**United States Holocaust Memorial MuseumPRIVATE**

**Interview with Samuel Rosenberg**

**August 30, 1987**

**RG-50.031\*0062PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Samuel Rosenberg, conducted on August 30, 1987 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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**SAMUEL ROSENBERGPRIVATE**

**August 30, 1987**

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Q: Where were you born, in what year?

A: I was born on September 2, 1922 in a town 100 miles east of Warsaw called Stasphov (ph), population 10,000.

Q: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: I had one brother and one sister.

Q: Were they older or younger?

A: My brother was born in 1927 approximately and my sister in 1925 approximately.

Q: What did your father do?

A: My father was a shoe merchant and my mother was a housewife.

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Q: What was your home life like? Was it religious?

A: I came from a religious family. My parents were very observant. About half the population of our town (5000 people) were Jewish and most that I knew were fairly observant.

Q: Did your father wear a beard?

A: He wore a short little beard with the traditional head covering, a kippur.

Q: Your grandparents, did they live in the proximity?

A: My grandparents lived in our town and as I understand it the family has lived there for several hundred years. I remember my grandparents very distinctly. My grandfather was a very orthodox man and my grandmother always wore a long skirt down to the ankles. They had a store in the town center where they sold shoes at retail to the farmers from the surrounding countryside who came to the marketplace.

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Q:What type of schools did you attend?

A: I went to public grade school for seven years from the ages of 7 to age 14. Classes lasted from 8a.m. until 1 p.m. When I finished public school I went to a religious oriented school where at first classes lasted until 6 p.m. As I matured to the age of 10 or 11, classes lasted until 9 p.m. We got a half hour recess at 6 p.m. Our house was walking distance to the school. The Hebrew school was a very modern mitzraki (ph.) school where the teachers came from out of town and had graduated from schools of Jewish learning. Classes were usually in Hebrew.

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Q: When you were in the public school you were with non-Jewish children? Did you have feelings of antisemitism?

A: I went to school with non-Jewish kids. Until fourth grade it was an all-male school. With the fifth-class it was coeducational. It started at 8 a.m. with a Catholic prayer where everyone had to stand, but the Jewish kids were exempt from saying the prayer. The teacher kept a cross and a crucifix at the front of her desk. Antisemitism was part of the school system. Teachers were engrained with the annoying of the Jewish children. School then was a six-day proposition. The Jewish children would not go to school on Saturday for religious reasons, but we had to make up the program on Sunday. Teachers and students made fun of the Jewish children because of their Jewishness.

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Q: What is the most cherished memory you have from your childhood?

A: The house of my grandparents always had a strain of Zionism. I remember marching from school on Lag BaOmer between the holidays of Passover and Shavout on an outing. I looked forward to this outing very much. My second cherished memory is that on Huf (ph.) Tammuz, that is twenty days into the Hebrew month of Tammuz, we marched to the synagogue for a memorial service in honor of Theodore Herzel, the father of political Zionism. This was back in 1926 or 1927.

Q: How did things begin to change in 1938 and 1939?

A: The government of Poland was considered in foreign countries to be a dictatorial government. I didn't realize this at the time, probably because I was too young. The real change began with the death of Pilsusky (ph.) who was favorable to the Jews and a socialist. Then came to power those who were antisemitic and who looked forward to a way of getting rid of the Jewish population. They propagandized not to buy from the Jewish stores but this was how the Jews earned their living.

01:00:10:51

Q: When did you first become aware of this?

A: When I came of age, like 11 or 12, I joined a Zionist movement. I heard threats that I would be expelled from school for being political at such a young age. But I was not afraid because I had an uncle on the Education Committee. Going back to the Nazis, the war started on Friday, September 1. We didn't really have radios in the town but there was one in the bookstore which we all huddled around. We heard that the war had begun and that the Germans had attacked towns on the Western border. On the third day they began to bombard certain places and sent spies to convince the people that the war was lost and to give up. On Tuesday, September 5 our town police shot into the air at German planes, which provoked them to drop several bombs on out town, destroying three buildings and those families. My grandfather went out to see what had happened and he just dropped dead. The bombardment continued and we had to leave the town for safety, but my grandmother would not leave the body because of Jewish law that says that you must stay with the body until burial. We tried to convince her but she wouldn't leave. We left for a while but came back to town even though the bombardment continued. We got a horse and buggy and brought the body first to the synagogue and then to the cemetery. The attendant was afraid to bury him, but agreed to watch him. Our tradition says that you should bury the dead on the same day or the following day but this took three or four days. By the eighth or ninth day of the war, the Germans arrived in our town. I was surprised that they talked to their horses in German. They all gathered in the marketplace. If they saw a Jewish man they would cut off his beard and injure him too.

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Q: What was your first encounter with the Nazis?

A: It was much later. They gave out laws of how the town should govern itself. They sent the mayor away to Auschwitz, probably because he was a member of the Underground. Because I was a part of the Zionist Youth League, we gathered in the woods to plan some sort of resistance. We said that if there was no way out, we should at least through bottles with some sort of poisonous water to blind them. Someone in the town told the German-oriented police that we were meeting there. After that no one met there anymore. Life was restricted in movement and food. Religious services kept in family circles at home. We held services morning and evening at an uncle's house for 11 months to recite Kaddish (ph.) prayers.

Q: Was your family still intact?

A:Everything was still intact, except that movement was very limited. My father's shoe business was conducted basically to people out of town. He was afraid to continue these transactions so I was sent to various cities to sell the shoes. In July, my feet were cold. He'll remember this event in 1940 forever. I traveled 40-60 miles, returned in same day. Shoe products were very limited and very expensive.

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Q: When was your family first separated?

A: They first established a ghetto in 1942; Jews couldn't leave ghetto. My brother and I had to ship shoes through the post office, sending them C.O.D. and picking up money at post office. We had to go through non-Jewish ghetto by chasing each other as if playing a game. This is how we got to the post office through 1941. They organized a Judenrat and demanded labor constantly to make Jews work and disgrace them. In 1941 they asked for 250,000 dollars or they would punish the city. It was very hard to make money. Once we got it, they asked for more. There were rumors for such time about a resettlement of the Jews in eastern Europe but it didn't materialize. The first pogrom I heard of was in a city on the other side of the Vistula called Miades (ph.), population 10,000. It was a prosperous town. In one day they slaughtered 1,800 Jews and brought them to the famous cemetery of Burlichra (ph.) This was first action against the Jews in Poland; this was in 1942. A few people escaped to our town; a family named Kuntz came to live with us. Our family had 5 people. They spread rumors of a resettlement; so our family escaped to the woods. When nothing materialized we came back. One day they came to camp, announcing people could go work at Skowshutzo (ph.), a munitions factory. Many went but I did not like the idea. A nephew of the Kuntz family was an assistant to the head engineer of the Umler company that was building a road to the Soviet Union. The sons of this family were living with German engineers near Medetz (ph.) My brother, my sister, I, and my two cousins gathered with 10 others on a Sunday night in October to escape to this camp. Arrangements were made to drive us across the Vistula on barges. We marched all night. It was a clear night when we crossed the river. On the other side, a man arranged for a barn with hot water for us. In the morning, we marched to the camp. This was west of our home town. The head of the Volksdeutsche, a Pole of German descent came out with several dogs and was very rude to us. After a day without food, we were allowed into the camp. We were all allowed to work except for my brother who they felt was too young. To be inside the camp during work hours was dangerous because the SS came there often. On November 11 he was accepted and allowed to work. We were building an Autoban through the woods to the Soviet Union.

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Q: So how were you treated in this camp?

A: Work started at 5 a.m. We dynamited the trees in the woods and made a base for the road. This lasted for quite a while. This was a labor camp. A few people got very sick; they didn't know it was typhus. The two sons of the family who stayed with me got very sick; the SS came for them the next day. They took them out into the woods and shot them.

Q: How long were you and your brother in that camp?

A: We were in the camp until 1943. In 1943 they liquidated this camp. The older workers disappeared through hunger etc. We were transferee to a factory that made airplane parts, located in the same area. There were barracks there. The treatment here was more harsh. It was under the jurisdiction of the SS. I was assigned to work in the factory where they assembled the back wing of the plane with an electric hammer. They were short of material. Often we were put to work for two continuous shifts. At night I had to stencil a machine. I fell asleep with my hand on the machine and it caught my hand. I ran back to the camp and was treated by a Jewish female physician named Bikerai (ph) who was from Cracow. She treated me, putting on a leather cover so it could not be seen that I had lost fingers. I went back to work. There were various means of punishment in the camp, to let one hang by his arms for half a day, to whip him on his bare behind, to deny him food for a couple days. I was very sick; but they called us to the gathering place. My brother had to support me. If I had been seen to be weak, I would arrive that same day at Berderoff (ph), the cemetery. There was a hospital. If you were there longer then a day or two, you were eliminated.

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Q: What kind of food were you given there?

A:We were given coffee (not real) in the morning, soup at noon, a piece of bread for dinner. On Sunday there was a piece of margarine too. One day they had a soup made of horsemeat. Although I was very hungry, I could not eat it. Sometimes we worked on Sunday; otherwise there was a day off.

Q: How long were you in this camp?

A: I was there until the end of 1943. My parents were in our town when there was the resettling. The day before the resettling, they ran into the woods and that’s where they lived. My mother got pneumonia; so they had to surrender to the ghetto. From there they were probably sent to Treblinka or something. They were in the woods from November until the middle of March. My sister was in a camp near us called Fischer (ph.) She worked on drying the marshes, but got sick. We tried to arrange to get her back to our home town. She was shot crossing the bridge on the border but not killed. From there I don't know what happened.

Q: So now you are in the camp?

A: My brother and I were together. They loaded us on trains, saying we were going to the salt mines, but in reality we were sent to Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, there was an order not to derail. We went back to Plasha (ph.) for two or three days. There was a massacre there; the SS were shooting people angrily and randomly. Many in my transport lost their lives. We were sent back to the Vischtka (ph.), but we stayed there only for a day. There we all got new striped uniforms and caps. We had been tattooed earlier with a KL (Konstat Lager ph) They had us in rows of four. If one misses, all four shot. We were all marched to train. Everything was closed in, 70-80 to a train. It was July and the heat was unbearable. We were brought Germany; it took 7-10 days. There was a bucket of water for all to share per day and a loaf of bread. Finally we arrived at Floss (ph), a small town in Bavaria near the Czech border. From there we were taken to Flossenberg (ph.) To give you some background on Flossenberg, it was a notorious concentration camp. Hundreds of thousands of people had lost their lives there. There were many political inmates. As you entered the camp was the phrase, Work will redeem you. We were counted as if each of us was a diamond. The place looked like a resort; it was clean and beautiful. We sat down, but the heat was unbearable, maybe 110 degrees. An SS doctor had examined us and marked a red number on our foreheads. I get a number two. The nights got very cold. In the morning our heads were shaved, with a mark on our forehead. My brother and I were placed in different barracks. Our numbers were 16,971 and 16,972. We were assigned to work at the messerschmidt; the headquarters was in Plessenberg (ph.) They had a branch in Viden (ph.) Many inmates worked in the stone quarries. No one survived longer than four weeks. I worked alternating day and night shifts. I did the same work as I did before. Food was very scarce. The SS treated the Jews rudely, even though there were only 300-400 Jews out of 25,000. Jews were marked by numbers and a yellow stripe, green for criminals, and red for political opponents. They were talking about Leo Schussling (ph), an inmate.

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Q: Did you believe it would end, being in there?

A: Faith made me believe it would end. They drove us naked from the barracks for 300 feet. Many died from the cold. I want to get to the important things since we have little time left. Two prisoners escaped. They gathered whole camp on Christmas Day they hung them in the center of camp for 24 hours. There was strict conformity to discipline. Sometimes we had to sing. But there was much crying inside.

01:00:56:12

Q: Did you have any contact with the political prisoners, the criminals, or the Germans from the town?

A: I did not see a female face the whole time. The German inmates were very cool to the Jews. So were the Russian POWs; they were very anti-Semitic. Most of them were Ukrainians. Right before (15 days) the liberation. The SS distributed ammunition to the German inmates. I don't know their orders. Two weeks before there was no more food, except for kernels of wheat. The night of April 15, the loudspeaker said that all the Jews should come out. We were marched down to Floss, the train station. They divided us by age between open and closed wagons. Those under 16 were in the open wagons. My brother was ion this group. On the road about 5 miles, we encountered a bombardment. Many people were killed. We travelled for days. On the morning of the 18th there was a bombardment. I had convinced my brother to be with me in the closed wagon, but he was hit in the head and died instantly. This was near Schlossenfelt (ph.). The 140 who had died were buried in the Catholic cemetery there in a separate place. We started to march. It was a very rainy season. We stayed overnight in barns of the local farmers. We marched all day on Saturday, until we reached Neuberg von Felt (ph.). Two girls from the town brought us cooked potatoes. We had not eaten for three days. If you went to the front of the line, the SS asked them to kneel down and they shot them. On Saturday night they took us to another farmer. Sunday we were marching.

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