

Ellis Lewin

Ellis Lewin was born May 22, 1932, in [Lodz, Poland](#), to Josef and Chana Lewin. He had an older sister, Mariym. Ellis hoped one day to become a musician like his father who was a highly regarded concert pianist. Ellis described the early years of his childhood as typical: vacationing with family, riding bikes, playing soccer, and getting into mischief.

Ellis attended public school his first two years before being withdrawn and tutored at home. Ellis recalled feeling fear and anxiety even before the German invasion of Poland in 1939. Since the Lewin family already lived in the area designated as the Lodz [ghetto](#), they did not have to leave their third floor apartment. Even as conditions worsened, Ellis took comfort in being with his family.

As a ghetto policeman, Ellis' father, Josef, managed to keep the family together until the summer of 1944. During the liquidation of the ghetto and despite attempts to hide, the Lewins were deported to [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#). When the men and women were forcibly separated upon arrival, Ellis and his father said their last goodbyes to Chana and Mariym. Although Ellis was selected for the gas chambers, Josef was able to save his son by bribing a [Ukrainian](#) guard with diamonds. Ellis and Josef lived in a crowded, disease-infested barracks among sick and dying prisoners for five weeks.



Visual History Biographical Profile

In early 1945, the Germans evacuated prisoners from Auschwitz-Birkenau as the Russians approached. Separated from his father, Ellis fought to survive on his own. Upon arrival at Kaufbeuren in Bavaria, Ellis worked in the kitchen and would sneak scraps to other inmates until he was caught and whipped. After six weeks in the camp, Ellis was transferred several more times to various work camps. Following a death march to [Dachau](#) in the spring of 1945, Ellis anxiously awaited liberation. Once freed by the Allies, he contracted typhoid fever and was hospitalized for a time. He then lived in a displaced persons' camp in Bavaria and worked as a valet for an American trucking company.

In May 1946, Ellis immigrated to the [United States](#). Three years after Winifred Fryer took Ellis into her foster home, Ellis was reunited with his father, Josef. They learned that when Mariym contracted a fever, she was sent to the [gas chambers](#). Because she could do nothing to save Mariym, Chana went with her daughter to their deaths.

Ellis was drafted and served in the Korean War. Upon his discharge, Ellis met his future wife, Joan, an American from Cleveland. They had three children: Dennis, Debra, and Richard. At the time of Ellis' interview in 1996, he and Joan had two grandchildren, Adam and Andrew.