

Jo Wajsblat

Wartime Experience: Concentration Camp Survivor

I was born on January 31 1929 in Lodz, Poland. My father's name was Iser and my mother's name was Kajla. My older sister, Haja Sarah, was born in 1926 and my two young brothers Heneh Aba and Jone were born in 1930 and in 1931. During my childhood, I lived in Lodz, with my family. My father had a goldsmith's shop and my mother did sewing at home. All of the children went to the Talmudic School.

After my father died, in 1940, we were forced to live in the ghetto in Lodz and being the oldest son I became the head of my family. I was 11 years old. I had to work in a machine shop to help support the family. After my long days at the shop, I had to help at home with all of the household chores.

In September of 1942, all children younger than 10 years old, all sick people, and all people over the age of 65, were deported to the prison camp of Chemno. My 9 year old little brother was taken from us and we never saw him again.

My mother died in August of 1943 and one of my aunts came to live with us in the ghetto. One day in August of 1944, I went out to buy food for my family and when I returned there was no one at home. The German's had raided the neighborhood and arrested everyone. They disappeared to never be seen again.

Four days later it was my turn to be arrested and deported to the camp Auschwitz. The trip to Auschwitz was in a closed and locked train boxcar in deplorable conditions. We arrived at a camp that we did not know existed. We were taken from the train and separated into three groups: men, women, and children.

I remember seeing my neighbor kissing his wife and telling her that they would meet at home after the war. Another prisoner asked my age, I told him I was 15 and he said I must claim to be 17. In the evening we were again separated in groups. Another prisoner told us to volunteer to work for the Germans otherwise we would be sent directly to the gas chambers to die.

I spent four months in Birkenau and with great difficulty avoided being selected to go to the gas chamber. During that time I was transferred to several different prison camps. I was then sent back to Germany where I worked in a factory repairing heavy trucks. One night in the first of May 1945, without warning the Germans packed 130 of us into a railroad boxcar and left us all night in extremely cramped and cold conditions. The next morning we were released and returned to our camp. At about 11:00 a.m. that day, the American soldiers arrived and freed us from the prison. I met a Jewish American soldier who asked if I wished to return to Poland. I replied that I would not as I had no one there for me now. He said that I could return to America with him. This person was based in France and I returned to Paris with him. We arrived in Paris on June 6, 1945 and I was placed with a wonderful family by the soldier where I was

treated exactly like their three children. The children two girls and one boy accepted me, and I remained with them until I received my Visa to go to America in May of 1948.

The same day that I received the Visa, I was reading the newspaper and learned there was a war in Israel. After reading this I decided instead to immediately travel to Israël to help. I thought that if the Jews could have had their own country in 1940, there would not have been the trials, tribulations, and horrors involved with the camps. So, instead of going to America, I volunteered to join the army of Israël. I was accepted in the army and was sent to a training camp named Grand Arenas in Marseille, France. Here we received very intensive training both day and night in all of the skills of combat.

We were taken to Port de Bouc and loaded onto an old converted oil tanker named FABIO. This old tanker had been converted into a vessel to transport men, machines, and supplies. We traveled for 12 days in extreme conditions going to Haifa. Our only food during the trip was canned sardines and crackers. Upon arrival we were taken to two camps named camp ATLITE and camp MAHNE YONA where we continued our training. It was here that at the age of 19 I was officially registered, as a soldier of Israël and my number was 93205. One morning we were transported to the Kibboutz Houлда where we entered the war. Our mission was to secure the road from BIRMANI to Jerusalem. The fighting was severe, and I was wounded and transferred to a hospital in Abougoch. Upon my recovery, I returned to the fighting with the Pal-Mah division. I was wounded again in the head in the battle of Montcastel. I recovered and was transferred to Neguef where I remained for three months until the Pal-Mah division was discontinued in 1949. At the time I was assigned to a heavy mortar division in ATIVAT-GOLANI until I was discharged from the army.

I returned to Paris and in 1954 I married Rachèle Frojman. We had three daughters: Claudine, Chantal, and Nathalie. We created a business of women's ready to wear named Silhouette and operated that business for 45 years.

Beginning in 1963 I returned 10 times to Auschwitz. On 4 or 5 of these trips I took four groups with me and explained to them what took place there. In addition, I give lectures in schools. This is my contribution to keep the memory and history of these events and their effects on the Jewish people. Even though I was wounded two times during the war, I am in good physical condition and every year I run the marathon Paris-Versailles.

It is written there is a destiny in life, and I believe this.

Des dossiers du Mémorial de la Shoah—Paris

Jo WAJSBLAT

né le 31/01/1929 à LODZ (POLOGNE) de Iser et Kajla WAJSBLAT

Déporté à AUSCHWITZ depuis la POLOGNE, rescapé

Enfance heureuse à LODZ, père orfèvre, mère couturière. Puis le ghetto en 1940 où nous sommes enfermés. A 11 ans je deviens chef de famille, au décès de mon père. Je travaille dans une usine de métallurgie pour subvenir aux besoins de la famille. Septembre 1942, les enfants de moins de 10 ans, les malades et personnes âgées sont déportés au camp de CHEMNO. J'ai perdu ma mère en 1943, déportée. En Août 1944, je suis arrêté et déporté à AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU. 4 mois à BIRKENAU où j'ai échappé à plusieurs sélections dont celle, exceptionnelle, de la chambre à gaz. Le 1er mai 1945 évacuation du camp, nous sommes libérés le lendemain par les Américains. Un soldat américain, basé en France, me proposa de le suivre à PARIS. Nous sommes le 6/06/1945. En Mai 1948 j'ai mon visa pour les USA mais ayant appris que l'Irgoun se bat contre les Arabes de Jaffa, je change de destination et m'engage comme volontaire dans l'armée d'ISRAEL. Arrivé à HAIFA je suis conduit au camp ATLITE puis au camp MAHNE-YONA où je reçois mon livret militaire. J'ai 19 ans. Je participe à de nombreuses batailles jusqu'à ma démobilisation. Depuis 1963 je me rends chaque année à AUSCHWITZ pour accompagner des groupes, et en France, donner des conférences dans des lycées.