

Questions to Consider When Viewing Video

1. What was Jacob's home town called when he was born? What did the Nazis later call this town?
2. Why was Jacob's town one of the first to be taken over by the Nazi forces?
3. Jacob talks of two times as a 15-year-old when he attempted to save his father. What were they?
4. Give an example of a courageous act performed by one of Jacob's sisters.
5. Jacob was sent to a number of different camps. How many were there and what were the names?
6. Give two examples of when Jacob was actually helped by a guard or kapo in the camps.
7. What was the significance of the marking of a "T" or "U" during a selection in the camp?
8. Why was Jacob so anxious that his number in the camp be 18?
9. What kind of attitude did Jacob have while going through the camps? Why do you think this attitude was so important for his survival?
10. What is the message expressed by Jacob in the poem that he read at the end of his talk?

Holocaust Survivor Jacob Hennenberg

Filmed on October 24, 2006



"I put my mind someplace else."

Jacob Hennenberg

Face to Face
A Holocaust Education Program at
Congregation Shaarey Tikvah
Beachwood, Ohio

Jacob Hennenberg was born in 1924 in Oswiecim, Poland, the town which was later renamed Auschwitz by the Nazis. His mother died a month before his bar mitzvah. About a year later, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia attacked Poland.

In 1939 all civilians were ordered to leave the town. Jacob, his father, and Jacob's four older sisters (two with babies), went to Krakow. Then Jacob and his father walked 500 miles to the east. Jacob's father did not want to stay in Russian territory, so they walked back. To avoid being recognized as Jewish, his father reluctantly agreed to allow Jacob to cut his father's long beard and sidelocks. Jacob remarked, "I had to do to my father what the Nazis were doing to our people."

When they returned, all Jews had to wear an armband with the Yellow Star. Nazis called it the "Badge of Shame." Jacob's father said his family would wear a "Badge of Honor." His sisters embroidered beautiful Jewish stars, and ever since, Jacob has used the star design as a symbol of his family.

His first forced labor job was cleaning the old barracks and stables of the Polish Army. This was the area that became the death camp Auschwitz. The prison held hundreds of prisoners, many of them Catholic priests and nuns. In 1941 all the Jewish inhabitants of the town had to leave and go to a ghetto, where the family was assigned to one room.

A Nazi guard came to the room and ordered Jacob's father to leave; Jacob volunteered to go in his place. It was the last time he saw his father and three of his sisters. He was taken to six forced labor camps and one concentration camp. He traded his warm blanket to a soldier; in exchange, the soldier took Jacob's photograph and mailed it home to his family. Both of them could have been killed for this strictly forbidden act.

In one camp, a "doctor" made a "selection," and Jacob had a T painted on his back, for "*tauglich*," meaning "able to work." U meant "*untauglich*," or "unable to work."

The guards in the forced labor camps were police, while the guards in the concentration camps were SS. When he was in Waldenburg, Jacob was issued striped pants and jacket, wooden shoes, and a tattooed number. Jacob's number was 64242 – the digits add up to the number 18, which represents *chai* (life) in Hebrew. Jacob survived by putting his "mind someplace else" and concentrating on food and survival.

Jacob was liberated by the Russians in 1945 and came to the United States in 1949 with a wife and baby, penniless and homeless, and not speaking English. He never told his son about his experiences during the war, but many years later began to write articles, which his granddaughter typed for him. He is grateful for the opportunities his adopted country has offered him.