

BERNARD BROCLAWSKI

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Bernard Broclawski, son of Barish and Maryam, was born on January 27, 1927, in Pabianice, Russia (now Poland).

Barish was a scholar and politician, and Maryam was a shopkeeper. The family was very religious. Maryam died of throat cancer in 1932 and Bernard and his brother, Abraham, went to live with their paternal grandparents. Barish remarried and had another son, Yitzhak. Bernard spoke Yiddish at home and Polish at the public school he attended.

When Bernard was ten, his father asked him to help financially support the family. Bernard worked as a textile worker part-time until he graduated from elementary school at age 13. He then went to work full-time. Bernard was drafted into the Polish army in 1939 and was wounded on the first day of the war. After being transported back to Lodz, he was put in a body cast. When he was released from the hospital, he was sent to live in Soviet-occupied Poland; he was convinced that as a Polish-Jewish prisoner of war (POW), he would be killed.

Bernard managed to locate his father and brothers in Grodno, where work was difficult to find. To support his family, Bernard signed up to work at a coal mine in Siberia. His war injury kept him from working in the mine, but he found work as a machinist. Bernard lost contact with his family in 1941, and he later learned that they had been shot and killed by the Germans after the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

Bernard became a German teacher, but was arrested in 1943 for a speech he gave. He was in prison for eight months and was then sentenced to hard labor. He was released only after WWII ended, in 1948. Bernard returned to Poland, where he found work as a bookkeeper. He married Irma in 1949 and their daughter Johanna was born in 1950. Bernard went to school and was a leader of workers' organizations. Due to increased antisemitism in Poland, the family immigrated to the United States in 1968.

This interview was conducted on November 12, 1991 in San Francisco, California.