



**5 JEWS AND THEIR  
INTERNMENT  
IN SACHSENHAUSEN**

Excerpts from the Centropa interviews

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 **centropa**

“The Russians came in, but we were like animals, we weren’t aware of anything, we were dazed, and later I found out that the Germans had been giving us bromide all that time, they put it in the tea and everything else. We didn’t even have our menstruation and were sedated, so there was nothing to doubt or think about.

And only when the bromide wore off we woke up and realized what had happened. But even then we had no idea what was happening because we remembered nothing.”

– Klara Markus



**Image:** Aerial photograph of Sachsenhausen, taken by the British Royal Airforce in May 1943. (*Attribution: public domain*)

**Cover image:** Imre Kinszki in Budapest, c. 1920s.

## **Introduction**

Centropa is a Jewish historical institute with offices in Vienna, Budapest, Hamburg, and Washington. In 2000 the first phase of our activities began with a ten-year-long oral history project that collected interviews with 1,200 elderly Jews still living in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Baltics, and the Balkans. Rather than focus solely on respondents' experiences during the Holocaust, Centropa asked respondents to share their memories of the entire 20th century – just as they lived it. Centropa digitized 24,800 family pictures and documents, including annotations from the interviewee. Please visit Centropa's website, [www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org), to find English translations of our interviews and annotated photographs. For academics wishing to access transcriptions in the original language, please contact our office in Vienna ([office@centropa.org](mailto:office@centropa.org)).

## The Concentration Camp System

Beginning in 1933, the Nazi party built numerous camps intended to detain so-called “enemies of the state.” In the early concentration camps built in Germany, most detainees were political prisoners (i.e., communists, socialists, and social democrats) or ‘asocials,’ a term Nazis used to refer to criminals, homosexuals, Roma, Sinti, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Nazis created different kinds of camps, including forced labor camps (where Nazis exploited forced labor of prisoners for economic gain), transit camps (temporary holding facilities for prisoners), prisoner-of-war camps (which were used exclusively for Allied prisoners of war), and killing centers (whose sole purpose was the systematic execution of large numbers of prisoners).

In many forced labor camps, prisoners were systematically malnourished, exposed to lethal working conditions, and subject to brutal violence. Camp authorities intended to overwork prisoners to death while extracting the maximum amount of labor out of them. Prisoners were sometimes leased out to private firms, with their wages paid directly to the SS. This served the dual purpose of meeting labor shortages while also economically benefiting the German Reich. In many camps, Nazis conducted medical experiments on prisoners. Many victims of medical experimentation did not survive or became permanently disabled. In 1934, the concentration camp system was reorganized under the direct authority of the SS and police. This meant that the concentration camp system was no longer subject to judicial or administrative review beyond the SS and police structure. The Nazis could imprison anyone indefinitely without charge and treat prisoners in any manner. After the outbreak of World War II, Heinrich Himmler forbade (except under extraordinary circumstances) the release of any and all prisoners for the duration of the war.

After the implementation of Hitler’s “Final Solution” in 1941, the Nazis began to build large killing centers in occupied Poland, the country with the largest Jewish population in occupied Europe. These camps were designed to murder large groups of people as quickly and effectively as possible. The earliest death camps used mobile gas vans, which utilized carbon monoxide gas from the van’s exhaust pipes in order to murder prisoners. Later death camps used gas chambers and pesticides like Zyklon B. Only a small number of those imprisoned in Nazi camps survived.

Conditions in concentration camps declined rapidly in the last months of the war, leading to mass death due to severe overcrowding, disease, exposure, and starvation. As Allied forces began to surround Germany at the end of the war, Nazis sent thousands of concentration camp prisoners on forced ‘death marches’ by foot and ‘evacuation transports’ by vehicle toward camps further away from the front lines. The true number of victims of the concentration camp system is difficult to estimate, but historians place the number between 1,885,889 and 2,045,215. By the end of the Second World War on 7 May 1945, the Nazis had murdered more than six million European Jews.

**Sources:**

*Nazi Camps*. Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-camps>

*Concentration Camp System: In Depth*. Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/concentration-camp-system-in-depth?series=10>



**Image:** Entrance to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, 1944. (Attribution: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-78612-0002 / Unknown author / CC-BY-SA 3.0)



**Image:** Propaganda photograph of roll-call on the *Appelplatz* of Sachsenhausen, February 1941. The photo was taken from Watchtower A of the camp – note the machine gun on the right of the image. (Attribution: Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen)

## Sachsenhausen: The Camp

Sachsenhausen concentration camp was built in mid-1936 with the intention that it would become the “ideal” concentration camp which would architecturally express the worldview and total power of the SS. Sachsenhausen was used to train new SS guards, and it enjoyed special status because of its close proximity to Berlin, the capital city of the Third Reich.

In the nine years the camp was active (1936-1945), more than two hundred thousand people were imprisoned there, including around twenty thousand women. These prisoners included political opponents, Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, criminals, and others classified as “antisocials”. Initially, the internees were chiefly German citizens, but this changed after the outbreak of World War II. By 1944, around 90% of prisoners arrived from outside Germany. Internees were forced to perform extremely hard manual labor in SS-owned workshops and factories in the main camp and subcamps of Sachsenhausen. Thousands of these prisoners died from exhaustion, starvation, disease, exposure, medical experiments, torture, or systematic executions. Sachsenhausen also became notorious for its treatment of prisoners-of-war. In 1941, about twelve thousand Soviet POWs were deported to Sachsenhausen, where most were shot by the SS on arrival.

On April 21st, 1945, with the Soviet Army fast approaching, more than thirty thousand prisoners were forced on death marches towards north-west Germany. Thousands did not survive. Soviet and Polish armies liberated Sachsenhausen on April 22nd, 1945. At the time of liberation, the camp held just three thousand ill internees and some doctors and nurses who had been left behind by the fleeing SS. Many of these prisoners died shortly after the liberation as a result of their time in the concentration camp.

### Sources:

1936-1945 Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen. <https://www.sachsenhausen-sbg.de/en/history/1936-1945-sachsenhausen-concentration-camp/>

Sachsenhausen. Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/sachsenhausen>



**Image:** Barrack 39 in Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp Memorial, 2014. (Attribution: Denis Apel)

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## ARTUR RADVANSKY

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Martina Marsalkova

Date of Interview: June 2005



*Artur Radvansky's wedding photo in Prague, 1946.*

[Read Artur Radvansky's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Artur Radvansky's family came mostly from the Polish Beskid Mountains. He grew up in Radvanice with two younger brothers. His father was a store owner and his mother was a seamstress. As a child, he learned German from an aunt who was from the Sudetenland. Artur describes the Radvanice of his childhood as heterogenous and harmonious. He had friends who were Czech, German, and Polish, and together they would often go skiing and dancing. After the German invasion of 1939, Artur tried to flee to Poland with his father. They were caught on the road and sent to Buchenwald. There he experienced truly horrific treatment, and his father died of starvation in his arms. In April 1942, he was sent to Ravensbrück, then later to Sachsenhausen in September 1942. There he worked in the infamous 'shoe-testing' workshop and a brick factory. He was also part of an unsuccessful prisoner uprising. Artur was transported to Auschwitz on October 15th, 1942, where he was tattooed with his prisoner number and assigned to work in the hospital and later the gynecology ward. While in Auschwitz he also met his future wife, Alzbeta. He was sent on a death march to Ebensee, a subcamp of Mauthausen, on March 17th, 1945, where he was liberated by the U.S. Army on May 6th, 1945. After regaining his strength, Artur returned to Prague only to discover his whole family had perished in the Holocaust. In Prague, he connected again with Alzbeta and they were married in 1946 in the Old-New Synagogue. Artur went on to study and work as a chemist. Together Artur and Alzbeta had two children, Jiri and Anna. Artur has been an active member of the Jewish community of Prague since the 1970s.*

“In August or September 1942, we again were put on a transport because everyone in the camp that wasn't absolutely necessary had to go to the East. But we knew that there were extermination camps in the East. Before we got to the East, they transported us to Sachsenhausen. On the way to Sachsenhausen, we stopped off at an airport for about thirty Jewish prisoners. Among them was some guy named Sohnenstein, with whom I made friends. We were in Sachsenhausen for only a short time. I worked there in the 'Schuhkommando.' Its job was testing shoes for a factory that was competing for orders from the SS and the army. Part of the road was asphalt, part concrete, partly made up of small stones, partly of large ones, and so on. We tested all day, rain or shine. During testing we



couldn't go to the toilet, eat, or drink. Many people who couldn't handle walking or even running on the road died there because they were shot.

In Sachsenhausen, I also met an engineer by the name of Skuta, a clerk from the gardening commando, whom I had met still before the war, in the Ludvik pit. He and I used to organize those escapes to Poland together. When he recognized me, he picked me out for the commando, where for three weeks I repaired broken gardening implements. During that time I was better off. I had access to food, ersatz coffee, saccharine, and bread. I was there for only a short time. Then I went into a brick factory. There we manufactured very hard bricks, so-called clinkers [cinder blocks]. It was horrible work in that we had to pull them out of the oven with our bare hands, and also many people died on the way across a canal and two rivers where the bricks had to be carried. They were joined by a narrow and unstable plank, and the SS shot or left to drown anyone that fell down. There were more than a few of them.

In Sachsenhausen, I was also a participant in the first prisoner uprising which wasn't bloodily suppressed. Before our departure for Auschwitz, which was scheduled for 6:30 PM, we first showered and then disinfected in the showers. Some old prisoners from the typing pool came to us there and said that, just like us, they had sent off a transport of Russian prisoners to the East and the only things that had been returned were their bloodied clothes. They then told us that we've got nothing to lose and that we should resist. Sohnenstein was the first that ran out the door. I followed him and jumped out the window. Of course, outside the '*Blockältester*' [person in charge of one barrack, or 'block'] caught us, and the SS began to beat us. The '*Lagerführer*' [camp commander] also arrived and asked Sohnenstein, who had been his servant in one of the preceding camps, whether we had lost our minds. To this Sohnenstein fired back that we didn't want to die like sheep. But the Lagerführer convinced him that we weren't headed for our deaths, but that we were needed in the East for work. At that time he also said the name 'Auschwitz' for the first time. We then got proper clothing, a third of a loaf of bread, and a piece of bloody cheese for the trip.”

## KLARA MARKUS

Maramarossziget, Romania

Interviewer: Eموke Major

Date of interview: October 2004



*Klara Markus (on the left) with her sisters and friends in Carei, 1939.*

[Read Klara Markus's biography here](#)

[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

*Klara Markus was born in Nagykaroly in 1914, the youngest of the three daughters of Jozsef and Rozika Kaufmann, who owned a grocery store. After Klara's father died in 1917 of heart disease and her new stepfather ruined the family fortune before leaving them, Klara and her mother and sisters would have been destitute without help from their family. Klara grew up speaking Hungarian and remembers being on very good terms with her non-Jewish neighbors and playmates. After graduation, Klara became a typist and later worked in an umbrella factory in Budapest. She lost that job when anti-Jewish laws were passed in Hungary. She was deported to Dachau from Budapest on October 15th, 1944. From Dachau, she was transferred to Ravensbrück, then Spandau-Berlin, then Oranienburg (a subcamp of Sachsenhausen), where she was liberated by the Russian Army. Klara arrived home in Nagykaroly on September 11th, 1945, only to learn that she was the only surviving member of her family. In 1946 she met Endre Markus, a doctor, and on March 15th, 1946, they were married after just one week. Klara and Endre had a son and a daughter together.*

“I was taken away from Budapest on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944. First they took me to Dachau. This was the sorting place. We didn't work there, we were only taken to labor camps from there: Ravensbrück, Spandau-Berlin [located in a suburb of Berlin], Oranienburg [a subcamp of Sachsenhausen].

I also remember that when our turn came to be gassed, they took us to the gas chamber but ran out of gas. A woman came in and said, ‘*Na das ist schön! Kein Gas mehr.*’ [German for ‘How nice! We ran out of gas.’] We worked in an ammunitions factory.

There was a very decent man, an old man, the master, who used to bring me some bread or something in secret. I don't think that it was bread, but then what was it? I know he brought me something secretly. There were decent people even among them. I was liberated from Sachsenhausen.

The Russians came in, but we were like animals. We weren't aware of anything, we were dazed, and later I found out that the Germans had been giving us bromide all that time. They

put it in the tea and everything else. We didn't even have our menstruation and were sedated, so there was nothing to doubt or think about.

And only when the bromide wore off we woke up and realized what had happened. But even then we had no idea what was happening because we remembered nothing.”

## JERZY PIKIELNY

Warsaw, Poland

Interviewer: Kinga Galuszka

Date of interview: February to June 2005



*Jerzy Pikielny in Lodz, 1937/38.*

[Read Jerzy Pikielny's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Jerzy was born in Łódź in 1926, the only child of a well-off, non-religious family. He remembers clearly the occupation of Łódź by the German Army in 1939, and his family's subsequent forced move to the Łódź ghetto. Jerzy's grandmother and grandfather died in the ghetto, and his family remained there until its liquidation in August 1944. From Łódź, Jerzy and his parents were deported to Auschwitz, where they were separated, and soon after Jerzy was 'bought' to work at the AL Friedland camp (a subcamp of Gross Rosen, a satellite camp of Sachsenhausen). He survived, although ill and injured, until the SS guards abandoned the camp in the face of the incoming Soviet Army on May 8th, 1945. Jerzy managed to locate his mother (his father had perished in the camps), and they both returned to Łódź Jerzy continued his studies before moving to Gdańsk to study electrical engineering. In Gdańsk he met his future wife, Nina. Their son was born in 1956, and today they have one grandson.*

“They soon started to 'buy,' as it used to be called at the time, metalworkers. They carried out a selection among those claiming to be metalworkers. The ones looking fit were picked out and sent to a different labor camp. You had to take off all your clothes.

I met a friend then, Bialer, who worked with me in the ghetto and was a member of the organization I spoke of. We started to hang out together and we were both 'bought' to go to the AL Friedland camp [a subcamp of Gross Rosen], where 500 people were transported. That was a place designed primarily as a labor camp. The conditions were rather harsh. Some of us went straight for factory training.

We worked in a plant owned by VDM [*Vereinigte Deutsche Metallwerke*], I think it was called Hermann Goering Werke, which manufactured plane propellers, and we also did some earthworks, or '*Stollenbau*' [Ger.]. We dug large recesses in the slopes. I still don't know what they were for. It was a very hard job – the mountains were rocky and we had no special tools. We had a German foreman, an old man, who was rather decent but had no influence whatsoever. We were guarded by SS men, Germans, but also Ukrainians and Latvians, who were often worse than the Germans.

When the Soviet offensive reached Silesia, the death marches began, which of course weren't called that at the time. All the camps were being moved further west. The people marched on foot and had to stay somewhere for the nights. Our camp was one such place, along with the nearby unused *Hitlerjugend* camp.

On one such occasion, when I was lying ill in the infirmary, some fellow inmates rushed in to tell me my father was among the newly arrived. I asked the doctor, a Slovak, to let my father see me. He came and stayed with me overnight. Unfortunately, the next morning he had to return to the group he'd come with from the camp in Kaltwasser [now Zimna Wódka]. In the middle of March 1945, he died in Flossenburg camp. He was probably killed.

A man called Abram Kajzer kept a diary during his stay at Kaltwasser camp and particularly during the march. He hid his notes in the toilets. After the war, he traveled the whole route again and collected them all. He wrote in Yiddish because he didn't speak Polish, but in 1947 he asked Adam Ostoja of the Wydawnictwo Łódzkie publishing house to help him with the translation. The book was translated and published under the title *Za drutami smierci* ['Behind the Wires of Death,' edited and prefaced by Adam Ostoja, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie 1962]. Kajzer wrote of being in Zimna Wódka with my father. He had fond memories of him.

Shortly after I met with my father, I had an accident at work. A milling cutter injured two fingers on my left hand. The wounds wouldn't heal throughout the war, mainly because of malnutrition. Consequently I was unable to work at all. It was sometime in March or April. I have some doubts regarding the exact date as we had no sense of time in the camp. We just knew if it was winter or spring.

Anyway, I spent the rest of the time in the infirmary. I came outside one day to chat with some friends. Suddenly someone came running to fetch me, as they were looking for me in the infirmary. I entered the room and saw all the patients standing naked before some Germans. One of them, uniformed, was collecting all the patients' charts. Behind him stood our '*Lagerältester*' [Ger.: a prisoner in charge of other prisoners in the camp], a Jew from Łódź called Herszkom. He gestured for me to drop my chart on the floor and cover it with my clothes. So I did and stood naked, too. As soon as the Germans made sure they got all the charts, they left. A couple of days later a truck came and took all the people they'd taken away the charts from. I stayed. I guess Herszkom saved my life.

On May 8th, 1945 at noon, the SS guards ordered a roll-call. The weather was beautiful. The commandant of the Friedland camp, a captain, I think, said they were leaving, but not for long, and so they were leaving us there. They would know how we'd behaved as they returned. If we misbehaved, they'd punish us. A member of the German citizens' committee which had assembled in Friedland spoke next. He spoke in a different tone. He asked us not to leave the camp so that we'd all be handed over to the Soviet authorities together. We were asked if we held any grudges against the leaving SS crew.

On the morning of May 9th, it turned out that the members of the committee had fled. The camp was situated next to a road leading to the town. We concluded we had to hide as well

because otherwise the retreating German troops could kill us. We ran uphill into the woods. There were uniformed Germans there, very close to us, firing machine guns at the advancing Soviet troops. Later the German units moved away and the Soviets marched in.”

## FERENC DEUTSCH

Budapest, Hungary

Interviewer: Dora Sardi, Eszter Andor

Date of interview: July 2001



*Ferenc Deutsch after coming home from forced labour. Budapest, 1945.*

[Read Ferenc Deutsch's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Ferenc (Efrahim) Deutsch was born in Vaja, Hungary, in 1917, as one of eight children. His father worked as an accountant on a farm and his mother was a housewife. Ferenc remembers their family as being rather poor, and he started working after school at the age of only six years old. His mother was very religious and raised her children to be observant Jews. In 1940, Ferenc joined the army as a soldier but was soon taken instead for forced labor. He became a skilled war-factory worker and was considered too indispensable to be deported initially. In 1941 he met Irenke Klein, who became his wife in that same year. She was pregnant when she and her mother were deported to Auschwitz and murdered. Ferenc was deported on the last transport to Sachsenhausen in October 1944. There he started working as an engineer in an airplane factory. In February 1945, all surviving inmates of Sachsenhausen were forced to*

*march to Theresienstadt. Ferenc was liberated from Theresienstadt on May 8th, 1945 by the Soviet Army. Upon returning to Rakospalota in July 1945, Ferenc was reunited with his sister. Most of their siblings and other family members were murdered in Auschwitz. Ferenc married a second time to Sarolta Holstein, a technical designer who had been imprisoned in Auschwitz. She had been a victim of medical experimentation in the camp and as a result could not have children. Sarolta died in 1981, and Ferenc married a third time, to an American Jewish woman, who died in 1990. He remarried for the fourth time to Edit Czitrom in Budapest, and they divide their lives between Hungary and the U.S. Today, Ferenc and his younger and older brother all live in Delray Beach in the United States.*

“I was taken to Sachsenhausen with the last transport in October 1944. In Sachsenhausen, there was an international ‘Vorzeigelager’ [demonstration camp] under the guidance of the Red Cross. There we were together with POWs. They were not taken for work as we were. We were together in the barracks and they got a monthly parcel from the International Red Cross.

They shared the contents of the parcels among the ten people in the barracks. Every morning at five we were taken in closed train cars from Sachsenhausen to Oranienburg, to an airplane factory which belonged to a company called Henkel. I had to perforate plates, on what was called a Vollmaschine [full machine], but I had no clue about it.

In February 1945, when the Allied Forces were getting closer, we received an order that the *Lager* at Sachsenhausen had to be emptied. We walked until Theresienstadt. We got to Theresienstadt at night on the first of May. Everybody was disinfected, and we were given other clothes, which were fresh and clean.

For six days we were there doing nothing. I saw that we were in an area where families were together. They were all Czechs. They had flats where there were small children, and parents and grandparents, too. I was amazed. More than once the Germans were shooting as they left, and many died there in that lager.

I was liberated on May 8th, 1945. They wanted to take me from Theresienstadt to Sweden. All day long the loudspeaker said in all languages: 'Don't go back to those countries which expelled you.' Very many went away, but I wanted to go home because I did not know at the time what had happened to my wife, and I wanted to help the family."



**DOCUMENT: Ferenc Deutsch's deportation certificate**

**Photograph taken in Budapest, 1945.**

[Read Ferenc Deutsch's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)



“This is my deportation certificate.

I was taken to Sachsenhausen with the last transport in October 1944. In Sachsenhausen, there was an international ‘Vorzeigelager’ [demonstration camp] under the guidance of the Red Cross. There we were together with POWs.”

**PHOTOGRAPH: Ferenc Deutsch after returning home from forced labor**

**Photograph taken in Budapest, 1945.**

[Read Ferenc Deutsch's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)



“This is me shortly after coming home from deportation.

I was liberated on May 8th, 1945. They wanted to take me from Theresienstadt to Sweden. All day long the loudspeaker said in all languages:

‘Don't go back to those countries which expelled you.’ Many went away, but I wanted to go home because I did not know at the time what had happened to my wife, and I wanted to help the family.

The International Red Cross had an office there where we were given papers, as we had no documents at all. The papers were filled in according to one's declaration.

Everybody stated their name, age, and the trade they wanted. I declared at least three trades. We were also given 800 Czech crowns. I stayed in Prague for some days on those 800 crowns to fortify myself a bit, then I left for Hungary.

I got to Rakospalota in July 1945. I went to the house we had lived in, but I did not find anybody there.

Then I went to Bethlen Square, where I got a certificate stating that I'd been disinfected, and then I could get food and clothes.”

**PHOTOGRAPH: Photo of Ferenc Deutsch used in his deportation ID**

**Photograph taken in Hungary, 1944.**

[Read Ferenc Deutsch's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)



“This is the only picture from before the war that I had on me when I was deported, so I gave it to be used on the deportation ID.

I was taken to Sachsenhausen with the last transport in October 1944. In Sachsenhausen, there was an international ‘*Vorzeigelager*’ [demonstration camp] under the guidance of the Red Cross.

There we were together with POWs. They were not taken for work as we were. We were together in the barracks and they got a monthly parcel from the International Red Cross.”

**PHOTOGRAPH: Imre Kinszki**

**Photo taken in Budapest, 1930s (?)**

[Read Judit Kinszki's biography here](#)

[Click here to see her family pictures](#)



*Imre Kinszki's daughter, Judit, remembers her father as a highly educated, kind man who spoke five languages fluently and studied philosophy and literature even though he could never attend university. Imre worked as an archivist at the Association of Textile Manufacturers, and in his free time he practiced photography. Imre was a pacifist, not allowing his children to play even with toy guns. He was murdered on a death march from Sachsenhausen. His family never discovered the location of his death or where he was buried.*

“My father, Imre, was born in 1901.

He wanted to study medicine, but he was not allowed to because he was a Jew. My mother bought him his first camera in 1928 when my brother was born. No sooner had he received his camera than his desire to do everything perfectly took over. He studied photography, invented a camera for microbiology, wrote articles on photography, and entered competitions.

He worked at the Association of Textile Manufacturers as an archivist. That's where he met my mother. My father remained at his job until the third Jewish law. By then it was simply impossible for his employers to keep him anymore, so they sent him out on pension in 1939. My father came home one day and put a stack of money on the kitchen table in front of us all. He said to my mother, ‘Well, you have to take this and make it last.’ She looked at him and asked, ‘For how long?’ He sighed. ‘Until Hitler goes,’ is all he said.

He was in the labor brigades in 1944. When the Soviets got closer he was deported to Germany. He was killed on a death march from Sachsenhausen.”

## JOZEF SEWERYN

Warsaw, Poland

Interviewer: Zuzanna Solakiewicz

Date of Interview: May 2004



*Jozef Seweryn in Warsaw in the 1950s.*

[Read Jozef Seweryn's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

*Born Józef Kraus in 1917 in Kraków, Jozef's bourgeois lifestyle changed dramatically when he was drafted into the Polish army in 1938. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, he managed to obtain false documents and change his surname to Seweryn in order to hide his Jewish identity. Nonetheless, he was sent to Auschwitz for helping Jews in Kraków's ghetto. Józef recalls that he survived his time in Auschwitz only because knew how to repair fountain pens and give haircuts, and he was thus useful to his Nazi captors. He also spent time in Sachsenhausen, Oranienburg, and Ravensbrück. His family perished in the Holocaust. After the war, Józef served as a witness in many war criminal trials. Today, he identifies as a Pole of the Jewish faith and lives with*

*his wife in Kraków.*

“In 1944 I was transferred to Sachsenhausen, and from there to Oranienburg, Ravensbrück, and finally to a camp in Barth. There was an aircraft factory there where we all worked. We produced two-engine bombers. Most of the inmates were moved out of that camp on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1945. We were being led towards some town when the Russians cut us off. The Germans surrounded us when they saw them approaching and started shooting at us. I survived.”