

# Handout – Camps – Survivor Testimonies

## Iby Knill

In 1944 Iby was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. After arriving, Iby was shaved, showered, and given a prisoner uniform before entering the camp. Her language skills were very useful in Auschwitz, as it meant she could communicate in German with the guards, which sometimes resulted in better rations. However, this did not protect her entirely; Iby developed a hip condition and she ended up in the camp's hospital. It was then that she underwent X-ray experiments.



Iby only stayed in Auschwitz for six weeks, because she and some friends volunteered to accompany a slave labour transport to an armament factory in Lippstadt, Germany. They were forced to make armaments for the German war effort. Where possible, Iby and her friends would sabotage the work. Eventually, Iby was put in charge of the camp hospital due to her fluency in German and informal nursing skills.

In March 1945, the hospital unit was evacuated and Iby and the other women were taken on a death march towards Bergen-Belsen. Anyone who couldn't keep up was shot. Iby had a renewed infection in her hip and credits her survival to her friends, who carried her along the way. Iby was finally liberated by the American army on Easter Sunday 1945.

## Arek Hersh



In the summer of 1944, Łódź ghetto was liquidated and on 25 August, Arek was transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He was just 15 years old.

During the selection process, Arek noticed that the healthier-looking people were being sent to one side, so he quickly followed them when a disturbance distracted the guards. Arek was then shaved all over and made to shower before being given a striped uniform and tattooed with the number B7608. After this Arek lost his name and identity. From that moment on, he was only referred to by his number.

After two weeks, Arek went to Auschwitz I (one of the three main camps at Auschwitz) to work as an agricultural labourer for the SS, ploughing fields and fertilising them... He was later transferred to the fishing commando, which involved catching fish from the river Vistula to be sent to Germany.

Fearing the Soviet advance, the Germans evacuated Auschwitz on 18 January 1945. Arek and the remaining prisoners were taken on a forced march which lasted three days, with no food and only their striped uniforms as protection against the deep snow and icy temperatures. Those who survived arrived at Katowice railway station and were then taken to Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar in Germany.

Arek was placed in a children's barrack for a few months before he and three thousand others were loaded onto open wagons on 7 April 1945. Only 600 survived the month-long journey to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. Arek was liberated by the Russian army on 8 May 1945. He remembers being given rice pudding to eat.

## Eugene Black

Eugene's transport was the first Hungarian transport to arrive in Auschwitz. On arrival, Eugene was swiftly separated from his mother and sisters, then also from his father. After being completely shaved and then showered, Eugene was given his prisoner number, 55546, and a striped uniform. Similar to other arrivals at that time, he was not tattooed.

Eugene remained at Birkenau (also known as Auschwitz II, one of the three main camps at Auschwitz) for around ten days. Then he was selected for slave labour, and sent via Buchenwald to Mittelbau-Dora in the Harz Mountains. Here, the Nazis used slave labourers to manufacture V1 and V2 rockets underground. Eugene's job was to load small trucks with rocks dug out from the tunnels for 12 to 14 hours each day, without rest, and on starvation rations. Eugene spent five months doing this back-breaking work in Mittelbau-Dora.

After Mittelbau-Dora, Eugene was transferred to Harzungen, a sub-camp of Buchenwald, to build barracks for the many prisoners being evacuated from the east. He became ill with pneumonia and was taken into the camp hospital. Weakened and starving, he rested for ten days and remembers that an elderly Luftwaffe (German air force) doctor treated him well.

In mid-March 1945, Eugene and the other camp inmates were taken on cattle wagons on a seven-day journey without food or water to Bergen-Belsen. Eugene described Bergen-Belsen as "a hellhole". Typhus ravaged the camp and there was no sanitation. Food was scarce... Just over 500 inmates of the original three thousand on Eugene's train survived.

Eugene was liberated on 15 April 1945 by the British Army. He had been reduced from a fit 75kg 16-year-old, who loved playing football, to barely 30kg.

