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Out of Oświęcim

A Family's Odyssey – with William Rosenbaum

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1 hour, 08 minutes, 33 seconds

Speaker: William Rosenbaum

Transcribed by: Rachel E Lieu

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Out of Oświęcim: A Family's Odyssey – with William Rosenbaum (2017)
Holocaust Living History Workshop

Time	Transcription
00:00	[The Library UC San Diego]
00:05	[A Holocaust Living History Workshop Event]
00:11	[January 19, 2017 / Out of Oświęcim: A Family's Odyssey – with William Rosenbaum]
00:11	<p>Susanne Hillman: Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the first workshop of the new year, and I'm absolutely delighted by the turnout. I thought, given the topic, there would be a significant number, but I didn't know the room would pretty much be full. It's also nice to see so many students from Professor Hertz's class. We always try to attract the young people. It's important for all of us, of course, to understand uh, history but I think it's particularly important to the younger generation. Today we hear about the odyssey of a family from Oświęcim. I don't know if I massacréd a Polish name now. Bill will rectify me. This town has become the symbol of Nazi brutality but, of course, under the German name Auschwitz. We commonly associate Auschwitz with industrial manslaughter but for many Jews, for a significant number of Jews I should say, it was also, Oświęcim was their hometown. And this is what we hear about today, at least in part. Our speaker is William Rosenbaum, the son of a former inhabitant of Oświęcim. William is a first-generation American, born and raised in the United States - in San Diego actually. After attending Patrick Henry High School, he studied at UCSD [University of California, San Diego]. So it's a pleasure to actually have an alumni or alumnus talk here. He graduated from UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] with a degree in economics and accounting. He recently retired from the local manufacturing and real estate business and his, he has been involved with the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC.</p>
01:54	<p>Susanne Hillman: Mr. Rosenbaum has visited many of the places he will talk about today, including Auschwitz. He is married and the father of two children, and his wife is also here today. I can't find her right now but oh, there she is. Okay, as we shall see Mr. Rosenbaum's presentation includes some clips from the Shoah Foundation video testimony with his father. And of course, anytime anybody talks about video testimony I get all excited because I love the Shoah Foundation Archive, The Visual History Archive. For those of you who are interested in watching the entire testimony, UCSD is actually one of only a few universities on the West Coast and one of uh, something over 50 worldwide, who has access to the entire archive. And this means, that currently if you live in the San Diego region, you can watch more than 54,000 testimonies. It's still expanding. So the archive has many testimonies with some of our past speakers also, like Lou Dunst, Agathe Ehrenfried, Rose and Max Schindler, uh Edith Eger, and Gerhard Maschkowski. So if you know anybody in San Diego who has gone through the</p>

Holocaust, chances are a testimony is in the archive. I'm happy to tell you more about this truly extraordinary and wonderful resource after the event. But now, please join me in welcoming today's speaker William Rosenbaum.

03:30 William Rosenbaum: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. I'd like to say thank you to the Geisel Library, and the Department of Jewish Studies for asking me to come speak, and of course to Dr. Susanne Hillman. And a special thank you to Mark Casamatus back there, who helped me digitize my uh, information. As a matter of fact, I've never spoken publicly and I've certainly never used a PowerPoint. So this is a first for, for at least for me; so we'll see. Talking about the Holocaust, San Diego lost uh, one of their heroes this last Saturday. You mentioned Max Schindler. I don't know if you know that, but Max Schindler was either 90 or 91, long-time San Diego resident who passed away Saturday. So he's survived by his wife Rose, and his four children and grandchildren. And we wish them well as they go through the period of recovering from his loss. But another uh, San Diegan who was very vocal in his talking about his experiences. But I want to start off by saying why am I here because I am obviously not a survivor. I'm not a victim. I'm not a historian. And I've already told you I'm not a lecturer. I'm not a scholar. I'm not an author. I've done none of those things. I'm a businessman. But I am the son of a Holocaust survivor, which Susanne said. I was born right here in San Diego, spent most of my time here - except for the time what I was in UCLA. But uh, I want to talk about Oświęcim. It says, Out of Oświęcim. And we might ask ourselves why do we even care about Oświęcim.

05:23 William Rosenbaum: You know, Oświęcim is just a little Polish town in the southwestern part of Poland. They started settling Oświęcim in the 1200s and by the 1300s there were approximately 100 homes in this little town of Oświęcim. The Jews started migrating to Oświęcim in the mid-16th century, and by the 18th century actually, half of this little town was Jewish. So it's interesting that with a population half of, half the population being Jewish the the town was known by at least two other names. The first name we know, Oświęcim; that's the Polish name. But there was another interesting name. Since this was such a Jewish place, the Jews had a play on words. There was a word called Ushpitzin. What does Ushpitzin mean? Ushpitzin is a prayer that we say during the holiday of Sukkot, and it's a prayer that welcomes guests, and it's a prayer of welcoming. So it's interesting that the Jews came up with their own play on word Oświęcim - Ushpitzin, two names. But the more notorious name that we all know this by is of course the German name, Auschwitz. Auschwitz the concentration camp where more than a million Jews perished.

06:52 William Rosenbaum: So we go back by the 1800s; it's half Jewish. My father was born there, in this little town of Oświęcim in 1925. He was the son of David and Regina Rosenbaum; they're pictured here at their engagement which is approximately 1922. We don't have the exact date of their engagement, but there

they are, acknowledging and commemorating their engagement. The Enoch family, which my grandmother Regina Enoch, her family had been in Oświęcim since the 1600s, and her father owned a very large building in the center of the town of Oświęcim. This building bordered the main town square. There were businesses down below and there were apartments up above and all of the Enoch children, and there were many of them, when they got older and got married, they all moved upstairs and lived in the upstairs apartments. And that's where my father was born, in that building. Today that building is the judicial system in the town of Oświęcim. It's one of the largest buildings in the city and it still stands today. This picture was taken in 2010.

- 08:26 William Rosenbaum: This gives you an overview of the town and you can see again, here is the town square - right in the center of the town square - and this is the building. This was my great-grandfather's building. My father's grandfather's building. The building he was born in. I find it interesting to look at this picture because, when you look back historically in some of the old pictures in Poland, you see the markets that were set up, the market square. This was the congregating place where everybody met, and here a Jewish man owned that building. The Enoch building was taken over by the Nazis and the building became the Nazi headquarters for the region as soon as the war started. And the square here during the war became known as Adolf Hitler Plaza. So my ancestors started immigrating in the 1600s, and over the generations, they were very, very successful. Obviously, they had property, they had businesses, they were in the wine business, they were in the tannery business, they also had building materials. Here's a picture of one of the family businesses. That's Jakob Enoch. e-n-o-c-h That was the family name and, you can see here, j-a-k-o-b. That's, my father was named after his, I believe, that's his great-grandfather. So the name carries on generation after generation.
- 10:09 William Rosenbaum: So by 1938, moving ahead in 1938, half of the town was Jewish and a lot of the businesses. There were 14,000 people in Oświęcim and most of the the town was well organized, well run, and the Jews had good economic freedoms and had a very good life. I want to take a moment now and show you a clip from my father's Shoah video. This is, at this moment the interviewer is asking my father what his earliest recollections are. So he's, you're going to hear him in his own voice describing what it was like as a child.
- 10:53 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] I - E - N - I - E - C - I - M and in Polish is A - U - S - H - W - I - T - Z.
- 11:14 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Could we start perhaps with your early memories of living in Poland? What are your earliest memories that you can recall?

- 11:24 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Well I would say my uh, earliest memory somewhere around the age of three or four, living in, in a large home where my grandfather, from my mother's side, reside there since a 17th century by the family, and we had a large, it was a large building and we had two large rooms and a kitchen. Uh, I had a brother a year older, and I had a brother was two years younger. My sister was one year older.
- 12:09 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] And what were their names?
- 12:11 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] My sister's name was Fela F - E - L - A and my brother's name was Simon. And we moved from this town, from this city to another place called Dzierżycie which was about 20 miles to the west.
- 12:35 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] How old were you then?
- 12:37 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] I, I would assume that I was about five years old. Uh, my parents were in the hardware business and building material business. Uh, we had a store downstairs and we used to live upstairs. I had my mother and father both working in the business. So we had a lady taking care of the children, probably did some of the cooking and cleaning. And about five years later, we build a larger home for ourselves with the intention of moving the business there too, which never took place because uh, the war broke out in 1939 uh, September 1st. And after about two months my parents' business was confiscated and we were asked to move out of this Dzierżycie and back to my grandfather's town Auschwitz.
- 13:54 William Rosenbaum: They were asked to leave. My father was a very gentle person, at least when he got older. He was a tough guy when, when we were young. We were scared the heck of him. So here we are pre-war 1938. We're looking at all of these Jewish stars. They're Jewish schools. All these buildings, here's my great-grandfather's building. Here's the town square, the synagogue, the stores, and factories. This was a very Jewish town and it's amazing what happened to it when the war started. So my father was talking about the family moving from Oświęcim, which is up here, to this town called Dzierżycie and you'll have to forgive my Polish but that's I'm pronouncing it the way I always heard it Dzierżycie. He said it was 20 miles away; it's actually 13.8 miles via the crow. And uh, in this new town of Dzierżycie my father and his family had a very good life. They were talking about their business that they had. They're talking, there were 80 Jewish families in the town of Dzierżycie and there was a synagogue and they had a very good life.

- 15:15 William Rosenbaum: This was the family business. This was the hardware store. This picture's taken circa 1931 maybe [19]32 and it's interesting, in the very front here - we'll get another picture of it - but that's my grandfather. There's a little boy here, that's my uncle, and my grandmother's in the back. Let's go to the next picture. I'm going to enlarge this a little bit. So it says, HANDEL ZELAZA, and what does that mean? It means in Polish like industrial iron, industrial iron. And some of the names there refer to asphalt, tar, paint, copper, plaster, iron, things that you would use in, in construction and building materials. But the interesting thing that I love more than anything else about this picture - the fact that it has my, my grandfather here, my grandmother here, my little uncle here. The name up here, Regina Rosenbaum. We're talking 1930s woman-owned and operated business. Now my father in the video said that both his parents worked in the company but in actuality, he told us when we were children, that it was primarily his mother's business, and his mother ran the company. And when I saw, when, I never saw that enlarged until I was much older. And I was able to scan the photograph and enlarge it and I had noticed Regina Rosenbaum - just blew me away. The other interesting thing here is this woman in the white dress, with the white stripes. That's the family nanny. That's Anna the nanny. She was with the family as long as my father can remember.
- 17:04 William Rosenbaum: So both of the parents worked in the business but it was primarily his mother's business. My father remembered his good life. He always used to talk about going to school and having a good education. He said everybody in the town of Dziedzice had to have religious education. So he was the only Jewish boy in his class, and as a result of the requirement of having Jewish education, the school provided him with a Jewish teacher. So he would be taken out of his classroom, the only one, and he had his Jewish education while everybody else had their religious education. That clearly identified him as a Jew and the problem is that antisemitism was there. Whether people wanted to talk about it or not, that was there. He always spoke about having to be on the lookout because he had to know where the bullies were because, if he wasn't careful, they would beat him up. So, he said he learned how to run fast and to keep his eyes open. The children, his brother, his sister, his mother, would travel frequently back to the town of Oświęcim. They would go actually every weekend. The grandmother would take, the mother would take one of the three children with her and they'd spend the weekend, visit the grandparents, see all the first cousins. It was a very close family and they enjoyed the the time with each other traveling back and forth.
- 18:30 William Rosenbaum: Here's a picture of the family business in 2010 that I took. It's very interesting. Nothing, nothing has changed. So my dad referenced the new house that they built. This was the house in 1935. This was the brand new house, looks like there was apartments up above and they had planned to move their building down to the, their store down to the ground floor and they would live up above. So when he was a child, for several years, they lived up above on the the

two top floors. There's the picture 2010. Again nothing, nothing has changed. The streets are the same. The buildings are all the same. It was about this time that my father's family is talking about what to do. It's 1938 and they know what's happening in Germany. My grandparents were talking about what to do. My grandfather had a British passport. He had gone to Palestine in the early teens and fortunately had a British passport. So they actually could have escaped. But the problem was my grandmother didn't want to give up the family business. She didn't want to give up the comforts and the lifestyle that they had had since the 1600s.

20:03 William Rosenbaum: So in actuality, the the rest becomes what we know. This is a picture that most of you have seen already; it was in the pamphlet. My father at his Bar Mitzvah in 1938 wearing the prayer shawl, the tallis. His mother, his brother Simon, down in the front, sneaking back right through the middle there, is his sister Fela, and his grandfather and his father. The other interesting face that I point out because I don't know too many. I don't know who the other people are. My dad always said they were neighbors or friends. Anna the nanny, right there in the family picture. Anna the nanny is why we have these pictures. If it wasn't for her, my father found her after the war and when the Nazis confiscated their home and business, she kept these pictures for, for herself and gave them to my father when he found her after the war. There's a picture, my daughter and I, we were standing in the same spot that the Bar Mitzvah picture was taken. I want to go back and point out if you look at the roof line here, look at the tile, there's the roof line and the tile. Nothing has changed. All the buildings were the same.

21:29 William Rosenbaum: So we fast forward to 1939. The Nazis invade Poland and within a relatively short period of time, as my father said, they lose their home, they lose their business, and they're sent back to live in Oświęcim with the rest of the family. Fortunately, the rest of the family still had a place to stay and they were able to stay there. It was about this time that his younger brother Simon is sent off to be with the nanny. The parents thought, well maybe he'll be safer with the nanny. Unfortunately, that only lasted for six months, and then Annie brought him back to the family, and uh, it was unsafe for her. Her life was in jeopardy as well as, as his. So now the family, 1939 they've been kicked out of their house and now they're in Oświęcim. Now they start getting sent to different work camps, ghettos, work camps and there's a series of work camps. The forced labor begins and during the next three years, the family actually stays together. It's remarkable, but they stay together and move to different working places. It's not until 1943 that they start to break up the family.

22:54 William Rosenbaum: This is my, my uncle Simon. We'll talk about him in a, in a little bit. And that's Anna, Anna the nanny. Without her, we wouldn't have any of these pictures. Right now I'd like to play a little section of the video again. This part of the video talks about, they've been in ghettos, they've been in work camps now

for three years. The family is together but the interviewer wants to know what happened at the, in the ghetto, what was happening. And this, this is where uh, my father describes the end of the ghetto life.

- 23:45 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] He married my mother.
- 23:49 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] When you left the ghetto, do you recall when that was and how it came about?
- 23:58 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Well the ghetto, slowly they, they kept eliminating people. So the ghetto became less and less populated.
- 24:13 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Do you know where they were being taken to?
- 24:15 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] No, I have no idea what would, I would assume at that time - now knowing what happened - that some of the younger and very old ones were taken to Auschwitz immediately, to be killed.
- 24:31 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] So the people that were in the ghetto noticed that the people were leaving, but they really didn't have any fear as to where they were going?
- 24:39 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] No, we didn't know. And then, when they came, when we had to, the whole ghetto was closed, was being closed uh, several trains came in and got, we had to all assemble in the center square. From there, marched to the train, and we were put in box cars and all taken to Auschwitz.
- 25:04 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Do you recall how many people were in the box cars?
- 25:09 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Pretty much standing room only, you know.
- 25:12 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] And how long was the trip from?
- 25:16 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] It was not a long ride. I, I would assume that somewhere two, or three hours.
- 25:21 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] And you were taken to?

- 25:24 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] to Auschwitz.
- 25:26 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] also in Poland?
- 25:27 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Yes, that happened somewhat, sometime in the middle of 1943.
- 25:33 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] You were with your father, mother, and brother?
- 25:36 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Yes. Yes.
- 25:38 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Do you recall panic, or were people just unknowing where they were going to? Were you told where you were going?
- 25:46 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] It was well organized. You couldn't tell what the next minute is going to bring. But once the train stopped, there were some SS men waiting for us with dogs and you could see some officers, well-dressed officers, and regular people, soldiers just kept the line straight and just keep pushing everybody into a straight line. As we approached the commanding officer though, we separated. They separated man and woman in two separate lines, and women usually had the children, the younger children. And at that point - and I still recall the name and that I cannot guarantee you for sure but that man I faced was [Josef] Mengele. He's the one where took me, told me to go to the right. My father went to the left and somehow I asked, yelled my brother to come over to my side to be with me. Simon.
- 27:19 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] Did, did, did the guard want him to go with your father?
- 27:21 Jakob Enoch Rosenbaum: [from a Shoah Foundation oral history video] No. I asked him to. Then he come over running to me and the guard noticed that and grabbed him back and he sent him back to the other side. And at the same time, there was an uncle of mine, and he was an officer in the German-Austrian Army during World War I. And he stood up straight in salute to that officer, talked to him German that he was an officer, and he told him to go to the right. He saved his life, for about three weeks. He died three weeks later.
- 28:06 William Rosenbaum: The irony of it is, here's where he's born a little the town square in Oświęcim, less than two miles - this is the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. So he's been all over Poland in different work camps, different uh, ghettos, only to come back to where he was born, but now it's a concentration camp. So the parents, and the younger brother, and my father were

together. But it was also at this time that his sister, when they cleaned out the ghetto, was sent to a different camp. They didn't know it at the time but it was Bergen-Belsen, and his sister stayed in Bergen-Belsen and the rest of the family was here. It's at this time that we're presuming that my, my grandparents went to the gas chamber, and my uncle went to the gas chamber because they were never seen again. My father, fortunately, had work experience. He had been working in wood shops. He had been working around building materials. So he was able to be of use to the Germans, and he had steady employment in the camp, which meant that he was not on the list to be called out because they had frequent reviews and they were calling out people to go to the gas chamber quite regularly.

29:43 William Rosenbaum: So he was successful in the fact that he had a skill. His sister, unfortunately, Fela, survived the war. Amazingly she survives the war. She's a year older than my father so she's 20 years old at the, at the end of the war. But at this time the camps are, are overrun with typhoid fever. They're burning, the soldiers are burning the buildings down because they're so infected, so much infection. She dies about six weeks after the war and my father did never see her again. But somebody did bury her. This is her plot in um, outside of Bergen-Belsen. We don't really know where this is, unfortunately, because the picture was given to my father, and don't have a real clear understanding of where she's buried. But there it is, Fela Rosenbaum. Born in Oświęcim. Died June 26, [19]45, and liberation was mid-May. So in December, early January 1944, my father's been in Auschwitz now, but the Russians are approaching from the East and the Germans are concerned that they want to get all the viable humans out of there that can still work. So my father, along with about a thousand other people, or several thousand other people, go on a march.

31:18 William Rosenbaum: That march, they don't know where they're going but ultimately they land up in Dachau, Germany which is right outside of Munich. The march is a deadly march, sometimes referred to as the march of the dead. If you could not, if you could not keep up the pace, you were shot. If you couldn't stay warm at night, you froze. A lot of people died along the way. My father actually remained in the Dachau concentration camp for just a short while because the Germans, at this point, the Americans are coming in. The, the Germans are very disorganized, and they don't really find anything for them to do at that point because the the forces are running for their own safety. The German forces are running for their own safety. There's rumors that are circulating around the camp that any of the remaining prisoners are going to be shot so that they won't be able to tell the story. So my father along with some of his other prisoner friends decide to make a run for it, and they actually escape from Dachau and they meet up with the American armed forces and my father's misery of the concentration camp finally ends. It probably would have ended maybe a few days later, a week later, because the German defenses were, were crumbling. And at that point, just about

everybody who was still there would have survived, but they weren't going to take a chance.

32:58 William Rosenbaum: So here we are in 1945. My father is now a displaced person. He's an ex-prisoner. His number 135-905 tattooed on his left arm. 135-905. I can't forget that number. I saw it all my life and it's the only identification my father has, but he is fortunate because he starts working with the American Army. He gets a job in the construction detail and he gets an apartment, a car, a little money, and, as he puts it in his own words, we started to live again. So they were anxious to start living again. They were anxious to, to uh, find out what had happened to their relatives. He spends three years with the American Army. He gets discharge papers from the American Army in Germany and is able to move to beautiful San Diego. He says he had a choice between Houston and San Diego. Fortunately, somebody said, go to San Diego and thank God we're here. Now we start my life. You know, I'm born in 1955 and my dad came in [19]48. He met my mom in [19]52. They got married, had three children. My father starts a woodworking business. Think of it, a woodworking business. It's what had saved his life and now it was going to make him his future. He started a commercial cabinet factory and to this day that company is still going on.

34:38 William Rosenbaum: My father didn't like to speak about the war though. He tried to shelter us, and my mother and father both thought that it would be best not to tell us. But the problem is that we were not living in a vacuum, and we started to ask him about the number on his arm. And he would joke around saying that was the social security number. I don't know that any of us even knew what a social security number was, but that was my father trying to protect us. But we were starting to go to Sunday school, Hebrew school, starting to hear stories, starting to learn, starting to see pictures. I mean, we're only talking about a few short years after the war. We know that our father is from Poland. We know that we don't have any relatives. There's nobody left. Everybody is gone, all the cousins, the aunts, the uncles, grandparents - gone. So we start asking more questions, and my father starts to give us a little bit of information. The problem with a little bit of information is that your imagination starts to grow. We've seen pictures. I've seen pictures of the bulldozers pushing bodies. I've seen pictures of people being shot. I've seen all these things running through my mind, and this has a lasting impact on me as an individual because it traumatized us. I know it traumatized me. I know that my brothers - I have two brothers - were also somewhat traumatized in the same way. And to top it off, my dad builds a bomb shelter in the back of our house.

36:16 William Rosenbaum: That is an underground bomb shelter; it's approximately 144 square feet. It's 12 feet underground. It's got beds for all five of us. It's got a bathroom. It's got air ventilation system, a hatch on top. We're prepared for the next war. We're ready to go. That always put a little bit of fear in our heads. I remember, as a child, having nightmares, and always thinking that that the

Germans were coming for us, and frequently waking up after being shot in my dream and dying. But otherwise, growing up in San Diego was fairly normal, if we didn't really realize how different we were until we were older. We started to, went to local high school, Patrick Henry High School. And during my high school years, I spent two months in Israel, traveled around the country and I really became tied into my Jewish roots at that time. I did experience a little bit of antisemitism and, because of my father's background, it was like a raw nerve. I mean, you couldn't have picked the wrong, you couldn't have picked - this the worst person to make a dirty Jew comment to because I wasn't going to tolerate it. And I remember once in school getting into a fight with somebody who really, really was after me. But it was also during this time that the Vietnam war was waging on, and got this Jewish Zionist ideas in my head. And I'm thinking, well if I get drafted, I'm not going to Vietnam. I'm going to Israel because I want to go where my people are. And the reason I point these things out is because these are not necessarily normal thoughts that most kids would have been having at that time.

38:19 William Rosenbaum: These are thoughts that been have built up over the years as being exposed to my father, whether he chose to tell us or didn't choose to tell us we absorbed a lot of this information. He was a tough act to follow. My father spoke five languages. He could speak Polish, German, Yiddish, English, and Spanish quite well. He was an extremely good judge of character. He was uh, an ethical person. These are the kind of values that, that I was taught. He was, had long-time business relationships that lasted him his lifetime, and he was very, very, very conservative with money. My brothers and I actually thought that we grew up poor. We grew up in a middle-class environment but we thought we were poor because of the way uh, the way we had to use, use, use use - couldn't waste. Nothing could be thrown away until it had absolutely no value anymore.

39:20 William Rosenbaum: The other thing was that we were exposed to because my father had this strong dominance over us, everything we did had to be approved, or meet his approval. You know, he told us what colleges to go to. I came to UCSD for my first year in college because he said, Bill if you want to go to school, you got to go to school in San Diego your first year. I didn't want to come to UCSD, no offense, but I didn't want to come to UCSD. I really wanted to go to UCLA where my girlfriend was going. Maybe he knew more than he wanted to tell me. But he told us what kind of careers we should pursue, what kind of neighborhoods to live in, what homes to buy, what investments to make - things that parents start to let go but in our home, until my father's passing, everything we did we did to honor him, and to put him on a pedestal because of the life that he had. And we were dutiful children. My father lived till 2005. He was just about 80 years old when he died. And it was later in life that he finally, finally started opening up, and you could just see the man softening up. The man that you saw in this picture was not the businessman, not the hard nosed father who would smack us on the rear end with

a belt if we got out of line. This was a man that had finally realized at the end was coming.

40:55 William Rosenbaum: He had lung cancer and I remember him telling the the doctor, because my father was still smoking, and he says, doctor, I should have been dead when I was 15 years old, when my parents died, he said, and nobody's going to tell me to stop smoking now. So he kept smoking. He died just before his 80th birthday. But he started opening up, and in 1996 he was convinced to go back to Poland to see where he was born, to see his home. And uh, together with this Holocaust survivor, he started talking about his - this other Holocaust survivor - he started talking about his experiences. He talked about the the early occupation when the Germans came in. Told us the story, when he was 14 years old, that he and a friend were walking through the town, the Nazis are already invaded. The boy's got a boy scout knife strapped to his side of his belt. The Nazi soldier thought he was part of a resistance and shot him dead in front of my father, 14 years old. He spoke about the last time he saw his parents. He spoke about those two lines that he described in there. But he talked, in tears, about how he was trying - his mother had told him on the train, don't let go of your younger brother's hands, keep hold of your younger brother - and when he tried to get his younger brother over, the German soldier divided them and sent him back.

42:33 William Rosenbaum: He never verbalized that until shortly before he died. He held all of that inside. You know he talked to about the last time he saw his mother. He actually did see his mother again, after they went through the lines, approximately a month later. There was a fence that divided the women from the men in the Auschwitz concentration camp. His mother was at the fence looking for her boys, looking to see who she could find, and she saw my father. He went up to her. She had a pouch with a little piece of bread around her neck. She took the bread out of her pouch and gave it to my father and told him to be strong, that he would survive. These are hard stories to recall but these are stories that um, these are stories that mold us as to who we are and who I am. They've left indelible marks on me. They've left scars on me. I know I look at the world differently than my contemporaries. I know I look at the world and say, is there another Holocaust that could happen? I know I look at the world and say, is America the safest place to be for a Jew? Maybe. Maybe Muslims could be saying that too. But today I still say, is there a safer place to be? I have an exit plan. I know, God forbid things get bad, I know where I'm going. I know how I'm going to go. I know where I'm going to go and I know how I'm going to get out of town. I'm not going to wait for the next group to come in.

44:26 William Rosenbaum: I still go to a synagogue, not because I'm religious, but because I don't want to be the first Jew in my family - given my father's background - to not support a synagogue and not be part of the Jewish community. I'm very concerned about human rights. I see inequality and I try to fix

it. I see racism. I, I understand why black people are still, black African-American people, are still angry because it takes generations to heal these wounds. These wounds don't go away with the passing of the one person. They have been transferred. They're transferred to me and they're transferred, I'm transferring them to my three children. They're going to get a little less than I got. I got a pretty heavy dose. My brothers and I got a very heavy dose and, from what I understand, my stories are not so unique. So although I don't have a tattoo number on my arm, I too feel like I am a survivor. And that is why I'm here. I'm here to tell you my father's story, and telling you that it has had a lasting impact on me, and I hope that it will have a lasting impact on you as well. Thank you.

46:03 Susanne Hillman: We are now taking questions. Yes?

46:0 Speaker 1: Have you been involved at all in the second-generation groups?

46:13 William Rosenbaum: Off and on. There have been attempts to get second-generation people together, and there was a an attempt about 20-some years ago. And I know that there's currently another group that started up with, I think, Ruth Gottschalk is involved with it. There are some people, and I have been to one of their activities. But I was actually here, in this exact room, a year ago when Max Garcia, the other Holocaust survivor, was here and he was showing his film, and his daughter was here. And it was such a coincidence that he was in the same place as my father. Their numbers were 3,000 numbers apart. So I, and I went up and talked to him. He was 91 years old, same age as my father. They would have, were born the same year. But what really struck me was, when his daughter was here on the panel talking - and I don't know if any of you were here - she talked about the nightmares that she had, and she felt, she felt like she was unique. And immediately after, I didn't want to say it publicly because again, I've never spoken about this publicly, I came up to her and I said, you're not alone. And I started communicating with her the very next day via email, talking about our stories, and talking on the telephone. How difficult it was, because we do have a fear, and we do have exposure that most other people don't have. So there is a reason for us to congregate. I personally uh, haven't taken the advantage of, of those.

47:53 Speaker 2: I have an aunt who was an Auschwitz survivor, and my cousin talks about the same kind of thing as you do. But she also I, I'm curious because my aunt did not tell us very much about what her history was until very late in life. And I just want to know about your father. What, when did he tell you, and what, how, how did it work?

48:19 William Rosenbaum: Very little for most of our lives. He told us as much as we needed to know to keep the story moving forward. I just, I think my parents - my mother was not a Holocaust survivor - but I am first generation American. My mother was born, a Jewish family living in Mexico, and my father met her here in San Diego. So I'm definitely first generation. In fact, I'd love to say that the joke

that I'm a chipolack because my mother's born in Mexico, and my father is born in Poland. But they made it, they made a conscious decision that they were not going to burden the children with these stories. They thought it was too much for us. Unfortunately, I think that by not talking about it, it makes it worse. So he, he told us bits and pieces. We knew there was a hardware store. We knew he was in a concentration camp. We knew. But honestly, to this day, other than some of the specifics I'm telling you today, I don't know a lot of the specifics. I can't tell you that all the different ghettos he was in until the final ghetto, the Bedzin ghetto. Uh I, I can't tell you the details of how they stood together. They were together as a family but I know they robbed, stole, did whatever they needed to do to feed themselves and stay together as a family for the first three years until they got transported back to Auschwitz. It was really the last couple years of his life, when he finally, you know. I don't have, I don't, he knew he didn't have much time left and I think, he started telling us stories.

- 49:56 Speaker 3: What do you see as the legacy of the Holocaust going forward, as more and more survivors are passing away? So, the next 10 years, in the next hundred years?
- 50:06 William Rosenbaum: That's a great question. And I'm glad to see that, that you're here because you're going to be one of the next generation to hopefully tell the story. It's, it concerns me, concerns me greatly, that there are Holocaust deniers. There are people around the world that would like to think that the Holocaust didn't happen, and without people like my father, and like Max Schindler - may he rest in peace - and his wife Rose, and other Holocaust survivors that are still talking, the stories are not going to be told. Thank goodness we have the Spielberg Foundation that made these tens of thousands of videos that document the history of these people and what they actually experienced. But I am afraid that in time, it's going to be a blurb, and I think that's why Jewish people, that's why the state of Israel, makes such a important emphasis to keep the story alive because it is who we are. It's a, it's a scar on our lives. And unless we keep telling the story over and over, just like we tell the story every year about how we were slaves in, in Egypt. We recite the same story every year. We have to keep reciting the story and remind ourselves that if we're not vigilant that these problems could happen again. And I'm one to tell you that my antenna are always up. So I do think that in the generations to come, it's going to be a struggle to keep the story told, and that's why I feel passionate about telling the story now while I can.
- 51:53 Speaker 4: Thank you so much for sharing your story. I have a question. Are you familiar with the theory of epigenetics and how trauma is actually passed down on a cellular level?
- 52:07 William Rosenbaum: Maybe I know it. Maybe I know it through life, but not through uh, education.

- 52:11 Speaker 4: It's a relatively new theory that there was a recently a book written. I can't remember the name but your story really bears that out.
- 52:20 William Rosenbaum: I actually feel like I, I'm, I'm my, I'm living my father's trauma right now. And uh, it's probably within and I don't know, I don't know why I do this. Well, I do know why I do it; I do it because I feel different. I feel different inside but frequently, when I meet people I let them know, my father was a Holocaust survivor. I'm not telling you that because I want sympathy. But to me, it means something. It means that. I know what it means, but I'm sure they don't know what it means. I'm sure they don't know that my antenna are up, or that I'm on guard, or that I'm cautious, or conservative, but that's what it means to me. And I know that I'm living that experience. And one other thing, my father was a happy man. My father was amazingly happy. He was very serious, very hard worker, extremely, extremely successful in business. He was, he, he gave us a wonderful life through his efforts and his abilities. But remarkably, I look back at the hobbies that he took on, and the vacations that we took, and the normalcy of our life, but yet all this baloney got stuck in my brain. And I think that a lot of that has to do from being around him and, and protecting him because we always protected him. We did. My mother would not let us get out of line. We were the best-behaved kids that anybody knew because, God forbid, we should step out of line. Bam, we were in trouble.
- 54:00 Speaker 5: Um hi. Um so, um, as an Asian, I love both history from Asian and Europe and, and we can see that Germany and Japanese are two countries that was the starter of the Second World War. And Germany is admitting their Holocaust history, and the government and, and people - they admitted. But Japanese is not actually really love to admit it. So do you have any comments or feelings about that?
- 54:40 William Rosenbaum: That's an interesting question. It's more interesting than you know because I'm going to Japan in, in a month, and somebody just told me about this um, book uh, *Killing the Rising Sun*. And they were telling me how the Japanese were so brutal - so, so brutal. And I said, should I? And I asked my friend, should I read it? No, you don't want to read this book. It was real brutality. Uh Japanese, I don't, I don't know a lot about that culture. But I do know that they were very brutal, and they're, that's uh, that's a whole other story. You just jogged a memory in my mind, which I'm not going to go there, sorry.
- 55:31 Speaker 6: Hi, we have quite a bit in common because my dad was sent to Auschwitz as well, and in September [19]44 was also sent to Dachau, from where he was liberated. Uh, and on my mom's side, there is one cousin who actually was from Oświęcim as well. We ended up, as a matter of fact, spending my teenage years in, of all places, West Germany. But my question to you is whether you'd

ever been to any of the American or worldwide gatherings of Holocaust survivors or their children?

- 56:02 William Rosenbaum: I haven't been to any of the gatherings. I've uh, involved with the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. I've been there and, of course, I've been to Auschwitz, the concentration camp in Dachau, the camp where my father escaped from. I periodically attend events that are sponsored through the Holocaust Memorial Museum, which sponsors events throughout the country, sometimes Los Angeles, sometimes San Diego. Most of the time though they're Washington DC. It's hard to get to but interesting. You know who else is from families from Auschwitz? Wolf Blitzer's family. I don't know if you saw that but last, last year sometime he did a special on CNN about his family's connections and he went back to Oświęcim. And I tried to write to him, but he didn't respond.
- 56:53 Speaker 7: What was your dad's attitude towards religion? Towards Judaism?
- 57:00 William Rosenbaum: He was a broken man when it came to religion. He went. And I say he, he did it out of obligation, and probably the same way, the same reason that I go - out of obligation. It wasn't until maybe a few years before he died, or when my mother died, that he started the, reconnecting to religion. But he felt that God had let them down. And he was raised in a very religious, very orthodox family. His father was a scholar. I would say that they were very modern orthodox people. You saw from the Bar Mitzvah picture the way they were dressed. The grandfather had the long beard but his father was dressed in modern-day attire and his mother. But very, very orthodox. I think he felt that religion let him down, and I don't think he really believes so much in organized religion. But as he got older I think people grasp for whatever comfort they can find and, and I think that he started reading prayer books again and.
- 58:11 Speaker 8: Oh, we have something in common. My maiden name is uh, Rosenbaum.
- 58:18 William Rosenbaum: We could be related.
- 58:20 Speaker 8: It's possible. Um, my uh, grandfather said he came from a town that sometimes was in Russia, and sometimes was in Poland because the boundaries kept moving. But I don't remember the name. If it was, I don't know what.
- 58:36 William Rosenbaum: Well it's amazing how common Rosenbaum is back there. When we were growing up in San Diego, ours was the only Rosenbaum in the phone book. But you go back to Europe, there are a lot of Rosenbaums.
- 58:47 Speaker 8: Yes. Um, I just wanted to make another comment um, and I - people can, you know, disagree with me. But I feel, even though we know that some antisemitism still exists in this country of course, but I feel that the the people that are what we call haters - is just to use a generic term - hate the Hispanics, the

immigrants, the blacks, the Muslims, more than they hate the Jews. And in a way, it's almost like protecting us.

- 59:22 William Rosenbaum: We've arrived. We're finally not the bottom of the list,
- 59:28 Speaker 8: Yeah right, yeah. We're like the fourth one down or something like that. But I feel that much more obligation to fight for the rights of the others who are being, I feel, more persecuted than we are just because of our background. We understand what it is that they go through.
- 59:45 William Rosenbaum: And that was a point I was trying to make too. I see that. I mean I, I make the comment about African Americans and I, and I see - especially now with what's going on, with what we've just experienced, with the election, and with the shootings that we've had all over the country and, and um, people marching for rights, black matters life, black lives matter - and, and I, and I say to myself uh, most people don't get it. You don't know what it's like till you live within somebody else's skin. You don't know the history that they've experienced. You don't know the racism that has been there for generations. You don't know if that young black man's father was whipped, or beaten, or suffered Jim Crow laws. And it wasn't even until the 1960s-70s that we even had things that we could call civil rights. But yet uh, and there are generations of black people that, that are living the same way that I'm living, with the history of what their parents and ancestors went through. So it does. I, I asked the question: how many generations does it really take to heal?
- 1:00:54 Judi Gottschalk: Okay. Hi Bill. It's, it's actually Judi Gottschalk and we, we met at my home um, and I just, I didn't know if there's any other second generation, third generation in this room but we do have an active group going. Um, and I wanted to tell everybody, you know, that it is very active, and um, it, we, we welcome everybody into it. You don't even have to be a second generation. We would take anybody who's interested in being with us um, and...
- 1:01:25 William Rosenbaum: Did I strike any bells? Did I? Did I ring?
- 1:01:29 Judi Gottschalk: Oh well, I would say so and I wanted to also say that my mother Agathe Ehrenfried and my father Berek came to San Diego just about the same time as Bill's parents. 1949 my parents came and had a very, very similar growing up and but my mother and dad were friends with his dad. It's such a pleasure too, not a pleasure, but it's, it's like looking in a mirror. And I appreciate your thoughts and what it's like to grow up in San Diego and, at that time. You know there were some people in this town, I don't know if people who've lived here a long time knew, the Camiels - Zel[ig] and Jeanne and Gert[rude] Thaler? These were people who were meant, were HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, who welcomed our families, took them under their, my - Zel owned a liquor store at Seventh and B, and everybody went to his liquor store. And he found jobs, and housing, and

adopted me, and took me to theater and, and brought me up to be like an American. So there are people in this town who, who did amazing things. And I thank Bill for bringing this all back to my memory.

- 1:02:51 William Rosenbaum: It's interesting how many survivors landed up in San Diego. I'm not really sure why. You know, back in the late [19]40s like San Diego is just a virgining city, and uh, like I said, my dad had a choice of Houston or San Diego. They were probably both developing cities and fortunately chose San Diego but apparently, a lot of other Holocaust survivors did too because they're - growing up I remember that there was a very active, what they called, New Life Club. The New Life Club was the club that the survivors belonged to. My father didn't want to live in the past. He told us that. That I can tell you with certainty that I don't want to live in the past, I don't want to go back and recall, and every time I meet the same people these people think about what we've been through. I want to look to the future and that's...
- 1:03:42 Speaker 9: Yes hello. I just wanted to ask you about your, your children. And what would you...
- 1:03:49 William Rosenbaum: They're mashugana also.
- 1:03:50 Speaker 9: Yes, what would you wish the future generations, and young people, to to, do to keep all this alive?
- 1:04:02 William Rosenbaum: I know that in certain parts of the world, in Israel and certain other places, they send children, at teenage years, to Auschwitz, or to the concentration camps to visit. I think it's important that they continue to learn the story because, if they don't learn the story then it will become a distant memory, and the deniers of the Holocaust will will win. So it's really incumbent upon us to keep, for lack of a better word, exp - I was going to say forcing our children to learn - but we need to expose the children, and expose them to what can happen when these atrocities are allowed to get out of hand and we don't stand vigilantly by to stand up against it.
- 1:04:51 Speaker 10: Um, how did your father feel about Germany and the German people as the country evolved from the [19]40s to what it is today?
- 1:05:01 William Rosenbaum: It's a good question. I actually left that out. There was a card in here that said, Germany. It's, I think it's easily understood that he never forgave the Germans for what they did. There were a lot of Jews that received compensation from the Germ, from Germany afterwards. My dad tried to get their family property back, tried to get the home back, but at that time most of that was under uh, Eastern European control, under the Iron Curtain. But he also, on one hand, wanted to, to be compensated because he was so bitter and so angry, but on the other hand, he said, if I take their money then I gotta maybe forgive them,

and I can't forgive them for what they did to us. I have to be honest with you, I got, I got that. And I got that gene. It's not that I don't forgive them because I, it's not, they had, they didn't do it to me, but they did hurt my father, and they did hurt my relatives. And, and I know that I, I can't buy a German car. I have, I've been to Germany a couple times but only to go to the concentration camps, only to go see the Jewish history that was there, that was left behind so that I can further understand my, my family's background, my ancestors. But I, I'm a little embarrassed to say that, but it's true, that it's still hard for me - as the son of a survivor - to, to think positively about Germany. That's an honest answer.

1:06:46 Susanne Hillman: Okay, final question.

1:06:49 Speaker 11: It's um, I wonder if you know about the march that the neo-Nazis are planning to have on a town, I think in Montana. It was supposed to be this weekend. They've put it off temporarily but they have stated that they plan to smash up Jewish businesses and attack Jews in their homes.

1:07:15 William Rosenbaum: I hadn't heard about that one. That one slipped by me. Um, you know those are the kind of things that send shivers down my spine, and those are the kind of things that, when I was a, a teenager, I was ready to join the Anti-Defamation League or the the ADL, or willing to go to Israel and work underground. I mean, you have, we have exposure that most other people don't have. So we have a great sensitivity to those kind of issues. I even, you know, I even wondered about going public and having this conversation. Do I want to expose myself as a, as a Jew, as a survivor child? Do I want to have those kind of ex, that kind of exposure? So yeah, those kind of things scare me. I think that in America we're a strong enough society, but they were pretty strong in Germany too. But I think in America we're a strong enough society and there's enough of us to say, no way. We're not going to tolerate that. Thank you very much. I appreciate everybody coming.