

## William Lowenberg

### Wartime Experience: Camp Survivor

I was born August 14, 1926, in Westphalia, Germany. My ancestors had lived in Germany since the fifteenth century and were merchants and cattle dealers.

I moved with my family to Holland in 1936 to be near relatives in Holland in what we hoped would be a safe haven from the Nazis. We were arrested there in 1942 with the rest of the Jewish Community and sent to the Westerbork transit camp which was used to intern Jewish refugees mainly from Germany and we remained for several months. From there I was taken away from my parents and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. My parents and sister followed a few weeks after and were murdered in the gas chambers.

I stayed in Auschwitz until the spring of 1943 and was then sent, along with 300 other men, to Warsaw to demolish the ghetto and to dispose of the many murdered Jewish bodies. In 1944 the Warsaw camp was liquidated. At that point there were 3,600 Jews left out of 12,000. Of that number, 240 survived the Death March and ended up in Dachau. I remained in Dachau until April 30, 1945, when we were liberated by the U.S. Army. "I don't know what kept me going. The past was gone. There was no future. I wanted to live so badly and be able to go back and tell my story. After liberation I returned to Holland and Switzerland hoping in vain that some of my family had survived.

In 1949 I came to the United States. From 1953 to 1955 I served in the United States Army (Korean War) and returned to San Francisco again to pursue my previous employment in the Real Estate business in which I am still active today. I got married in 1957 and my wife Fern and I have two children and two grandchildren.

During my years in San Francisco I have been active in the Jewish and general community. I was president of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties. I also served as president of the Jewish Home for the Aged and as president of the Bureau of Jewish Education. In addition, I served for seven years on the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel. I was appointed by President Reagan to be on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Council and later, during the planning and construction period, I became the Vice Chairman of the Museum.

The book I am holding in my portrait, a section of the Torah, belonged to my father. It was kept by Catholic neighbors and returned to me after the war.