

# Sam Nussbaum Testimony Transcript

My name is Sam Nussbaum. Before the war I was a youngster. I quit school when I was fifteen years old. My father, let him rest in peace, he told me, "Samech, you see what's going on here?" It was in 1935. "I cannot give you any more higher education because we Jewish people are restricted here in this country. I would suggest that you pick up a trade. Learn a trade – pick it up whatever you like to work at." So it just happened to be that in that courtyard what I lived that there was a plumber and I worked with him. And I picked up plumbing. It took me three years to get my journeyman license.

And meanwhile my father woke me up four o'clock in the morning, he went with me to the synagogue and he studied with me the Bible every morning and he studied with me and he also taught me other things – what I couldn't get in school. My father was a very smart man. Before the war the farmers they brought in wheat, grain, rye, barley. But the wheat and rye – they took it to the mill. The mill, we were partners in the mill – a big mill. As a matter of fact, they called it the Nussbaum's mill.

1939 – The Russia and Germany they made a pact –and they divided – that was the war what broke out between Germany and Poland. As a matter of fact, that was the World War II because as soon as they attacked Poland. England gave a warning to Hitler, if you attack Poland we declare war and they did. And from 1939 to 1941, I lived under the Russians for two years until the war broke out between Germany - Hitler attacked Russia. They moved in in 1941 – I think it was in June. The city of Przemysl was bombed from the air very heavily and they picked up the Jews to clean up the streets – the Germans did. And we – it wasn't bad – we went to work and we start cleaning up and that was going on for, I would say, about into the winter. But in July the 15<sup>th</sup> – I remember that – the 15<sup>th</sup> 1942 they were close and they gave an order to move into the ghetto. All the Jews – they designated an area. And the railroad was next to the borderline from that new ghetto. The railroad – it's very important to know about the railroad. And we had – I forgot the time – we had a very short time to move over to this ghetto. So, what do you take? You couldn't take any furniture. But you took – you had linens, you put pillows in the linens, dishes. I wish I could show you a picture – like a little girl, five years old, was carrying a linen. Everybody was carrying something. You make another trip, another trip.

While this was going on, Polish people and the Ukrainians – we were still in our apartment – they were fighting over *our* furniture. Who's going to take the furniture? That's how it happened. We were sitting, my father looked at me, and laughing. They were fighting on our furniture. One guy says, "I was here first. Mr. Nussbaum, wasn't I here first?" We didn't say anything. We didn't answer. We just laughed. And in the ghetto, we had about two thousand families in ten houses. You know in a store – there were a were a few stores that new area. We could have in every corner there was a family. Didn't have enough room in the corners – some went right in the middle. A family moved right in the middle. They didn't have

nothing. Just 'cause we were sharing with each other and so and so. And that's how we moved into the ghetto. Whoever was caught after the date, they just shot 'em. Just like that.

In 1943, as they created another ghetto – they split the ghetto in two – A and B. The A was a working ghetto –working for the German government - do something for the German government. The B went out to the city and at nighttime, in the evening, they came back. And on my side, A, they brought in a commander from Rozwadów, Rozwadów – it's a city in Poland. His name was Schwammberger. All of a sudden we hear there's gonna be another *aktion* – *aktion* means the assembly Jews that she shipped out and the gestapo knew that they had another 9,000 Jews in general left. So the Jews did not go. They had to look in the basements and they shipped out about half of them. They shipped them to Auschwitz. A few weeks later they went through the same thing. They knew they got to have about 3,500 – they had a pretty good count. That many Jews are still left. Both ghettoes had about I would say 4,000 Jews left and they knew about it. So they made another *aktion* and the Jews dug bunkers underground. And they separate an apartment and you can sometimes they seal off a room when you walk in. There's no door. Only way you could get in from the attic and you could hardly tell there was a room. They had a window to look out. But the walls were so covered up, the Gestapo walked and finally they realized there were some rooms sealed off. They called a German *schutzpol* [*Schutzpolizei*] – that's engineers.<sup>1</sup> They start blowing up houses.

Anyway, they got out let's say about - they figured out that they should have another 1,500 Jews left. That's what they figured out. They couldn't get the 1,500 Jews to be shipped out. They were blowing up buildings, but they still were hiding. The last shipment what went out – Schwammberger picked me up to close the cars. He didn't put me in it, but they closed the cars. You know the car, they got the door, you slide the door and they put the lock on it? I was doing it. But I didn't realize later I seen my family was gone. I didn't even realize that my family was on one of those cars. After the ghetto was liquidated, the B ghetto was liquidated, and I went where my family used to live -nobody there. So I realized I closed my family. They had a transport going to Szebnie to Auschwitz. But first was Szebnie. Szebnie was also a small concentration – was like a camp, but you didn't have any stripes, you know like the concentration camps.

Schwammberger had put me in that load behind the 100 people and I was 150 people left in the city of Przemyśl when I was gone – 150 people. And I came to Szebnie and from Szebnie I found my father there alive and joined him. “How did you get over here?” he said. I don't know it just happened. They picked him up to go to Szebnie. And we went together to Auschwitz. I had number 161,483 and he had number 161,482. The turn on our hands - he was ahead of me, you know. Luckily, when we came Auschwitz, they left they picked up, you know,

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<sup>1</sup> The *Schutzpolizei* were not engineers. They were a policing agency, in this case locally responsible for helping in the deportation.

you go here and you go here. Me and my father went to the living side. And I went to Auschwitz and I was in the barracks – living, between the living people.

Interviewer: When was this?

It was in November 1943. In Auschwitz every morning, at 5, 4, or 5:00 in the morning, don't forget November - cold in Poland is cold November - snow. We had just a thinny jacket and the coat is also striped. What can I tell you. It was very thin. In the morning we had to assemble and stay in line. They count us every morning. But the officers were not so in a hurry to count us. So let us stay for hour and a half, two hours, in the cold weather – open prairie. Everybody was trying to hide behind each other the wind was really killing us -was cold, windy place. And I don't know it was probably zero outside - cold. And that was going on. You know, I don't remember how long I was in Auschwitz. I forgot. I didn't what day it is – Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. I didn't know day and night. I just know it's dark and I knew it's light. That's only thing I knew. I didn't know what day it was of the week. No paper. You couldn't keep... some made notches, cause nobody told us what day it is. And all of a sudden, they need mechanics to go someplace. Everybody was going. Everybody wants to get out Auschwitz. I was really Birkenau – Birkenau was next to Auschwitz. It was also affiliated of Auschwitz.

And we had Jewish *kapos* even, Jewish *Kapos* beating us up. They got more food. Just to improve their own – but we had them – beating us up, calling us dirty names also. Anyway we stay in the line to register to go someplace to work – hoping it goes to work. But they was serious because they checking on you out. They give you a little measurement what you measure tenth of a millimeter, hundredths of a millimeter. You have to know how to read it. They give you the instrument and they set it and they tell you how big is the opening? And I read it and I told them – I'm okay. Pick me up. My father (shakes his head no), what did he know about those measurements? I start pleading, begging. The one German soldier – he was a Ukrainian – hit me so hard. I was bleeding. And there was nothing I could do. That was the last time I seen him. We went – were shipped – to a coal mine. And the coal mine was named Fürstengrube. That's in western Poland, close to Germany, a coal mine. And when I came to that coal mine about twenty people went over there and the twenty were- all of them were like 161,450 – you know - same numbers – just happened to be like that. And because when we came to the barracks and everybody was tattooed and we had 161,000.

So we came at camp – concentration camp – another concentration camp. With the police, SS, electric wires – same thing like Auschwitz – cold outside, but we had a lot of coal from the coal mine – inside the barrack was nice and warm. And next day we going to work. We had to walk about fifteen minutes to the mine. They had a shaft – an elevator. We walked about 600 meters underground. All of a sudden, in the coal mine they claim they need mechanics to go in a factory. And I am picked up one of the guys to go to the factory. Only four guys left that concentration camp – me and one from Holland, and two other guys and they moved us over – they picked a truck – they had about six armed machine gun soldiers with four

of us and we were travelling. The factory wasn't too far away from the coal mine. The city's name was Swietochlowice. It was another concentration camp. First they put me to clean up the yards – and so they need a mechanic to clean up the yards. And I was cleaning up the yards. Then they put me in the factory. They were making flack artillery – those are guns for shooting down the planes. They Russians are moving in. We heard the shot – artillery. And all of a sudden, all in the camp, going to move, walking. We got – they had waited for trucks. We were sitting on an open area to go to Austria. And they shipped us to Mauthausen. Mauthausen, I called it Mordhausen – they were murdering people – murderers. Came to Auschwitz, to Mauthausen I mean, I'm sorry and soon we were carrying rocks, going up into the camp carrying big heavy rocks because they were still building it. And we would carry rocks. You know how many people didn't make it? Lucky, I was organized in a little food. I was able to go even two trips if I had to. But we came after, we dropped the rocks in a pile and they gave us a place where to sleep.

But there was a lot of people coming from other camps – running away from the Russians. They didn't have enough room to put us to let us sleep. People were laying honestly just like herring. We couldn't lay flat. We had to lay sideways – one head here, one head over here another over here. And the whole ward was laying. You couldn't turn over. They killed a whole ward. We heard the screaming and the machine guns. It was not us – it was just behind the fence – screaming and shooting it's unbelievable. Who was over they? We don't know yet. I don't even know today. And they killed a whole 700 people in one shot. And we went to from Mauthausen, we walked to Amstetten and Wels, another camp. But finally I'm gonna get to that camp that I was liberated – in Ebensee. Ebensee where we made light fuel for the airplane in the mountains. And that camp we walked up the mountain every morning. And every time you walked by that one area, ten different people were hanging. Where they got the people, I don't know. We were afraid to go to the bathroom, because they probably picked them up going to the bathroom.

I'm going to tell you about Ebensee – the liberation of Ebensee. The commander – we had lots of Germans also over there. They were trying to execute – the American army was very close. So that commander from that camp wants to get us up in the mountains and blow us up in it. We didn't know as much as the German prisoners knew then. Because some SS people to the Germans – no Jews – “the commander has decided to take you up in the mountains and blow you up. Don't go there.”

And you should see those Germans got up in front of the whole camp sitting on that assembly place and he talks to us in German. And he says, “The commanders going to be here. He's gonna ask us to go up in that mountain. Nobody moves. They're gonna blow us up – dynamite – the dynamite already. They're gonna just blow us up. And that's what happened. The commander didn't know that one of his people told our Germans not to get there.[unclear] “Since we are trying to survive and we gonna be bombed, we got a good place to hide, I would suggest everybody including us go up in the mountains – that's right – in the mountains to be

safe from being killed. Let's go." Nobody moved. Nobody moved. The SS with machine guns kill us here, but we not going up there. We didn't go up there. It didn't take more than four or five hours, and a tank broke through the gate. That was a moment. And I see Americans. They don't have the battery [unclear], they have to wind up the camera shooting, shooting films and I was standing there. We got liberated – May the 5<sup>th</sup>. Guns were laying all over – machine guns. The Germans – the SS- they left. They left everything. One guy didn't got up in time. The feet – they killed him to death. Who comes to rescue us? An Israeli! There was no Israel. It was Palestine. Palestine was there and the Jews did serve in the English Brigade. They called it – they had the menorah on their hat and here comes a little Jew to Ebensee – we were locked up again. He drove in he says, he talked Yiddish to us, we didn't talk English. But he talked Yiddish to us. He didn't talk Polish he was from Israel, from Palestine. He says to us, "Children, where you gonna go? What are you gonna do?" The only one we seen to come up and talk to us. "You not gonna go back to Poland, are you? Who wants to go back to Poland?" He said, "Let's go home." He meant Israel, there was no Israel. "Let's go home! Stay here and I'll come after you."

That's exactly what happened. And we waited and waited about three weeks we waited. We knew he's gonna come. He said he would come. You got to listen to this. Twenty American trucks with the white stars, he's English, don't forget he's English brigade, American trucks with the stars on the doors, with black drivers – Negro drivers – loaded already from Jews from the other camps – the trucks were loaded with other Jews. We didn't even know there were some other Jews. We thought we were the only ones survived. "Jump on the truck, quick! Get on it!" We jumped on the trucks. He said, "Leave that here, we'll give you everything you want, just leave it here." [unclear] They had, I would say, about twenty Israelis – Palestine Jews. And they drove us over the Alps and we came to Modena, Italy.

My gosh, we had a lot of Jews over there, already there who came over from different areas. We start looking – maybe we find somebody. We couldn't find anybody. Anyway, then I want to go to Israel – really. But I couldn't go to Israel because English – England was in charge of Palestine. They won't let us in. And I'm sittin' in Italy. I got married in Italy and my little boy was born. They just changed my life. And all of a sudden, I get a letter from New York from my mother's side – the name was Grosser. And he says in the letter, "You know, if you mother was Berta Grosser and your grandfather was Moses Grosser, you're my cousin." Then he sends me a letter and he says, "Why don't you come to America?"

In November in '47, the American consul calls me. Number twenty - when I registered, number twenty just left to America and the end of '47 they're calling me. I checked with the girl, she talked German. I said, "Number 20 just left this year." She said, "Well, we called number 21, 22, 23 – nobody shows up. Finally, we had to call you." So here I am in America – in 1948 in March 18 I landed. The ship – I came in a Russian ship – not by air. In a Russian ship, I came to America.

Source: Sam Nussbaum video testimony - <https://mchekc.org/portfolio-posts/nussbaumsam/>