

## Charles Zilberberg

I was born in the late 1930s in Kozienice, Poland. I had a nice life as a very small toddler, and would walk to my grandparents' house. My father worked in the forest and my mother took care of me.

Then the Nazis came and ruined everything. [When the Nazis took Poland in 1939, they wreaked havoc on multiple Jewish establishments in the area and destroyed many people's way of life. They instituted themselves as a dominant force, unstoppable. Commentary by grandson interviewer, Michael Nathenson.]

My parents and I were hiding in the forest. I was around 4 years old when we started hiding in the forest. I am not sure what length of time, how many months, we were hiding and living in the forest. Finally the Nazis came for us. Someone must have told the Nazis where we were hiding, and turned us in, and this is how we came to be captured.

My parents were sent to a work camp. I hid under my mother's dress during selections, and I hid for all the years I spent in the work camps, as a very young child.

Once I was packed into the luggage on the back of a truck. A loaf of bread was packed in the cargo hold, much higher up than where I was stuffed in. The bread must have been crumbling, and pieces of it were falling down into my eyes. But I couldn't cry in order for tears to wash the crumbs from my eyes. I couldn't make any noise, or I would give away my location, and the fact that I had been hidden in there. Instead I had to suffer silently with the pain of the crumbs falling into my eyes, while being packed in amongst the suitcases and other cargo.

The conditions in the camp were terrible. I was just a very young boy at the time. One day someone came to ladle soup into cups that we prisoners held out, waiting for our cup to be filled. I held out my cup for soup as it was being ladled. The soup from the ladle spilled onto my hand as it was being poured into the cup. Instantaneously right before my eyes my hand blistered up, being severely burned by the boiling hot soup. But, no matter what, I would not let go of the cup. I didn't dare

drop the precious cup of soup. The soup itself was not so special, but there was never any food, and we were starving. Conditions were horribly unbearable. I was less than seven years old at this time. I am not sure exactly how old I was.

I got out of the camps when the war ended and the camps were liberated. My parents and I went to Italy. I was sent to a Catholic hospital, which was attached to a church. I wasn't well nor healthy after all this suffering, and I was emaciated. My parents got their lives together while I was in the hospital for a few months.

One time when I was living there, all the kids lined up and walked forward. I went with them, not knowing what was going on. The nuns ran over to me when I got to the front, stopping me harshly from getting a wafer, and saying I couldn't get it because I was Jewish. I did not know that the kids were lining up to receive communion and that it was only for Catholics.

One day some of the other boys who lived at the convent were talking about the heroes of the Bible, like Samson and Moses, etc. I said to the boys that those Bible heroes were Jewish, just like me. The boys replied that those were good Jews, not like Jews today. So we got into a fistfight.

I came to America with my parents when I was about 10 or 11 years old. We came by a ship where I had my first drink of Coke. We arrived in New York, possibly at Ellis Island although I am not sure. I remember being sprayed with DDT when I was going through the immigration facility.

I grew up in the Bronx on the Grand Concourse. I went to PS# 70 in sixth grade, then Preston Junior High School, and then to DeWitt Clinton High School for boys.

I had a job hauling laundry for seventy five cents an hour to and from apartment buildings. I would also make money in tips. I would carry large baskets filled with heavy, wet laundry, all the way upstairs in a walk up apartment building, only to find that the people were not home. Then I had to bring it back down again, and return later.

I went to City College and majored in chemistry. I was going to be drafted anyway, so I joined the National Guard so that I could choose my branch of service in the military. I was trained as a Combat Engineer. I was in the National Guard for six years and achieved the rank of Specialist Five. I got married, and we lived together in Queens. As soon as our child was born, we moved to New Jersey, where I worked as chemist. When we moved to New Jersey we did not know it but we had chosen to live in a historically German town. We did not experience overt anti-semitism there. I got my MBA from Rutgers University, and today I have two grandsons.