

## GABRIEL BENICHOU

From Saint Pierre Prison in Marseille, Gabriel Benichou was taken to Drancy, Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Warsaw ghetto, Dachau, and on two death marches.

*“When I spoke of the horrors that had taken place no one believed me. So I found refuge in silence, I never mentioned it. But every night in my dreams, I went back to Auschwitz.”*

Gabriel Benichou was born in 1926 in Algeria into an observant Jewish family. He was expelled from his school in 1941 because of the Vichy regime’s anti-Jewish laws. His sister managed to get him accepted into a boarding school in France where she lived.

In April 1943 the Gestapo came to arrest Gabriel and his sister and take them to the Saint Pierre Prison for interrogation. After a few days, they were sent to the Drancy transit camp, and then shipped in cattle cars to Auschwitz-Birkenau where Gabriel had the number 130509 tattooed on his left forearm. He experienced hard labor, often without any purpose, barely enough food to survive, freezing weather and epidemics. He was later told that his sister had been forced to submit to medical experimentation and died.

In October 1943, Gabriel and other able-bodied men were sent to clear the Warsaw ghetto. Because of his youth, he was chosen to work in the kitchen but soon contracted typhus and was in coma for a month. As the Russians advanced, the surviving inmates were evacuated on a death march to Koutno, then put into cattle cars for three days without food or water until they reached Dachau. Later on, during the approach of the Allies, along with other Dachau inmates he was sent on a second death march towards the Tyrol. On the third day, he escaped with two other men. They were recaptured and put back into the march instead of being shot immediately.

Gabriel was liberated by the American forces on May 2, 1945, and after a stay in France, he returned to Algeria. He studied pharmacy and medicine in Algeria and Paris where he worked as the director of a medical laboratory. In 1976 he married. Following a terrible depression, he took his wife Hilda to visit the camps where he had been imprisoned thus helping him to exorcise the ghosts. Gabriel and Hilda have a son and a daughter. At the request of his grandchildren, he started visiting their schools, bearing witness to the atrocities he experienced during the war.