

## BERNARD OFFEN

Bernard Offen survived the Plaszow, Mauthausen, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Dachau concentration camps.

*"I decided to push beyond my personal discomfort and pain by sharing what happened in Auschwitz. I spend each summer in Poland in order to create a deeper level of understanding of what happened there"*

Bernard Offen was born 1929 in Krakow-Podgurze, Poland. He lived with his parents, two brothers and a sister in the part of the city which was transformed into a ghetto during the Nazi occupation. His father was a shoemaker.

When the ghetto was liquidated in 1943, Bernard was sent to the Plaszow slave labor camp, from which he escaped. During his few days of freedom, he hid in an old cemetery. He was then smuggled into the Julag I camp near Plaszow and was hidden there. Eventually he was able to work by taking on the identity of another inmate who had been killed. The Julag camps were absorbed into the Plaszow camp, which had become a concentration camp shortly after the liquidation of the ghetto. In Plaszow camp he was reunited with his father with whom he worked making boots in one of the barracks. 1944, Bernard, his father and two brothers were deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. His brothers remained there, but Bernard and his father were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where, on arrival, they were separated for the last time.

Bernard spent three months in the quarantine barracks at Birkenau. Then, because of the advance of Soviet-Allied forces, he was sent to the Dachau-Landsberg concentration camp. He was liberated by American Allied troops following a death march from the camp in late 1944.

Bernard's mother and sister were deported from the ghetto probably to Belzec, where they were murdered. After the war, he searched for other relatives, but out of fifty-nine members of the family only Bernard and his two brothers had survived. Bernard found them serving with the Polish Army in Italy and the three went to England and eventually immigrated to the United States, settling in California.

Bernard dedicated himself to telling his personal memories of the Nazi treatment of Jews and has created documentary films and written about his wartime experiences. In 1981, he went to Poland for the first time since the war and has returned each year, guiding thousands of people to the sites of former ghettos and of the Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau camps.