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Interviews with: Robert Salzberg, Otto Orenstein, Carla

Chotzen, Walter Chotzen, Sarah Rozenberg, and Richard Kuba, Fred

Hirayama, and Hideo Nakamine, members of 522nd which liberated

Dachau.

Interviewer: Judy Weichtman

Hirayama

I thought it was a miracle how people survived.

Orenstein

I was living in Hawaii at the time of Pearl Harbor. After the

attack, my parents and I were taken by the FBI to an internment

camp, for four months. There were separate camps for men and

women. I was travelling on a German passport and they considered me

German.

Hirayama

After the liberation [of Dachau], the American Army ordered the

German Army to clean up the camp. Many American soldiers

stationed near Dachau did not know about it. We knew there were

concentration camps even before the war. But Dachau was created in

1933, originally for 5,000, then later expanded for 200,000.

Kuba

I don't recall reading in Stars and Stripes about the camp, but

heard stories about it. I first learned about Dachau when we

passed the outskirts of the camp and saw liberated prisoners

roaming the village. I didn't learn of the seriousness of the

camps until after the war.

Salzberg

I was living in Cologne in 1936, and I went to a nightclub and saw

a comedian who said: "Do you know why they build such high walls

around Dachau? They don't want anyone to get in." He tried to be

funny. The world knew about it. In those days, they only took

enemies of the government, like the Communists. The German people

knew about it.

Carla Chotzen

I thought I was a German child until I was ten years old, when I

was told otherwise. I was not from a religious family.

Kuba

When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, I wondered what's going to happen

to us. My mother thought Hawaii was a beautiful country, but after

the bombing she worried. School teachers, Buddhist ministers were

picked up by the FBI. My mother worried about the children. I

thought and felt I was an American. But when I applied to be a

guard, I was turned down because of my Japanese features.

Fortunately, later, I was accepted in the Army. We accomplished

what we went out for - to prove our loyalties as Americans.

Rozenberg

I am not an American, I am a naturalized Canadian. I came to Canada

from Holland in 1951. I was born in Warsaw and attended school. I

experienced the start of the war, on September 1, 1939, when Warsaw

was bombed by the Germans. They entered Warsaw after three weeks of

opposition from the Polish Army. Warsaw was practically demolished.

The Ghetto was built in the Fall of 1940. Enclosed. One day I hid

my father in a clothes closet so he would not be taken to work,

because I didn't know if I would see him again. I worked with my

mother in a cosmetics factory. My brother was also working. This is

how we got rations, because food was rationed. In 1942, my parents

and brother were taken to Treblinka. Somehow, the Germans weren't

interested in me; I was young and working. In 1943, we celebrated

the first night of Passover at my uncle's, my mother's brother,

place. He baked bread for the Ghetto. Some cousins from my father's

side were there. I used to come with a friend for weekends. We paid

the Jewish policemen in order to go with a group of working people

to where the bakery was. After the weekend, we returned with

another group with supplies from relatives. The second night of

Passover was not celebrated in 1943. We had to go into bunkers.

On April 23, 1943, I arrived at the Majdanek concentration camp,

near Lublin. The men and women were separated. I was there for

three months. A group of SS officers selected a number of women,

who were nude. We went to work in an ammunition factory, to produce

bullets for ourselves. In 1944, the Russian Army was moving west.

They moved us from Skarzysko-Kamienna to an ammunition factory in

Czestochowa.

I worked there until January 15, 1945, when the Russian Army

liberated us. We were to be deported to Germany on that day. We

heard noises from the far distance. The Russian Army surrounded the

place, so trains that were supposed to come in and take us, could

not. The Germans fled and the Russians came in the next morning.

That day, we were taken to roll call at the ammunition warehouse.

We stayed there all day until dark, without food or facilities; it

was freezing and we were barely clothed. The Germans were standing

in their white furs and we marched through back to the barracks.

Then the Germans fled. We didn't see anyone in the watch towers.

Hirayama

We saw those white furs. I noticed that each [German] farm family

had one foreign farm hand. Most of them were Polish.

Rozenberg

Me and my Lagerschwesters, there were 13 of us, feel we were

treated all right by the Germans, in a way, as well as the

Russians. We weren't raped or killed. We were beaten by the

Jewish policemen. We made sure our work was done, and always clean

and in order. The factory had hot water, there was no hot water in

the barracks. We had to steal a special soap used for the

machines, and washed our hair during the midnight shifts when the

SS officers were on their break, so we wouldn't get lice. When

Jewish policemen saw us with wet hair, this was when we were

beaten. One of them was tried and convicted in Israel and received

a well deserved punishment. They didn't shave our heads because of

the uprising in Warsaw. We were considered political prisoners.

They shaved the heads of the Greek Jewish women. There were others

in Majdanek too, prostitutes, Gypsies.

Hirayama

In France, women who collaborated had their heads shaved after the

war.

Rozenberg

The Germans used to close up the courtyard and look for men to

work, almost on a daily basis - to polish their boots, clean their

rooms, sweep the streets. I didn't want my father to go. When they

closed the courtyard, I hid my father in a closet and put a lot of

clothes in it. They closed the courtyard one Friday, late

afternoon. The Germans took whatever they wanted from people. But

when they came into our house, there were Shabbas candlelight. My

mother's sister was moved from outside the Ghetto and was living

with us; both sets of candles were lit. We couldn't put on the

electricity too often because the Germans were still bombing Poland

even in those years.

When the Germans came in, they asked what the candles were for. The

Volksdeutch, who was with them, told them we were observant Jews.

So they didn't touch anything in our home.

Hirayama

How did you cope with sickness in the Ghetto?

Rozenberg

You tried to stay away from hospitals, in the camps and the Ghetto,

because that was the first place the Germans looked for people to

deport to the gas chambers.

Hirayama

Were there gas chambers in the camp you were in?

Rozenberg

Yes. Majdanek was a destruction camp. Only a handful of people

survived - the women and men chosen to work in the ammunition

factory. There was no work in Majdanek itself, except in the fields

a little bit, and the kitchens. There was a roll call every day and

those chosen went to the gas chambers.

Hirayama

Did they strip everybody naked, take their clothes and shoes, when

they sent people to the gas chamber?

Rozenberg

They claimed everything from us when we first entered the camp, and

sent to the showers. Some went to showers with water, some went to

showers with gas. Gray and navy blue striped clothing was given to

us. You didn't know which way you were going, to the water showers

or gas showers. We didn't know we were going to the ammunition

factory either, when they chose us. There were three tables set up

in a row, and you went to a table and put your name and number

down. Would you believe, I don't remember my number; I'm not

tattooed. It was not necessary because Majdanek was a destruction

camp.

Hirayama

At Dachau, they had gas chambers, all kinds. Also, because there

were too many people, they put people in Haberstein (ph) castle and

then sent them to Poland.

Rozenberg

We didn't know the other shower was gas at first. But after a

while, we knew the building ahead of us was the crematorium "the

Office." I was not yet 20 years at the time, I didn't know these

things. When they took people out of the Ghetto under different

pretexts, we believed they were going to work. For example, they

had a tailoring factory; people making coats for the army. They

told people they would be taken to this place, in a little town

outside of Warsaw. Some got there, but others were taken to

Treblinka. They couldn't tell you you were going to Treblinka,

there probably would have been an uprising sooner.

We didn't have ammunition in the Ghetto. The Poles didn't supply

us. We had to use Molotov cocktails. I wasn't part of it, but I

lived through part of it. That was the breaking point.

I was in my uncle's bakery. Flour had to be brought into the Ghetto

by horse and buggy. We sent three people instead of one -

supposedly to handle the bags of flour. There was a Jewish

underground, inside and outside the Ghetto. We smuggled out people,

distinguished writers, people who contributed to the community

throughout Poland. At a certain spot, people were waiting for them

with false passports, non-Jewish names, and hidden in places in the

country. The driver came back through a different gate, so the

German that gave him the pass at one gate for three, didn't see him

come back. In April 1943, the air was heavy in the Ghetto. People

being smuggled out:, ammunition being smuggled in. The uprising was

planned very carefully.

Hirayama

How did people who escaped manage, because many people on the

outside were hostile.

Rozenberg

People didn't escape. They were taken out of the Ghetto and met by

sympathetic people, and then put into certain places; monasteries,

churches, in the country, in somebody's attic. When they discovered

our bunker, our hiding place, they marched us to the train station

and took us in cattle cars to Majdanek.

It was easy for the Germans to build destruction camps because the

Poles collaborated with them. They wanted to get rid of the Jews

even more than the Germans. It was the Poles that found the Jew

that was hidden, because the Germans couldn't distinguish.

Salzberg

My sister lived in Warsaw, but not in the Ghetto. She was a very

determined young woman. She lost her husband in Galicia right away,

he was taken by the SS and killed. She made up her mind to go to

Warsaw, but she lived on the outside. She worked for the Germans.

They called her a "Russka," no one knew she was Jewish. She said

there was 101 or 107 days straight when they bombed Warsaw, after

the Polish uprising [in 1944]. They bombed right over the roof

tops, because people were hiding in the sewers. She lost all her

possessions in the fires.

On Sunday mornings, if she didn't go to church, they would point

her out. One day, she didn't go and the Gestapo took her to the

priest. My sister was raised in the southern part of Poland by a

family, who also saved my brother's life. So she used to go to

church sometimes; she spoke perfect Polish. So when the priest

asked her questions, she answered them, and he told the Germans she

was Polish. She believed the priest knew she was Jewish, though.

Later, when there was the uprising, they rounded them up and put

them in cattle cars to be sent to Germany. But outside of Warsaw,

there was an air attack, and when the guards ran away, my sister

escaped back into Warsaw.

My brother was hiding with a young Polish man, who put him to work

in a soda factory. Finally they got wise to him; he ran into the

woods and joined the partisans, and marched all the way to Berlin.

He's in America now, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and he's a

millionaire. I brought him here in 1947. What you said before about

Pearl Harbor; as a Jew, I can feel for your people. You come from

the Japanese culture but born here. It's the same with us. When

something happens in Israel, I feel bad even though I'm in America.

Hirayama

You can't change yourself.

Rozenberg

We are here to tell the future generations about our experiences so

it will never happen to anybody. We could all live in peace and

harmony if it wasn't for prejudice and people who instigate

differences between you and I.

Salzberg

Would you like to hear how my sister's second husband was saved? He

was in Lemberg in southeast Poland. The population was Ukrainian

very hateful towards the Jews. They rounded up all the Jews by the

thousands, marched them outside the city and shot them. My brother-

in-law was one of them. The Germans gave the Ukrainians weapons;

they used the Ukrainians against the Poles. A German officer in a

command car pointed at a boy who used to clean his uniform and

called him over. My brother-in-law walked away too and escaped.

Weichtman

What do you want your children to know about the Holocaust so it

will not happen again?

Kuba

The best way to educate is to have a video in your home of a good

movie about it so you can see.

Rozenberg

Schools should have a subject included in the curriculum about the

Holocaust. It's being done in Edmonton Alberta.

Carla Chotzen

I feel we have a responsibility to quit making arms and find things

we have in common. Decrease nationalism and increase human

commonality.

.END.