

LEO BERKENWALD

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



Leo Berkenwald, whose Hebrew name is Chaim Lajb Berkenwald, was born on August 31, 1923, in Lodz, Poland, to Josef and Chana Berkenwald. He was the second of four children.

Prior to the war, he completed seven years of public school in 1937 and then served as an apprentice in a tailor's shop.

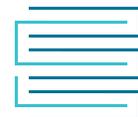
In February 1940, when the Lodz ghetto was formed, Leo and his family were not required to relocate because their home was within the ghetto's designated area. Shortly thereafter, however, living conditions worsened as the ghetto became overpopulated with thousands of deportees. Like other ghetto occupants, Leo was a forced laborer until August 1944 when the Lodz ghetto was liquidated.

Leo and his family were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp on August 24, 1944, and after arrival Leo never saw his parents and his two sisters again. Later, in hopes of being reunited with his brother, Leo joined a transport bound for a labor camp in Eule, Germany.

Falling ill after months of hard labor, in late 1944, Leo was transferred to a hospital in the camp in Dornhau, Germany. On May 8, 1945, Soviet forces liberated the prisoners at Dornhau, and Leo remained in a field hospital for several weeks. He was then moved to a displaced persons' camp.

Toward the end of 1945, Leo and his friends smuggled themselves into the American zone of occupation, and while in a displaced persons' camp in Bamberg, Leo was reunited with a cousin. With aid from the Workmen's Circle, Leo and his cousin immigrated to the United States in 1946.

Leo met his future wife, Helene, also a Holocaust survivor, in New York, where they married in March 1947. With aid from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Leo worked various jobs in the ladies' garment industry until his retirement in 1980. Leo and Helene have two children, Amy (Lubchansky) and Steven, and one grandson. At the time of his interview in 1995, Leo and Helene were living in Florida. ■



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.