of Holocaust survivors alive today is rapidly dwindling. With their passing, the incomprehensible cataclysm known as The Holocaust, or Shoah, is fast morphing from a 'lived memory' into a 'historical memory'; from a personal experience of 'those who were there' into impersonal commemorative monuments and museums.

All too soon, there will be no one left to offer first hand testimony of what it was like to actually be there when all hell broke loose; all too soon, even those who knew and heard directly from the victims of the Nazis and their collaborators, will be gone.

It is, therefore, a matter of great urgency that we gather and preserve for future generations as much primary documentation and testimony as possible about the lives and experiences of those heroes who survived the Holocaust, managed to build new lives, and were willing to tell their stories.

Memoirs serve as a very important means of preserving these testimonies. Several years ago, Holocaust survivors began approaching Bobbi Kaufman, asking for help writing their memoirs, describing their lives before, during, and since the Holocaust. She began working with the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach (HMMB), writing the memoirs of Holocaust survivors who were docents and contributors to the memorial. This collaboration was instrumental in her developing a series of in-depth, book-length memoirs. Six books were completed and uploaded onto the HMMB website and the HMMB created lesson plans for each book to be used in teaching about the Holocaust.

Now, in collaboration with the HMMB, the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies, and the George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies of the University of Miami, the series has been named Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in Florida. The existing books were graphically redesigned and several new books have been added to the collection, with the objective of continuing to expand the series. The complete series will be freely available to the public in digital form on the HMMB and Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program websites.

Our hope is that this series will make a significant contribution to the growing literature of Holocaust survivors' memoirs and serve as a tribute to their ability to make new lives for themselves while never forgetting.

Dr. Haim Shaked
Director, The Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program
University of Miami

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of our family who
perished in the Holocaust:

Chaya and Jacob Zaks and son Nuchim (Natek)
Liwcia and Szmuel David Mell
and children Jacob, Chaim and Beryl

and in memory of Marcia and Israel Joe Sachs
who survived

— *Helen Sachs Chaset.*

LIFE BEFORE THE WAR

Until 1935 Jews lived in our small village of Pryzyrow, Poland, side by side with our Christian neighbors in relative peace. Jews were forty percent of the population of about 2,400 people. Close ties were formed between families of both faiths; there was mutual respect and tolerance. This atmosphere was created by our beloved Father Grzywak, the parish priest who, by informal decree and personal example, held the proponents of Jew-baiting in check. After his death, the church replaced him with a young, rabid, anti-Semite who constantly preached his venom and incited the faithful to open hostility.

I was ten years old the day The Terror began. It was Passover 1935 which unfortunately fell on Easter. As Jews and Christians walked home from religious services, shouts of "Christ killer" resounded through the town square. The crackle of breaking glass sounded above the shouts; storefronts were smashed, and many Jews were injured. Village life changed.

MY CHILDHOOD

After serving in the Polish army in World War I, my father, Jacob Zaks, moved to Lodz where he attended the advanced fashion school of Levitanus/Paris/Lodz. In 1922 he married my mother, Helen Gelbart. My brother, Nuchim was born in Lodz in 1925.

When my grandfather's hearing and eyesight began failing and the economy of Poland was in shambles, my father moved his family to Pryzrow and went to work in his father's tailor shop. I was born in Pryzrow on March 21, 1926. Later, when I was in the camps they wrote my birth date as March 25 and that ended up on all my documents.

My father's family had lived in Pryzrow for more than four generations. Friendships were strong in the community. My grandfather, Mendl Zaks, was an accomplished tailor who made *bekeshas* worn by the Hassidic Jews as well as the cassocks for the Catholic clergy. I vividly remember sitting with my grandfather in Father Grzyswk's orchard talking with him and other Jews who would rest there on sunny afternoons.

The tailor shop was in the front room of grandfather's home. Grandfather's bed and belongings were in the front room along with the cutting table and the sewing machines. Our family lived in the large back room. The

house was a one story concrete structure with one window and one door. There was no bathroom, just an outhouse.

My grandfather, a widower, was head of the household. Although my mother complained about having to cater to his demands and whims, by marrying into the family she had to take on the responsibility.

My family practiced traditional Judaism, not orthodox Judaism. We were progressive. We went to shul only on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. Following services, my father would always invite someone to come home with us. It is a Jewish custom to invite guests for the Sabbath meal, a custom that would soon help save our family.

We were a large, very close family. My father's sister, Szaindel, and her husband, Hartske Rosenbaum, and their five children played an important part in my life. Their daughters, Paulette and Blima, often cared for my brother and me. Paulette is the only surviving member of the Rosenbaum family. My father's brother, Samuel Yosef, established a tailoring business in Lodz developing a clientele of well-to-do, prominent citizens. He had three children. His son, Lutek, and his daughter, Bronia, are the only ones in his family to survive. My father's second oldest sister, Chaja Sura, lived in Lodz with her husband, Mandzia Rosenblum, and their eleven sons. Only Mandzia and one son survived. My father's sister, Leya, and her husband, Avrom, also lived in Lodz. They had two daughters. My father's sister, Hinde, lived in Czestochowa with her

husband, Simon Oberman, a butcher, and their three children. My father's sister, Basia, was married to Israel Hoch, a teacher.

My mother's father, Harske Gelbart, with his long grey beard, his round cap, and his vest over a collarless shirt, brought to mind the character of Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. He would sometimes take me with him to market to sell the shoes he made. After a two hour horse-cart ride we would set up his stand and display the footwear hanging from a canopy. Grandfather was an ex-soldier in the Tzar's army who fought in the Russo/Japanese conflict. He was a God-fearing Jew who prayed three times a day. Grandfather Harske had four daughters from his first wife: Blima, Genia, Yita, and my mother Helen (also called Chaya.) From his second marriage he had three children: Samuel Lemiel, Nuchim, and Ruchcia. They lived just a short walk from our house so we spent a lot of time with the younger children. My father would often take my brother and me on business trips to Czestochowa and Lodz. I have poignant memories of visiting my Aunt Yita and her husband, Mordchai Rosenwajg, who were married at the same time as my parents in a double ceremony.

SCHOOL

I began going to *cheder,* Jewish religious school, at age four. We learned the daily prayers, some biblical history, and to read and write in Yiddish. I did not like *cheder*; I was rebellious and stubborn, but a good student after a while.

Public school began at age seven, but because I was considered gifted, I began at age six. The teachers encouraged me and tutored me. The school's director, like the priest, kept anti-Semitism in check.

On summer vacations my brother and I would visit neighboring towns or go to summer camp. Grandfather Gelbart would take us on two or three hour wagon rides through dense forest. We visited the caves and cliffs of the National Preserve. We would go to the river to swim. In winter, dressed in fur parkas and matching hats, we ice skated down the frozen river and sledded on the snow-covered meadows. (As tailor's children, we were always well dressed.) I spent the most innocent and sheltered years of my life in Przyrow.

After Father Grzywak's death things changed dramatically at school. Teachers who once favored me became outspoken Jew haters overnight. Jewish students were heckled and sometimes beaten by Christian schoolmates. Although we learned to tolerate the abuse, outright hostility began to

grow. My brother and I enjoyed such a sheltered childhood within the family as well as in the community, that the uprisings came almost as a surprise to us.

After the Easter Sunday incident my father's customer base began to dwindle. Many Christians shied away from doing business with Jews. My father's former apprentices and employees became his competitors. Some of them had worked with my father for many years and we considered them one of our own. I often wonder if we had remained in Przyrow through the war years if our family would have found refuge with any of them.

In the spring of 1938 another Easter Sunday incident occurred. The centuries-old ridiculous story about Jews using the blood of a Christian child to make matzos surfaced. After a fiery sermon at the Easter service, the priest stood on the church steps and incited the crowds to violence. Following this incident, my family decided to move to Sosnowiec where my mother's family lived.

We moved to the suburb of Sielce, where well-paid coal mining employees were used to having their clothes custom made and doing business with Jewish tradesmen. Within weeks of opening his shop my father had enough business to hire several employees. We lived in a two room apartment at 21 Sielecka, just two doors down from my mother's sister, Blima, and her husband, Schlomo Teichner. Uncle Schlomo was a dentist and all their children were successful in the dental field.

I was eleven years old when I began sixth grade at the interfaith public school on Koscielna Street. My brother and I took the streetcar to school but walked home to save the carfare. We were frequently set upon by gangs of boys who would attack us with stones and sticks. Despite the difficulties, I was growing up. I attended professional soccer games and on Saturday afternoons I went to the local movie theaters with friends — boys and girls. I joined the young Zionist group, Beitar, which stressed the need for a Jewish homeland.

In the winter of my sixth grade, my parents arranged for me to spend after-school hours at the Teichner home helping with household chores. My mother and my aunt hoped my uncle would teach me to be a dentist, but my uncle was reluctant. Gradually, as my uncle realized my willingness to learn, he began to teach me to do fine wax work making models for bridges and crowns. Later he had me assist him with patients. I planned to go to school to become a dentist.

This all changed abruptly in the summer of 1939 when war between Germany and Poland became inevitable. The Polish government activated the civil defense and all citizens had to obey civil defense orders or suffer beatings or imprisonment. Jews and Christians worked together to dig trenches for bomb shelters. By August there were daily air-raid exercises where we had to scurry to the nearest shelter. Army reservists were being called to duty. We worried that my forty-one year old father would be sent to the front lines.

FLEEING FROM THE NAZIS

My family decided to leave town, to go east away from the fighting. We decided that our family, the Teichners, and the Klasners would meet the following day, Friday, September 1, 1939, at the railroad depot.

We packed some food, our jewelry, heirlooms, and even fur coats which we thought we could barter or sell in an emergency.

Friday morning, September 1, 1939, Germany declared war on Poland.

On Friday we could only find room in an open freight car. We took it. The next day we found room in a closed-in car. Hundreds of Poles, Jews, and Christians alike, crowded into the rail cars. German troops were right at our heels. The train made little progress, blocked by the masses of our troops ahead of us. Days passed, tempers flared. Wednesday, September 6, the day my father was supposed to leave us and join his army unit, our train was caught in crossfire; the aerial strafing was intense. The train ground to an unexpected halt — our worst fears were realized: the Germans were upon us. There were shouts of, "raus, 'raus, 'raus, 'raus! Get out, out, out, out." We were ordered to line up alongside the train where we were held at gunpoint. Officers walked back and forth in front of us pointing at men and boys who were immediately lined up and marched into a field behind some

haystacks. My father and brother were among them. We all shrieked and sobbed when we heard the sudden rat-a-tat of machine gun fire. Miraculously, some men and boys returned, including all the relatives in my family who were in that lineup.

We were told to return to the train to get our belongings, then we were ordered to march in the direction of the nearest town, Wolbrom. After five days on the train we were less than 100 kilometers, 62 miles, from home. The moon was full and we could plainly see the crumpled silhouettes of Polish soldiers' bodies lying in the streets and in doorways. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of refugees assembled in the town square. There was chaos and rumors of impending calamity.

Uncle Itzchak slipped out of the square and contacted an acquaintance who lived near the square who, for a fee, agreed to help us. Our family decided it would be safer to split up into smaller groups because large groups were easily discovered when fleeing, and because transportation and lodgings were easier to obtain for fewer people. My immediate family, my mother's two sisters and their husbands, and the two Klasner children were our small circle now.

We slipped out of the town square and walked about three kilometers to a farmhouse. The farmer led us to a large storage shed already occupied by several other refugees. That night our family offered the farmer a handsome

reward to take us across the river about a half-hour ride from the farm. At dawn everyone was jammed onto a horse-drawn hay wagon. The farmer said he wanted to be paid double the agreed upon sum or he would not take us. We agreed to pay.

At this time, Uncle Itzchak changed his mind about going with us and said his family was going to his home town instead. There were six of us now in our group: Aunt Blima, Uncle Shlomo, my parents, my brother, and myself.

We reached the river's edge as the sun was coming up. The farmer pointed out the shallowest area where we could cross without swimming. We crossed, sat down to dry our feet, then set out on our way. Disastrously, we discovered it was not the river we expected to cross. It was a small branch of the Przemsza River flowing in the opposite direction we wanted. We were heading southwest instead of northeast. We were walking into the same territory the German troops had taken the day before. That day, September 7th, we lost our chance to flee from the advancing German army.

Since we were not certain of our location, we joined dozens of other refugees all walking in the same direction. By late afternoon we got to a farmhouse where we were given a place to rest overnight. In the morning we walked back to the main road and decided to keep walking until something turned up. Friday mid-afternoon a driver with a horse and

buggy was willing to take two people. The family decided Uncle Shlomo and Aunt Blima had priority. Again, there was a tearful goodbye to family. We kept trudging on, struggling with our luggage and bundles.

It was one week since we left our home and the Sabbath was now upon us. Father asked around for a place to stay and was directed to the home of a prominent Jewish family where we would be welcome for the Sabbath meal. As we approached the large, gabled home, the Brooks Estate, two men appeared, took our bundles, and asked us to follow them. There we joined nearly three dozen people gathered for the candle-lighting ceremony ushering in the Sabbath. Maidservants in white aprons lined the walls of the lavish dining room. After the blessings over the wine and the bread, the host made one brief reference to the calamity facing the Jews and stated that prayer and supplication were the only remedies to help us. We understood then that we would not be safe anywhere and decided to find our way home.

On Saturday afternoon my father walked to a nearby village where he found someone willing to transport us part of the way home. Sunday morning we climbed onto a straw-filled wagon drawn by a single animal. By Sunday evening the driver would take us no further so we put our baggage on our backs and trudged into town where for a few Zlotys we found a place to bed down. On Monday my father secured a ride as far as Dombrowa. Now we were no more than an hour away from home, but there was no

transportation to get us there. We were exhausted and at a loss. We spent the night there with distant relatives and the next night at my father's sister's home in Bendzin. On Wednesday morning my little family undertook to walk the last segment of our return trek.

On Wednesday, September 13, 1939, twelve days after we left, we walked into the courtyard of our home in Sosnoweic. My parents believed, though unsuccessful and grueling, the attempt to escape had been worth trying.

THE SOSNOWEIC OPEN GHETTO

The Germans had seized the city of Sosnoweic on September 4, 1939. The great synagogue on Dekarta Street had been burned down. The SS, (Schutzsaffel or Protective Squadron) ran through the streets attacking people. Traditional Jews were the first victims — their beards were cut off with bayonets, their faces mutilated. Jewish citizens were suddenly arrested, some were tortured, others were shot, a few were hanged. Jewish stores were ordered to lock their doors. We were not prepared for the extreme shortages that overcame us. Standing in line for a loaf of bread would take an entire day and often two days. Food was in short supply. Some Christians would denounce their neighboring Jews to earn extra rations.

Decrees against the Jews were strictly enforced by the Schupo, the ordinary police, and a newly created special Jewish police force, the Milicja. To use the Jews to do their dirty work, the Judenrat, a self-governing entity within the Jewish community was created. The Germans demanded that members of the Judenrat carry out their orders.

Moshe Merin volunteered to head the Judenrat. He was a willing tool of the Germans who grew to be a despotic ruler.

The German Einsatzgruppen and SS units would appear in neighborhoods with lists of names prepared by the Judenrat to 'round up' Jews to be sent off to labor camps or to prison. With the onset of winter, new decrees were put in place. It was no longer possible to leave one's neighborhood without special permission and an incipient ghetto was created. We were ordered to place the yellow Star of David patch on the front and back of our outer garments.

Young Polish children helped the Gestapo, the German secret service agents, identify Jews, their reward a candy bar. We had Christian neighbors in our courtyard and one in particular could not be trusted. That family had a little girl, eight or nine years old, who, whenever the SS swooped into our courtyard, would guide them to the Jewish neighbors. One morning in late December 1939 half a dozen trucks pulled up and surrounded a number of buildings including ours. Schupos ran into the courtyards, pushed open the doors into the apartments and rounded up all the men and boys they could find. As our door flew open and the Schupo grabbed me, my mother rushed to throw me an overcoat. There was no chance to say goodbye. As I was led down the stairs and marched through the yard, another brute dragged my classmate, Heniek, out of his family's apartment. His mother tried to hand him a coat, but the officer pushed it away. We were shoved into

an open truck with a dozen or so others. Freezing rain soaked right through our clothes and light footwear. They delivered us to the city of Katowitz where we were handed implements and ordered to clear the street of ice and snow for an upcoming visit of some government officials. At eight o'clock that evening we were taken to a police station in Sosnowiec where we spent the night before walking home the next morning.

Orders to turn in personal valuables came frequently. Jewish militia ransacked people's homes to remove any items of value that could be used in the black market. I vividly recall the mandatory attendance of all Jews and Poles to watch a multiple hanging on Koscielna Street of three men and one woman caught trading in smuggled food.

Moshe Merin, eager to prove himself to the Nazis, agreed to every one of their demands while attempting to portray himself to the Jews as a leader and savior. Hundreds of people were part of the Judenrat overseeing labor, health, housing, food distribution, security, prisons, etc. When Merin would receive an order for five or six hundred Jews to be sent to a prison camp he would pull the names from lists prepared by his own advisors. He explained to us how these few hundred would save a thousand from conscription. Nobody trusted him. Many people did not

sign up for any food or social services because deportation lists were formed from these service records.

Between May and August we experienced more frequent deportations. Well over 1,000 people were deported, the majority to Auschwitz. Shops and factories closed, food rations were reduced. Daily raids and atrocities were more than a person could bear. There was talk of forcing the Jews of Sosnowiec into a ghetto, so we began looking for compatible people to room with in the upcoming forced move.

The Judenrat established workshops to provide forced labor for German businessmen. My father obtained a job as foreman at the Held Shop, where military uniforms were refurbished and camouflage jackets and trousers were made for the German army. My brother was employed at a shop that made furniture. Uncle Shlomo Teichener returned home and became very busy in his dental practice. Almost daily I went to help him. Many of his patients brought in diamonds to be embedded into crowns and bridgework for safekeeping for an even darker hour.

It was late summer 1941 when, on a day I substituted myself for my mother to stand in line to get our family's allotment of bread, a sudden commotion occurred. Before I had time to realize it, I was marched down the street to where helmeted, machine-gun toting SS with their ferocious German Shepard dogs ordered us onto trucks.

As soon as we arrived at our destination we were ordered to line up and form a column, five people to a row. We were marched to a large tool shed where implements were distributed. We were to dig trenches to encircle and form a perimeter for an airport. After a few days I was shifted to doing road construction. I returned home two weeks later.

Because my parents were in constant fear after my two captures in roundups, they decided I should try to get a job in the Held factory. I got the job and was placed in the trim section working on the same shift with my father. My family now had three ration cards.

THE SOSNOWEIC CLOSED GHETTO

The end of June 1942 was the deadline for Jews to move into the closed ghetto. The ghetto was a ten-square block area designed to house 20,000 Jews. Herding people together was a way to facilitate *akcions* and roundups because people would not be spread all over the city. My father found a two-room apartment on Dekerta Street for our family of four to share with two young men, one's fiancee, and a mother with her two little girls. Those of us with jobs got work cards that made us eligible for food coupons. We would shop and bring home whatever we could and everybody would share.

I worked at the Held Company which made uniforms for the German military. My job was fastening buckles onto camouflage trousers and jackets. There were six or eight boys and girls around my age working together. I had just turned sixteen. We sang and laughed, but stopped abruptly when supervisors come into sight. One girl, Lola Fuch, was special to me. During lunch break, Lola and I would find a corner and spend a few precious moments in privacy. We shared concerns of what the future had in store for us as sweethearts. We each had our photos bonded into a pocket mirror for everlasting memory.

In early August 1942 there was a new decree requiring all Jews to gather at a designated place the next day supposedly to have our work certificates certified. Nearly 20,000 men, women, and children assembled at a large soccer field that fateful day. Late in the afternoon the gates to the field were slammed shut. More and more SS, with their fierce dogs at their sides, could be seen on the opposite side of the fence. After we spent many hours standing in the hot sun, a sudden rainstorm was a welcome relief but soon we were ankle deep in mud. Adults became agitated when they noticed the machine-gun emplacements. The Jewish police began clubbing and kicking as they attempted to restore order. At nine o'clock the main gate was opened and families were told to stay together and line up. The police kept screaming orders as they shoved frightened people into queues.

It was after midnight when my mother, father, my brother, and I approached the inspection desk to present our work papers. Although we now had only two work cards because my brother had lost his job at the furniture factory, the officer barely examined them before we were whisked out the gate. We were safe for the moment.

My father and I returned to work the next day. In the fall of 1942 the inevitable occurred. A detachment of SS troops surrounded the building where I worked. They ran into the shops indiscriminately pulling people out and lining them up downstairs. My father and I were among them. We were marched under heavy guard to Dulag detention center.

As we were being pushed into the holding pen, my father asked me to communicate with my mother, should we be separated, to inform her of our whereabouts. "Take care of yourself," he said as they slammed the door of the cell shut. I was still looking at the door when I was pushed to another cell. We never had a chance to embrace. I was placed in a cell with a dozen or so other detainees. There was a small window in one corner. I placed my forehead on the bars, scanning the street below.

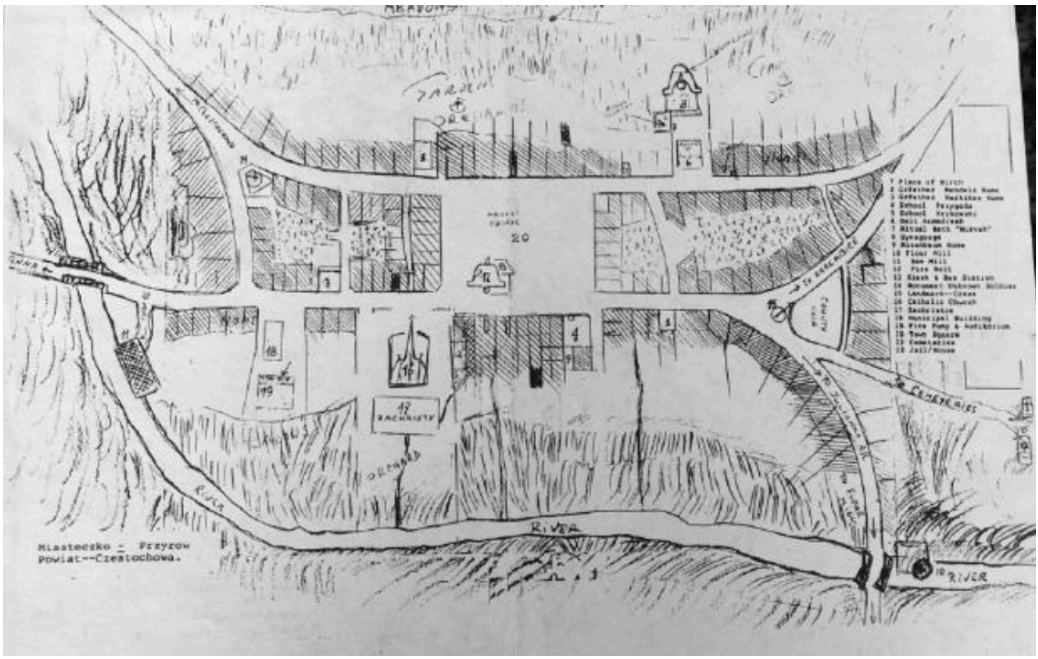
After five days the SS allowed some detainees, including my father, to return to work in the shops. As my father was being marched away he shouted my name. When he saw

me look out the window he momentarily escaped from the militia and shouted to me that everything possible would be done to have me released. That was the last time I ever saw my father and the last words we ever exchanged.

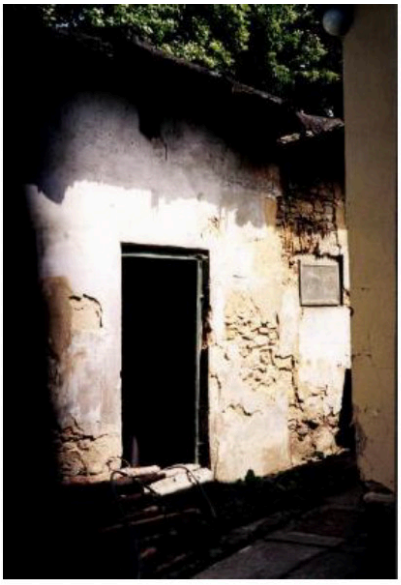
My paternal grandfather, Mendl Zaks.

My parents, Chaya and Jacob Zaks.

With my brother, Nuchim.



A map I drew of my home town showing the location of my home, the priest's orchard, my school, the town square, and the synagogue.



My home was in part of the building on the left. We had one window and one door. The archway led to the town square.

MARKSTADT LABOR CAMP

The next day we were ordered out of the cell. After roll call we formed columns and were marched off to a railroad siding. We were pushed and shoved into railway cars like cattle. Every now and then a sobbing spell came over me. How I yearned for my family; how I longed to have my father beside me. I was facing the unknown all alone. Suddenly, something in my pocket brought me out of my stupor: it was the little pocket mirror with the picture of my girlfriend, Lola. I also had my official documents, my work card, and my factory ID. Those were the only possessions I had with me.

After several hours the train stopped in the middle of nowhere. Around 300 of us were ordered to exit the train and form a column of five abreast. The SS marched us to a huge square, an *appellplatz*, surrounded by barracks on all sides. After roll call, the commandant addressed us, "If you behave in accordance with our rules, you will be rewarded with work and a good ration of daily bread. Should you choose otherwise, any act contrary to camp rules will be severely punished."

Upon the commandant's departure, men in striped prison garb approached us kicking and beating us mercilessly. This was our welcome to Markstadt work camp. They then marched us off to the wash barrack where the camp "barbers" clipped our hair to one quarter inch.

Our next step in this initiation was getting a total change of clothes and having to leave our old clothes on a pile. I had to give up everything: the picture of me with my brother, and the little pocket mirror with Lola's picture were snatched away. Next, the barber shaved a one-inch wide furrow from the front to the back of our heads. Finally we were lined up and dusted with fumigating powder. My new clothes were a striped shirt-jacket and trousers. They were unlined and without pockets. I received a pair of shoes that were luckily my size, but they were worn out and minus the laces. Then, with a few kicks and random clubbings, the kapos marched us to the kitchen barracks.

Kapos were Jewish prisoners chosen by the SS guards to help control other prisoners. Kapos got special treatment: they were not abused, they got better food, wore civilian clothes, and did not have to do hard labor. To keep this special treatment, the kapos did whatever it took to keep the SS happy including brutally abusing other prisoners. Kapos in charge of the barracks were called *Lagerkapos.* Kapos answered to the *Lageraeltester,* also a Jewish prisoner, who reported to the Commandant. The Commandant was a Nazi military officer. Most of the guards were civilians.

At the kitchen barracks three inmates distributed metal food bowls. We were warned that if we lost this bowl we would have no way to receive food because the main meal would always be liquid. The bowl had a wire ring attached to it so it could be suspended from a string worn around the waist.

We approached two huge kettles where we received a ladle full of black ersatz coffee. After the coffee, I was selected to follow the kapo to Block 16 in a part of the camp known as Abyssinia where I was assigned a second-level bunk. I slept for a short while on the straw mattress, but for the next few hours I sobbed. I was sixteen years old.

In the morning we were marched half a mile to the *appellplatz* for roll call. We stood at attention for three hours while we were counted and taught the rules of a labor camp: any faults, such as untied shoes or a cap worn wrong would result in a severe beating. After marching back to the barracks, we again stood at attention as we attempted to soothe the blows the kapos had meted out. I believe what exacted the most hurt was that our tormentors were Jews.

Next, we were issued a white patch with a number and a blue triangle stenciled on it. Each number was recorded against the prisoner's name. Henceforth, I was to respond to *Haeftling*, Prisoner 24446. The patches were to be sewn onto the left front side of our jackets. Most of us could easily have done that, but needles and thread were forbidden. Finally, the kapo's personal tailor loaned us a couple of needles and some thread making us indebted to him.

Again it was time to march to the *appellplatz* for roll call. Work battalions were now returning after a work day. It took hours for final inspection as kapos body searched prisoners for any contraband brought back from a construction site. The kapos reported the number on inmates brought back. When the numbers corresponded with those noted that morning, a report was sent to the SS administration. The SS then dispatched an officer back to the *appellplatz* to deliver a written report in a formal ceremony. The Germans loved the formality. Roll call happened three times daily.

When roll call was over we formed a food line. I was soon facing an inmate clad in striped prison pants and a white chef's jacket, a quart-sized ladle in his hand, dipping it into the huge kettle as fast as he could, and emptying it into the bowl of the prisoner facing him. I held out my bowl and the cook emptied a ladle full of soup into it. As I joined the others sitting on the ground consuming our meals it dawned on me that I had no spoon. No matter. I sat down and slurped my soup as tears fell freely into my bowl. Then I joined a group walking back to Abbisinia.

That night I could not fall asleep, replaying in my mind the events of the day, my first full day in the camp. My thoughts wandered back to the day I was caught in the raid at the shop, trying hard to capture the image of my mother the morning I was leaving for work. I was not certain if I kissed her on the cheek that last time I saw her.

At the morning roll call I was assigned to join the Commando Gruen-Builfinger work detachment. Gruen-Builfinger was one of dozens of large contractors involved in constructing new plants for the Krupp industry, the largest supplier of the Nazi war machine. Other contractors were Mathies Ag and Firma Hess. Albert Speer's construction agency was the sole supplier of slave labor for Nazi labor camps.

For the next two years I responded daily to the words, *"Speer-Kommando, eintreten.* Speer detachment fall in." Every day, three thousand prisoners would form columns and march off to work.

At the tool shed the first morning I was handed a spade and a pickax and along with two other inmates, one handling a wheelbarrow, we joined a detachment of about thirty laborers. Each work gang of thirty prisoners was assigned to two sentries and one kapo. Civilian German construction specialists supervised the work. We were to dig trenches which would be filled with concrete as foundations for new factory buildings. The supervisors demanded the speedy completion of our tasks — the Furher would not tolerate delay. At noon, when we halted for the midday break, I was completely exhausted. The line for food was long and the work site was a five minute jog away, so we had little time to eat. Noticing me slurping my soup, a man offered me his spoon when he was through using it. But, I had to return to digging trenches before I

had a chance to consume my bowl of soup. The constant surveillance forced us to work without stopping even to take a drink of water. Permission to go to the latrine was most often denied. At dusk we took our implements back to the tool shed and after an hour long march, in strict formation, we came through the gates of the camp. Then we stood at attention for an hour at roll call. In the food line, when my turn came to hold out my soup bowl to be filled that evening, I first noticed the blisters on my hands.

In my barrack, my hands were cleaned and bandaged. In the morning the bandages were firmly glued to my hands. My second day at the worksite I was again assigned the pickax. At the midday break, when the sentries switched shifts, my coworker risked switching with me and letting me use the wheelbarrow and he would take the pickaxe. This was going fine until one guard decided the wheelbarrow was not being filled to capacity. From then on it was filled to overflowing and I spent the rest of the day hauling dirt and gritting my teeth in pain. The constant surveillance by the sentries and kapos was an additional strain.

With the wheelbarrow there was some relief for my skin, but the heavy loads were a strain on my slight physique. It did not take long for the inevitable to happen: I was momentarily distracted and lost my balance resulting in the entire contents of the wheelbarrow spilling into the

freshly dug trench. First on the scene was the kapo who began beating me with his whip. At the time I did not know it, but it was far better and to the prisoners' overall benefit for a kapo to handle a situation and keep the SS from taking control.

One evening in November, colder than usual, as we were putting our tools away, we were ordered to form a column and were marched to a rail siding where we were divided into teams of twelve or fourteen inmates. We had already heard about the midnight cement-laden trains. Two planks fastened to the railcar floor formed a steep incline. Two of the team stood at the railcar doorway, while the rest lined up at the bottom the planks. As we filed up and into the railcar we would turn our backs to the two loaders who would then heave a bag of cement onto our backs. As we held onto the bag with our arms, a second bag was added. We then ran down the left side of the plank while others were rushing past us on the way up. In a bent over position we carried the bags to where other inmates took them from us and put them in neat stacks. This continued uninterrupted until the car was emptied. Then we went on to the next car, and the next, until the entire train was unloaded. It was a crippling task especially for us younger prisoners. Extended workdays occurred frequently for my brigade.

Many times we were called out in the middle of the night, marched out to the site, unloaded the cement, then returned to camp in time for morning roll call. Always working with cement, my lungs filled up with the dust. My nose and mouth were blocked making it difficult to breathe. We were covered with dust yet we would not dare enter our barrack in such a dirty condition. The barracks kapo would not tolerate a speck of cement on the floor. We marched instead to the wash barrack where there were only troughs with spigots over them where we cleaned up as best we could.

Public lashings at roll call were a common sight. Random blows, kicks, and fists to the face for no reason were even more common. Everything was done to break down a prisoner's semblance of his own humanity.

Winter brought additional hardship. Our meager clothing had already worn thin. There was absolutely no protection from the elements. Someone in our work gang thought of wrapping the paper cement sacks around our bodies underneath our striped clothes to protect us from the cold wind while we worked outdoors. It worked. The bags became an important commodity on the camp's black market. Winter was the most difficult time for me. The thirty-six months of suffering had weakened me physically, but the ever-present glimmer of hope in my inner soul never left me, though at times it wavered. Hope that the

free world would rescue us played a big part in my survival.

There was no talk of rebellion but we did resist in our own ways. Sometimes, we would take a minute to slow down at work, or take momentary shelter from the elements. Fellow inmates would warn of approaching guards with the whisper of "*Sechs, sechs*; Six, six," and we would rush back to work.

Nine or ten months had passed since I had last seen my parents and brother. I was beginning to be very concerned about my brother. I was certain in my feelings that he was in a nearby camp and hoped he was well. I sensed that my parents would manage to hold on until this nightmare was over. The foolish idea of my father's secure employment calmed me.

FUNFTEICHEN LABOR CAMP

In the summer of 1943 I was transferred to a group working on the sewer system. Huge, multi-ton concrete drain pipes, four to six feet in diameter, were being joined in trenches we dug to create a maze of tunnels throughout the factory area.

By mid-year 1943 many prisoners were exhausted both physically and emotionally. Selections were conducted at roll call. Those selected were marched off to sickbay where they were held for a day or two depending on how large a transport the authorities wanted to send off to rehabilitation camps. Those sent to rehabilitation camps were never seen again.

Just around that time, my pre-war appendicitis flared up. It lasted for five or six days. I was near collapse at times while on the worksite. Somehow the condition abated only to come back a few weeks later and lasted nearly two weeks. The excruciating pain caused me momentary blackouts, but I was determined not to report to sickbay.

During late summer 1943 more and more people were brought to Funfteichen from the ghettos. There were now seven or eight thousand inmates. My search for my brother in these transports became an obsession. One day at work, a fellow inmate related a story to a small group. He told us that the day before he had gone to see a friend who was an orderly at the infirmary when he wandered into a partitioned-off section where about two dozen prisoners who had been brought in from another camp, were lying on the bare floor. He was told that these prisoners were to be part of a larger transport to a "special" place. I begged him to introduce me to his contact at the infirmary. I could not put the thought of my brother possibly being in that doomed transport out of my mind. I resolved to find my way to the infirmary with or without permission.

At roll call that evening I requested permission to visit the infirmary. When I opened my jacket, the kapo glanced at the boil on my chest, and nodded approval for a visit to sickbay. I wove in and out of the long line at sickbay until I spotted the orderly I hoped could help me. He pulled me out of line and led me to the far end of sickbay and behind a partition. I moved my eyes from one skeletal body to another. It was hard to differentiate one from another; none looked human. Though it only took a minute or less, it seemed as if forever, when I stepped over to one I identified without a doubt as my dear brother, Nuchim. I could not get any kind of response from my brother, he was already unconscious. I stood there transfixed, unable to take my eyes off him. As I turned to leave, the inmate lying next to my brother, near death himself, looked up at the ceiling and repeatedly whispered, "He is better off, he is better off." All during that night I stared at the ceiling. All I could see was my brother's face I remembered from my childhood and the face I had just seen.

The major portion of the construction complex was now completed. The factories were turning out trainloads of arms and munitions. The prisoner population began to drop as deportations continued. Workers no longer arrived from the ghettos to work at the Krupp factories. With fewer factory tasks, we were assigned menial jobs within the camp like pushing loaded wheelbarrows of dirt and boulders from one end of the camp to the opposite end and back again. The only purpose was to break our last strand of spirit.

As 1944 drew to a close my hopes for my parents to have survived the last days of the ghetto did not seem plausible. The idea that they were deported to Auschwitz constantly occupied my mind. My mental state left me with but a shred of hope. I did not truly believe that God would save me.

In my irrational state of mind I must have broken some rule. I do not recall the reason for the lashing I received but it most likely was that the kapo had to satisfy his quota to satisfy his superiors. All the barrack inmates were ordered to attend the "show." I was held down over a wooden bench in the clearing at the center of the barrack. I remained conscious through the first five or six strikes, then I blacked out. My whole back, my buttocks, and my legs were lacerated. The pain totally immobilized me. The block elder, the one responsible for this beating, ordered me to stay in and not go to work that day. The next day I joined my brigade and limped off to work. I resolved to never again let myself fall into a state of mind that would make me so vulnerable.

There was a constant shuffling around of prisoners from one camp to another. I was returned to the Mathies Ag Company where I worked preparing railroad tracks: shoveling gravel, stomping it, and then placing the ties. It was a backbreaking task and I had no physical strength.

I was wielding a twenty pound hammer, pounding iron spikes through wooden ties and gravel. Long days took a tremendous toll on the emaciated prisoners. Great numbers died there. Toward the end of 1944 German military defeats were common knowledge among the camp inmates. We were hardly able to carry on at this time, but every rumor of a Nazi defeat energized us, body and soul.

Tragically, some inmates ran to the electrified fence to end their misery. If someone was found electrocuted in "No Man's Land," a strip about eight feet wide separating the electrified wire fence from the twelve-foot high concrete camp wall, the body of the victim would then be paraded in a wheelbarrow in front of the assembled prisoners.

One morning at roll call two bullet-ridden bodies of attempting escapees were pulled back and forth on a wheeled platform for hours to drive home the point. Escapees were always considered part of conspiracies and entire barracks would be punished. Surely, the Nazis did not care if there were a few less prisoners — it was all a game to them.

By summer 1944 my strength had completely left me. One night as I was attempting to climb into my bunk, I fell to the floor overcome with violent convulsions. The barrack supervisor ordered someone to attend to me. I felt my face being sprinkled with water and the foam being wiped off.

Upon hearing that I was to be sent to the infirmary, I got up on my wobbly feet, and a pair of hands — I never knew who they belonged to — catapulted me up to my bunk. This assistance could not have come from any of my weakened fellow prisoners; I believe the kapo did it. Certainly there were acts of kindness to me over the years, often from the most unlikely sources.

Gradually, the prison population was reduced. The exhausted prisoners were no longer a viable labor force. We were replaced with Eastern Europeans who were paid to work. Much more time than usual was spent in roll call because selections for deportation took place then. Soon I found myself among those who staggered in procession from one end of the camp to the other and back again doing useless work for hours on end. Again I was pushing a wheelbarrow filled with dirt and stones.

We knew we were in a deathly race for time and our lives. Victory seemed so near, yet so far. I constantly pondered and weighed the thoughts: "Does it make much sense to go on? Is it worth all this suffering?"

The bread rations were cut to a mere morsel. There was no nourishment in the thin soup. Before, at the worksite, we might find an occasional scrap of food left by chance or intentionally by a German supervisor. One time, a supervisor ordered me to clean his canteen, pointing to it with a smile, and yes, there was a good portion of his lunch left inside for me. Though rare, such deeds occurred.

I had now been in the camps for just over two years. My body now had inflamed and abscessed skin lesions. One day, the pain of an infected abscess on my chest was so unbearable I finally asked for permission to go to sickbay. I feared sickbay more than anything else in those two years. The orderly lanced the abscess, gave me permission to leave, and I walked out victorious. To be made to stay in sickbay would have been the end for me. While at the sickbay I saw my image reflected in the glass door of a medicine cabinet. For a moment I had great difficulty convincing myself that it was actually me I saw there. I thought, "How is it that I am still alive and functioning when I look like that?"

My third winter at the camp roared in with unprecedented ferocity. Cold rains turned to icy snow. The Nazis did not quite know what to do with us; the Krupp complex was complete. In early December 1944, on an icy-cold morning, a separate column was being formed during roll call. The wind was fierce; it blew the electric lamps on the poles in all directions, adding to the eeriness of the scene. When my number was called I joined the new lineup. I took a look around; no one seemed in better shape than myself. Most were far worse, which increased my fears. It was the largest transport in months. Since no replacement laborers had come in, it became clear that the camp was being liquidated.

FIRST DEATH MARCH

One morning in December 1944, the SS marched us out of camp, their ferocious dogs keeping us in line. The SS guard in charge of the march was Ukrainian. The Ukrainians did not need to be educated by the Nazis on how to treat Jews. They brought their own brand of brutality with them. Their centuries-old hatred of the Jews propelled them to commit the most heinous acts against us.

Clad only in meager, worn-out rags, we trudged in fresh snow that covered rock-hard frozen ground. When it got too cold for the warmly dressed sentries, they made us speed up to a brisk jog which most of the prisoners could not do. There were many who could not stay within their column.

For the kapos, this was a far cry from the life they were used to, but at least they were dressed in warm winter clothes. They busied themselves prodding the prisoners to keep moving, constantly flailing their clubs at those falling back. The columns did not stop to dispose of the dead; the guards simply ordered the corpses shoved into a ditch.

We did not march on paved roads which would have been easier; we marched through pastures where the snow was often two feet deep. Now and then we would come to a

ravine and be forced to mount a steep edge, and sliding back into the gully would then have to crawl out on all fours. I began to wonder if this march was a deliberate plan to get rid of as many prisoners as possible.

At nightfall we came to rest at a huge barn where we assembled for roll call. About half the transport was absent. When they arrived nearly two hours later, roll call was taken again. By then, the small amount of bread had already been distributed and the stragglers received only what was left. We had traveled less than a mile.

The barn was too small for even half of our group so we piled up on one another and fell into an uneasy sleep. The sentries created a passage through the middle of the barn as they walked two abreast, lanterns in hand, kicking the frail, brittle bones of the prisoners. Eventually, under the watchful eyes of a guard and his dog, small groups of six were allowed out to relieve themselves. The precious few hours of shelter were enough to renew my spirit. I could feel that spark of energy, wanting to go on at all cost.

A burst of machine gun fire shattered the air, and with that, reality set in as we started day two of our march. That morning some did not make it out of the barn for roll call. Frozen corpses were dragged out of the barn and into the field for burial.

As we marched, we noticed countless earthen mounds out in the fields. It was common for farmers to store reserved produce in trenches below the frost line and cover them with hay and soil, creating such mounds. They would dig up the food as they needed it. How we longed to dig into the mounds, but we were not permitted to stop.

They kept us marching through open fields while blustery winds blew. At times the wind blew with such velocity the frail bodies became suspended in the air, then dropped to the ground as if they were mere leaves. After two more nights and days of marching, at nightfall on the fourth day we neared a vast compound with barracks as far as the eye could see. More than one-third of our transport did not make it to our destination, Gross-Rosen.

GROSS-ROSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP

We were at Gross-Rosen, a satellite camp of the Ravensbruck/Sachsenhausen Nazi prison system. We entered the camp at dark, some in our column crawling on all fours. Immediately, a horde of kapos set upon us. We learned something new about kapos: the kapos here were in charge of practically everything pertaining to the prisoners.

The camp was filling up so rapidly the Nazis' administrators could not cope with the numbers, but they were confident the kapos could handle the responsibility of murdering the inmates. The first evening, after roll call, I was assigned to the kapo of Block #32. I will forever remember his name: Stefan. He was one of the most notorious killers in this camp. There were many like him who would beat up a helpless victim with his bare hands then finish him off with a blow in the head from a club handed to him by a trusted helper.

In late 1944 Gross-Rosen evacuations were going on while at the same time prisoners were being brought in from all satellite camps. This created a huge pool of fairly work-capable prisoners. I was sent to the penal work gangs. Our job was to dig up boulders in one place and bring them to another for no purpose other than to torture us. The entire system was designed with one thing in mind: to further reduce the prisoners' chances of survival and bring them as close to a "natural death" as possible.

During the three weeks I was held at Gross-Rosen we were required to line up to be tattooed with our prison numbers. On three separate occasions I was arbitrarily pulled from the line and sent off to work. Thus, my prison number was never engraved on my arm.

The conditions in the barracks were appalling: the kapos were sadists who kept us on our knees scrubbing the floors as they kicked and beat us; the bunks were filthy and vermin infested.

The dead bodies discovered in the bunks were no longer paraded at assembly. The Nazis no longer needed to impress us with their barbaric acts to make us obey.

Late one night I had awakened and in the darkness I saw a fellow inmate reach over to a neighboring bunk and pull a bundle from under what appeared to be a sleeping comrade. My eyes turned to the culprit. His response as he proceeded to bite into a chunk of bread was matter-of-fact, "He won't need this anymore," as he left his dying comrade. This is what the Nazis did to us.

SECOND DEATH MARCH

In late December or early January 1945 I was selected to be shipped out of this living hell. It didn't concern me where I was going, I just wanted out of this camp. About 500 of us were ordered into open railcars full of coal dust. We were packed in so tightly we could not move a limb or even turn our bodies. We heard shrieks and lamentations and constant moaning. Every now and then a single voice would utter the prayer *Shema Israel* which was soon joined by many. I dared not fall asleep for fear of freezing to death. Even then when I feared death, fear of death itself translated into a spark of life.

At dawn we were ordered out of the train. At roll call it was obvious some prisoners were missing. We realized what

happened as bodies were removed from the cars. A carload of digging implements, shovels and pickaxes, were thrown from the train. We were ordered to form columns of five abreast as usual. The implements were distributed. Surrounded by sentries we trudged across snowed-in farmland. At dusk we stopped at a farm shed. We had not had any food or water since the morning before we boarded the train. After roll call we were ordered to sit in rows against the barn wall fitting tightly against each other. They did not want us spread out because then we would be more difficult to control.

We were dumbfounded when a horse-drawn field kitchen pulled up. We lined up for a bowl of warm soup and a small portion of pasty bread. I ate my bread right away; I never saved my bread ration for a later time like some people did. It was too chancy to save it. After we ate, a contingent of prisoners were marched off to dig a hole for a latrine. A line formed for those who wanted to use the freshly dug hole. Trips to the latrine continued for some time, then abruptly stopped even though people were still lining up. The vicious kapos enjoyed this game.

I am not certain what gave me the physical strength to keep going with my swollen limbs and my rib bones protruding through my skin. No wonder the Nazis would not have us march through populated areas. They did not want people to see the atrocity.

It was still dark when we were awakened. Bodies were being dragged out of the barn to freshly dug ditches. By the time we left, all trace of us having been there was erased. The SS was menacing, their weapons ready for firing. We moved with great difficulty, shifting the implements we were carrying from one shoulder to the other. Our columns were no longer orderly. Some of us were tripping over those who fell, causing a pile-up of bodies, picks, and shovels. Looking to my left I saw that the third person in my line was having a problem staying in formation. The fellow prisoner next to me noticed, too. As the man began to stumble I asked him to allow us to help carry his two implements thinking if he could get a spell of relief from the weight he may recover enough to go on. At first he was reluctant; in the end he consented. He looked at me as if to say, "You're in no better shape than I am. How will you handle the additional load?" He seemed to surrender in a number of ways and handed us his implements.

The day passed with no food. I had scooped up some clean snow and sucked on it a number of times which had momentarily eased my thirst.

We came to another shed. Though this one had only part of a roof we welcomed it after the open fields. After roll call we stretched out on the floor but immediately sat up. To hold a nearly bare back against the frozen ground was too painful to withstand. During the night we heard vehicles drive up and the hundred prisoners nearest the door were put on trucks and driven away.

The rest of us stood in roll call for what seemed an eternity, anticipating, fearing the end. Mid-morning, half a dozen vehicles pulled up and we were rushed to board them. We traveled for about two hours when, out of nowhere, a city appeared before us. We drove through the town and came to a single lane of tarmac which brought us to the outer perimeter of a small encampment with no more than half a dozen barracks.

GOERLITZ CONCENTRATION CAMP

We marched in a single line through the gates to Camp Goerlitz. As we stood at attention, Kapo Auben Tschech, a Jew and a true savage, welcomed us and ordered the kapos to "teach us how to behave." Suddenly, the camp commander, Oberst Zunker, appeared. He sized up us new arrivals and was obviously disappointed by this batch of prisoners whom he expected to be employed at the WOMAG auto plant. We were not the proper element to be mingling with others at work, nor should we be seen by German civilians on our way to the factory.

We were dismissed to the wash barracks where we lined up for delousing. Then our heads were shaved with the classic stripe down the middle. I was one of the lucky few

to get "freshly recycled" jackets and trousers — my first "new clothes" in two and a half years. Some were lucky enough to get shoes.

I was given an upper bunk, something I welcomed although it was increasingly difficult for me to climb up there. Some fellow prisoners were unable to control their bladders and others were too weak to walk to the latrine, so the upper bunk was desirable. Some unfortunates would lie in their own waste until helped by fellow inmates.

Under Tschech's supervision, six kapos did his bidding. The meanest were Eichenbaum, Tenenbaum, and Kessler. Gershon headed up my barrack. The three kapos assigned to my work detachment, Mathis, Glazer, and Schulzinger, though trying to save their own skins, were often helpful in difficult situations.

My job at Wagon and Maschinebau AG (WOMAG) was, at first, to assist a civilian technician preparing parts to be installed on military half-tracks' undercarriage. I would carry stacks of metal plates from outside the building and place them near our workbench. These plates were so cold that my hands stuck to them like glue. The man I worked with was a decent, grandfatherly German. Whenever I goofed up, although it was his responsibility to report such incidents as sabotage, he would let it pass. Once in a while

he would order me to clean up his food utensils, always with a grin on his face — there was always some food left in there. These acts of kindness helped our will to survive.

Food supplies did not arrive regularly. A day's bread allotment may be shortened and the soup would contain only a morsel of sugar beet. Sometimes, after working and standing for hours for roll call many of us would be glad to forgo the bowl of soup and be allowed into the barracks rather than be subjected to the kapos' games.

The kapos made up rules on a whim; therefore in order to survive we were sometimes forced to simply disobey. For example, to avoid being punished for a rip in our garments we would have to possess a needle and some thread, which was against the camp rules. I would sometimes place a needle wound with thread in the seam of my jacket.

By February 1945 our bunks were infested with lice. Our skin was virtually eaten away. Existence was complete misery. The last ersatz soap I ever had was in Markstadt, two years earlier. The few weeks I had been working with the German man emboldened me to ask him if he could possibly give me a small cake of soap. I must have been out of my mind to be so bold to do that. Soap was a luxury item even for the Germans. The next day he brought me soap. Soap was so precious in the camp I feared someone would steal it from me.

My next job assignment was carrying heavy metal parts to the spray painter and then stacking them for future use. Things were going badly for me. I was beginning to feel the punishment my body was taking more and more. The cold, the hunger, the mental stress, all combined to bring me almost to the abyss. I was now crossing the threshold to becoming a zombie, a walking corpse.

DEFIANCE

Working at the spray section I had a chance to communicate with some other inmates. If it was too dangerous to communicate verbally, we communicated with facial expressions. Not too distant from the spray tent was the wire fence that surrounded the entire factory complex. For days we carefully scouted the area and observed the pattern of the sentries' movements. Our plan was not to escape, but to visit the earthen mounds outside the fence. The mounds were storage areas for produce used in the factory kitchen. The fence presented no problem; I found a spot where it could be easily lifted. The scores of potatoes, beets, and carrots carelessly dropped on the ground were an easy enticement. The risk of getting food was worth a try. The mounds were no more than forty feet beyond the fence. They were, however, in an open field with nothing to shield us from sight.

The decision was made to recruit a couple of fellow inmates for the venture. Lookouts placed at strategic locations were needed for our plan to work. There were a few people we could trust, but there was always the chance that someone fearing consequences might snitch, so we had to be very selective. Many factors besides hunger drove our determination to proceed. We felt a deep need to express defiance after years of slavery; we became brave.

The plan was made. Our daring band of six was made up of prisoners from different work stations to not draw suspicion if too many people were absent from a station. Three of us would go under the fence, two would be lookouts. One chickened out. I was the only one from my work team involved in the food "run."

We crawled under the fence, scuttled to the nearest mound, picked up a few pieces of frozen beets and carrots, stuffed them into our trouser legs tied at the bottom with rags, and shuffled back as fast as we could. Suddenly, the sentry noticed us. As we neared the fence a welcoming committee of kapos was ready for us. The kapos tried to protect us but the sentry insisted that the kapo punish us. We were led to a spot behind a building where two kapos pelted us with their clubs while urging us to cry loudly as a possible deterrent to keep the sentry away. The kapos knew it was best to satisfy the sentries rather than bring the matter to the higher-ups in the camp.

After roll call that evening, six of us were left standing at attention long after all other inmates were back in their barracks. It was late evening when three of my comrades were ordered to return to their barracks. I have always wondered if these three had informed on us. The three of us remaining were led to a spot behind the latrine. I was sure we were awaiting execution. Suddenly, I felt no fear. As SS Zunder drew his revolver, one of my comrades fell to his knees. Zunder cocked his pistol and put it to the sobbing prisoner's head. The bullet did not discharge. He attempted to fire again, and again, but no discharge. The prisoner cried out, "Shema Israel." One more time the SS officer pressed the pistol to the prisoner's head and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. Cursing, Zunker walked away in disgust instructing the kapos to do what they pleased with the prisoners. They beat us mercilessly before we could drag our bodies back to the barrack. The next morning, like everyone else, I took my place in line for roll call.

One night in March 1945, while lying awake in my bunk, I felt someone near. A large, strong hand brushed over me and a huge chunk of bread was placed in my hands. Before I could sit up to see who it was, the phantom was gone. Then I heard the kapo bidding good night to Gustav, the kitchen kapo. Gustav was known to be a terror. I had purposely stayed out of his sight. A few days after his nighttime visit, I came face to face with him as I stood in line for my bowl of soup. He treated me to a ladle of soup

with chunks of vegetables and other materials. I had an inkling that he was the man whose implements I helped carry on the way to Goerlitz. He must have inquired about the boys who had done that simple deed of kindness. I did not know the person walking next to me on the death march and I did not know the fellow prisoner we helped. I probably would never have thought about it at all if he had not taken the initiative.

One day, as I was leaving the washroom, Gustav handed me a bowl filled with something I hadn't seen in years: a casserole of meat and vegetables. My eyes filled with tears. Gustav would often recruit help for the kitchen and would feed them leftovers. As much as it mattered to have that extra bite of food, I did not care to ingratiate myself to this person. I was afraid of him.

THIRD DEATH MARCH

Suddenly, things changed. As the war was nearing the end, the Nazis' immediate problem was how to destroy the remaining Jews in the camps. Death marches proved very effective at killing many thousands. It may have eased their conscience — they were not killing us; we just died. Half the prisoners at Gross-Rosen were to be moved to Gross Roehrsdorf.

At noon my column moved out. It was my third march in the past three months and would be the most brutal. I felt barely alive. We never arrived at Gross Roshsdorf or any other camp. We were simply and cruelly marched for ten days before returning to Goerlitz.

After a few days I was back at work at WOMAG. The Nazis must have been desperate to make more and more weapons. In the last days of the war we continued working even during Soviet bombing raids.

LIBERATION

As bombs exploded in the town, our only wish was to see the enemy destroyed before we ourselves gave our a last breath. We desired the destruction of the camp and were willing to face the consequences. Work at WOMAG stopped in May. Roll call took much longer than usual. We stood at attention for hours on end.

One morning we heard a great commotion outside of the barracks. As we prepared for roll call, an unusual noise rose from the crowd. We ran outside where a strange scene revealed the moment we so desperately longed for. In utterly stunned confusion everyone pointed to the abandoned watchtowers and the open gate of the compound. Many sobbed as they prostrated themselves in prayer. Others yelled at the top of their lungs. No guards were in sight. The kapos seemed to

have gone into hiding to avoid being avenged for their inhuman conduct.

I joined a small group that decided to venture into town. Small clusters started walking toward the open gate, wary of some trick the Nazis might be playing on us. The path was one we had walked every day, but now it was the path to liberty. As we looked back we could see more comrades following our lead.

The city streets were deserted except for a rare air-raid warden who would urge us to get off the streets. We felt no need to take shelter from the bombs. I vividly recall standing in the middle of the street cheering and waving to the bombers. We cried and laughed as we recognized the Russian red star with its yellow hammer and sickle.

Only one thing was on our minds in that first hour of freedom: food. We did not dare to knock on doors of inhabited residences. It was getting dark when a few of us found our way into a dwelling we thought was unoccupied. We got into the basement through a window located halfway above the ground. We sat on the floor and fell asleep. When we awoke we noticed shelves full of preserved fruit. The older ones in our group warned us to exercise caution against eating too much because of our weakened digestive systems. All we wanted was a chunk of bread.

We had no idea where to go. We were searching for food and some decent clothes when, suddenly, we ran right into an oncoming German military patrol. There was no time to react; we were surrounded. They ordered us back to the camp where the watchtowers were manned again. They assured us we would be safer there than in the city. It was obvious they were more concerned with their own safety than with ours. In the afternoon army provisions were distributed to all prisoners. Confusion reigned. It seems the Soviet army was on the outskirts of the city. Meanwhile, the German army, in orderly retreat, had taken time to "secure our safety." We were still not free.

The wash barracks became a busy hub. Some had found clean clothes in the town, but even without a fresh change of clothes we tried to clean ourselves. By nightfall we had calmed down considerably. There seemed to be no choice but to wait and see what developed. No one slept that night. At daylight someone yelled, "They're gone! They are all gone!"

We formed small bands and once again set off for town. Our focus was to obtain food and a change of clothes. We were afraid to make contact with the town's people because it could be a problem if the Russians found us commingling with them — the enemy.

Very late in the day we came across a house with no occupants. When it was completely dark, we forced the door open. As we moved through the ground floor of the house, a sudden barrage of heavy Russian cannons erupted. We quickly found our way to the basement where we huddled in the small, pitch-dark room. We were not afraid of the artillery shells, we were afraid the Germans would discover us before the Russians secured the area and shoot us on the spot.

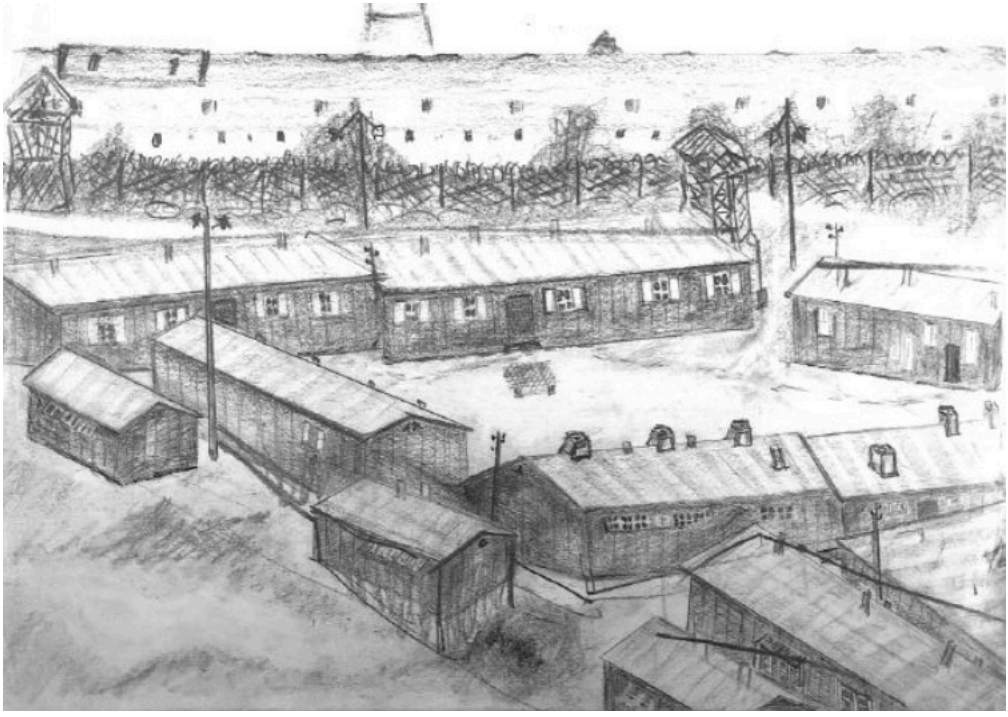
My thoughts turned to scenarios of homecoming. Could I hope against hope that I had a home? It had been years since I had seen my family except in my dreams.

At dawn, bursts of machine gun fire erupted right outside the house, then more shouts. We held our breaths in this, our moment of salvation. "The Russians are here," we whispered. There was great uncertainty. Do we wait in the cellar for them to discover us? How do we approach these liberators in case they do not know who we are? Our older comrades knew forward troops would shoot on sight and we had no white cloth to signal surrender. We made a decision: we clambered out of the cellar and walked out into the street, single file, with our hands in the air.

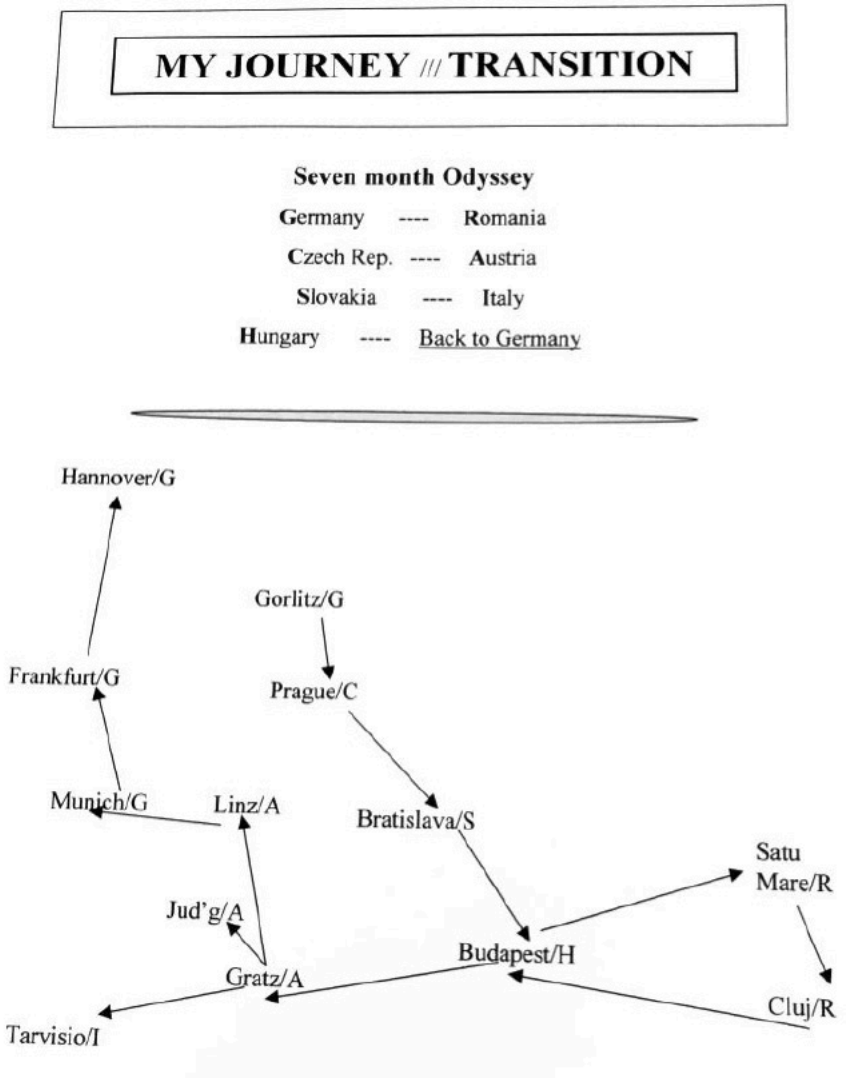
What we saw was hundreds of wild-looking, machine-gun toting, men running through the street. A few immediately surrounded us and pinned us to the wall, their weapons ready. Suddenly, one of them recognized that we were not

Germans. Soon, we were all hugging and kissing this wild-looking bunch. An officer on a motorcycle appeared and asked in Russian if we were Jewish. A conversation in Yiddish ensued. We cried. The hardened troops cried with us. This was the morning of May 8th, 1945. The day we were liberated at last.

A handful of survivors remained in the camp in make-shift hospitals. Others were housed in abandoned dwellings the Russian occupiers designated for us. We lived and moved in small groups, men and women together, not feeling secure all by ourselves. Because Russian soldiers drunkenly celebrating victory would attack any woman, we male survivors took on the role of protectors. I had turned nineteen; I was not quite certain whether to act as an adult or like the high school boy I thought I was.



I did this drawing of Goerlitz Concentration Camp shortly after liberation.



My seven month journey from liberation at Gorlitz to Hanover, Germany.

SEARCH FOR FAMILY

At the end of May I joined a few other survivors on a homeward trek. Three boys from Poland, two young sisters from Romania, and a mother and daughter from Hungary joined us. After two days hitchhiking with Soviet military vehicles we arrived in Liberee, Czechoslovakia, a major rail center. Most travel involved endless waiting for trains; rail stations served as our hotels. When we arrived in Prague our hopes for a return to Poland were dashed when we learned that ethnic Poles were threatening and even murdering returning Jews.

Our travels would take us through lands occupied by the Soviets. We came to adore the Soviet military men and thought of them as our heroes. We went on to Budapest, then to Satu Mare, Romania, where a Jewish community was re-emerging. I stayed there for three weeks. I was housed and fed like hundreds of other refugees by the Joint Distribution Committee and HIAS, both Jewish charitable organizations.

While in Romania I befriended a small group of young people who knew agents serving in the *Brichah,* the Jewish Agency, secretly operating in the Soviet and British occupied parts of Europe whose mission was to bring Jews to Palestine.

Because Britain, which controlled Palestine under an international mandate, greatly limited the number of Jews it would allow to move there, clandestine operations began in Europe to smuggle Jewish survivors to Palestine in the face of British opposition. I became part of a group of seven young men and five women, all close in age, committed to working as a team with the *Brichah*. Our first assignment was to get to Austria where we would be given our orders.

We had no passports or visas; we were stateless. We knew no names for references, only code words. Border crossings had to be arranged and deals were necessary at checkpoints. The *Brichah* agents apparently had "their' men at the borders. Our first stop was Budapest where we spent the night then headed west to the Austrian border. The terrain was mountainous and rugged. The Russians kindly guided us to the crest of a mountain, then demanded our watches.

It took two more days to reach Graz, Austria, where we met our contact who was part of the British military's Jewish Brigade. Our job would be to assist the *Brichah* in transporting thousands of Jews past the British, into ports in southern Italy, where they would board ships to cross the Mediterranean Sea, to go to Palestine. Our group would only travel to Tarvisio, Italy, a short distance across the Austrian-Italian border. Others would then take the emigrants further south to Udine and Bari in southern Italy.

Our mission was to engage the British at the Tarviso railroad station checkpoint and keep the Brits occupied on one side of the platform while the *Brichah* men and women guided the refugees into busses waiting outside the station. We would wrangle with the British soldiers, resorting to hand to hand combat, kicking, scratching, spitting on them, until we were signaled to allow them to subdue us and put us on the train back to Austria where we would help with the next transport. I stayed with the agency for over three months. While I wanted to be part of the creation of the Jewish homeland, and I could have joined a transport to Palestine at any time, I needed to continue searching for my family.

Since liberation my journey had taken me to Prague, Bratislava, Budapest, Satu Mare, Cluj, Budapest, Gratz, Tarvisio, Jud'g, Linz, Munich, and Frankfurt.

Now I wandered from one displaced persons' camp to another but came no closer to finding any of my family. I finally settled in a camp near Frankfurt au Main, Germany, in the American zone. While at a railroad station I recognized a fellow campmate who suggested I move to Vinnhorst where he knew my first cousin was living.

I registered at Vinnhorst Displaced Persons' Camp in Hannover, Germany. At Vinnhorst I realized it was time for me to grow up. I pursued my education while working

and learning dentistry and serving on the camp security team. Over two hundred people, mostly teenagers or in their twenties, lived in my five-story brick building. The camp's rabbi tried to be a moral watchdog, but it was a tough task with a bunch of young adults without parental supervision. We bartered our UNRRA supplied food and clothing and a black market underground economy flourished. We paid private tutors to complete our education and trade schools sprang up. We went to the theater, the movies, and partied with other camps. We joined Zionist organizations.

Loneliness led to the formation of new relationships. Marriages occurred at unprecedented numbers. Each new baby gave us a feeling of being born again, as well as the hope of a new Jewish nation being born in Palestine.

At Vinnhorst I met and fell in love with a young woman, Maniusa. We married four months later, April 14, 1946. At our wedding Maniusa wore a black dress that was handed down from one bride to another. With no parents to lead us to the *chuppah*, the wedding canopy, new friends were given the honor. Food rations were pooled and the whole camp was invited to the celebration. Our daughter, Helen, was born in Vinnhorst August 28, 1947.

In June 1949, nearly five years after liberation day, our emigration permits were approved. We were sponsored by my cousin Paulette's relative, Isaac Derman, who lived in the United States. Maniusa, Helen, and I left Vinnhorst for Bremen, Germany, where we boarded our plane to the United States of America.

THE STORY OF MANIUSA "MARCIA" MELL SACHS

As told by her daughter, Helen Sachs Chaset

It was like pulling teeth to learn about my mother's experience in the Holocaust. My mother was born in Lodz, Poland, but grew up in Brzeziny, a suburb of Lodz. Her parents were Samuel David Mell a tailor, and Liwcia Gedankengot Mell. She had three half-brothers and one half-sister, children from her father's first wife who died in childbirth. My mother was the only child of his second wife. We have never found a birth certificate for her, but I did learn that she was born two years earlier than she claimed.

When she was sixteen the family was relocated to the Lodz Ghetto and moved into the apartment they had lived in previously. For the next two years, my mother worked at Strohsschuh Abteiling on Brzezinska Street. Early on, her mother, her half-sister, and her half-sister's children were arrested and deported to Auschwitz.

My mother was with her father in the ghetto until he was taken. She was still a youngster, so she went to live with a cousin and her cousin's husband. When the husband tried to molest my mother, she told her cousin about it, and the cousin kicked her out. My mother had no place to go. She

was taken in by the secretary to Mordecai Chaim Rumkowski, chairman of the Jewish Council of the Lodz Ghetto. Because she was living with the secretary to Rumkowski, for a long time whenever her name came up on a deportation list the secretary was able to get if off. My mother was transported on the next-to-last deportation from the Lodz Ghetto to Auschwitz.

After a few days at Auschwitz she was transferred to Ravensbruck, a women's camp in northern Germany. My mother never told me what happened to her there, but I believe my father knew the truth. From Ravensbruck she was sent to Muhlhausen in Germany where she worked in a munitions factory. She said the kapos at Muhlhausen were the worst of any camp. They savagely beat her on her back and kidney area causing lifelong health problems.

In January 1945 my mother was sent to Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp in northern Germany. Everybody called Bergen Belsen hell. My mother never talked much about Bergen Belsen; she just said it is impossible to imagine how horrible it was.

Her only work might have been picking up corpses in a wheelbarrow. When the British liberated Bergen Belsen in April 1945 they discovered approximately 60,000 sick and starving prisoners inside, and another 13,000 corpses lying around the camp. Another 14,000 died shortly after liberation.

It took my mother six to eight weeks after liberation to recuperate before she was strong enough to leave Bergen Belsen. There were three sisters and two other women who were liberated at the same time she was. She became one of their group that traveled together directly to Vinnhorst DP Camp in Hanover, a short distance from Bergen Belsen.

At Vinnhorst my mother was one among a hundred and fifty, or so, young people with very similar experiences. With no family or loved ones, they found solace in one another and lived as if one big family. Each woman in her little group found a husband and several babies were born there, including me.

For their first date, my father asked my mother to go to the cinema. She always tells this story: she was looking at the movie and every time she looked at him, he was not looking at the movie — he was looking at her. He couldn't keep his eyes off her. My father confirms the story. Young people were getting together in the camp. The rabbi was informed, maybe by one of my father's roommates, that a woman was in my father's room, so he went to check. My mother hid under the bed. The rabbi knew she was there, so she had to come out. The rabbi said, "You have to get married." So they got married on April 14, 1946.

Although my mother was taken toward the end of the war, and spent just two years in the camps, she had more physical,

emotional, and mental scars than my father who spent six years in the camps. I grew up waking up to her screams in the night. My father was her protector. Because doctors were able to document the damage done to her in the camps, she received monetary compensation from the German government. She suffered with back pain her entire life and passed away from kidney disease in 2016, a result, I believe, from the beatings she received at Muhlhausen.

In the late 1990's Ravensbruck invited the surviving women who had been in the camp to come for a conference. My mother went with her friend, Marilla. The Germans paid all travel expenses; perhaps as a way of doing some penance.

My mother's parents, sister, and two brothers died in the Holocaust. One brother, Yitzak, who was shipped to a Russian labor camp, survived. In the 1960's my parents sponsored him to come to the United States. While at the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1993, I asked my mother, "What was the worst thing you remember about the Holocaust?" She immediately answered, "When my father was taken away from me." I understood, for the first time, that as a young person she could tolerate beatings, starvation, oppression, punishment, horrible sights, but being ripped away from her family is what she remembers as being her worst memory. I believe my mother's message would be to love, appreciate, and always care for your family.

Marcia's half-brother, Yitzak. He survived the war, married in Poland and moved to Israel. In the 1960's we sponsored him to come to the United States.

Marcia's youngest half-brother. He did not survive the Holocaust.

Marcia and Helen looking for Marcia's childhood home in Lodz, Poland.

Marcia and Helen in the courtyard of the building where Marcia lived as a child and from where she was taken by the Nazis.

IDENTIFICATION CARD
for ex-political prisoner of
KZ. Fünftüchen
AUSWEIS
für ehemalige politische Gefangene aus

III
Current number 564 Internee number 24446
Laufend. Nummer Häftlingsnummer
name Israel S a c h s
Name
born 25.3.1926 at Sosnowitz
geb. zu
nationality poln.
Nationalität
adress Flügeldamm 32 = Hannover
Adresse
was kept in captivity from 1942 to 1945
in Nazi-German Concentrationscamp and was
liberated from the Görlitz
wurde vom 1942 bis 1945 in national-
sozialistischen Konzentrationslagern gehalten
und vom Görlitz in Freiheit gesetzt.

Unterschrift Sachs Israel.
signature

Hauptausschuß ehemaliger politischer Häftlinge
Land-Niedersachsen, Hannover

My identification card saying I was in Goerlitz Concentration Camp.

JEWISH D. P. CAMP
VINNHORST
2713 C. ASS. CENTRE
I. RO. TEAM 908

DATE 26.2.49

C E R T I F I C A T E

This is tne certify, tnat S A C H S , Israel born 25.3.1926
D.P.No.188356 is registered in tne Jewish D.P.Camp since 21.Nov.1945.

Camp Administration Leader

JEWISH D.P. CAMP VINNHORST

My registration certificate at Vinnhorst DP Camp.

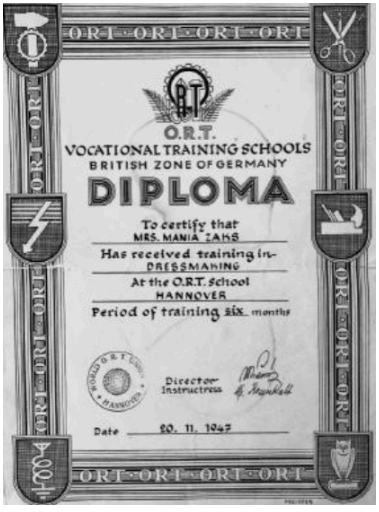
IDENTIFICATION CARD
for ex-political prisoner of
KZ Bergen Belsen
AUSWEIS
für ehemalige politische Gefangene aus

Unterschrift signature Marcia Sachs

III
Current number 563 Internee number
Laufend. Nummer Häftlingsnummer
name Mania S a c h s
Name
born 21.4.1925 at Lodz
geb. zu
nationality poln.
Nationalität
adress Am Flügeldamm 32
Adresse
was kept in captivity from 1944 to 1945
in Nazi-German Concentrationscamp and was
liberated from the KZ. Bergen-Belsen
wurde vom 1944 bis 1945 in national-
sozialistischen Konzentrationslagern gehalten
und vom KZ. Bergen Belsen in Freiheit gesetzt.

Hauptausschuß ehemaliger politischer Häftlinge
Land-Niedersachsen, Hannover.

Marcia's identification card probably issued at Vinnhorst. It states that she was a prisoner at Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp.



O.R.T.
VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOLS
BRITISH ZONE OF GERMANY
DIPLOMA
To certify that
MRS. MANIA ZAHS
Has received training in
DRESSMAKING
At the O.R.T. school
HANNOVER
Period of training six months
Director-Instructress
Date 30. 11. 1947

Marcia's certificate of learning dressmaking at Vinnhorst DP Camp.

Our wedding invitation.

Our wedding at Vinnhorst DP Camp in Hannover, Germany. April 14, 1946.
Marcia wore a black dress that was handed from one bride to another.

With Marcia and Helen at Vinnhorst DP Camp.

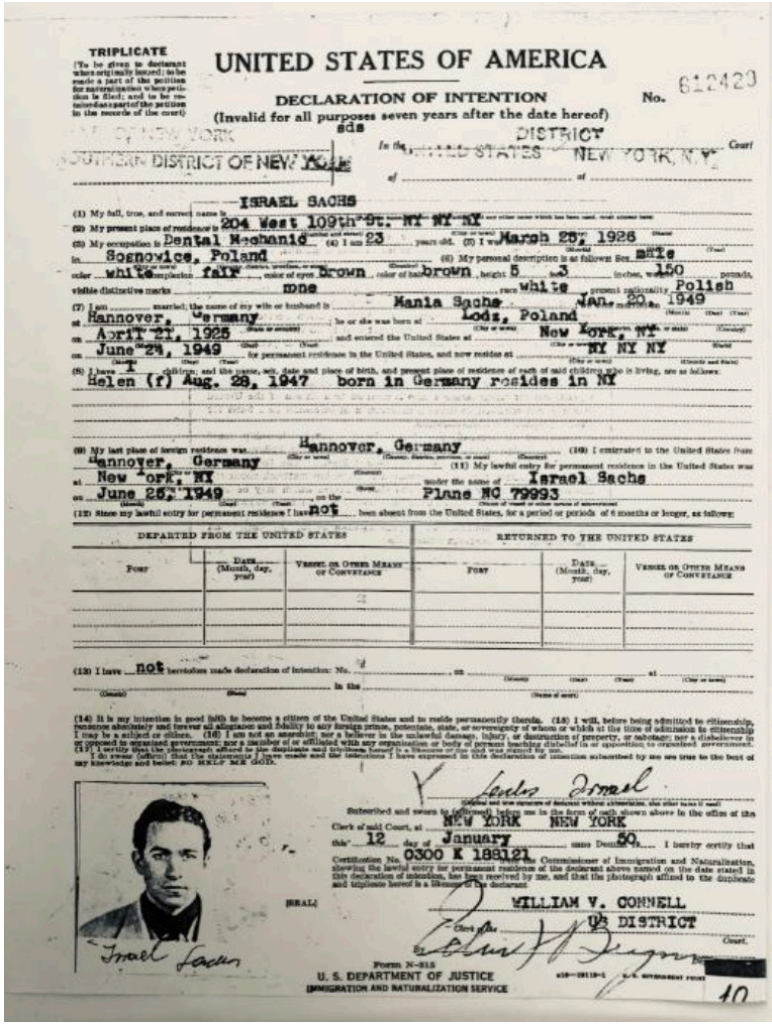
Sister Edith, who helped care for the children who were born in Vinnhorst DP Camp. Helen is standing in the back wearing a bow in her hair.

Festive dinners at Vinnhorst DP Camp. Marcia and I are the couple on the left.

Marcia and I are the couple at the rear left side of the table.

Demonstrating in Vinnhorst Displaced Persons' Camp in support of Israel becoming a state. I am carrying the pole with the banner.

Marcia at Vinnhorst.



TRIPLICATE

(To be given to declarant when originally issued; to be made a part of the petition for naturalization when petition is filed; and to be retained as part of the petition in the records of the court)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

(Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof)

No. 612423

sds

ISRAEL SACHS

(1) My full, true, and correct name is

(2) My present place of residence is 204 West 109th St. NY NY NY

(3) My occupation is Dental Mechanic (4) I am 23 years old. (5) I was born on March 25, 1926 in Sosnovice, Poland (6) My personal description is as follows: Sex male, color white, complexion fair, color of eyes brown, color of hair brown, height 5 ft 3 inches, weight 150 pounds, visible distinctive marks none, race white, present nationality Polish

(7) I am married; the name of my wife or husband is Mania Sachs, she was born on Jan. 20, 1949 at Hannover, Germany, and entered the United States at Lods, Poland on April 21, 1925 and now resides at New York, NY

I have 1 children; and the name, sex, date and place of birth, and present place of residence of each of said children who is living, are as follows:

Helen (f) Aug. 28, 1947 born in Germany resides in NY

(9) My last place of foreign residence was Hannover, Germany (10) I emigrated to the United States from Hannover, Germany (11) My lawful entry for permanent residence in the United States was at New York, NY under the name of Israel Sachs on June 26, 1949 on the Plane NC 79993

(12) Since my lawful entry for permanent residence I have not been absent from the United States, for a period or periods of 6 months or longer, as follows:

DEPARTED FROM THE UNITED STATES			RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES		
Port	Date (Month, day, year)	Vessel or Other Means of Conveyance	Port	Date (Month, day, year)	Vessel or Other Means of Conveyance

(13) I have not heretofore made declaration of intention: No. , at , in the

(14) It is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States and to reside permanently therein. (15) I will, before being admitted to citizenship, renounce absolutely and forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which at the time of admission to citizenship I may be a subject or citizen. (16) I am not an anarchist; nor a believer in the unlawful damage, injury, or destruction of property, or sabotage; nor a disbeliever in or opposed to organized government; nor a member of or affiliated with any organization or body of persons teaching disbelief in or opposition to organized government. (17) I certify that the photograph affixed to the duplicate and triplicate hereof is a likeness of me and was signed by me.

I do swear (affirm) that the statements I have made and the statements I have expressed in this declaration of intention subscribed by me are true to the best of my knowledge and belief: SO HELP ME GOD.

Israel Sachs

Subscribed and sworn to (affirmed) before me in the form of oath shown above in the office of the Clerk of said Court, at NEW YORK NEW YORK this 12 day of January 1950. I hereby certify that Certificate No. 0300 K 188121, Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, showing the lawful entry for permanent residence of the declarant above named on the date stated in this declaration of intention, has been received by me, and that the photograph affixed to the duplicate and triplicate hereof is a likeness of the declarant.

WILLIAM V. CONNELL

Clerk of the US DISTRICT Court.

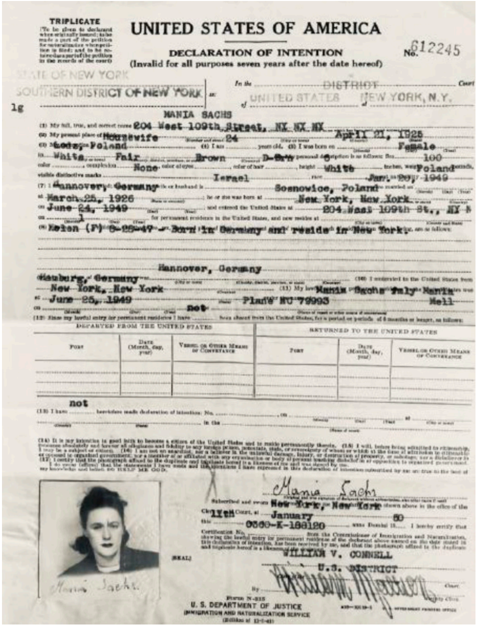
Form N-315

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

10

My declaration of intention to become a citizen of the United States.


TRIPLICATE

(To be given to declarant when originally issued; to be made a part of the petition for naturalization when petition is filed; and to be retained as a part of the petition in the records of the court)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

(Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof)

No. 612245

STATE OF NEW YORK
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK ss: In the DISTRICT Court of UNITED STATES at NEW YORK, N.Y.

1g

MANIA SACHS

(1) My full, true, and correct name ... 204 West 109th Street, NY NY NY

(2) My present place of residence ... Housewife 24 April 21, 1925

(3) ... Lodz, Poland (4) I am ... years old. (5) I was born on ... Female

(6) White, Fair, Brown, D-Brn, personal description is as follows: Sex ... 5 ... 100

color ..., complexion ..., color of eyes ..., color of hair ..., height ..., weight ... pounds, visible distinctive marks None ... White ... Poland

Israel ... Jan. 20, 1949

(7) I ... Hannover, Germany ... wife or husband is ... Sosnowice, Poland ... married on

March 25, 1926 ... he or she was born at ... New York, New York

June 24, 1949 ... and entered the United States at ... 204 West 109th St., NY N

on ... 1 ... for permanent residence in the United States, and now resides at

(8) Helen (F) 6-28-47 – Born in Germany and reside in New York.

Hannover, Germany

Hamburg, Germany ... (10) I emigrated to the United States from

New York, New York ... (11) My lawful entry ... Mania Sachs Maly Marie

June 25, 1949 ... Plane NC 79993 ... Mell

not

(12) Since my lawful entry for permanent residence I have ... been absent from the United States, for a period or periods of 6 months or longer, as follows:

DEPARTED FROM THE UNITED STATES			RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES		
Port	Date (Month, day, year)	Vessel or Other Means of Conveyance	Port	Date (Month, day, year)	Vessel or Other Means of Conveyance

not

(13) I have ... heretofore made declaration of intention: No. ... on ... at ... in the ...

(14) It is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States and to reside permanently therein. ... SO HELP ME GOD.

Mania Sachs

Subscribed and sworn ... New York, New York ... 11th ... January ... 50

0500-K-188120

WILLIAM V. CONNELL

U.S. DISTRICT

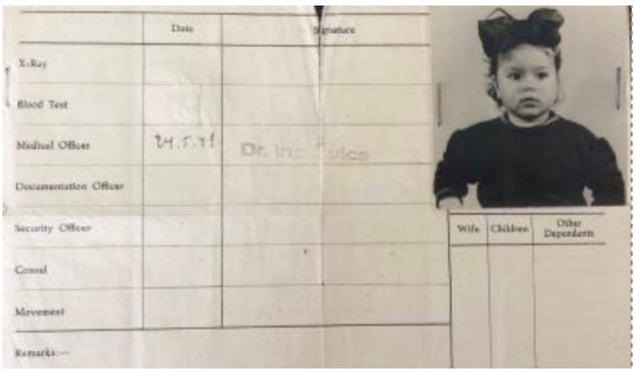
(SEAL)

Form N-315

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

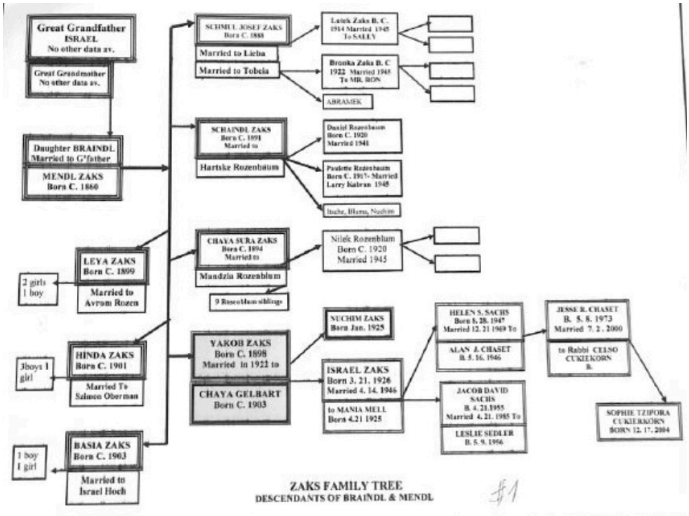
Marcia's declaration of intention to become a citizen on the United States


	Date	Signature
X-Ray		
Blood Test		
Medical Officer	24.5.49	Dr. Ins Zulco
Documentation Officer		
Security Officer		
Consul		
Movement		

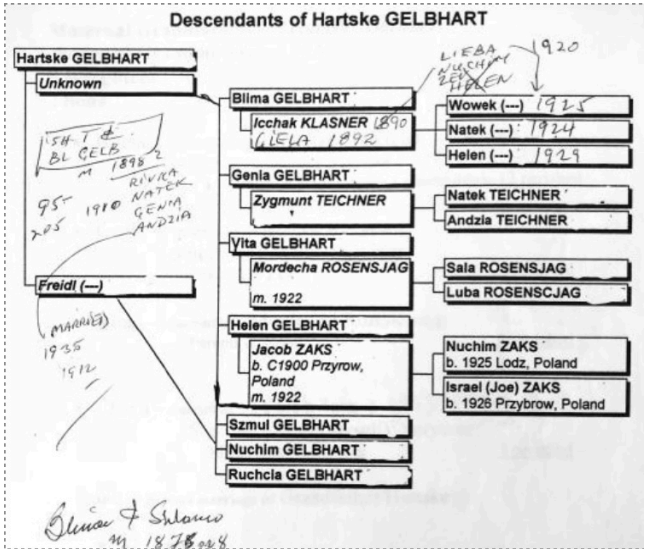
Remarks:—

Wife	Children	Other Dependants

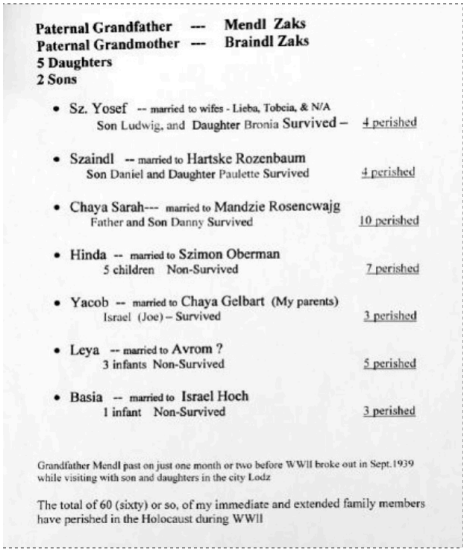
Proof our daughter, Helen, was medically cleared to travel to the United States, May 1949.



My paternal family tree.



My maternal family tree.



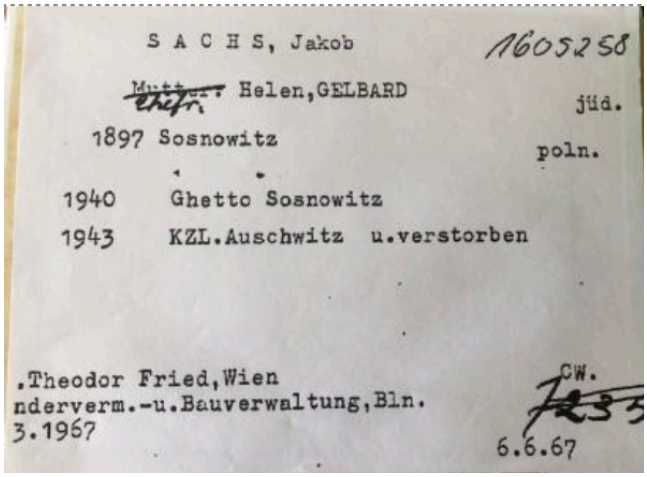
Paternal Grandfather --- Mendl Zaks
Paternal Grandmother --- Braindl Zaks
5 Daughters
2 Sons

- Sz. Yosef -- married to wifes - Lieba, Tobcia, & N/A
  Son Ludwig, and Daughter Bronia Survived – 4 perished
- Szaindl -- married to Hartske Rozenbaum
  Son Daniel and Daughter Paulette Survived 4 perished
- Chaya Sarah--- married to Mandzie Rosencwajg
  Father and Son Danny Survived 10 perished
- Hinda -- married to Szimon Oberman
  5 children Non-Survived 7 perished
- Yacob -- married to Chaya Gelbart (My parents)
  Israel (Joe) – Survived 3 perished
- Leya -- married to Avrom ?
  3 infants Non-Survived 5 perished
- Basia -- married to Israel Hoch
  1 infant Non-Survived 3 perished

Grandfather Mendl past on just one month or two before WWII broke out in Sept.1939 while visiting with son and daughters in the city Lodz

The total of 60 (sixty) or so, of my immediate and extended family members have perished in the Holocaust during WWII

Approximately 60 members of my family perished in the Holocaust.



S A C H S, Jakob 1605258

~~Mutt~~ ~~chter~~ Helen, GELBARD jüd.

1897 Sosnowitz poln.

1940 Ghetto Sosnowitz

1943 KZL. Auschwitz u. verstorben

.Theodor Fried, Wien
nderverm.-u.Bauverwaltung, Bln.
3.1967

CW.
~~F233~~
6.6.67

Record of my mother surviving the Sosnowitz Ghetto and dying at Auschwitz.

LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

As told by Helen Sachs Chaset

When my father, mother, and I arrived in New York June 28, 1949, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS, put us up in an apartment hotel in Manhattan. They arranged jobs for my parents and for a retired couple to babysit for me. Both my mother and my father got jobs in the garment industry.

My father had studied dental technical work in Germany and tried to do that in New York as well; but when he learned he could make more money in the garment industry than he could as a dental technician, he started studying fashion design at night school. He worked as a fashion designer for Sprayegan Company until he started his own company, Helen Matthew, with his partner, Marvin Zinn. My father would study pictures in fashion magazines then design high-end coats, suits, and dress ensembles. They sold to Bonwtt Teller and other fancy department stores. As I watched his rough hands smooth the delicate fabrics on a model, and do it just so, I would think of those same hands dragging cement and digging trenches for the Nazis. My father made all my mother's clothes; she was always beautifully dressed and my father was always so dapper.

In New York my father had a gold necklace made with the numbers 24446, his prisoner number. Because he did not

have a tattoo he wanted a visible sign that he was a Holocaust survivor. He wanted people to notice the necklace and ask him about it. He wanted to educate people.

My father was very good at languages. He had begun learning English in the DP camps. He already spoke Yiddish, German, Polish, and little bit of Russian. Later in life he became fluent in Spanish. When he was doing work in Honduras at garment factories run by Koreans, he learned a bit of Korean. My father always spoke to me in English; my mother spoke to me in Yiddish. English was always difficult for her.

My brother, Jacob David, called Jake, was born in New York on April 21,1955. Jake and I never had grandparents. Other than my father's cousin, Paulette, and my mother's half-brother, Itzak, we had no family. Friends from the DP camp became our family.

In 1957 we moved to Pompton Lakes, New Jersey. As my mother got better at English my parents became very social. Our home was the center of entertaining for the American as well as the survivor community. When we had guests my father did all the cooking (he learned from an Italian chef in New York where he often ate lunch), but my mother was the one who brought everyone together. Everybody loved her — she was the attraction. She was funny and they loved her accent.

My mother always had a very strong sense of self-preservation and a strong survival instinct. She took great care of her health and her appearance — eating well, exercising, and using cosmetics. She never let anyone take advantage of her and was always cautious in her dealings with people.

My mother steered my brother and me to the friends with the characteristics she wanted us to have. She let us know who she approved of and who she didn't. We were expected to always be the best we could be. I went to Clark University where I met my future husband, Alan Chaset. When Alan first visited our family, my mother noticed his open suitcase and said, "You know, he keeps a neat suitcase." She approved of neatness; Alan had her blessing. Alan went on to law school at Georgetown University and I went on to earn my masters and doctorate degrees in education from George Washington University. We have a daughter, Jesse. She has her undergraduate degree from Brown University and her Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Southern Mississippi. Jesse and her husband, Celso Cukierkorn, have a daughter, Sophie, my parents' only great-grandchild.

My brother is a great artist — very talented in photography, drawing, and woodworking — talents he inherited from our father. Jake went to Florida State University, had a career as a firefighter and paramedic, and is now a city commissioner in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, where he lives with his wife, Leslie. My father was very proud of him.

Like many Holocaust survivors, my parents always kept an abundance of food in the house. Food had to be really spoiled for my mother to throw it away. I remember my brother and I fighting at the table over the last of something and my father telling us to share it. When I said there was too little to share my father said, "There is never too little to share." A lesson he learned in the camps.

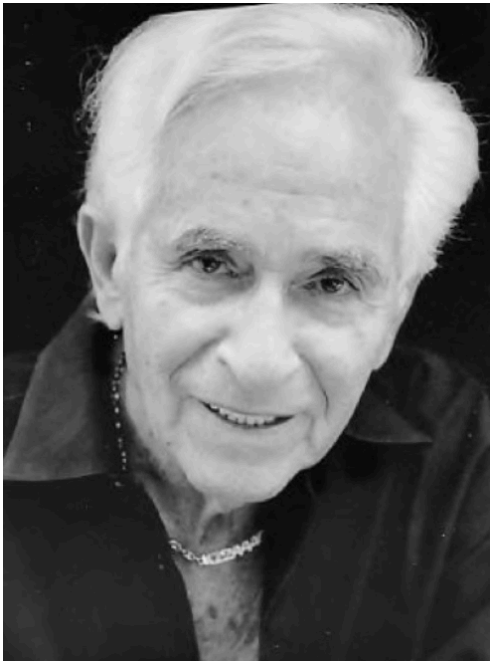
My parents were not religious. They did not keep a kosher home, and my mother did not light Shabbas candles. They went to synagogue only on the High Holidays, or for a Bar Mitzvah, or wedding. Although my parents did not know when their parents and siblings died, they always lit yahrzeit candles, on a date they chose.

In 1970 my parents moved to Florida because my mother was having kidney and stomach problems and her doctors thought she would do better in a warm climate. My father saw there was a garment industry there and felt he could start a business. He did build two businesses. My mother worked for a while as a saleslady in a dress store, then as part of the security force at Neiman Marcus.

In the 1980's I went to see Bergen Belsen. There was really nothing left of the camp except a small museum. My friend and I got to the museum just before it was closing. I cried as I begged the caretaker to please let me in for just a minute, telling him my mother had been a prisoner there, but he refused. He watched me cry and kept repeating, "No, the museum closes at five o'clock." At that moment I

understood something about the German mentality. Following orders. I turned and looked at the beautiful old cypress trees and thought, "These are the trees my mother saw," and I felt I was in the place where she once stood.

In 1993 my father visited his granddaughter, Jesse, at Brown University. When she asked him to speak to her class on the art and literature of the Holocaust, he declined. He left, and while driving through the beautiful fall leaves, he began to cry because he realized he had missed an opportunity to tell his story to the next generation. He decided right then to devote the rest of his life to Holocaust education and to caring for Holocaust survivors. My mother often spoke to people individually, but only once did she speak publicly about her experience in the Holocaust.



Wearing the necklace I had made with my concentration camp prisoner number, 24446. With no tattoo, I wanted a visible sign that I was a Holocaust survivor.

At one of the hundreds of talks I gave about the Holocaust.

On the March of the Living I am placing memorial plaques with the names of my family at the entrance to Auschwitz/Birkenau where they were murdered.

My family. Standing from the left: Celso Cukierkorn, Jesse Cukierkorn, Helen Chaset, Jake Sachs, me, Alan Chaset, Leslie Sachs. My great-granddaughter, Sophie Cukierkorn, is standing next to Marcia who is seated.

At my great-granddaughter Sophie's Bat Mitzvah. From the left: My aide Tameka Foster, Jake Sachs, Leslie Sachs, Alan Chaset, Helen Sachs Chaset, me, Sophie Cukeirkorn, Jesse Cukierkorn, Celso Cukierkorn, Celso's mother Brenda Cukierkorn, Sophie's cousin Dahlia Cukierkorn.

With my great-granddaughter, Sophie, at the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach.

My father became a full-time volunteer: first at the Holocaust Documentation Center at Florida International University translating documents for survivors and later as a docent at the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach. He spoke about the Holocaust at schools, churches, synagogues, civic organizations, on television shows, and in films. Wherever he was invited to speak, he went. My mother would speak with students individually, but I never heard her speak publicly to a group.

Along with fellow survivor David Mermelstein he worked tirelessly with the Claims Conference, an organization whose mission is to provide justice and reparations for Holocaust victims. My father did receive monetary reparations from the German government because he had worked in the labor and concentration camps. He was also eligible for a pension because he had worked in Poland for his uncle, the dentist, but could not get that pension because his uncle's son refused to testify on his behalf.

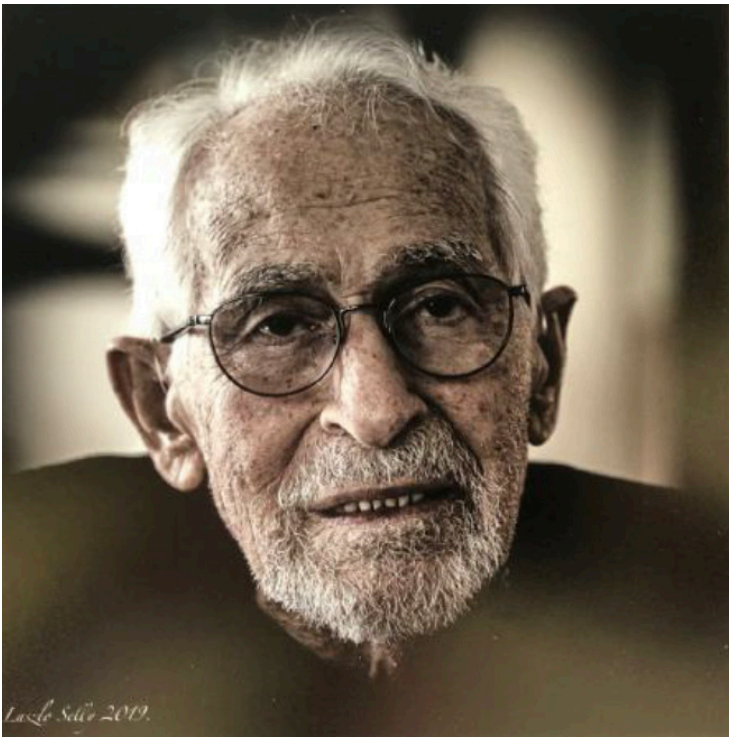
In 1997 my father, mother, and I went to Poland. It was my parents' first time back; my mother was very reluctant to go. We started in Lodz where we stood in the courtyard of the building where my mother lived as a child and from where she was taken by the Nazis. Next, we went to Auschwitz where we found paperwork confirming that her parents had died there.

On that trip my father realized he could lessen some of the pain of his past by revisiting it. This made it possible for him to go on the March of the Living, a Holocaust educational program that takes high school students from around the world to the see the concentration camps in Poland. The March of the Living became the most important thing in my father's life; it became his purpose in life. Although it always hurt, year after year he would walk through the concentration camps with the teens telling them, "This is what I lived, this is what I experienced." In Israel he climbed Masada with them and danced with them on Israel's Independence Day. This was his way to influence the younger generation, to teach them the lessons of the Holocaust and the importance of Israel as the Jewish homeland. Over and over he would say, "Stand up for what you believe is right. Never tolerate oppression. Don't be silent."

While at Auschwitz on the March of the Living, I found documentation listing my father's parents as dying at Auschwitz.

Until the very end my father never stopped learning. He had tremendous interest in artificial intelligence and how computers were changing the world. He never stopped reading history, philosophy, essays, and memoirs about the Holocaust. He read and watched the news daily. He was proud to live in what he thought was the greatest democracy in the world. He carried a worn, pocket-size constitution and Declaration of Independence in his wallet. He was a passionate man.

My father passed away July 2, 2020. His last words to his granddaughter, Jesse, and great-granddaughter, Sophie, were, "I worked hard all my life to provide for my family and I am proud that I was able to provide for them. I am very proud of my family."



Portrait of me taken by Holocaust survivor and professional photographer Laszlo Selly. Winter 2020.

ABOUT THE WRITER

I began writing for Holocaust survivors in the 1990's when survivors I met on The March of the Living asked me for help writing about their feelings on returning to Poland for the first time. Later, survivors I interviewed for Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation asked me for help writing down all the things they did not speak about in their interview. Soon, other survivors began approaching me seeking help writing a book about their experiences in the Holocaust. I met with the survivors, recorded our numerous conversations, organized and wrote the stories in the survivors' own words, printed the books, and then handed the books to the survivors as my gift to them. The books were written solely for the survivors and their families; they were never intended for publication. They are being published now because my friends, Carol and Jaime Suchlicki, recognizing their historical value as first-person testimony, introduced me to Dr. Haim Shaked to discuss finding a wider audience for the books.

Thank you to Dr. Haim Shaked director of the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies at the University of Miami for agreeing to publish the books and for your guidance and patience as we worked together on this project.

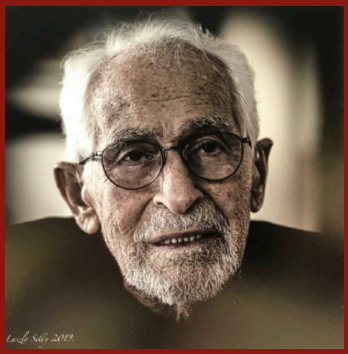
I am grateful to the March of the Living for introducing me to the world of Holocaust education and finding a role for me in it.

Thank you to the Shoah Foundation for choosing me to be an interviewer and for mentoring me through more than thirty interviews of Holocaust survivors. Your training led me to do the work I do today.

Thank you to the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach for encouraging the docents at the memorial to work with me to write their memoirs. I appreciate your confidence in me and your respect for my work.

Thank you to the my dear Holocaust survivors for sharing your most painful as well as your most joyful memories with me. Thank you for answering questions that no one should ever have to ask or answer. Thank you for trusting me to write your memoirs accurately and respectfully. It has been my honor and pleasure to work with you.

—Bobbi Kaufman



"The Gestapo pushed open the doors into the apartments and rounded up all the men and boys. As our door flew open and they grabbed me, my mother rushed to throw me an overcoat. There was no chance to say goodbye."

— Israel Joe Sachs

In 1942 sixteen-year-old Joe was arrested in the Sosnowiece Ghetto and spent the next two years digging trenches, laying sewer pipes, and hauling cement in Nazi labor camps. He would then endure three death marches, transport by cattle car, and imprisonment in Gross-Rosen and Goerlitz concentration camps before being liberated by the Americans.

In a DP camp after liberation, Joe married Maniusa Mell, a survivor of Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, and Bergen Belsen. In 1949 they emigrated to the United States where they raised their son and daughter.

There is a concept in Judaism of a positive commandment, something that is time dependent, something that must be done *now*. One must, accordingly, applaud this important effort by the Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program of the University of Miami to collect and publish Holocaust survivors' memoirs as there will soon—too soon—come a time when the last survivors will be no longer. Sadly, tragically, this testimony is not only urgent but timely because the world in which we live echoes their world and the quality of their witness. The very nature of their survival has much to teach today's generations. One must express gratitude for this project and in the sagacious words of Hillel say: "If not now, when?"

Dr. Michael Berenbaum
Professor of Jewish Studies
American Jewish University
Former President and CEO
Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation
(Now USC Shoah Foundation Institute)